

GOING DEEPER WITH THE TWELVE STEPS

RENE LAFAUT, MSc.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my Mom, Elizabeth Lafaut, who first encouraged me to examine my life's journey in the context and framework that the Twelve Steps provide.

ENDORSEMENT

A good work. I like Rene's balanced approach with an emphasis on God's grace, a positive outlook rather than simply becoming mired in one's sins, and the pilgrim's progress dimension. Again, there is quite a bit of text... if used in a community context then it would be of great use. My hat continues to be off.

Bill Reimer, Regent College, Vancouver, BC

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

1	Introduction	1
2	The Twelve Steps	15
3	Forgiveness	21
4	Repentance	27
5	My Thinking Behind the Steps	34
6	A Theory On Why We Can Lose Our Freedom	39
7	Some Hints on How to Work the Twelve Steps	49
8	Conclusion	84
9	Cycles of Addiction	86
10	Unwanted Behaviors Cycle	98
11	Further Reading	104

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1 INTRODUCTION

Many people would like these questions answered:

1. How can we be freed from compulsions, bad habits, or addictions?
2. How can we be healed from spiritual/ psychological wounds?
3. How can flaws in our character be removed? and
4. How can weaknesses be turned into strengths?

First off, there are no “real” quick fixes for any of these necessarily! Building a life or doing renovations takes much time, and at its best and healthiest it is observably gradual. When a sin has a single root, then God can uproot it quickly together with our cooperation. But when things are messy, tangled, knotted, hard, not flexible, and without movement; without play then more than one maxim, more than one medicine, more than one strategy is needed to undo, heal, and purify us.

There is always a path beneath our feet to take for spiritual healing: it’s always a journey; but we must learn to search for the healing, and in the process we will grow in faith, hope, love, patience, humility, and healthy relating.

So, what makes a journey a healing one? One answer is to respond in humility to the little “t” truths that the Creator speaks to us daily which we can tune into if we know how. By humility I mean being teachable.

Asking the Holy Spirit a question, and listening for an answer

can be very straight forward when we know the promises and principles found in the Scriptures and believe them. When one comes into God's presence one shouldn't do so lightheartedly, otherwise one won't take God's answers seriously, and one won't be as discerning concerning whose voices we are listening to.

We can test the source of the communications in our minds that we hear after having asked a question to the Holy Spirit within us by simply asking: "Is this the flesh or the Spirit speaking?" If the answer is the "flesh" then we reject the message; if it is "Spirit" then we can further test the content we are sure the Holy Spirit has spoken to us. The book by Brad Jersak called *Can You Hear Me?* provides a lot of practical wisdom on how we can go deeper into two-way prayer and I highly recommend it.

Mark Virkler's book on two-way prayer through journaling called: *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* is also very helpful. The keys are meant to give structure to the process of journaling.

They help one to listen, remember and reflect on what "actually" is said by God in a non-judgmental, non-attacking, and less skeptical fashion. He provides biblical tests to discern what is written and is well worth the read and practice.

Both authors writings have been foundational to me arriving at the contents found in my books.

Once one has a grounded faith in hearing God's voice, then this book, and my book: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* can be good locales,

backdrops, structures or methods that can spring board us into healing processes with God's help.

What Kind of Addiction Do I Have?

An addiction can have more than one root that causes it, so we shouldn't peg our hopes on only one medicine or one approach when we seek relief or hit blockages to recovery. However, not giving it our best shot when working a strategy means we never gave the strategy a healthy chance. We owe it to ourselves to walk with the God who can make the Steps work. Going deeper until we find the truth that sets us free to practice self-control and to also love people more deeply is what is needed.

Here are some possible roots to addictions:

- a) Spiritual wounds such as unforgiveness, holding onto judgments, or nursing hatred and desires for revenge are dealt with in this book.
- b) Marring of the personality with strongholds such as fear, pride, envy, judging, greed, meanness, anger, negativity, self-pity, lust, sloth, and gluttony are dealt with in my book: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive*.
- c) Believing lies that the devil, and the world speak to us that put us in bondage are dealt with by practicing two-way-connecting-prayer in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Meditating on the Bible and learning to counter lies with little 't'-truths that God will bring into our lives as we search for the ability to love God, people, and self healthily.
- d) Trying to fill that God-shaped-vacuum for peace within us with idols such as sex, porn, food, junk-food,

cigarettes, soda pop, alcohol, exercise, people, gadgets, cars, homes, property, clothing, shopping, gambling, experiences... etc. can be idols that behave like magnets that attract us relentlessly but ultimately they offer no lasting relief. Yet, such can be broken by redirecting one's spiritual thirsts and hunger to God where they belong, with strategic and intense heartfelt prayer. I discuss this issue in detail in my book *Dismantling The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil So Love Can Thrive* (and in the last two chapters in this book).

- e) The last two are (i) the herd instinct, and (ii) familiarity or habit. Being in the wrong crowd, having the wrong friends, being in an unhealthy relationship, living in the wrong parts of town, or having the wrong kinds of jobs can all contribute to catapulting oneself into the throws of addiction, desperations, and heartbreak. Choosing to love God above all else is the only way out... and He will lead us out if we walk in faith, listen to Him and obey Him when He asks us to leave behind our Egypts for the Promised Land.

Concerning weaknesses and character flaws. There is no finite system of principles that will bring about complete restoration in everyone. Certain little "t" truths will help one person and not another and visa-versa; but the source of these truths is always the BIG "T"-Truth: Jesus. This is because we believe different lies, and we need the correct corresponding truths to set us free from the lies we have believed. We won't see everything at once or by ourselves, but Jesus does, and He wants to help us. Our hearts are mysterious. But if we have a tenacious faith like the tenacity of a mustard seed we will win through as we struggle and

search for freedom to love and learn how to care more deeply for people. Change will come, maybe not immediately, but observably gradual.

Also, a healthy enough relational connection with God, understanding certain truths, a commitment to love, awareness of spiritual hunger, and caring for people; need to be in place solidly before healthy positive change can really start to take root, and be felt in our lives. Healthy thinking must also take a priority.

Analyzing our beliefs and way of life by ourselves alone will not go far enough. We need a living spiritual Light to guide us, to give us strength, to carry us through the spiritual tearing down and building up processes within each of us. We also need to renew our minds and attitudes through a growing healthy two-way relationship with God. He wants to be the friend and Love that will bring healing and peace to us. Real change is a process that can go all over the place at times.

“The Twelve Steps” found in this book, are a deepening of the Steps used in traditional AA groups or other communities that try to help those with addictions. If you are a person who practices “The Twelve Steps”, then I think this book might bring more freedom from addictions and enable you to love people more deeply in your spiritual journey. It can help with many of the problems mentioned above. But don’t be too sold out on this method alone to solve all of your problems. The heart is a very hidden thing. All little “p”-principles have their limitations, and so do “The Twelve Steps” in this book. Sometimes not focusing on spiritual self-help literature for a

period of time will clear the head and mind, and enable God to communicate with us better and lead us into more freedom elsewhere within.

There are different personality types: analytical, intuitive, touchy-feely, out of the box, visual imaginer, as well as the differences that male or female-ness bring into the picture. We also absorb new information in different ways: verbal, touch, visual, or written. Some do so with the help of repetition, others latch on quickly. Some go mostly by what they know, others mostly by faith.

Faith focused people go farther than those who are purely knowledge focused. Those who go by faith are open to revelation, usually ask enough questions and obtain the promises by taking risks and using imagination. Whereas, those who are knowledge focused are usually limited in perspective, don't take chances, are more closed-minded, and go nowhere new any time soon.

When encountering dilemmas sometimes telling oneself: "I don't know what to do" is unhealthy. A better strategy to use is to ask oneself: "What do I believe I should do?" This second strategy opens up the mind to creativity, humility, and teachableness instead of caving into despair because one doesn't know certain supposed absolute truths. Fact is, we don't have absolute truth, only God does.

Analyzing one's situations repeatedly all by oneself, and being alone in the driver seat, is not as useful as fellowship with God. If we have believed any lies that brought bondages it is because we saw the lies as a truth... and no amount of self-

analyzing will uncover the lies as false. Only light exposes things for what they are: Jesus is the spiritual Light of the world. Listening to God and inspired people is more useful than analyzing.

Every person sees things differently (some significantly and others less so). So, others see what we often don't, and this can be very helpful. God sees everything, and does speak directly to us, but often He likes to speak to us through others in case we get spiritually proud and begin to look down on what others have to say because of our "direct connection" with God. God does speak in a multitude of different ways and we need to respect this. The spiritual journey we embark on in working the Steps is one where we grow dependent on community and on our Higher Power through faith and commitment to caring for people.

As I discovered the power to change that the Most High God grants to those who practice the Steps I eventually realized that I ought not confuse the Steps with my theory behind these same Steps. If these Steps bring you closer to God, and help free you from some compulsions, then fine... hooray! If not, then swimming on the surface needs to be abandoned by going deeper and deeper into the heart of our situation.

God's presence is: PEACE because He is more than just a mind (whose principles or insights we can agree with and profit from); He has an infinitely rich personality (He wants relationships with all of us and to be enjoyed, loved and heard), He has a heart (full of desires to be close to us, and to love us), He has emotions (like joy, and sorrow), He has likes

and dislikes (being for good (spiritual health), and against evil (spiritual sickness)); and He has power together with understanding to heal our hearts and minds.

God cares for each of us, and He wants to lead each of us to the places He has prepared for us. Those who want to rule over their own lives alone, making their own decisions acting like they are a “god” without consulting the true God will find working the Steps very challenging if not very difficult. We all have this tendency to varying degrees within us and we have to give them up with God’s grace one step at a time in prayer.

If one does not want to be free, then don’t bother attempting to practice these Steps (Cf. step 6) because they usually only work for those who “really” want to be free. The Steps talk about putting one’s faith in a Power greater than oneself.

Jesus is my Higher Power. If you don’t know Him, or are skeptical about His claims and promises because of the hypocrisy of and hurts inflicted by some of those who claim to follow Him. Please don’t shut Him out of your life for this reason alone. Go to the source. Get yourself a copy of the New Testament and read for yourself all the wonderful things He did in His earthly journey. If you are going to reject Him, reject Him because of who He is and not because of the stink belonging to some of those who claim to follow Him.

The path (to becoming free) described in this book may help some people jettison restrictive baggage from their past, but because the heart is a mysterious thing other helps will likely be in order too. I have listed a few other approaches (or books) at the end of this book that have helped me (some in

small ways and others that have helped me in BIG ways).

I highly recommend an approach to relationship with Jesus that is based on the solid promise that those who believe in Jesus do know His voice. As one grows in being able to recognize God's voice there will eventually be less guessing, less frustration (less hitting one's head against walls or doors), less putting pressure on oneself, and less trying to use one's own wits alone to figure out the next step to be taken for healing and renewal. If you do see bad fruit in your life, then ask God what the roots are and He will eventually in His time show you what to repent from in prayer. This might seem difficult or even impossible; but with Brad, Mark and Patti's books it will follow naturally.

If you won't give up then Jesus will make a way for you into freedom from compulsive/ sin strongholds if you let Him (probably not immediately, but gradually in an observable time frame as you go deeper)! Even when plagued with confusion and doubt, Jesus is here with us. He will lead us through our confusion when we commit to following Him despite the pain, guilt, poverty, and shame we may be experiencing. We are not left as orphans. We have God with us, to help, protect, and save or heal. Let's become dependent on God through faith, trust, and teachableness.

If you do find some freedom from working the Steps below, don't think you have it all figured out. There is so much hidden from each person, so none of us see the whole of reality. We all have at least a few hundred things that need to be dealt with in our relational selves. Enough work to last us

until our journeys comes to an end. God is the great physician: let Him be in charge. Don't go ahead of Him thinking you know what needs to be repented from, but do search. Real change comes only when repentance in certain areas of our lives is okay with God and coincided with His timing. If God wants us to repent, then He will let us know how as we search things out, and when needed God gives us the power to change. Self-righteously going ahead of Him is doomed to failure and won't help us fight through the blockages, bondages, pressure, lies, frustrations, confusion, coldness, and darkness.

Those people who have faith, not so much faith "in faith", but in God will conquer¹ the battles and embrace the fruit of God's promises in life when they search things out in the context of their relationships with God. Waiting on (searching in a patient, wise, and caring way with) Him to deal with all the shit in your life one thing at a time is wise. For this to work, don't rush things. For this to work: hearing, recognizing, understanding, knowing God's voice, and searching where He leads is of utter most importance. He is the key, the light, and the balm that brings hope, direction, and healing.

A sturdy foundation² is necessary to build a house (or a relationship with God and a stable life) that will celebrate a wholesome joy and stand the tests of many storms or hardships. The Steps in this book offer a structure that can be used to humbly renew our attitudes, and to become free

¹ 1 John 5:4

² Cf. Matthew 7:24-25

from many of our compulsions or addictions.

When I first renewed my walk with Jesus, I had some pretty silly ideas on how real change was to occur. I felt like a new creation because of the joy and meaning I felt back then. But in reality, I had so much dead wood in my heart taking the place of love, and blocking my eyesight (impairing my conscience) that I didn't know about. On one hand, I thought I had high morals, and in some ways that was true, but on the other hand I had no idea about just how far short I fell from God's moral standards in many areas, or how unhealthy spiritually my heart and mind actually were.

Later, when my Dark Journey began, my mother strongly suggested that I needed to practice The Twelve Steps in order to get healthy again. She gave me an AL-ANON booklet that I attempted to read, but I found it very disagreeable because of my "narrow fundamentalist" ways of looking at things back then.

But eventually, I would come to see that working "The Twelve Steps" can be crucial for real change in some areas of our lives. Many Christians think that all the changes necessary in one's life will occur through saying the "Sinner's Prayer". But Holy Scripture indicates that we can and should go deeper in our relationships with God. In doing so God can bring much healing, peace, and the ability to bear much good fruit. In some cases, God uses (discipline) or suffering to help create meaningful change (in order for this to work we need to have faith in Jesus/ God and His goodness and to tenaciously persevere). Some of the times we will need to have

debilitating lies (that may have had some truths in them) that we somehow began to believe in our pasts exposed by Jesus (and replaced with His liberating truths).

Lies bring bondages; truths bring freedom³. Sometimes we will have to forgive others and our selves for freedom to come our way again (as we can lose it in bumpy or turbulent situations). We also need to learn how to think in healthy ways. Believing truths can set us free, but won't if we don't think correctly about those truths, even though we may have those truth stored within us.

Idols also bring addictions and need to be replaced with God's presence in our hearts/ souls/ spirits/ and minds. At all times one will have to "abide in Jesus"⁴ and welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives in order to pursue, get free, and remain free from addictive behaviors. Abiding is a simple thing. It requires from us to remain teachable and to follow Jesus wherever He leads us to. We get strength when we abide in Jesus by humbly believing that Jesus is with us, won't forsake us, and we aren't in this alone. To abide in Jesus, we need to believe in His goodness, nurturing our ability to hear His voice, and being committed to doing what He asks us to do in the present. Real freedom is the ability to do what is right. By abiding in Jesus we experience a growing peace and out of this peace we will conquer compulsions and we will also bear much good fruit.

Since these Steps do focus on sins or wrong doing (and

³ Cf. John 8:32

⁴ Cf. John 15

unhealthy attitudes), I have learned that my correcting - focus needs to be on my life and not so much on other people's faults, and that I am not called to convict or point out anyone else's sins. Yes, people have sinned against me. But the Steps in part are meant to get me to deal with my sinful reactions to those people and their sins because that is where one's bondages usually are.

Those who come to God do so because they desire and hunger to be loved and to love. This also means we start caring for those who hurt us in the past.

In practicing these Steps our aim ought to be: "healthily loving others as ourselves" for this is the goal that makes, in part, these Steps complete and helps to uncover the little "t"-truths necessary to set us free in our daily living.

I am including in this book as much helpful truth that was fashioned in the furnace of my experience with the backdrop being The Twelve Steps. I have learned stuff from reading the Bible, self-help books, and theology books; and attending Twelve Step groups, and listening to the body of Christ. I don't know where I'd be if God did not wisely bringing people or books into my life at the right times with wisdom that helped to conquer the darkness in my heart. Here are the Steps that have worked for me in certain troublesome areas in my life:

2 THE TWELVE STEPS

Here are the official Twelve Steps from Al-Anon:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. 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. 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.⁵

My Interpretation of The Twelve Steps:

Step 1. I admit that I have very serious compulsions, addictions, or insensitivity in my life that have become unmanageable.

Step 2. Come to believe that there is “a” good-ness (named Jesus) somewhere in the universe who is so good that it is willing to help me back to sanity.

Step 3. Next, I turn my life and my will over to Jesus, as I understand Him for now realizing that the farther I travel with Him the more differently I will see and experience Him. This Step for the Christian is called: “Learning to abide in Jesus the True Vine.”

Step 4. I do a fearless moral inventory with the help of Jesus.

Step 5. I confess to God and another person the “exact” nature of my wrongs. God will forgive these, and promises to cleanse me from them as I continue to work these Steps.

Step 6. Become entirely ready for God to remove all my defects.

Step 7. Humbly ask God to remove all my shortcomings.

Step 8. Make a list of all those I have harmed and become

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willing to make amends to them all, because I acted out my selfishness or my anger in unhealthy ways (for instance by hurtful words, stealing or taking my revenge).

[The spirit of step 8 means to further embrace these healing actions: Make a list of all those people I am

- I. Holding judgments against,
- II. Holding resentments towards
- III. Having hateful attitudes towards, or
- IV. Plotting revenge against.

Even though I possibly did not act out my hostility against these persons, and become willing to forgive and love them, and give up the hatred and desire to hurt them. If I have never embraced my anger against those who wronged me I need to do so.]

Then proceed to next step.

Step 9. With God's help I make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

[The spirit of step 9 asks to do the following in the light of what is asked in step 8. With God's help:

- I. Give up my judgments towards the people I hold them against,
- II. Forgive those people who hurt me,
- III. Give up my hatred (and the criticism that grows out of that anger) for the person(s) I had problems with. And,
- IV. If I am nursing or toying with vengeful thoughts I give them up]

I will show how to do these in the next two chapters.

I don't need to confess and repent from my anger about injustices, only my anger⁶ that I self-righteously try to use as a tool for meanly changing other people as well as myself. I need to own my anger, respect its place and process it healthily. It can be a warning bell or alarm that something is wrong. If I say my anger is morally wrong in this context, then I am denying a place in me that senses injustices, or hurt (and these won't be dealt with; the denial of anger or justice will bring about many negative emotions that will lead us to hurting people and growing compulsive behaviors). Anger about injustice is usually good, but if we don't process it healthily, then it leads to judgments and resentments, and these need to be dealt with. If we have resentments then these rob us of our joy and happiness and we will eventually nurse this negativity with pleasures that become addictions.

Usually, anger is an emotion, not a moral wrong. We are allowed to be angry, but we ought not sin in our anger.

The Twelve Steps don't address being addicted to judging. My book *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* deals with this and many other important topics more thoroughly.

Step 10. I continue to take personal inventory and when I am wrong promptly admit it; seek forgiveness and repent in prayer when needed, and dispense mercy through the grace of God and regularly ask Jesus so I can abide in Him by renewing my mind with truthful thinking.

⁶ Cf. James 1:20

Lies feel like truths to those deceived by them. Lies put people into bondages. Real truth sets people free to love. Therefore, relationship with God, and growing in being able to hear the voice of God is the next step:

Step 11. I seek through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for my life and the power to carry it out. Relationships, Truth and grace set people free.

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, I try to carry the message to others, and to practice these principles in all my affairs. Once free from an addiction certain truths will protect me when tempted. But focusing on the Great Shepherd and following where He leads me to is pivotal to getting out of traps, temptations, and snares.

The above Steps are a set of practical principles that can be taken for freedom to come observably gradual in many cases.

If you have resentments, hatred, and desires for revenge and want change stick to the Steps above for as long as God requires it. If you want ideas on how to forgive or want theories on why I think the Steps work, then look below.

But remember God is interested in relationships, not obsessively pursuing principles or focusing on dirty laundry all the time. Working on fixing ourselves solely by independently exerting brute force, pride, control, angry-pressure, self-pity, analyzing or problem solving, blindly knocking on door after door is very time consuming as well as a painful way to tackle life. Jesus offers a healthier way.

Jesus is our Spiritual Doctor⁷, if we would have Him in our lives. Getting to recognize His voice allows us to ask Him questions that He will answer (and if He doesn't do so immediately there may be very good reasons for it). This will lead us to renewal in our stagnant minds and hearts leading to healthier behaviors and with His help bring peace, strength, and freedom from compulsions, and addictions; and possibly more freedom to love people.

Brad Jersak's book called, *Can You Hear Me?* lays a very good foundation that will help us build our relationships with God in ways that will help us grow spiritually, and it will help our prayer lives to no longer be boring. Mark and Patti Virkler's books on Journalling will help in the same way to build on Brad's book.

These Steps are good as far as they go, but how do we give up judgments, resentments, hatred, and seeking revenge?

⁷ Luke 5:31