

# INTRODUCTION TO THE 12-STEPS

## Skills to Be Learned

- Identifying What Is and Is Not Controllable
- Understanding When to Let Go and When to Take Action
- Identifying One's Personal Source of Strength
- Increasing Motivation for Change

In this chapter we are going to introduce you to the 12-step philosophy of AA and NA (Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous). The 12-steps teach you that recovery not only involves being abstinent from drugs, it also involves changing your entire way of living—your attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

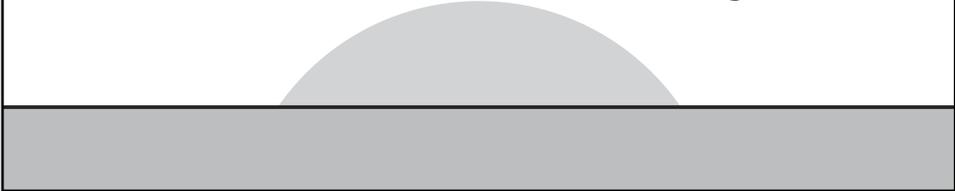
You’ve probably noticed that HHRP frequently refers to the serenity prayer:

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Clearly, as suggested by the prayer, the first order of business is to identify those things in your life that can’t be changed so that you can “turn them over” or “let them go.” By doing this you become empowered to identify what problems require your attention and you gain courage to carry out whatever actions are required to make the necessary changes in your life. Finding the right balance between “letting go” and “taking action” is a sign of wisdom. The 12-steps have helped many people find this balance, not only in the addictions but also in coping with chronic illness. This chapter will briefly introduce you to the 12-steps. This introduction to the steps does not take the traditional approach; rather, it provides a broad interpretation of the steps so that you can find what is meaningful to you. People spend their entire lives “working the steps;” therefore, this chapter is not meant to be comprehensive, and, in fact, it will cover some very important issues only superficially. You are strongly encouraged to attend 12-step groups in your community where you can get in-depth information and guidance about the 12-step program.

## STEP ONE

*We admitted that we were  
powerless over our addiction, that  
our lives had become unmanageable.*



The meaning of the word “powerless” is often misinterpreted in the context of this step. How do you interpret the word “powerless” in this step? Consider the following:

- This step does **not** mean you are powerless to make changes in your life.
- As the serenity prayers suggests, your first priority is acceptance of things you cannot change. You have to begin with acknowledging that you have a problem.
- One thing you cannot change is the effect of drug use on your life; the chemical effect of the drug has enslaved you and you are powerless to change the drug’s negative effect.
- Your life has become unmanageable because the drug is in control.
- Once you admit your powerlessness, you empower yourself to begin to take control over those things in your life you can change—such as the decision not to use drugs.
- **Therefore, this first step actually empowers you to begin your journey of recovery. You find serenity in acceptance of the things you cannot change, such as the negative effect of drug use in your life, and then can then begin to gain the courage to change the things you can.**

## STEP TWO

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



No one can define your “higher power” for you. What does “a power greater than ourselves” mean to you? Consider the following:

- For some people, their “higher power” is the God of their religious beliefs and practices.
- For others, it may be nature, love, the life force, chi, or energy.
- It could even be your strong desire for “sobriety” or “a healthy lifestyle”—that part of your being that is your source of strength to achieve sobriety and good health.
- You don’t need to be religious in the conventional sense to work the steps.

To summarize Steps 1 and 2—In Step 1 you accept that the effect of drugs on your life is beyond your control and that you have reached the point at which your life has become unmanageable. Then Step 2 tells you that there is hope for a better life if you truly believe that there is a source of strength available to you that can enable you to live a drug-free life.

## STEP THREE

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

If “God” is your higher power—your source of strength, however, **you** define this—what does it mean to decide to turn your will and life over to God? Consider the following:

- It does **not** mean that:
  - you must be religious in order to work the steps.
  - you surrender to another’s will.
- It **does** mean that you have now made the decision to give up your old life of addiction and devote yourself to a new drug-free life based upon whatever your “higher power” represents (for example: serenity, spirituality, balance). You surrender to (you become) your source of strength.
- In this step you actually make your decision. It is the connection between your strong belief that a drug-free life is possible for you (Step 2) and taking action in Step 4.

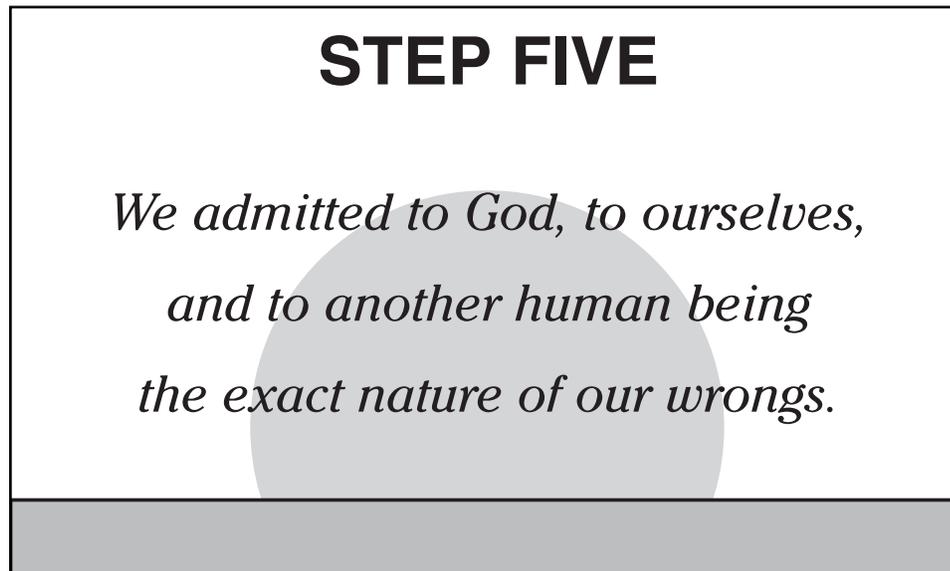
## STEP FOUR

*We made a searching and fearless  
moral inventory of ourselves.*

What is a searching and fearless moral inventory? Consider the following:

- A fearless moral inventory is an honest self-examination to identify your strengths and weaknesses.
- It does **not** mean focus only on your weaknesses or focus on how others perceive you.
- It **does** mean:
  - get to know yourself—your “addict” self, your “ideal self,” your “spiritual self,” your many “selves.”
  - understand the connection between your different senses of self and your addiction.

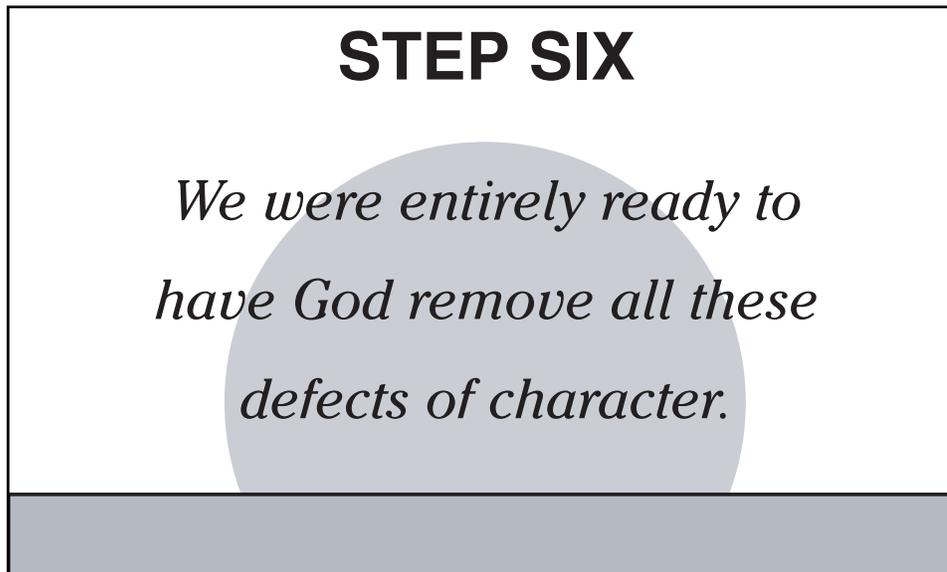
So, in Step 1 you accept that addiction causes powerlessness, in Step 2 you believe that a new life is possible, in Step 3 you decide to devote yourself to this new drug-free life, and now in Step 4 you begin to take action by conducting a thorough self-examination to determine what you may need to change in order to embark on this this new drug-free life. This gets you ready for Step 5.



What does it mean to admit our wrongs? Consider the following:

- In this step, you begin to bring other people into your journey of recovery and give voice to that private self-examination you conducted in Step 4.
- It does **not** mean:
  - You should now admit your wrong-doings to all those you wronged. Not yet anyway!

- You should wallow in shame and guilt. This can lead quickly back to addiction.
- You should attempt to justify your actions to this other person.
- It **does** mean:
  - You should identify the specific harms that your life of addiction has caused to:
    - You (don't forget the ways in which you have harmed yourself.
    - Other people.
    - Your higher power (have you compromised your beliefs, values, integrity, and wasted your talents?).
  - Having the courage to reveal yourself with all your failings to another person—this requires trust which is essential for a drug-free lifestyle.

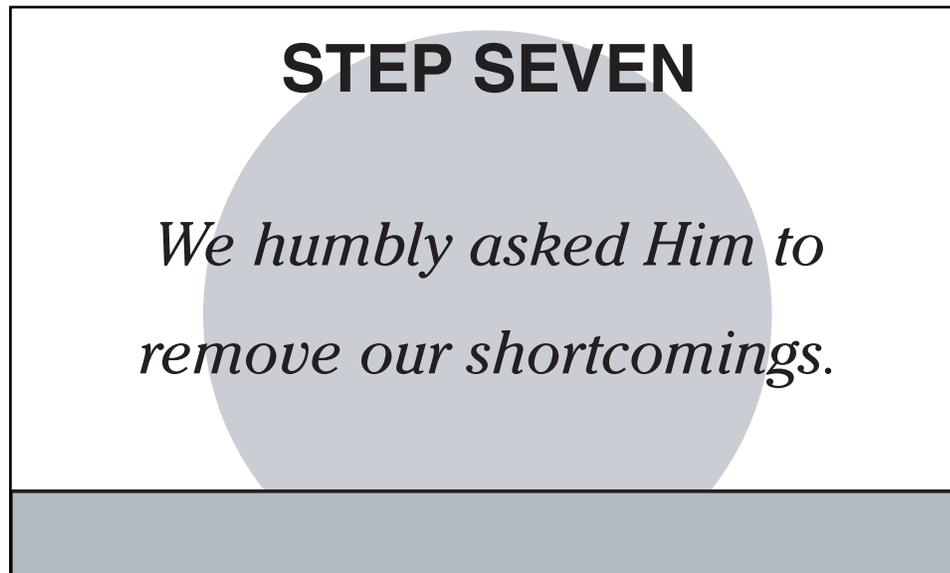


What is meant by defects of character? Consider the following:

- Having identified what needs to be changed in previous steps, this step involves getting ready to make fundamental changes in your way of life.
- Defects of character refers to your old way of living and thinking—your “addict” self.
- You are now ready for God, your higher power (however you define your source of strength) to eliminate your “addict” self and to permit your “ideal” self to emerge.

So working this step means that you are ready to let go of your old

“addict” life. This step represents the mental process that is necessary before you can take action in the next step.



How does this step relate to Step 6? Consider the following:

- Step 7 is the action part of Step 6.
- This is when you say goodbye to your old life and invite your new drug-free life to begin.
- It does **not** mean that your drug-free lifestyle is in someone else’s hands.
- It **does** mean:
  - Learning to say no to drugs, going to new places, meeting new people, changing your attitudes, setting and resetting goals.
  - Being patient—change takes time.
  - Working hard—change takes effort.
  - Asking for help when you need it.

So, Step 7 is the self-improvement step. Here you make changes to your “self”—you change the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that have kept you from achieving physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

## STEP EIGHT

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

Is this step an action step or a mental process? Consider the following:

- Although this step requires action in that you generate a list of those you have harmed, it is the essential mental process required for action in Step 9.
- Before you can attempt to make amends, you need to be willing to do so, and you need to identify each person you have harmed. This requires:
  - Being honest with yourself and others about the harm you have caused.
  - Having empathy for the feelings of another.
  - Having regret for the harm you caused.
  - Making the decision to disclose your feelings to someone who may not think highly of you.
- You must not proceed to the next step until you have done this. If you proceed to action without deep personal conviction, the result is insincerity; insincerity is part of your old “addict” life, and has no place in your recovery.
- Place yourself on your list of people you have harmed and be willing to forgive yourself.
- Having given up your “addict” ways in the previous step, in this step you make the decision to demonstrate your sincere regret to others about your previous “addict” behavior.

This step is the essential mental process required for taking action in the next step.

## Review

Let's review what we've covered so far. We've discussed the first 8 steps in the 12-step program of recovery. Although some of the steps seem similar upon first reading, with careful analysis you saw that each step moves you to the next step. For example, the necessary mental process always comes before the action step. You also saw that the journey of recovery includes other people in your life and attempting to make amends for your previous lifestyle. Let's review the first eight steps briefly.

- Step 1.** You accept that your unhealthy lifestyle has become unmanageable—this is a mental process.
- Step 2.** You strengthen your belief in a healing power that can change your life—this is a mental process.
- Step 3.** You make the decision to give up your old lifestyle—this is a mental process.
- Step 4.** You identify what personal changes you need to make in order to live a healthier lifestyle—this is an action step that can't be taken in the absence of the previous mental processes.
- Step 5.** You then disclose to at least one other person what you need to change about yourself—action step.
- Step 6.** You experience readiness to change your life—mental process.
- Step 7.** You begin to make personal changes—action step.
- Step 8.** You made the decision to make amends to those you harmed—this is the mental process necessary for taking action and for involving others in Step 9.

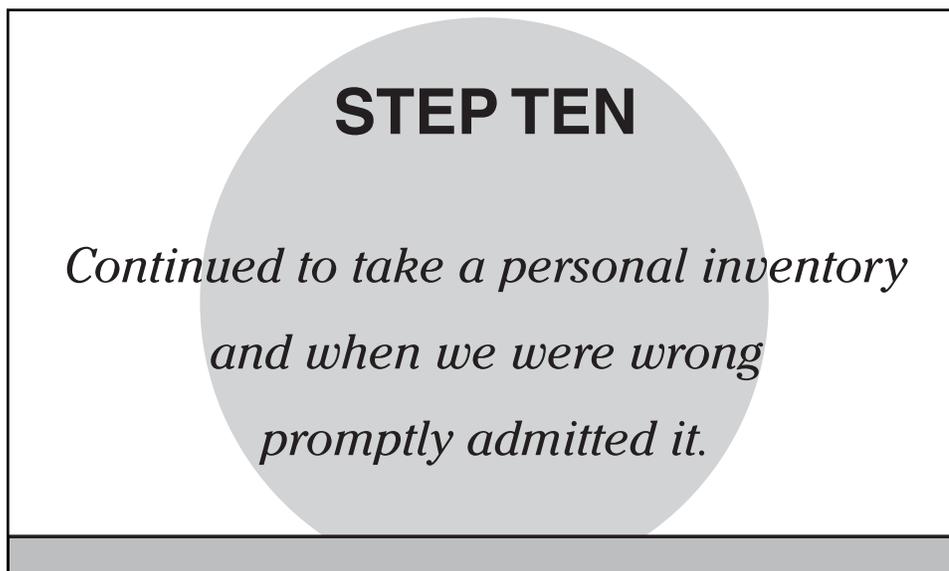
## STEP NINE

*Made direct amends to such people  
whenever possible, except when  
to do so would injure them or others.*

What does it mean to make direct amends? Consider the following:

- This is an action step. Having made the decision to make amends, you now go into action and take responsibility for the harm you caused others.
- The point of this step is to acknowledge past harm (not necessarily fix it), and then let it go.
- Making amends may include compensation of some kind, and/or a sincere apology, depending upon the situation.
- This step does **not** mean:
  - you will be forgiven by those you harmed. Being sorry does not ensure forgiveness. Remember one of the things you cannot control is someone else’s response. Go into this step with no expectations about the other’s response. Even if the other person does not accept your apology, you know you are sincerely sorry, and you can now let it go and move forward with your life.
  - that people who have harmed you will attempt to make amends to you. Remember you can’t control someone else’s behavior. If others have harmed you, you need to make amends to yourself. This means being willing to honor yourself and remove yourself from relationships that cause you harm.

So, in Steps 8 and 9, you take on the attributes that are essential for your new healthy lifestyle—being honest, taking responsibility, having compassion and empathy, and doing whatever you can to prevent future harm. Although you cannot reverse the harm you caused, you can reduce future harm.



How does this step differ from previous steps? Consider the following:

- This step is the maintenance agreement you make with yourself.
- Initiating abstinence from drugs is extremely important, but being able to maintain a drug-free lifestyle is equally important. This takes effort.
- It is easy to fall back into old patterns, so you need to be vigilant.
- You agree to monitor your moods, feelings, thoughts, and actions. (This can be done daily in quiet time, or in a diary, or through conversations with a friend).
- You agree to acknowledge to yourself and others when you are wrong (when you have inadvertently slipped back into old “addict” ways).
- In this step, identify and acknowledge your ongoing strengths and successes as well as continuing to address your weaknesses head on.

## STEP ELEVEN

*Sought through prayer and meditation  
to improve our conscious contact with  
God as we understood him, praying  
only for knowledge of his will  
and the power to carry that out.*

What is “God’s will for you?” Consider the following:

- In Step 3, you made the decision to give up your old life of addiction and devote yourself to a new drug-free life and to your “higher power” (for example: serenity, enlightenment, balance). This is “God’s will for you.”
- Recovery from addiction is not a destination, it is a process. After you give up your old life and begin your new life, and ensure that you can maintain it, your life can continue to unfold in a positive way. This process is ongoing.
- Your life unfolds in a positive way, through prayer and/or meditation, self-reflection, and reaching out for help.

- Step 11 is about:
  - The growth of serenity, courage, and wisdom.
  - Acknowledging that you don't always have all the answers.
  - Acknowledging that you need help and support in order to continue to grow.

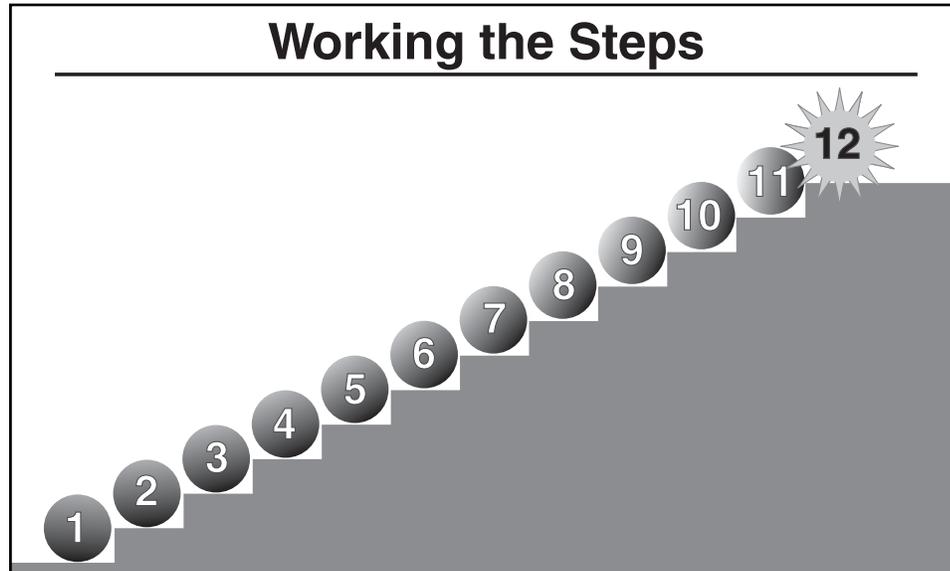
## STEP TWELVE

*Having had a spiritual awakening  
as the result of these steps, we tried to  
carry this message to others and to  
practice these principles in all our affairs.*

How can it help your recovery to help others? Consider the following:

- When you share with others:
  - You strengthen your own beliefs.
  - You make the steps real, more concrete.
  - You make the steps more available to you in times of high risk.
  - You receive a gift of inner peace by sharing what you know.
- This step reminds you to:
  - Share solutions, not problems. Rather than engage other drug users in what we call drug-a-logs (stories about drug use), communicate with others about what helps you to stay abstinent.
  - Remain humble—remember where you came from.
  - Practice what you preach (walk the walk, don't just talk the talk).

In previous steps you reached out for guidance. You changed your life. You demonstrated a desire to allow your life to unfold to its highest potential. Now, in reaching out to provide support to others, you begin to experience the joy of living your life to its highest potential.



Recovery from addiction and living a healthy lifestyle are not destinations. Each is a process – a journey. The journey requires honest self-reflection and reaching out to others. The 12 step program can guide you on this journey. It is important to remember that the steps have different meanings for different people. Your journey may not be the same as your neighbor’s journey. This is what makes the steps so powerful. In this chapter, we have de-emphasized the religious interpretation of the steps in order to demonstrate how the steps can be interpreted in different ways. We want to emphasize that it is not important how someone else interprets the steps. It is only important how you interpret them. Find what you need in them. Everything you need for your journey is right there if you are willing to look, and if you are truly open to discovering your highest potential. You are strongly encouraged you to attend a 12-step meeting in your community.

### **Practice Exercise: Learning the Steps**

#### **Instructions:**

1. At the end of this chapter is a Worksheet entitled “12-Step Game Blank Worksheet” on which are listed the 12 steps. The steps are not in the correct order on this worksheet.
2. Put the steps in the correct order by writing the number in the box provided. You can check your answers by referring back to the text in this chapter.
3. Plan to attend a 12-step meeting in your community during the coming week (enter the date, time, and location in the schedules section of your Workbook).

## Quiz

**1. In the Serenity Prayer you ask for:**

- a. serenity to accept the things you cannot change
- b. courage to change the things you can
- c. wisdom to know the difference
- d. all of the above

**2. Step 1 of the Twelve Steps says that you are powerless over your addiction; this means:**

- a. you cannot change your life
- b. the drug is in control; you cannot change the effect of drugs
- c. you should leave your recovery in your sponsor's hands
- d. you cannot change your dealer's behavior

**3. You need to be religious to benefit from the 12-Steps:**

- a. True
- b. False

**4. A person's "higher power" is:**

- a. God
- b. nature, loving energy, life force
- c. an inner source of strength and healing
- d. any of the above

**5. Steps 8 and 9 refer to making amends to those you have harmed. Making amends includes:**

- a. forgiving yourself for any pain you caused yourself or others
- b. being honest with yourself and others about the harm you caused
- c. acknowledging past harm, not necessarily fixing it, and then letting it go
- d. all of the above

### **Practice Exercise: Stress Management/Relaxation**

We recommend that you conclude each chapter by doing a 10-minute relaxation exercise. Use this time to practice meditation, deep breathing, or visualization. Dim the lights, get comfortable in your chair, uncross your legs, and sit quietly with your eyes closed. Remember that learning to relax is a skill that takes practice, so if you feel restless at first, just remind yourself that this is a 10 minute gift of quiet time that you give to yourself. With practice, you can use meditation and relaxation in many areas of your life including helping you to "work the steps." So use this time now to practice becoming centered, relaxed, and focused on whatever step you have reached so far.

## 12-Step Game Blank Worksheet

**Instructions:** In each of the larger boxes above is one of the Twelve Steps. In the smaller box, write the number (1 through 12) that corresponds to correct order of the Steps.

Continued to take a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

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

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

We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

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

We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

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

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

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

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

## 12 Steps in a Journey of Recovery

