

## **STEP 12**

For the purpose of this writing I use the word “steps” and “principles” synonymously. I also believe the following terms are synonymous:

- Serve God by Serving Others
- Laying down my life for my brother
- Being my brother’s keeper
- One alcoholic sharing with another
- Nudging my brother or sister into the palm of God’s hand

At the risk of sounding condescending, but also in an attempt to provide an honest report of my perception, it appears to me that, way too often, people in twelve step programs today see the steps as “hurdles” across a path. Their reports, when they “chime in” during “open destruction meetings”, sound as if once they successfully complete one step, or even one year of continuous sobriety, it is now time to sit back, admire themselves in the mirror and congratulate themselves, pick up their chip to celebrate their hard work and show others that you too can succeed at this “work” and subsequently prepare for the arduous task of negotiating the next hurdle...the next step or the next year of “just hanging in there”. There is barely a mention of the word God and almost never a mention of the vital importance of helping others. The mere thought of this approach to the steps brings about fantasies of suicide for me. Fortunately, for me, my experience with the steps was enjoyable, genuine and intimate with God and with my sponsor and produced a true perception of freedom and hope. Hard work would have been attempting to recover without doing these steps in this fashion. I feel truly fortunate to have “stumbled” across such a simplistic, yet Powerful and effective, flavor of Alcoholics Anonymous.

My experience has been to incorporate these steps into the fundamental foundation of my daily living...like a set of guardrails along the sides of the path...the path being my journey in this life, with my brothers and sisters along side of me, not ahead of me or behind me...a “broad highway, hand-in-hand, in the spirit of the universe”. These guardrails keep me from straying too far in one direction or the other. They are principles, spiritual in nature, that are always applying. They apply equally to everyone. The reality of the fact that these principles apply, equally and relentlessly to everyone, is a constant of which we can completely rely upon. If these principles were not constants or did not apply equally and relentlessly, this world would be in complete chaos and we would have no security.

Gravity is a principle. Gravity applies even when I’m not aware that it’s applying. I fly airplanes. Aerodynamic principles don’t change the affect they have on my airplane when I allow myself to become distracted. So I practice the presence of aerodynamic principles on a regular basis so I can stay aware of them and execute my free-will in harmony with them so that I don’t crash an airplane. Spiritual principles don’t change the affect they have on my life when I allow myself to become distracted. So I practice the presence of spiritual principles in all of my affairs so that I can stay aware of them and live in harmony with them so that I don’t crash my life.

I cannot practice the presence of aerodynamic principle from the beginning of a flight, throughout the flight and then not practice the presence of them during the landing phase and expect to not pay consequences during my landing. I also cannot practice the presence of spiritual principle throughout my whole life, but not practice them in my significant relationships or at my place of employment and expect to not pay consequences in those areas. Principles demand my attention and compliance in every moment. Every moment is a moment where I must carry the visions of “God’s will” into all of my activities.

What is not constant, and what seems to be evasive to many...and evasive to me very often...is my "awareness" of these principles.

The most effective way to "practice the presence" of these principles in order to enhance my awareness is to share them with others, "one on one" is ideal. The act of one on one sharing with another is as old as man. At the beginning of this writing I expressed five different common expressions of this act. The founders of AA did not invent this act. It is the wisdom of the ages. It will work even when I'm not aware that it is working...because it is a principle. The twelve steps are one way to express how to effectively do this, but there are other expressions, other literature that express the same principles. They guide us like guard rails...they are not hurdles. They should be the foundation for our daily living.

I went to college for four years in an aviation program learning about aerodynamic principle, as well as many other things. However, when I began flight instructing at 22 years old, I was acutely aware that I was learning a thousand times more about aerodynamic principle sharing it with others than I ever did as a student. Not only was my experience greater quantitatively it was also sinking in deeper into all of my senses...pilots call this "seat of the pants" flying...my ability in an aircraft began to become second nature. I was reacting to things without even thinking about them. This has also been my experience with sharing spiritual principle with others. The experiences continue to mount but the depth of my understanding continues to grow deeper resulting in a second nature reaction....an intuitive nature took hold and I was able to live free, in harmony with these principles. One-on-one training was the most effective way to be shown and show others aerodynamic principle with my flight training...it is also the most effective way to be shown and to show others in our attempts to become spiritually aware.

My experience with being exposed to these principles by my sponsor was awesome, however, if I had to keep going back to my sponsor for this experience, not only would he be frustrated with me very quickly but I would stop being able to hear him...he would become completely ineffective. I would then be sponsor-dependent, not God-dependent. I had to get dependent upon God through sharing these principles with others. I needed a new prospect, a new guy, a brother or a sister who was willing to honor me by allowing me to share my experience with them. The fact that the newcomer was a thousand times more vital to my self-preservation than I was to his began to become evident and undeniable. The challenge then became...how do I maximize my effectiveness with helping the newcomer? How do I ensure that I don't try to help this guy so hard that I end up hurting him? I needed to focus my resources toward the man or the woman who was willing and open-minded.

As I continued to make myself available to others, one-on-one, and focused on effectiveness, my own personal awareness of these principles became more second-nature and every area of my life became simple, fun and exciting. I stopped seeing my life as if it were a wet blanket draped over my shoulders...I began to wear life like a loose garment. I was free. I was at peace. It seemed that I began to get my guidance and direction from this sixth sense...this sense of inspiration..."seat of the pants" living, just like the seat of the pants flying that developed from my consistency. Consistency was the key. I began to realize that laying down my life for my brother needed to have the same priority in my life as my next meal, my next drink of water, my next breath of air, my next good night's sleep, finding shelter from the elements....my "daily bread". But it required "consistency". Not hard work...just consistency.

This did not mean that I had to become a "martyr". I do not compromise my commitments to my employer, my customer, my family, man's law, etc. But when my brother or my sister is in need, I make a high priority of scheduling, in a timely fashion, how I can make some of my time available to help them. The help must be focused on helping them get dependent upon God through helping others. I need to show them how I help others. I also allow them to see my shortcomings. We are not saints.

My shortcomings become my tools. Without my shortcomings I will have no experience to share and I will have no compassion. To carry this message without love (compassion) is not only cruel, but completely ineffective. This is the language of the heart. Without genuine love in my heart, a genuine desire to help, my words will be “clanging symbols”...”Charlie Brown’s teacher”.

I can give a man a fish and feed him for a day. I can teach him how to fish and feed him for a lifetime. Come with me. I will make you a “fisher of men”. Translation...I can take you through the twelve steps and give you relief for a moment. I can show you how to take others through the twelve steps and feed you for a lifetime. Come with me. I will show you how to find others to take through the twelve steps.

The challenge becomes “not getting caught up in the results”. We make it available to the best of our ability with as much love as we can muster. At that point, we need to stand out of the way and let him or her execute their God-given free will in whatever way they choose and at whatever time they choose. I can ask questions, voicing a genuine concern, but I need to respect their free-will. If I have a problem with that, my problem is with my personal relationship with God...not with the non-compliant newcomer....since God gave them free will.

### **Having a had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps**

#### **Sponsor**

The word “Sponsor” can be defined in many different ways. We all have different experiences in what effective sponsorship is. I only have my experience and that is what I am sharing about.

The word sponsor is not used at all in the first 164 pages of the Big Book. However, I do believe that in the beginning people were sponsored into AA even if the word “sponsor” was not used. I am confident that when the “alcoholic squad” of the Oxford Groups, which eventually became Alcoholics Anonymous, were having their house meetings...they would meet a new prospect, bring him to the house meeting and he would see happy sober ex-drinkers who were genuinely happy to see him and trying to make him feel comfortable and welcome. The new prospect was probably thinking things along the lines of “what are you guys? Is this some kind of cult or secret underground society?” The person who brought him to the meeting would keep him under his wing until he was indoctrinated in to realizing who these people are, how this thing evolved and until his unfamiliarity wore off. The “sponsor” would share his personal experience one-on-one with his prospect. He would share with him the principles as he saw them. The 12 steps had not yet been written so they would use books such as Emmet Fox and some of the books in the Bible. The others would also share their experience with these new prospects. They were not the property of the sponsor like some people believe they are today. It has been illegal to own people in this country for over 150 years. These new prospects are not supposed to be treated like trophies or “notches on the belt”. They are human beings who are dying...first spiritually and then in every other way. We should all be trying to help them and attempting to not confuse them. Bill Wilson called Ebby Thatcher is sponsor until he died. Ebby couldn’t stay sober. A note about Ebby is that the difference between him, Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith is he is the only one who did not throw himself hard into helping others. He’s the only one of the first three that could not stay sober.

An effective sponsor will walk along this journey side-by-side with his brother/sister (laying down his life for his brother) explaining the cause and effect, the action and reaction, as they are taking these actions together. Walking ahead of the sponsor is arrogant and self-righteous.

A sponsor who walks along side of the newcomer, sharing his experience along the way, asking questions when he doesn’t know the answer, occasionally will result in the person being sponsored becoming aware of these principles...however, it will always result in an awareness within the sponsor.

If the sponsor is informed as to our primary purpose, he shows his newcomer how and why these actions are preparing him for the same primary purpose...to show him how to serve God by helping others. There are many secondary advantages (by-product) to living this way of life, but only one primary purpose. If I stay focused on the primary purpose, the by-product will happen naturally and beautifully, without me having to manage my own life or orchestrate the human powers in my life.

When this awareness reveals itself in the heart, not necessarily in the head, the natural reaction will be a desire to share these principles with others. It will not be a burden or even feel like an obligation...it will be a natural reaction.

### **Having a had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps**

The twelfth step summarizes the primary purpose of all of these principles. In other words, I like to emphasize the word "the". It is "the" desired result of these steps, not "a" result. "The" result. There is definitely countless by-product of these steps, but the spiritual awakening is the primary purpose...to go from being aware to being unaware...being asleep to being awoken, as the result of practicing these steps, or principles, in all of our affairs...all of them...half-measure avail us nothing. All of the by-product will evolve naturally provided I do not lose sight of the primary purpose.

These twelve steps, practiced as a fundamental foundation for living...practicing them as close to every moment of my life as possible and in all of my affairs, will create an "awareness", or an "awakening". The lack of practicing these principles in any or all of my affairs will result in something short of an "awakening", or something short of an "awareness".

If I am practicing these principles effectively, the natural result is I will have an instinctive desire to share this with others. My cup will runneth over. I will want to scream it from the mountain tops but I won't because it might prove ineffective. I don't want the words of my heart to fall upon deaf ears. I want them to fall upon an open heart. My biggest challenge becomes finding ways to effectively touch the hearts of my brothers and sisters and let them know the "good news"...that there is genuine "love" and there is a Power that can be depended upon, in any and all circumstances.

### **We tried to carry this message to alcoholics**

We try to carry this message...we don't carry it. We make ourselves vessels, or conduits, for the Power to use us. What we say and what people hear are very often two different things. But what is in the heart is typically undeniable. You can be the best prophet in the world, but if you don't have love in your heart, you're only creating a bunch of meaningless noise. In the Bible, Corinthians talks about speaking or taking action without love...it refers to clanging symbols. Your words will fall on deaf ears, if you have no love.

I like to point out that in order for someone to absorb a new idea, typically they have to be free of old ideas. I believe this to be the main reason why 18 to 30 year olds seem to grasp these concepts quicker and without as much friction. They are naturally searching at that age. The older we get the harder it is to let go of old ideas first, before we can adopt new ideas. I found this to be my experience in flight instructing as well. Young and new pilot trainees were like sponges...the older pilots that needed training were typically hard-headed...finding it very difficult to let go of old ideas.

When we get an idea, good or bad, we get hope...hope that this idea will work. When we are out of ideas, we are usually empty, or suffering. So even though we try to carry this message to alcoholics who still suffer we are also trying to carry this message to those who are already aware and not necessarily suffering, in order to affirm their previous experiences.

Other people may not see things the same way I see them and this is acceptable...as long as they are okay, not suffering, this should be celebrated. I believe there to be many paths to God. As long as we are on some path to God and staying open-minded, we should all experience "hope". Lack of hope, in my opinion, is what causes the emptiness in the soul...the fuel for fear to run my life.

I suspect that another reason why the authors of the twelve steps, when writing step twelve, left off "who still suffers" might be due to the fact that we don't know who is suffering. Some people are putting on happy faces, but are still empty inside. Some of them have been around for decades and are still suffering. We don't know who the alcoholic is that will hear our hearts...this is God's job, not ours. We just make it available to anyone who expresses interest. The results are in God's hands...not ours...thankfully. Imagine having that responsibility.

### **And to practice these principles in all our affairs**

This is a continuation of the word "try" (we try to carry this message and...), in case anyone missed it. We don't do anything perfectly...but we try. In my attempts to try to practice these principles in all of my affairs, I am going to stumble and make mistakes...this is okay...we learn from our mistakes. Our mistakes make us more effective in helping others. They give us the compassion we need to help others with love and they show others that spiritual perfection is not required and actually is unrealistic. I don't hide my shortcomings from the people I try to help. If I did, it would leave the impression that I am somehow closer to perfection than I actually am and then when they make their mistakes they think they are doing something wrong.

I can practice these principles in full, stop for a minute, take some actions that are selfish in nature and therefore instantly go unaware again...or back to sleep. This can be very frustrating because my delusional thinking sometimes puts rewards on taking actions that are spiritual in nature. I help someone, I feel really good...my thinking tells me that I should be able to do something selfish and fear driven now. This will be disguised by rationalizations such as "I need to take some time for myself", "I need to put balance in my life" or "I didn't get sober just to go to meetings". Often I end up taking these selfish fear-driven actions and pay the consequences...going back asleep or unaware...then my thinking tries to convince me that the steps don't work.

The steps are not a cure for unwillingness and they are not a license to be selfish and fear-driven later. They are a set of principles, that if practiced on a regular basis, will expel the delusion that these human powers are the source of my joy or believing that they are the source of my pain...which if practiced consistently will also expel the subsequent desire to engage in these addictive substances or behaviors. Regular practice of these principles will also allow the human being to be comfortable in his/her own skin and be usefully whole. I cannot practice these principles in some of my affairs and not in some others. They truly are principles for living..."All of My Affairs".

Another major reason why I need to practice these principles in all of my affairs is because people are watching me even when I'm not aware that they are watching. If our Creator truly designed us to eat food, drink water, breathe air, sleep, find shelter from the elements and to serve Him by serving others, then it makes sense that I need to practice these principles in all my affairs so that what others observe when I'm not aware they are watching is someone who truly desires to live this way of life.

This is about perception. I need a new perception if I am disturbed. The world doesn't need to change...my perception of the world needs to change. Practicing these principles in all of my affairs provides me with a new perception...a perception of this world from a Creator's viewpoint, rather than my viewpoint.

Principles are principles...they don't care what I believe, what I'm aware of or what I like. I fly airplanes. I stay current flying airplanes so that I don't lose the awareness of aerodynamic principles. Aerodynamic principles don't change because I went unaware. They don't change when I get aware. The only thing that changes is my awareness. Spiritual principles are the same. They don't change when my awareness changes...what happens is my awareness of principles, aerodynamic or spiritual, changes and then I can execute my free-will in harmony with what I can now see, or what I am now aware of. If I execute my free-will in friction with these principles, even if it really looked like it should work (delusion), then I'm going to feel the friction...or the pain, same thing. Pain, in my opinion, might be designed to cause me to see that my actions are not what I'm supposed to be doing. The fear of pain might be an instinctive or inspirational voice telling me that this action that I'm considering or negotiating is probably going to be painful. Joy might be our Creator's way of telling us that what we're doing is what we're supposed to be doing. The promise of Joy might be our Creator using our instincts or inspiration (sixth sense) to signal to us that this looks promising...keep moving forward.

### **What do I have to share? How can I help?**

I often hear people who are new ask these questions. I asked these questions when I was new. We all have experience to share. We all definitely have experience to share as to "what not to do" and we are beginning to get experience to share as to "what to do". If you are 21 years old, you have 21 years of experience. Helping others has NOTHING to do with sobriety time. Sobriety time is way over-rated. These principles are the wisdom of the ages. You don't have to be someone's sponsor to help them.

If you recently relapsed, you have not lost your experience...your memory has not been erased. If anything you now have even more absolutely vital experience to share to hopefully keep someone else from doing the same thing. Trust your heart...share your experience...don't worry about the results and don't be concerned with what unhappy people have to say about what you're doing.

There is one thing that is available to every person on this planet but will never be available to me...this is a "clear objective perspective of my life". My perspective of my life will always be clouded by my plans, designs and desires. Your perspective of my life is not clouded by those things. So I can do for you, and you can do for me, what neither of us can do for ourselves...provided we don't have ulterior motive with each other. If there is ulterior motive, this can become very murky if not completely ugly. We still need to try to help the people we have ulterior motive with (sex, money, security, etc.), particularly if there is no one else making themselves available to help, but obviously this is not the ideal situation.

What if I'm incarcerated? There are people incarcerated with you. As long as you're not in solitary confinement, try to help someone. Worst case scenario...write letters, journal, read spiritual literature, go to meetings or church ceremonies. Do something, anything, to get out of sitting around thinking about yourself.

### **Sobriety Time**

As it relates to spiritual principle, counting sobriety time is only a distraction. These principles have applied to you since the day you were born. Some people come into AA with one day of sobriety with more awareness of spiritual principle than some who have been sober for decades.

Long term sobriety provides momentum. If I stop taking spiritual action and the newcomer stops taking spiritual action, we're both going to eventually seek relief with the substances or the drink. He will probably beat me to the punch. But I will be close behind. That momentum is advantageous since I might get a moment of clarity in that time. However, let's say we both go out and get messed up with

the drugs or the drink and decide that we want to come back to AA. The newcomer will be able to come back with much greater ease compared to me who had substantial time in AA. My ego will fight me every step along the way. Very few people are able to return after a relapse that happened after having substantial sobriety time.

The other advantage to long-term sobriety is not only does it give my loved-ones cause to not be concerned for me but those who think that long-term sobriety means something will be more open to letting me help them than they would if I tell them I just came back from a relapse.

This business of putting sobriety time limits on who can be in a significant relationship, who can speak at a meeting or who can help someone else is extremely short-sighted and can only be coming from inexperienced or uninformed people. The most dangerous person in AA, in my opinion, is someone who is uninformed or inexperienced, but worse, believes that he/she is informed or is experienced. They are un-teachable. They are digging their own graves. I do everything I can to avoid getting a closed-mind and becoming un-teachable.

### **Some Final Suggestions**

I use basic guidelines, not rules, to enhance my effectiveness in helping people. Here are some additional notes that I believe are vital.

I do not put time limits on anything. Different people come from different situations and absorb awareness in different ways and in they take different amounts of time to understand things in the heart.

Actions speak louder than words. People are watching my actions, even when I don't know they're watching. Are my actions expressing that I am available? Are my actions expressing the same thing that my words are expressing?

When I have someone that I am thinking about helping, I always ask myself...are their actions expressing that they want my help? I pay little, if no, attention to their words...I watch their actions. Their consistent actions will tell me what is truly in their heart.

Before starting with the steps, I try to agree upon some fundamental concepts. Sometimes I'll use a history lesson to do this...other times I'll use recordings or some other conversation that they can relate to. The concepts that I'm trying to get across are...

- What is a Principle? – Something that applies to all people equally
- The Real Alcoholic vs. the Problem Drinker – Spiritual Malady
- The importance of "One Alcoholic Sharing With Another"

At this point, I would refer you to the writing that I did on "Sharing with Another" which will lead you back in to the first and subsequent steps.