

A Working Step 12 Guide

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At the bottom of page 88 it says, "The next chapter is entirely devoted to Step Twelve." That does NOT mean that ALL the information on Step Twelve can be found in this chapter, but that this chapter is only going to talk about Step Twelve. As a matter of fact, this chapter, which is called "Working With Others", gives us the part of Step Twelve that deals ONLY with ways to carrying this message to other alcoholics. Chapter 8 "To Wives", chapter 9 "The Family Afterward", and chapter 10 "To Employers" give us MORE information about working with a new person, as well as what to keep in mind when trying to practice these principles in ALL our affairs. For all the principles to practice mentioned in Chapters 8, 9 & 10 please go back to the Step 12 files and read "Principles in Chapters 8, 9 & 10."

For ALL the 12th Stepping tips & sponsorship references mentioned in the Big Book (including chapters 8, 9 & 10) please go back to the Step 12 files and read "Step 12 Twelfth Stepping Tips & Sponsorship Tools in the BB."

Step 12 Having had a spiritual awakening as THE result of these steps, we tried to carry THIS message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in ALL our affairs.

If you really look at the last three Steps, you'll notice that the Tenth Step talks about, "continuing," the Eleventh Step talks about, "seeking and improving," and the Twelfth Step talks about "in ALL our affairs," so our Program leaves no room for complacency or coasting. And besides, the only way you can coast is down hill. The Steps are kinda like walking up a down escalator. IF you keep moving you CAN get to the next level, but if you slow down or stop moving, it brings you right back down to where you came from. I don't know about you, but I DESPERATELY do not want to go back to where I came from.

Now that we've made conscious contact with the God of our understanding, we have received that greatest gift of this program - a spiritual awakening. God is now guiding us in such a way that it is indeed miraculous. This life changing experience comes suddenly to some (as in a spiritual experience), and gradually to others (as in a spiritual awakening). Let's see what else we can learn about this miraculous event.

Please turn once again to Appendix II on page 569 in the Third Edition or page 567 in the Fourth Edition. This appendix was written AFTER the publication of the first printing of the "Big Book" in April of 1939. In the first printing, the Twelfth Step read:

"Having had a spiritual EXPERIENCE as the result of these steps..."

In the two years between the first and second printings, the word "experience" in the Twelfth Step was discussed at length. As time went by, letters from alcoholics started to come in to the main office from people who did the work out of the Big Book and did NOT have the "White Light" spiritual experience that Bill Wilson had. They were writing to see if the more gradual spiritual awakening that they were having meant that they could not recover from alcoholism. This was the reason for adding Appendix II. Eventually the word "experience" was replaced with the word "awakening" in the Twelfth Step. The Big Book authors made this modification in order to include those whose lives had truly changed, but more slowly over a period of time.

Many of you will find this to be the case also. Your life has changed, but gradually rather than suddenly. You may not be able to point to a specific experience that brought about the change, but the spiritual awakening has occurred nonetheless.

At the top of page 569 or 567 in the Fourth Edition, the authors define the term "spiritual awakening":

"The terms 'spiritual experience', 'spiritual awakening' (and of course Dr. Silkworth in the Doctor's Opinion calls it 'a psychic change') are used many times in this book which, upon careful reading, shows that the personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism has manifested itself among us in many different forms."

"Yet it is true that our first printing gave many readers the impression that these personality changes, or religious experiences, must be in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals. Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous" (which means incorrect).

A spiritual awakening is nothing more than a psychic change that, among other things, eliminates our obsession to drink.

So Bill Wilson's rapid conversion experience at Town's Hospital, although it is similar to other experiences in our fellowship, is the exception rather than the rule. Further down on page 569 or 567 in the Fourth Edition in paragraph 4, we find the description of a more gradual spiritual experience:

“Among our rapidly growing membership of thousands of alcoholics such transformations, though frequent, are by no means the rule. Most of our experiences are what the psychologist William James calls the ‘educational variety’ because they develop slowly over a period of time. Quite often friends of the newcomer are aware of the difference long before he is himself. He finally realizes that he has undergone a profound alteration in his reaction to life; that such a change could hardly have been brought about by himself alone. What often takes place in a few months could seldom have been accomplished by years of self discipline. With few exceptions our members find that they have tapped an unsuspected inner resource which they presently identify with their own conception of a Power greater than themselves.”

As we read the next lines of page 570 or 568 in the Fourth Edition, we learn just how easy it is to have a spiritual awakening:

“Most of us think this awareness of a Power greater than ourselves is the essence of spiritual experience. Our more religious members call it ‘God-consciousness’.”

That’s all there is to it. If you’ve made contact with the God of your understanding and try to follow your Higher Power’s guidance, you have in fact, already had the spiritual awakening.

Congratulations. You are now living in the “sunlight of the Spirit.”

But, the spiritual awakening is just the first part of the Twelfth Step. Let’s look at what we have to do to sustain this spiritual transformation.

Please turn back to the top of page 89. Chapter 7, in its entirety is devoted to carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to others. The “Big Book” authors tell us what we MUST do to enlarge our new God-consciousness. The top of page 89 says:

“Practical experience shows that NOTHING will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry THIS message to other alcoholics! You can help when NO ONE else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail.”

When WE work with others, OUR lives change. Like it was said before, we don’t help another alcoholic because THEIR sick, we help another alcoholic because WE are sick, and part of our program of recovery is that we need to be helping others. In the second paragraph on page 89, the authors give us SOME of the results of working Step 12 otherwise known as some of the Twelfth Step Promises. The second paragraph on page 89:

“Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends - this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. FREQUENT contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.”

On pages 80 through 103, the authors provide us with specific instructions on how to carry our lifesaving message of recovery to others. They offer many valuable suggestions on these pages. For now, we are only going to highlight a few of them.

At the top of page 90, they start with the following advice:

“When you discover a prospect for Alcoholics Anonymous, find out all you can about him. If he does not want to stop drinking (in other words, if he is NOT willing to go to any lengths), don’t waste time trying to persuade him. You may spoil a later opportunity.”

In the middle of page 91, the “Big Book” authors even provide us with specifics on what to say. First we tell the prospect our story:

“See your man alone, if possible. (They are not suggesting that we do Twelfth Step work by ourselves. They are suggesting that the A.A.’s should be alone in the room with the new person so that they are not distracted by the alcoholic’s friends or family. The book continues.) At first engage in general conversation. After a while, turn the talk to some phase of drinking. Tell him enough about your drinking habits, symptoms, and experiences to encourage him to speak of himself. If he wishes to talk, let him do so. You will thus get a better idea of how you ought to proceed.”

Then on page 92, paragraph 1, it says:

“If you are satisfied that he is a real alcoholic, begin to dwell on the hopeless feature of the malady. Show him, from your own experience, how the queer mental condition (or mental blank spot) surrounding that first drink prevents normal functioning of the will power.” (In other words, that his best thinking CANNOT keep him away from the next drink.)

Please turn to the bottom of page 94. Here it says:

“Your candidate may give reasons why he need not follow ALL of the program. He may rebel at the thought of a drastic housecleaning which requires discussion with other people. Do not contradict such views. Tell him you ONCE felt as he does, BUT you DOUBT whether you would have made much progress had you NOT taken action.”

See how easy it is? For the next several pages we are provided additional suggestions on what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do, during our Twelfth Step calls.

Then on the top of page 96, the authors tell us not to give up if we are unsuccessful at getting through to the prospect. Basically, they tell us to plant the seed and move on. Top of page 96:

“Do not be discouraged if your prospect does not respond at once. Search out another alcoholic and try again. You are sure to find someone desperate enough to accept with eagerness what you offer. We find it a waste of time to keep chasing a man who cannot or will not work with you. If you leave such a person alone, he may soon become convinced that he cannot recover by himself. To spend too much time on any one situation is to deny some other alcoholic an opportunity to live and be happy.”

In the middle of the first full paragraph on page 98, they tell us what to do about the person who makes one excuse after another about why he or she can't stop drinking:

“...He clamors for this or that, claiming he cannot master alcohol until his material needs are cared for. Nonsense. Some of us have taken very hard knocks to learn this truth: Job or no job - wife or no wife - we simply do NOT stop drinking so long as we place dependence upon other people ahead of dependence on God.”

“Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well regardless of ANYONE. The ONLY condition is that he trust in God and clean house.”

How much simpler can it get? Like Dr. Bob said in his last major talk, “Trust God, clean house, and help others!”

In the first paragraph on page 100, the “Big Book” authors tell us WE grow spiritually when we “sponsor” someone else into the fellowship:

“Both you and the new man MUST walk DAY BY DAY in the path of spiritual progress. If you persist, remarkable things WILL happen. (Please notice the rest of this paragraph because it contains what some consider the greatest promise in this book) When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than ANYTHING we could have planned. Follow the dictates of a Higher Power and you will PRESENTLY (not some far off time and place, but here and now) you will PRESENTLY live in a new and wonderful world, NO MATTER WHAT your present circumstances!”

Starting at the bottom of page 100, there are a few statements that may not be very popular to some in our fellowship. You will rarely hear this part of the “Big Book” brought up at meetings. Follow along with me as I read how the authors describe the true freedom and serenity that thoroughly working this entire Program brings us.

“Assuming we are SPIRITUALLY fit, we can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do. People have said we must not go where liquor is served; we must not have it in our homes; we must shun friends who drink; we must avoid moving pictures which show drinking scenes; we must not go into bars; our friends must hide their bottles if we go to their houses; we mustn't think or be reminded about alcohol at all. Our experience shows that this is not necessarily so.

We meet these conditions EVERY day. An alcoholic who cannot meet them, STILL has an alcoholic mind; THERE IS SOMETHING THE MATTER WITH HIS SPIRITUAL STATUS. His only chance for sobriety would be some place like the Greenland Ice Cap, and even there an Eskimo might turn up with a bottle of scotch and ruin everything! Ask any woman who has sent her husband to distant places on the theory he would escape the alcohol problem.”

“In our belief ANY scheme of combating alcoholism which proposes to shield the sick man from temptation is doomed to failure. If the alcoholic tries to shield himself he MAY succeed for a time, but he USUALLY winds up with a bigger explosion than ever. We have tried these methods. These attempts to do the impossible have always failed.

So our rule is not to avoid a place where there is drinking, IF WE HAVE A LEGITIMATE REASON FOR BEING THERE. That includes bars, nightclubs, dances, receptions, weddings, even plain ordinary whoopee parties. To a person who has had experience with an alcoholic, this may seem like tempting Providence, but it isn't.

You will note that we made an important qualification. Therefore, ask yourself on EACH occasion, "Have I ANY good social, business, or personal reason for going to this place? Or am I expecting to steal a little vicarious pleasure from the atmosphere of such places?" IF you answer these questions satisfactorily, you need have no apprehension. Go or stay away, whichever seems best. But be SURE you are on SOLID SPIRITUAL ground before you start AND that your motive in going is THOROUGHLY good. Do not think of what you will get out of the occasion. Think of what you can bring to it. But IF you are shaky, you had better work with another alcoholic instead!

Why sit with a long face in places where there is drinking, sighing about the good old days. If it is a happy occasion, try to increase the pleasure of those there; if a business occasion, go and attend to your business enthusiastically. If you are with a person who wants to eat in a bar, by all means go along. Let your friends know they are not to change their habits on your account. At a proper time and place explain to all your friends why alcohol disagrees with you. If you do this thoroughly, few people will ask you to drink. While you were drinking, you were withdrawing from life little by little. Now you are getting back into the social life of this world. Don't start to withdraw again just because your friends drink liquor."

If I cannot go to a wedding because alcohol will be served there, then alcohol is STILL telling me what I can and cannot do. That does not sound much like freedom to me. It is important to keep in mind that the authors bring this up ONLY after presenting ALL of the Steps, and assume that the reader has worked them ALL and is spiritually fit as THE result.

God is now our "new Employer." In the last full paragraph on page 102, the Book gives us a new job description:

"Your job now is to be at the place where you may be of MAXIMUM helpfulness to others, so NEVER hesitate to go anywhere if you can be helpful. You should not hesitate to visit the most sordid (which means "morally degraded") spot on earth on such an errand. Keep on the firing line of life with THESE motives and GOD will keep you unharmed."

This completes Chapter 7. Like it was said at the beginning of Step Twelve, Chapter 8 "To Wives", Chapter 9 "The Family Afterwards", and Chapter 10 "To Employers" ALSO contain MANY tips on how to practice these principles in ALL our affairs, and these chapters contain other points on how to be most effective in dealing with a new member of AA. If what is mentioned in these three chapters works for our family and friends, it can certainly work for us in dealing with people we sponsor. Due to time restraints, we will be unable to highlight these three chapters, so please make yourselves familiar with them.

Just so we can highlight just one point out of these three chapters, please turn to page 120 in the chapter "To Wives". The "Big Book" authors even tell us what to do if we relapse. The middle of the first full paragraph on page 120 says:

"Though it is infinitely better that he have no relapse at all, as has been true with many of our men, it is by NO means a bad thing IN SOME CASES. Your husband will see at once that he MUST REDOUBLE his SPIRITUAL activities IF he expects to survive."

Being of service to others is CRITICAL to the continued growth and the maintenance of our sobriety. Keep in mind that one of the PRIMARY services we can perform is to take prospective members through the Twelve Steps, just like we did during these Beginners' Meetings. Each time we do this, we learn more about this lifesaving program and gain additional insight into the Divine inspiration that is the heart of our new way of life.

Who knows, maybe in a short time, some of you will be back to LEAD these sessions. As we have discovered, conducting these Beginners' Meetings is a real test of how well we are beginning to know and live the AA program, which is found in the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Now all that's left is to practice these principles in ALL our affairs. What principles? - The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous! They are the principles we practice DAILY for the rest of our lives.

Please turn to page 164. The "Big Book" authors conclude with yet one more statement concerning the importance of Divine guidance and the necessity of working with others. On page 164, starting with the first full paragraph, the Book says:

"Still you may say: 'But I will not have the benefit of contact with you who write this book.' We cannot be sure. God will determine that, so you MUST remember that your REAL reliance is ALWAYS upon Him. HE will show you how to create the fellowship you crave."

"Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will CONSTANTLY disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. (Of course, we CAN'T do this if we DON'T have a morning meditation practice.) The answers will come, IF your OWN house is in order. But OBVIOUSLY you CANNOT transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. THIS is the Great FACT for us."

"Abandon yourself to God as you understand God (Steps One, Two, and Three). Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows (Steps Four through Seven). Clear away the wreckage of your past (Steps Eight and Nine). Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge (which means "to walk with purpose and effort") the Road of Happy Destiny." (Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve)

"May God bless you and keep you - until then."

We are going to close this session by reading part of page 25. We have waited until now to share this page with you because back when we started this journey, you may not have FULLY understood the significance of what is written here. Having completed the

Twelve Steps and having had the spiritual awakening, you are now in a position to see these words from an ENTIRELY new perspective. Your life HAS changed. You now realize, "There Is A Solution." Page 25, starting with the first full paragraph:

"...Almost none of us liked the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcomings which the process REQUIRES for its SUCCESSFUL consummation. But we saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When, therefore, we were approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet. We have found MUCH of heaven and we have been ROCKETED into a fourth dimension of existence of which we had not even dreamed."

"The great FACT is this, and NOTHING less: That we have DEEP AND EFFECTIVE spiritual experiences which have REVOLUTIONIZED our WHOLE attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe. The CENTRAL fact of our lives today is the ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY that our Creator has entered into our hearts and lives in a way which is indeed miraculous. He has commenced to accomplish those things for us which we could NEVER do by ourselves."

"If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle-of-the-road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there is no return through HUMAN aid, we had but two alternatives: One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could, and the other, to accept spiritual help."

We want to welcome each of you who have completed these weekly sessions to the "Sunlight of the Spirit" and "fourth dimension of existence." We are committed to supporting and encouraging each of you as you move toward working the life-changing design for daily living that is the Twelve Steps. We thank you for providing us with the opportunity to participate in our own recovery, and to be a part of your miraculous spiritual journey.