

A Scriptural Healing Plan for Overcoming Addiction

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All addictions - whether drug or alcohol related, sexual, or relational - meet the same definition: “the compulsive engagement in behaviors that bring short-term reward but long-term destruction.”

No matter the addiction that brings short-term pleasure, even if it's accepted by society, if not overcome it will completely ensnare and destroy you. A range of treatments are available - from counseling to prescription medicine - but when God is included, people can experience real freedom.

One of the most common addiction treatments are 12-step rehab programs, the bases of which were first published in the 1939 book, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How More Than One Hundred Men Have Recovered from Alcoholism*. Many conscientious believers have asked me not only whether these steps are effective, but also whether they are biblical.

While often presented generically so as not to offend non-Christians, these steps are designed upon the journey of Christian conversion and spiritual maturation, which is one reason these programs are so successful. You see, the primary purpose of the 12 steps is not merely to achieve abstinence from the addiction, but the healing of the heart, as unhealed emotional wounds often lead people to engage in

addictions as means of self-medicating. Let's take a quick look at the scriptural underpinnings of the 12 steps.

Step 1: Admit You Are Powerless Over Your Addiction

We must admit our inability to heal ourselves, that our lives had become unmanageable, and that we need a Savior. "Jesus said to them, '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 a Power Greater than Yourself Can Restore You to Sanity

We must know the truth about God: that He is in the saving business - and not the condemning business - and He has the ability to heal us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16, 17). "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (John 12:32).

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

We must choose to open our hearts to God, as best as we understand Him, and let His power transform and heal us from within. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Step 4: Make a Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory of Yourself

We must stop running from the truth about ourselves and our brokenness. It is only as we are truthful that we can experience healing. "The truth shall make you free (John 8:32). "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 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

This step is about grace in relationship. As we confess our wickedness and experience love and acceptance from God and humans, our shame is replaced with love and empowers us to move forward in healing (John 8:1-11). "When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned" (Leviticus 5:5). "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that

you may be healed” (James 5:16). “If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1, 2).

Step 6: Be Entirely Ready to Have God Remove All Your Defects of Character

We must have heart honesty. God cannot remove from us what we persistently hold on to. If we really want freedom, we must honestly let go of our addiction. “I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me” (Jeremiah 33:8). “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:25-27). “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Hebrews 8:10).

Step 7: Humbly Ask Him to Remove Your Shortcomings

We must commit to daily acknowledgement that we are powerless to change our own characters or natures and daily reach out to God for His transforming presence. “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:2). “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

Step 8: Make a List of All Persons You’ve Harmed and Be Willing to Make Amends to Each One

True heart change replaces fear and self-centeredness with love for other people, and self-deceit with truthfulness. We stop lying to ourselves, stop denying the truth, and instead become lovers of the truth – including the truth about our own histories. As we are healed by our Creator, our motives change and a genuine love for others grows within.

Step 9: Make Direct Amends to Such People Wherever Possible, Except When Doing So Would Injure Them or Others

Both steps eight and nine are meant to help us apply new methods, principles, and motives to our lives – the process of thinking about the welfare and health of others rather than one’s self. In doing so, we move forward in God’s healing and deliverance. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23, 24).

Step 10: Continue to Take Personal Inventory and Promptly Admit to Wrongdoing

We should do our best to prevent new mistakes from taking root and becoming habits. We daily examine ourselves in light of God's design for life and health and apply His principles to our lives. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ... The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does" (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 That Out

We must grow in our relationship with God, exercising new healthy brain circuits resulting in the actual rewiring of our brains over time. "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take 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. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (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

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

Before concluding, there is one aspect that I have come to recognize as important in recovery from addictions that is not specifically addressed in the 12 steps: "bringing every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Science has revealed that even though we may avoid unhealthy behaviors (taking a substance, gambling, shopping), if we engage in the behavior in our imagination, the same neural circuits fire as when the actual behavior is carried out. This means that if we long for the addiction in our mind, if we imagine the "good ol' days," if we wish we could engage in our addiction but don't merely because we know it will harm or kill us, then our brains will not rewire and our characters will not change. Such persons never experience genuine freedom from their addiction.

However, when we not only change our behavior but our thinking as well, over time our brains actually rewire and what we once found pleasurable will, in time, become repulsive. This is the freedom that unity with Christ brings!
