

*Personal Experiences
with the 12 Steps*

Step 1

We admitted we were powerless over compulsive/addictive behaviors - that our lives had become unmanageable.

I sat alone wondering how my life had ended up in such turmoil. As I looked back on the past, I could see that my life had no direction, and the foundation of my spiritual values had crumbled. As a result, I developed an “I don’t care” attitude, which encouraged my impure thoughts to lead me down strange and forbidden paths.

As I observed the decline of my moral values, the statement “*as a man thinketh so he may become*” surfaced in my mind. I failed continually in my attempts to control my behavior. I thought if I could lower my values to make my behavior seem more manageable to me, I wouldn’t feel so bad about myself. But then I would allow my passions and appetites to drive my behavior down past the new set of values I had just lowered. At that point my life became unmanageable again. It became apparent that I could not even manage the life I had reduced myself to.

Eventually, I allowed my values to slip low enough to where abusing drugs seemed acceptable. My purpose for abusing drugs was to numb my feelings of regret and dull the pain of my guilt. I also abused drugs to fill the emptiness I created within myself when my wrongful behavior drove God out of my life. The longer I abused drugs, the more empty I felt, and the more addicted I became. There came a point when I realized my thoughts were becoming irrational because of the effect the drugs were having on me emotionally. After prolonged use, I could see how my character was being altered into someone I never dreamed I would become. I wanted to stop, but the compulsion to continue abusing drugs became so strong that I felt I could no longer say no.

I felt as though I was standing on train tracks deep inside a narrow tunnel. Every so often the train of my addiction would race down through the dark passageway leaving me no room to escape its impact. Knowing the chaos the train would bring, I would run down the tracks to avoid the inevitable. But I could only run so far before I would collapse, as my addiction with all of its destructive force, would then run over me. My only hope for the outcome of the collision was that I would live through it.

As I questioned what had happened to my life, I thought of what Lehi taught his sons. “*Men are free in this Earth life to choose liberty and eternal life, [through following Christ], or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.” (2 Nephi 2:27) Did my drug addiction hold me in captivity? Was my life miserable? Apparently I had made my choice, and it wasn’t eternal life. I realized my predicament and I became paralyzed with fear. The only relief I could find was turning back to drugs for the little comfort they provided and the escape I needed, so I wouldn’t have to think about what my life had become. I finally admitted my life was unmanageable, and I was powerless to control it.*

Step 1

We admitted that we were powerless over our compulsive/addictive behaviors - that our lives had become unmanageable.

Once again I caved in to my addiction. I had promised that I would never abandon my family again and party away the night. My addiction was out of control. Constantly I found myself obsessed with thoughts of using. I worried all day about obtaining my next fix, about running out, and about the chase to get more. Physically I was powerless to stop the compulsion to use. I had no regard for the consequences of my behavior. I was killing myself one line, one fix at a time, and I was clueless as to how to put my life back together.

My addiction created a spiritual hole within my soul. The hole continued to grow daily leaving a larger and larger gap in my spirit. As I looked at the others who partied with me, anger would surge. Why were they able to handle the party, while I had to be so powerless? My life was no longer sweet, and I became more and more depressed. It was time to do something about the ever-increasing hole in my soul. Before I could begin any inner healing I would need to be honest and open about my drug addiction.

I was terrified on the day that I finally asked for help. Nothing in the world could have taken the shame and fear out of the pit of my stomach. Yet, my desire to look good in front of everyone was outweighed by my desire to be free from the insanity of my addiction. Mustering all the courage I could, I confessed to my family, my Bishop, and my counselor as to my drug addiction.

Admitting that I was an addict and that I needed help was difficult. Having gone through the process, I can confess that this admission was the necessary first step for me to begin the road of recovery and healing. My grandmother use to say, "self recognition is the first step to betterment." She was right, as grandmothers so often are.

Step 2

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

When I became truly honest with myself, I could finally admit I was an addict. What this meant was that I finally admitted that my compulsive behaviors had absolute power over me. What was I to do? I had vowed countless times to stop the insanity of my addictions, but I couldn't. I was held captive by my compulsiveness. Every time I would try to resist the urge to cave into my compulsive behavior, I would quickly lose the fight.

Lehi counseled to his wayward sons to *“awake from a deep sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.”* (2 Nephi 1:13) I could identify with this passage, for I was definitely drowning in a gulf of misery because I was chained to my addictions.

I wanted my life restored back to normal and I needed help. So where was I supposed to start? Would God help me? Did I deserve His help? Did I believe He really exists? My spiritual journey had to start at the very beginning where faith is born.

“But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.” (Alma 32:27) Feeling very humbled because of my lack of self-control over my compulsive behaviors, I found myself in desperate need of God's help. I decided to pray that I might exercise my particle of faith, which wasn't much, but it was all I had. Even though I felt I did not deserve any response from God, after I prayed for strength, I felt a warm peace come over me, and my compulsion seemed to disappear for a time. I learned that day that God is real and that He had been waiting for me to come to believe that He would help me. Faith does precede the miracle.

Moroni declared: *I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.* (Ether 12:6) Heavenly Father wants to help all of His children, but He will respect our freedom to choose our own destiny. So it is in wisdom that He waits for us to turn to Him, so that He may do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. I take great comfort in knowing when I am tempted above what I feel I can resist, I can pray to Heavenly Father to remove the craving from which I am tempted. The result would always amaze me as the craving of my addiction would instantly be removed and my rational thinking restored through the Savior's power. Yet, there are days I would find myself on my knees more often, when temptation would return repeatedly to try to capture me.

Step 2

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

Many years ago, a group of us were asked to put together a choir. We were all in college and thought ourselves to be capable of the challenge. At our first rehearsal we found ourselves surrounded with wonderful talent, and many accomplished musicians. The only problem was that the choir never got off the ground.

There was a young fellow in our group who tried to be the conductor. Though talented, he lacked the ability to pull together our independent and strong wills. We all had an opinion as to the correct way to lead the choir. The truth was that we were a mess.

From the audience, our advisor watched and listened to the rehearsal, but said nothing regarding the chaos. At our next practice session, the advisor arrived with an older man and introduced him as our conductor.

We took offense to the intrusion of this old conductor. We were capable of doing the choir on our own. Our complaint did not intimidate the gentleman. He was pleasant in his introduction and frankly told us what he expected from us as a choir. Then, taking total charge, he began the practice. There was no more chaos or discussion of how things should be. There was only music. The talent had been there all along. What had been lacking was direction.

Likewise, I have many talents and abilities. However, the power to restore myself from the insanity and chaos of my addiction to the peaceful strains of life is a power that has not been given to me. That power is held by God. I need to join His choir and submit my will to Him so that He can bring me to my full potential. Taking this step requires that I swallow a huge amount of pride. I have to admit to myself that I cannot save myself.

The Grand Conductor, Heavenly Father, is capable of all things and has the power to restore. He knows how to direct the choir. The question for me was: would He allow me to join His choir and would He help me in my recovery? I was afraid that, because of my behaviors and sins, I would not be accepted. I believed that I had to do something to qualify for His help. I was wrong. "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden...*" (Matt 11:28) was His invitation. What I had to do was to risk, to believe, and to open my soul to this *power* greater than myself.

Step 3

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

When Alma the younger had made a commitment to the Lord to turn away from his self-centered carnal state to a state of righteousness he declared; *“My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more.”* (Mosiah 27:29)

Being in a similar state of wickedness as Alma was, I realized my self-serving will kept me in bondage along with my many compulsive behaviors. I did not like the person I had become, and would continually try to numb my feelings of failure through my addictions. I desired to have a profound change take place within me as Alma experienced, but the complexity of my inner self seemed so vast that I was at a loss to know where to begin. I had come to believe that God exists, and that he has power over my addictions. But did He know me well enough to change the inner me?

Jesus said: *“for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.”* (Matt. 6:8) This passage taught me that God knew me better than I knew myself. More than anything I wanted a relationship with my Heavenly Father. But I did not know how. As I considered my overall understanding of Heavenly Father, I realized that I only knew of Him. If Heavenly Father and I were to make profound changes in my life together, as Father and son, wouldn't I need to know Him on a personal basis?

So, how could I come to know Him? John declared: *“hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoso keepeth His word, in Him verily is the love of God perfect: hereby know we that we are in Him.”* (1 John 2:3,5) This passage suggests that I will come to know God by my obedience to His will. What was God's will? The scriptures are great resource of help in coming to understand Him.

Omni counsels us to: “Come unto Christ, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto Him... and partake of the power of His redemption.” (Omni 1:26) If I were willing to sacrifice all of my compulsive behaviors, resentments, pride, and secret desires as an offering to Christ, would He redeem me from their powerful influence over me? Absolutely! Would I come to know Him then? Heavenly Father is counting on it.

As I became willing to give to Christ everything about myself that was self-serving, He replaced what I had given up with wisdom and personal knowledge of His will. In doing so, I began to understand the nature of God and the incomparable difference between His wisdom and my own. As I continue in following His council, I become more and more convinced that His way is a better way to live. I am brought out of darkness when I am in compliance with His will and can see the world with more clarity.

The process of giving up my will for God's will is an ongoing challenge filled with many attempts at trying, and failing. At first, this was a very frustrating way to live. But by living for the successes, and not giving up when I would experience failure, I slowly made progress in abandoning my self-serving will while replacing it with God's will.

Step 3

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

By this point in my recovery, I had admitted that my drug addiction was out of control and that by myself I was powerless to break loose from it. I really wanted to believe that Heavenly Father would help me gain sobriety and to recover. But I was scared. It had been a major point in my life to not trust anyone, or to let anyone get too close to my feelings.

Now, I was supposed to turn total control of my life and will to God. I could acknowledge that I needed to turn over some control. But the idea of letting go of all of the sorrows, trials, pains, and sufferings that I was carrying was a lot to ask.

For me to choose to yield, and to follow Christ, was to accept that there would need to be an entire revolution of the inner me. Religion calls this kind of change “being born again.” In order to receive peace to my life, and to be able to inherit eternal happiness, I had to be born again. I could not escape the procedure. I had to stop controlling myself, and everyone around me, and turn that control over to Heavenly Father.

I learned that the action necessary to change my nature was to surrender my will to God. Then the process began with Heavenly Father performing a kind of open-heart surgery. I was in need of a changed heart, a softened heart. God began His work inside my soul.

I quickly learned that I would not be allowed any shortcuts in my recovery. I was frustrated because of the many challenges that needed to be resolved, and often felt alone. It was at this place of loneliness that I found my Savior. He had not abandoned me.

Many believe that there is no cure for compulsive behavior. I am not qualified to say one way or another. What I do know is that redemption from these behaviors is accomplished through the atonement of Jesus Christ. If allowed, He picks us up, cleans us off, and makes more of us than we could ever make of ourselves.

Step 4

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

As I began Step Four, I felt like an archeologist examining the ancient culture of my past. I searched for the clues I hoped would piece together the picture of what my life had become. I desired to discover the truth of how my character was developed and how I had acquired so many addictive behaviors. So many pieces of the picture were missing. I was unable to come to any conclusions.

I thought I had valid reasons for my behaviors, and could easily justify them. But as I honestly took inventory of myself, I found the vast extent of pride and self-centeredness that controlled my life. I really had no idea as to why I had become the prideful person that I hated.

One day I came across a passage in Ether that stated from the Lord, “*And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness.*” (Ether 12:27) I pondered this part of the scripture, wondering how it applied to me. I observed how aware I was of my addictions, as I was reminded of them daily. Why would the Lord have to show me my weakness if I already knew what my weakness was? I began to reason that perhaps my compulsive/addictive behaviors were not the weakness the Lord was speaking of. Maybe the weakness He was referring to was the underlying issue that was causing all of my addictive behaviors.

The Lord goes on to say, “*I give unto men weakness that they may be humble...*” (Ether 12:27) Perhaps my weakness was really a gift from God so that I would not live in a state of pride my entire life. I realized that my weakness was given to me as a safeguard for those times when I would stray from God and become self-centered and prideful. As I would stray off the path, my weakness would begin manifesting worldly desires and behaviors that eventually caused my life to become miserable and unmanageable. It was in that state of misery that I was brought to humility, which motivated me to return to the path that brought happiness and spiritual fulfillment.

Hoping to receive the answer concerning my past, I accepted the Lord’s invitation to come unto Him, that he might show me my weakness as I humbly went to Him in prayer. For me, the answer was not immediate; for I was now on the Lord’s timetable. Eventually the answer did come when Heavenly Father knew I was ready for it. When the answer came, I was shown the storm and wreckage of my past and all the missing pieces of the picture were revealed. By allowing the Lord to show me how my past had affected the present, I could finally see what my weakness was. It was then easier to apply the following steps of recovery to specific issues of my past. And with God’s help, I could then resolve those issues and finally be at peace with myself. This event taught me a deeper meaning of humility, and of its fundamental importance. Humility in fact, had opened the door for me to be healed.

The last part of Ether’s passage gave me a great deal of hope that I could one day overcome my addictive behaviors. “*My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me, and if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.*” (Ether 12:27) For years I was trying to be my own savior by relying solely on self-control. As it turned out, the task of overcoming my addictive behaviors was much easier the Lord’s way. When I was finally ready to accept the Savior into my life by fully embracing His counsel, then was His grace sufficient for me. Then the Savior revealed to me how to turn my weakness in to strength; thus, removing the core issue causing my addictive behaviors.

Step 4

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Many years ago, my youngest son, age six at the time, was handed a can of cleanser along with a charge to go clean the bathroom. He returned moments later. Holding up the can he read from the label, "Warning. Keep out of the hands of children." I was then informed that since he was a child, he would not be able to clean the bathroom. It was a good try. He still had to clean the bathroom.

Similarly, step four was the can of cleanser that I was given to begin the cleaning of my soul. At the time, I was convinced that a personal inventory of any kind would be harmful to my emotional stability. I wanted to hand the can back, but such was not to be. My chore was to "scrub out" the patterns, behaviors and beliefs that represented the true nature of my person. The job also required that I be totally honest in all areas of my life.

As I began this self-examination, I found behaviors and events from which I wanted to run but I could not allow my fear to stop the inventory. My next defense was to blame everyone and everything for my behaviors and problems. The blaming stopped my progress with the inventory. It was not until I quit all excuses, stopped all rationalizations, and honestly admitted that *I* had the problem that I was able to move ahead.

Another huge stumbling block along the way of personal examination was shame. I felt like a complete failure and viewed myself as a bad person. I have since come to know that it was the behavior and not the person that was bad. Further, I came to believe that to stop trying was to fail.

It was good to revisit and reflect upon the events that defined my out-of-control life. Being fearless in the inventory meant that I looked at all the behavior areas of my life and was honest with what I found. Though difficult to do, I was amazed how this exercise became a positive step towards healing unresolved issues within me. The blessing associated with this step, that unraveled the knots of my life, was peace to my soul.

Step 5

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

There came a point in my recovery when I felt I had stopped growing spiritually. I had come so far, and gained so much with the changes I had made in my life. Yet, I was still reminded of the sins of my past, as I would continually feel their tremendous weight on my shoulders. It was the Lord's way of telling me to not procrastinate the day of my repentance any longer.

I realized the seriousness of my predicament when I came across this passage found in the Doctrine & Covenants: *"For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I."* (D&C 19:16, 17) The unmistakable meaning of this verse left me with a sense of urgency, and I recognized it was time to apply step five to my life. It was time to admit to another person the exact nature of my wrongs. I felt my Bishop was the right choice, considering my circumstances. I knew how difficult it would be for me to bring to light all the dark secrets I had kept hidden for so many years.

As I entered the Bishops office, he greeted me with a warm smile. I felt so right in what I was doing. As I confessed my sins to my Bishop, I felt the tremendous weight of my transgressions being lifted from my shoulders. I had not realized the full extent of the burden I carried, until I vocalized all the sins of my past. As the last excruciating word of my full confession left my lips, a sweet peacefulness washed over my soul, and I felt as though my Heavenly Father was smiling down upon me, confirming that what I had done was right.

Later that evening as I lay in bed, I felt calmness in my soul where fear once resided. A blanket of peace fell over me as I took comfort in the last words written by Enos when he said, *"And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen."* (Enos 1:27)

I had been given a little glimpse of what Enos felt. I was filled with hope that one day I could feel the same.

Finally, my broken heart had begun to mend, as I started through the repentance process by first confessing my sins. My bishop gave me an outline of what I needed to accomplish in the process, so that one day forgiveness would be granted.

The Savior said, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30) At last, by confessing my sins, my loving Savior could take the burden of my transgressions off my shoulders, which cleared the way for me to continue in my spiritual progression.

Step 5

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

In a word, this step is confession. When the time was right, I put my faith and trust in God, and met with my Bishop. At that moment I knew I was vulnerable, that I was risking the possibility of being hurt and rejected by another's opinion of me. Still, I wanted to be clean and honest before God. Blessedly, Heavenly Father did not leave me alone, but provided an empowerment which allowed me to honestly share all of my ungodly behavior with my priesthood leader.

Talking with my bishop afforded an opportunity to “get real” about me, and to actually verbalize with sincerity and humility that I had, and continued to have, problems. I had worked hard for years to protect the secrets in my life. Doing so made me grow bitter, angry, impatient, and judgmental of others. The sharing of my inventory, or the confession of my sins, was a step toward taking responsibility for my actions without blaming or endeavoring to justify the bad behaviors. Confession was my admission, before God, that I was accountable to Him for all of my actions.

I was able to admit that I needed help in order to become all that Heavenly Father wanted me to become. Sin had destroyed my unity with God. My confession eliminated the obstacles that were blocking the reconciliation process. It also allowed me to realize that my ability to “mess up” was not greater than Christ's power to redeem.

Even in the most shameful and embarrassing moments of my confession, the Lord did not abandon me. The Bishop did not reject or demean me. Rather he expressed compassion and love. I felt he showed a strong respect and appreciation for my own willingness to repent and to seek the healing that can only come from God.

Though it required much courage, my admissions allowed me to move from the shadow of fear and guilt into the sunlight of repentance, hope, and healing.

Step 6

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

With God's help I can understand what my character defects are and why they are a part of my personality. With God's help I can see how my character defects affect everyone around me in a negative way.

One day my wife and I were sitting around the kitchen table with my 21 year old son and his girlfriend. The girl was having difficulty with her job, and was expressing her concerns. My son loves her very much, and only wants to protect and help her. But in a bossy approach, he proceeded to tell her what she would have to do to resolve her problem. From my point of view, I could see how demeaning my son's words were to his girlfriend. Yet, as the scene played itself out, there was a familiar ring to it. It was the "like father like son" syndrome. I turned to my wife and she gave me a look that said, "He sounds just like you." I then fully understood why my wife would always walk away in frustration every time we would have a similar discussion. It seems that I have been doing this our entire married life.

I came to recognize that the cause of the conflict in these circumstances would be defined as a character defect. I wrestled with the issue of whom I learned this character trait from and how I could blame my inappropriate behavior on them. In so doing, I could justify my actions. But what good would that serve?

I was absolutely certain I wanted this defect in my character removed from me, but it was beyond my self-control to do so. It had become so much a part of who I was, that I felt powerless to change it. It seems that each time a similar circumstance would surface, I would always say or do the wrong thing before I could stop myself. Thus I concluded, once again I felt the need to turn to my Heavenly Father for help.

When I asked God to help with this step, He didn't remove the character defect as such, but gave me a choice. When I would find myself in circumstances where a character defect was about to surface, the Lord in that same moment would bring to my mind a better approach to the situation. Thus, I would be offered a choice to keep doing it the old way, which always brought the same negative response, or try it the Lord's way; a way that would lead to a more positive out come. My willingness to listen to God's suggestions in changing my character must be ever present. If I am not willing to listen and yield to His will, then God will let me continue making the same errors in my association with others.

I also applied this principle toward the addictive desires that plagued my life. When I asked Heavenly Father to help me replace my evil desires with righteous desires, His suggestion to me was to reach out to others with compassion and understanding, so that I would come to love my fellowmen with a spirit of forgiveness and acceptance. As I did this my whole perception of the world changed along with my desires. As I listen for the Lord's suggestions and apply them to my life, a mighty change began to take place in my heart. By practicing over and over the Lord's suggested behavioral changes, my improved character eventually becomes part of my nature.

Changing my character so I can become a better person is an ongoing process. My success hinges on my willingness to continually yield my heart to Christ for his sanctification and purification. (See Helaman 3:35) The Lord will continue to purify my character, and my desires, as I trust in Him with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding. Acknowledging Him by yielding to his promptings, He continues to direct my paths. (See Proverbs 3:5,6)

Step 6

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

My work thus far in recovery uncovered many of my sins and character defects. Unfortunately, the mere acknowledgment and admission to these defects did not remove them permanently from my life. I realized that the former behaviors that shaded my life had to be removed to allow for the healing warmth of God's light. It was now time to deal with the issues of my life.

So as to not be overwhelmed with the many changes that my life required, I found that it helped to separate my character defects from my sins. The defects were my habits and thought patterns which led to my making bad decisions. The sins were the result of my bad behaviors. It was not hard to realize that I needed God's help in finding better alternatives to the ongoing choices that I had to make when dealing with daily challenges.

During this period of my recovery, I had to be willing to honestly admit to, and take ownership of my behaviors and sins. *To be willing* is one of the big principles behind step 6. I had to be willing to apply to my life the principles of recovery as presented in the various steps, including daily prayer, scripture study, and meeting attendance. I had to be willing to allow Christ into my life, and then be willing to follow His commandments as best I could. Yet, with all of this willingness, I was only beginning the great process of change. Though well underway, I was still far from the "new man in Christ" (See 2 Cor.5:17-21). There was so much to do before I could be "one" with Him.

I came to realize that my established character was not going anywhere. The second part of this step for me was to yield, or to freely give my choice (agency), to Christ. This allowed me to choose to follow the prompting of the Spirit in selecting better alternatives of behavior. By choosing to follow Christ, my personal behavior improved, and sin was avoided. Once again I learned that recovery was only possible through Jesus Christ, "*for behold, by [Him] redemption cometh...*" (3 Nephi 9:17). My defects were changed to strengths as I learned to yield to a higher power and make better choices.

Step 7

We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Over the years I had accumulated a long list of sins. I felt as though my sins were a yoke of bondage around my neck that I could not escape from. I hated myself for making so many poor choices that resulted in a life of misery. I constantly lived in a fearful state of dieing in my sins and losing the chance to turn my life around. Alma counseled; *“I beseech of you, that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.”* He goes on to say, *“For that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”* (Alma 34:33,34) My thought was, “If I hated myself so much, and I knew from the content of these scriptures that I would be the same person in the next life, why not make changes in my life now, and avoid the eternal misery of having to live with myself later? It was time for me to repent.

As I felt humility settle into my soul, I knew I was ready to approach Heavenly Father and ask for His forgiveness. As I knelt and pleaded with Heavenly Father for the remission of my sins, I experienced no heavenly messenger at my bedside. But I did receive a feeling of well-being. At that time, I gained a little more hope in God and I knew I had moved a little closer to the threshold of forgiveness.

I learned that forgiveness would only come after I had fulfilled all of the requirements of the repentance process. There were issues I had not yet addressed, like forgiving others, making amends and restitution to those I had harmed. There would come a time when I would feel the misery of pain I had caused others, which would fill my heart with more than just regret for what I had done. One day I would feel a strong sense of remorse, a Godly sorrow that would pierce the very core of my soul. When the moments of remorse would fill my heart, I wept uncontrollable tears of sorrow. I never knew there could be anything so painful; yet at the same time bring such healing to my heart. Like the heat from the refiner’s fire that purifies the metal, my experience of remorse fulfilled that same purpose. There were also moments when I wept tears of joy, as my heart would fill with gratitude in recognition of the person I was becoming. I am grateful to God for the ability to feel emotion again.

One Saturday morning, I woke up with a feeling of contentment, because of the way my life had recently been going. I was experiencing real happiness for the first time in my life, because I was finally becoming the person I always wanted to be. I recognized I had experienced a mighty change of heart, because I was finally losing the disposition to do evil. (See Mosiah 5:2)

I knelt beside my bed to express my tearful feelings of gratitude to Heavenly Father. My desire was to ask nothing from Heavenly Father, but rather, I wished only to express my gratefulness. As I poured out my heart in thanksgiving, the room fell completely silent. I experienced a calm and warming peace that welled up inside me. I then heard the words come into my mind, *“Ye, I forgive thee.”* I was overcome with emotion as I cried uncontrollably. I knew without any doubt that the words I had heard came from my Heavenly Father.

The yoke of bondage from my sins was finally gone, and I was left with total peace in my heart and with overwhelming joy that I could hardly contain.

Step 7

We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

At this point in my recovery, I took an opportunity to review my circumstances. Dismally, I found myself in the middle of a huge pile of sins, stacked like rocks all around. It was overwhelming to think that God would take away these sins simply by praying. Yet, that is what He said I was to do. So I prayed.

In the days of the Old Testament shepherds built circular enclosures of stone, topped with thorns, to protect their sheep from predators. These enclosures, called “obeys” had no doors. The shepherd always placed himself at the portal to guard off any intrusion and to keep his flock safe. Similarly, God took my “boulders” of inappropriate behavior and began building a fortress about me to protect me from the intrusion of the adversary. Though I still had agency to choose how to respond to temptation and trial, I had a measure of security, a wall of protection, constructed from my experiences. This protection, or knowledge, gained through trial and tribulation, allowed me to find safety by making better choices.

At the entrance to the Good Shepherd’s “obey” was the Atonement of Jesus Christ. I was concerned as to whether or not I would be allowed to enter. However, I soon realized that the matter of how horrible and vile my behavior had been could be swallowed in the miracle of the Atonement. Christ as the Guardian had the power to erase my sins, to clean me up, and to render me worthy of the blessings of forgiveness and salvation. My part was to repent and to choose to follow the commandments so as to be able to partake of this great blessing. After much humble prayer, I was allowed to enter.

Choosing to follow God and doing my best to keep His commandments was learning to turn to Him in all things. Even with my best effort, however, I realized that I was seriously limited in my ability to be perfect in keeping His commandments. I learned that He was aware of my limitations, and would in due course compensate for them, after all I could do. (2 Nephi 25:23). My job was to continue to make good choices, and to endure to the end.

Step 8

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

I am a prisoner of the past by my own making. Because of the defects in my character, my actions have been the cause of a multitude of harm to others. How can I begin to right all of my wrongs? How can I find the courage to face the victims of my botchery? How do I make amends to myself?

It is suggested that I first make a list. Maybe the list would help me sort things out. Perhaps if I honestly view the circumstances of each harmful incident and take responsibility for my part in them, God can then help me find a way to make peace with others. Perhaps by making a list of those I have harmed, I can reflect on what I might say to them.

I believe one day my path will eventually cross with all of those that I have harmed. Possibly some of those paths will cross in the next life, but I believe amends must be made to everyone before personal perfection is achieved.

By making a list, I can start the process of making amends, so that perhaps one day, the prison door of my past conflicts can be opened, and the burden of my guilt set free.

Step 8

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

One of the principle teachings of Christ was “*If ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee—Go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you.*” (3 Nephi 12:23-24). He obviously knew that during this life, relationships would be harmed, and feelings hurt, if His commandments were not obeyed.

A simple review of my inventory from Step Four was enough to produce a specific list of names of people to whom I owed an apology. There were also those to whom restitution, including financial and physical, needed to be made. It was hard to face an actual list of names of those whom I had harmed. There was no question, but that if I wanted to be able to move forward in my recovery, I needed to confront this difficult fact, and prepare my sincere amends.

It was folly to think that my compulsive behavior, as self-serving as it was, would never trample upon or harm the tender feelings of another. And yet, I truly believed that my conduct was so well controlled, and covered, that no one but me was getting hurt. To drag anyone down with me was never part of my thinking. But this was naive rationalization. The dishonesty alone that went along with my behavior hurt many loved ones, causing among other things, a loss of trust.

It has been good for me to participate in recovery meetings with loved ones. Many have expressed their feelings regarding the hurt and emotional anguish that was suffered in watching me, a loved one, destroy myself by my behaviors. My first defense was to refute that I too had been hurt by others and to express my own resentments. But this step was not about what others have done to me. It was about me taking responsibility for what I had done to others. Many had been hurt because of my conduct.

In consideration of all of the fallout caused by my behavior, it was good to take a step towards becoming a peacemaker. From the Sermon on the Mount, Christ taught, “*Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.*” (Matt. 5:9).

Step 9

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

It's been difficult to know how to go about making direct amends to the people that I had harmed. Because this has always been something I have avoided in the past, the task seemed much bigger than I was. I had learned in the previous steps that if I was having difficulty in applying a principle of recovery in my life, I had always been more successful if I first humbled myself in prayer to my Heavenly Father and asked for guidance.

The Lord counsels us to; *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16)*

I found that the passage in James did have its merit, for the righteous intent of my prayers did avail many opportunities. One of these opportunities was presented to me as I arrived at a house under construction that I was to work on. I recognized the parked truck in the driveway belonging to a person in my past that I needed to apologize to. I had directed words of blame and ridicule to my former friend some years ago. Being the self-centered and prideful person that I was, I had always felt justified in my actions toward him. Recently, the Lord revealed to me that my actions were wrong and amends needed to be made. Because my heart had been softened from applying the previous steps to my life, I felt a measure of regret, and a desire to make things right.

When I saw him through the window, I realized the Lord had provided an opportunity for me to apologize to my old friend. I knew if I was to be released from the burden of my wrongful actions towards this person, an amends needed to be made. After all was considered, I decided I must seize the moment and offer to him my sincere apology.

As I approached him in the kitchen area, I could see in his eyes that he had not forgotten the incident. He stood motionless as I greeted him with a smile and an outstretched hand. In the awkward moment that seemed to play out in slow motion, I told him that I was wrong in my past actions. He immediately agreed. Then with a sincere heart I humbly confessed to him that I felt badly about the incident, and that I was sorry. The aggressive expression on his face then turned to a smile as the mood of hostility that surrounded us vanished, and the room filled with the warm peaceful feeling of forgiveness.

I am happy to report that because of my efforts in working this step, along with the Savior's help, my old friend and I had found a measure of peace in our hearts that day, because an amends had been made.

Step 9

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

Rebuilding bridges, or the actual apologies, had to be more than a quick “*I’m sorry!*” Those words had been worn out long ago. I came to understand that amends are a function of sobriety over time, wherein I act as a responsible person. They do not allow for criticism of others for any reason. Simply stated, making amends is assuming ownership of my behaviors.

Prior to approaching anyone to offer my apologies, I found that I needed to prayerfully counsel with Heavenly Father for the appropriate direction which I was to take. To some, there would only need to be an apology. To others, I owed restitution. From others, I would need to hear of the hurt felt because of my behavior. I would need to know of their feelings at watching me, someone they loved, destroy myself. I had to hear of the fear that I caused by the loss of trust. This was a healing process, and contention and conflict of any kind had to be avoided at all costs. This was my turn to apologize, and to then be still and to listen.

I had no control over the reactions of others. Many were grateful for an opportunity to extend forgiveness. Others only offered a cold shoulder. This in itself was not important. What I experienced was the love of God empowering me with the strength to approach other people with my amends. The result was a brand of humility that allowed a deeper trust in Heavenly Father, and a respect for other people. I also found a healing within myself, which freed my spirit from the bondage of guilt and shame that I carried for having hurt so many.

Step 10

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

I am well aware of the fact that everyday I am faced with the challenges and temptations of this earth life. The Lord is continually giving me opportunity for growth, as He frequently tests me to see what my heart is set upon. Am I going to take advantage of opportunities to further my spiritual development, or am I going to sit on the bench of complacency? Am I going to dismiss the evil thoughts that temptation brings, or will I entertain those thoughts until I act upon them? Am I going to hold onto the word of God, or will I allow the mists of darkness lure me down strange and forbidden paths? (*See 1 Nephi 8:23*)

As I live in this mortal existence, I am continually being persuaded by my spiritual side to do good continually and partake of the sweet things God offers me. On the other side of the coin I am continually swayed by the enticings of the natural man, to sin and therefore reap the bitter consequences of the whirlwind that follows. In the book of Moses, *“the Lord spake unto Adam saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, (the mortal existence) even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.”* (*Moses 6:55*)

I tasted the bitter for many years, only because I hungered after anything that would fill the empty place in my soul. If I am not being fed spiritually, then most likely I am partaking of the bitter in an attempt to satisfy my appetite. To maintain spiritual growth, I must view the direction my life is going on a daily basis to make sure I am feeding myself with spiritual things. The flesh is weak, and if I allow myself to indulge in the bitter things of life, eventually I will get used to the taste and not desire to change the menu.

Nephi detested the bitter and became angry with himself when he would fall into temptation. Falling into temptation is a very common practice for everyone, even for the prophet Nephi as he describes; *“O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins, which do so easily beset me. And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted.”* (*2 Nephi 4:17-19*)

Although Nephi was angered at himself when he fell into temptation, he trusted in God to deliver him from the bondage of his sins. The Savior knew of the importance for us to learn from our failures. Thus, we come to recognize for ourselves that we cannot experience a fullness of joy in this life without God. So God gave us this promise: *“Yea and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.”* (*Mosiah 26:30*)

Someone once stated; *“There are no mistakes in life, only lessons. Our lessons will keep repeating themselves as many times as it takes until the lessons are learned.”* So what am I going to do? Am I going to keep repeating the same old behaviors over and over for the rest of my life? Or do I turn to God for strength against *the temptations which do so easily beset me*? This is something I need to reflect on everyday to determine whether or not I am moving forward in my recovery. My actions determine who I am. If I am partaking of the bitter, then I will become bitter. If I am partaking of spiritual things, then I am becoming spiritual.

There is comfort in knowing that even when I have been trying my best to do what is right, and I still fall into temptation, I can trust there is a loving Savior there to help me up, and offer forgiveness.

Step 10

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

As I approached step 10, it became a step of review and remembrance for me. I was not asked to dredge up the past - as was done in step four - rather it was a time to review where I was against where I desired to be. In a way, it was a course adjustment, as well as an awakening to a remembrance of my duty to be all that I could, and to maintain my sobriety and my commitment to everyone - to become a better man.

I remember listening one time to a pilot. He explained that, if he failed to set correct vectors at the beginning of a flight, the flight would end up in a totally different location. He said that an initial error of less than one degree could result in a destination difference of many hundreds of miles. Even during the flight, he would recheck his course, and make the seemingly small yet necessary corrections in order to insure an absolutely correct destination.

Life is not an aimless pursuit. Sobriety, along with a sure understanding of who I am and why I am here on earth, compel me to take whatever precautions are necessary to insure that I stay on course. I need to adjust my focus and direction daily. Today's adjustment is usually minor and spares me the pain and sorrow of major correction. There are roads that I do not want to walk again. Because I do not want to again stray, I find safety with a short leash and a regular daily review of my behavior and direction.

Step 11

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.

I have so much gratitude in my heart for the spiritual growth I have experienced, and the knowledge I have gained from working all of the previous steps. It seems the more I learn, the more I realize I need to improve my knowledge of God. I recognize that there is so much more for me to know, and do. I know I have come to Earth for specific reasons. I know that I agreed in the pre-mortal life to fulfill certain promises I made to the Lord. But what are they?

“The Lord knoweth all things from the beginning; wherefore, He prepareth a way to accomplish all his works among the children of men; for behold, he hath all power unto the fulfilling of all his words.” (1 Nephi 9:6) Only the Lord has knowledge of the *exceeding great and precious promises* that were made before I came to earth, and only he can qualify me to accomplish the work I have been sent here to do. If I am not actively praying for guidance, then I will not receive a perfect knowledge of what I am to accomplish in this earth life.

Peter said that God... *“hath called us to glory and virtue.”* And He has given me an open invitation to come unto Him and receive... *“knowledge in all things that pertain unto life and Godliness.”* His only requirement is that I must be willing to apply spiritual principles to my life such as... *“virtue, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* And within the knowledge given to me are... *“exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.”* (2 Peter 1:2-8 emphasis added)

Without the knowledge of God’s will for me, I would wander aimlessly through life without a clue of what my mission is. Because of His great love for me, Heavenly Father gives me direction through the knowledge and experiences of the prophets of old through holy writ, as well as the living prophets of today. God also teaches me through the Holy Spirit, which the scriptures describe as, *“It was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise, but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper, and it did pierce even to the very soul.”* (Helaman 5:30) Heavenly Father wants me to succeed in my life’s mission. He wants me to have knowledge of things pertaining to the kingdom I eventually will inherit. He wants me to someday become even as He is. But I must first be willing to do my best in carrying out His will for His divine purposes.

I must be willing to do my part if I am going to improve my conscious contact with Heavenly Father. There are spiritual principles I must strive to live by if I am going to continue to receive knowledge of God’s will for me. Joseph Smith clarified that: *“There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of the world, upon which all blessing are predicated— And when we obtain any blessing form God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”* (D&C 130:20-21)

Divine knowledge is definitely one of those blessings.

Step 11

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.

Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray? (Hymns 140)

Each day has become an opportunity for improvement, and reminds me that recovery is a spiritual program. I am totally dependant upon help from and deliverance by Heavenly Father. I don't have to go very far back in my past to remember that my best efforts resulted in my becoming an addict.

As I learn to have an ever-improving relationship with Heavenly Father, the behaviors learned are demonstrated in the way I treat others. In a sense, I am endeavoring to become one with God as I strive to know and do His will in my life. This is nothing more than the Atonement applied. Though the Atonement is many things, certainly one of its dimensions is to be "at one" with God.

I believe that to pray and meditate is to literally speak with Heavenly Father and then to ponder the personal revelation that results from this communication. As I have worked these steps, a very personal relationship has developed between my Heavenly Father and me. It is wonderful to know that He really does know me personally, loves me, and cares about me.

One might wonder exactly what is appropriate when talking to God. In response to this, I turn to Amulek in the Book of Mormon, where he taught: "*Cry unto him for mercy; for he is mighty to save. Humble yourselves, and continue in prayer unto him. Cry unto him when ye are in your fields, over all your flocks. Cry unto him in your houses, over all your household, both morning, mid-day, and evening. Cry unto him against the power of your enemies. Cry unto him against the devil, who is an enemy to all righteousness. Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them. Cry over the flocks of your fields, that they may increase. But this is not all; ye must pour out your souls in your closets, and your secret places, and in your wilderness. And when you do not cry unto the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto him continually for your welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around you.*" (Alma 34:18-27)

A friend once shared a thought that was posted upon a billboard. It read, "*While under reconstruction, consult regularly with your supervisor*"

Step 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others still suffering from the effects of compulsive behaviors, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

For many years, I allowed my compulsive addictive behaviors to take me down the strange and forbidden paths that left me in spiritual darkness. The emptiness and the all consuming fear I experienced while caught in this place of darkness, caused me to seek help from those who had also suffered from the same afflictions.

My spiritual awakening started when I attended my first 12-Step recovery meeting. As I listened to veterans of the group, I felt a ray of hope shining down through the darkness that lighted a pathway to a better way to live.

My spiritual awakening was a process of many changes of the inner-self. For some people it takes a lifetime, for others, a shorter time depending on how much effort is put into working the 12 Steps. As for my stubborn way of thinking, I took several years to finally get it. The process of my spiritual awakening was achieved not by just understanding the 12 Steps, but by applying their principles to my everyday life.

Having had a spiritual awakening, means that I had achieved a profound change in my nature. Through petitioning my Heavenly Father to help me lose the desire to do evil, my disposition gradually changed from evil, to a disposition of wanting to do good continually.

Being spiritually awakened means I am not only doing what is right, but I am doing it for the right reason. I am doing what is right because I love my fellow man, and want to be of service to them. When I am being of service to others by carrying my message of recovery to those who still suffer, I am becoming more Christ-like in my character, and the empty place in my soul is being filled with God's purposes.

Jesus urged his disciples; *"when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."* (Luke 22:32) There will always be times when I need to be strengthened by the good people around me. I am deeply grateful to those who take time out of their busy day to be of service to others. As King Benjamin stated, *"When ye are in the service of your fellow beings, ye are only in the service of your God."* (Mosiah 2:17) Part of the message I carry is: without each other to draw strength from, we would be lost. For it is through the Lord's servants that souls are brought unto Him. *"And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my father."* (D&C 18:15) I know that Jesus Christ lives, and that His power to heal is for everyone that will allow Him to. I am a living testimony of the success the 12 Steps of Recovery can bring.

My lost soul has been brought out of the darkness of addiction, and into Christ's light, and can now see the path before me. I am eternally grateful to my Savior for all the good that is present in my life today. For without Him, I am in a *"worthless and fallen state."* (Mosiah 4:5) I am grateful to my Savior for helping me restore my life, and for the overwhelming joy that comes from loving Him. Because He has given me everything, I feel the only way I can repay Him is to always yield to His will, and continually forsake my own selfish desires.

It is my hope that for the rest of my days on earth, I can be an effective instrument in the Lord's hands for His purposes. It is my hope that the Holy Spirit will always accompany my testimony of the truth as I carry the message of love and of the infinite healing power of Jesus Christ to those who are suffering in the dark.

Step 12

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others still suffering from the effects of compulsive behaviors, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. (Luke 22:32)

I have come to understand that there is a big difference between believing in the goodness of a principle and my ability to live that principle. It seems that a period of time was required to learn all of the “ins and outs” of a step and how to apply them to my life. Sobriety is great, but to be totally changed in behaviors and desires was a function of applying the principles of the steps to my life. This took time, in fact, more time than I thought that it would.

Once I had experienced the difference and realized that I could change, an overwhelming desire to share the principles that I was experiencing swelled within me. I wanted to go out and convert the world. I wanted to be an instrument in the hands of God, to bring this message of hope to others who were suffering as I had.

A great miracle of this recovery program is that Heavenly Father does use us to fulfill His purposes and to become instruments in His hands. This happens as we choose to come unto Him. I can testify that He heals, restores, and re-employs rather than discards those like me who messed up and are seemingly less perfect, or inadequate for His service.

To explain it simply, there is healing and peace as we turn our lives over to the care and keeping of God. When I get down in the rut, He allows me to find someone to whom I can render service. (See Mosiah 2:17). Service is the great key to healing. It never ceases to amaze me how by rendering service, I am lifted and am able to move forward along the path of recovery.

Truly, Heavenly Father makes more of me than I could ever make of myself. He has the power to heal, and to make us whole!