

are offering a gift at the altar ... [first] go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24).

STEP 11 Continue to Take Personal Inventory and Promptly Admit to Wrongdoing

Do your best to prevent new mistakes from becoming habits. Examine yourself in light of God's design for health and apply it daily. "Do not merely listen to the word, [do] what it says. ... The one who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed" (James 1:22, 25).

STEP 11 Seek Through Prayer to Improve Conscious Contact with God, Asking Only for Knowledge of His Will for You and the Power to Carry It Out

Grow your relationship with God by exercising healthy behavior daily. "Put on the full armor of God, so that

when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. ... Stand firm then, with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition, take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:13–18).

STEP 12 Having Had a Spiritual Awakening as the Result of These Steps, Carry This Message to Addicts and Practice These Principles in All Your Affairs

Allow God's love to flow through you to others—the more you give, the more you receive! "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

The Bible says to bring "every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Science has revealed that even though you may avoid unhealthy

behaviors, if you engage in the behavior in your imagination, the same neural circuits fire as when the behavior is actually carried out. This means that if you continue to practice the addiction in your mind, your brain will not rewire, your character won't change, and you'll never experience freedom from addiction.

However, when you change not only your behavior but also your thinking, over time your brain will rewire and what you once found pleasurable will, in time, become repulsive. This is the freedom that unity with Christ brings!

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Addiction: *the compulsive engagement in a behavior that brings short-term reward but long-term destruction.*

No matter the addiction that brings you short-term pleasure—whether alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, shopping, etc.—if not overcome, it will completely ensnare and destroy you. The good news is that God can lead you to real, long-lasting freedom!

While 12-step rehab programs are often presented generically, these steps are actually based on the Christian journey. They aren't designed to merely end your addiction, but to heal your heart from the emotional wounds that led you to self-medicate in the first place.

So whether you're in treatment already or are just beginning a journey to freedom, here are 12 steps you can take to be free . . .

STEP 1 Admit You Are Powerless Over Your Addiction

We all must admit our inability to heal ourselves, that our lives have become unmanageable, and that we

need a Savior. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

STEP 2 Believe that God Can Restore You to Sanity

God is in the saving business—not the condemning business—and He can heal you! "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it through him" (John 3:17).

STEP 3 Make a Decision to Turn Your Life Over to the Care of God

Choose to open your heart to God and let His power transform and heal you from within. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Learn from me . . . and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28–30).

STEP 4 Make a Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory of Yourself

Stop running from the truth that you are broken. It is

the only way you can experience healing. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me [and] see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24).

STEP 5 Admit to God, Yourself, and Others the Exact Nature of Your Wrongs

As you confess your wrongs and experience love and acceptance from God and others, shame is replaced with a love that empowers you to heal. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

STEP 6 Be Ready to Have God Remove All Your Defects of Character

If you really want freedom, honestly let go of your addiction. God cannot remove what we cling to. "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities. . . . I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ezekiel 36:25–27).

STEP 7 Humbly Ask God to Remove Your Shortcomings

Daily acknowledge that you are powerless to change your heart and reach out to God for His transforming presence. "Wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin" (Psalm 51:2).

STEP 8 Make a List of Those You've Harmed and Be Willing to Make Amends

True heart change will help you replace fear and self-centeredness with love for others, and replace self-deceit with truthfulness.

STEP 9 Make Direct Amends to Such People Where Possible, Except When Doing So Would Injure Them or Others

Steps eight and nine will help you apply new methods and principles in your life—thinking about the welfare of others rather than yourself. In doing so, you'll move forward in God's healing plan. "If you