

The Twelve Steps of Heart t' Heart

- 1 We admitted we were powerless over compulsive addictive behaviors* – that our lives had become unmanageable. (Mosiah 4:5; Alma 26:12)
- 2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. (Mosiah 4:9; Alma 26:12)
- 3 Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. (2 Ne. 10:24; Omni 1:26; Mosiah 3:19; 2 Nephi 4:34)
- 4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. (Alma 15:17; Mosiah 4:2; Jacob 4:6–7; Ether 12:27)
- 5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. (Mosiah 26:29; Alma 22:18)
- 6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. (Helaman 3:35; 2 Nephi 31:19; Mosiah 2:20–21)
- 7 Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. (Alma 36:18; Alma 38:8; Moroni 10:32; Mosiah 5:2; Alma 34:15–16)
- 8 Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all. (3 Nephi 12:9; 3 Nephi 12:24; 3 Nephi 12:44–45)
- 9 Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others. (Mosiah 27:35; 3 Nephi 12:25; Mosiah 26:30)
- 10 Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. (2 Nephi 4:18; 2 Nephi 10:20; Mosiah 26:30)
- 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. (2 Nephi 32:3; Alma 37:37; Helaman 10:4)
- 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. (Alma 5:7; Mosiah 27:36–37; Moroni 7:3)

*Any problem may be inserted here, in place of "compulsive addictive behaviors." Permission to use the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for adaptation granted by A.A. World Services, Inc.

Dearest Friends:

The Hard Truth Versus the Enticement of the Victim Mentality

Some months ago, I had a phone call that continues to wrench my heart when I remember it. My caller was adamant in renouncing the ideas found in *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*, that "in absolutely nothing can we consider ourselves victims," and that we "counseled with God and participated in determining" our mortal assignments and challenges. (See the section of Principle Six entitled, 'Agency, the Highest Truth—the Hardest Truth.')

We talked for a while and ended by respectfully agreeing to disagree, but I must admit my heart still aches for those who think they're being "done unto"—even by God.

I cannot ignore the fact that I have found the "poor me," or "woe is me," or "if it weren't for him/her/them/life, God" mentality to be at the core of all the poor choices I have ever observed in myself or others—including the ones we call addiction. Every poor choice I make has a rationale, an excuse that implies I can't help myself, that someone or something has "done unto me" and I just have no choice except to sin too. "This is how bad today is, I just have to do my addiction."

In reading Alma, seeking the Spirit of the Lord to open the scriptures to me, I found these insights on the amazing flattery and subtlety of the "victim mentality," by pondering the flattering lies of Nehor—a master teacher of the idea that we're "done unto" even by God.

...they need not fear nor tremble, but that they might lift up their heads and rejoice... (Alma 1:4)

These words sound so good, don't they? Nehor is saying, "There's nothing to worry about." At least for a moment, they sound very much like the words of the Lord through the prophets of God:

Doubt not, fear not... (D&C 6:36)

Lift up your heads and rejoice,... (Mosiah 7:19; D&C 110:5; 2 Nephi 9:3).

“We want to be told that we’re not accountable, that we’re absolved of all responsibility. We don’t want to be treated like children of God, sent to learn by our choices. We want to be picked up and carried by God like pets or playthings.”

But when left in context, they become a lie, because of Nehor’s next statement—which appeals to the natural man in all of us:

The Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men... (Alma 1:4)

Here is the reasoning Nehor uses for his *carte blanche* conclusion. And it might seem quite enticing, if we did not know the Restored Truth about God and about man, which truth is that God did not “create” man, at least not in the wholesale way Nehor’s words imply. Man is coequal and coeternal with God (D&C 93:29). Nehor’s words imply that God created man like some woodcarver might carve puppets or chess pieces, and that because God created us the way we are, he can and will redeem us—no matter *how* we are.

His words imply that we are all the equivalent of “victims” or pawns of God. This is the “victim

mentality” par excellence. No agency, in other words.

Nehor is preaching the idea that we have no agency. We are not free agents making choices. There is no need for choice because God is taking care of it all. There is no autonomy. God made us this way—like toys or objects of His fancy. He will do this. He will do that.

In a very strange and fascinatingly perverse way this is almost a form of nihilism. It negates, annihilates, denies agency. God made us. He will do with us as He wants. He’s good so He’ll save all of us. What we say or do won’t matter.

And it came to pass that he did teach these things so much that many did believe on his words, even so many that they began to support him and give him money. (Alma 1:5, emphasis added)

Apparently, there were many in those times, as there are in our own time, who enjoyed being told they weren’t going to be held accountable. We want to be told that we’re not accountable. We want to hear that we’re absolved of all responsibility or accountability. We don’t want to be treated like children of God, sent on a mission to learn by our own choices and progress toward being like God. We want to be picked up and carried by God like pets or playthings.

Sooner or later, this way of thinking is confronted by the truth as taught by the Gospel of Christ:

And it came to pass as he was going, to preach to those who believed on his word, he met a man who belonged to the church of

God, yea, even one of their teachers; and he began to contend with him sharply, that he might lead away the people of the church; but the man withstood him, admonishing him with the words of God. (Alma 1:7, emphasis added)

Nehor was teaching his own words. These were not words he had received into a believing and humble heart from the Spirit of Truth and revelation. Gideon, in bold contrast, withstood him with the “words of God”—words he had received by humility and prayer and counsel with the Spirit of the Lord and from the words of the prophets and scriptures.

People so often say, “We must not have known how bad it would be down here.” They speak as if our perspective from here, in this fallen state, is more accurate than the perspective we had before we were born.

There is a principle to be learned in all this: The words of Truth are not always easy and flattering. Why? Because the words of Truth always emphasize the principle of agency. The words of Truth always testify that we are not victims. We are always agents. We have been from eternity and will always be.

It would not seem, at first appearance, that a little child has

Dearest Friends

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any agency, that instead they are subjected to that which they have no power to choose. That interpretation is not founded on the revealed truths of the Restoration that each eternal soul was endowed with choice and had agency even in the spirit realm before mortality began.

All of us, to one extent or another, have responded to being sinned against by taking up the ways of sin ourselves.

People so often say, “We must not have known how *bad* it would be down here.” They speak as if our perspective from *here*, in this fallen state, is more accurate than the perspective we had before we were born. They speak as if we were deceived or taken advantage of back there, in that *unveiled* and *celestial* perspective. They speak as if now, we *really* know the Truth.

How perverse and twisted that idea is—and how blindly we partake of it and rehearse it to each other. It should be so simple and logical to us who have the fullness of the Gospel to realize that *back there* in that existence, our ability to estimate, to weigh and measure the benefits of a mortal journey versus its trials and risks was pure and clear.

It is *here*, embroiled in the temporal—the temporary—pain and confusion of *this* brief but highly significant life, that we cannot see what we once knew. *We didn't shout for joy in ignorance.* We shouted for joy in full vision and understanding of what bless-

ings this short moment of mortality would open up for us. Was it worth it to us, with our eyes wide open? It most definitely was!

The principle is: Don't flatter people's ears. Be sure (as a true friend, sponsor, loved one) that you are willing, according to the Spirit's guidance, to challenge them to think more deeply, to trust more completely, to stretch a little more.

We are not victims—not of God or of our perpetrators. We are agents who chose a mission, knowing full well the challenges, as well as the rewards. We were promised the highest degree of reward if we took the truly dangerous assignments, if we would continue faithful throughout this veil of service and trial—faithful to the Lord that He would redeem us and rescue us and restore us to all honor and reverence and respect.

We came here in His service—to help him try the hearts of the children of men. If we will not become bitter, if we will not begin to define this as a horrible experience, a “rip-off,” a punishment, we will find ourselves healing mightily in this life and receiving personal witnesses of His living presence and a perfect brightness of hope of being restored to eternal life, added upon with honor and glory for our service in the cause of God.

We were agents before we were born. We weren't “done unto.” We weren't fooled, cheated or tricked. We were in on the decision. We saw how hard mortality would be. We were given in some spiritual way the ability to see *and feel* the experiences of those who had been or were currently in a mortal state.

I know by the witness of the Spirit of Truth that we are not subjected to anyone else's will—not

even as children, born into *potentially* terrible conditions. We volunteered, knowing those *possibilities*. I believe with all my heart we knew we would be taking a risk based on the agency of others, so they could have the opportunity to learn by their own experience. And others took a fall for us as well, so we also might have the opportunity to use our agency unwisely and learn by our own experience. In other words, without exception, we're all in this together.

**Hard truth, highest truth:
Agency is the supreme,
ruling principle of
eternity.**

Even Jesus, our beloved Elder Brother, took this fall with us and allowed Himself to be subjected to our foolish choices, and He did so without making any foolish choices Himself. None of the rest of us can say that. All of us, to one extent or another, have responded to being sinned against by taking up the ways of sin ourselves. There is only One who didn't, and thus He becomes our only hope, the only name, way, or means by which we are redeemed from this dark and dreary wilderness trek. But we knew that, too, when we *chose* to participate in this mortality, and we knew that in Him there was no risk of being victimized, that He wouldn't even save us without our permission, our consent.

Hard truth, highest truth:
Agency is the supreme, ruling principle of eternity. Damnation and salvation, victimization and recovery are all equally *voluntary*.

—Colleen H. □

Step Study: Step One

What Part of “Complete” Don’t We Understand?

Avoiding the Slippery Slope of *Self*

Thoughts on humility—the firm bedrock of sanity and sobriety:

Yesterday, I had the blessing of attending a *Heart t’ Heart* step study meeting in which we focused on Step One. We read two pages of the text from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* published by AA, pages 21-22 and from it I was blessed to glean and capture the following thoughts and insights.

When it mentions “complete defeat” on page 21 of AA’s *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, it means *complete*. I’m tempted to ask, what part of “complete” don’t we understand? Complete means 100%. Not 98 or even 99 percent defeated. Complete defeat.

Total, absolute—those are synonyms for “complete.” Total, absolute defeat. Let’s check the word “defeat.” Maybe there’s some part of that word we don’t understand. “Frustration by nullification.” Hmm. “Nullification”? Let’s see...“null” means “equal to zero,” “amounting to nothing.” Okay, now we’re beginning to come full-circle to King Benjamin’s humiliating interpretation of us—“nothingness.” Ouch.

A few sentences later on the same page of the *12&12*, we find the words “absolute humiliation.” I am tempted, again, to ask what part of “absolute” don’t we understand? Or maybe it would be a good exercise for us to look up “humiliation.”

Humiliation: embarrassment, *mortification*, disgrace,

shame, public shame, degrade, brand, tarnish, forfeit one’s good reputation, fall from one’s high estate,...

Being *anything* else but absolutely powerless, absolutely humble—even to the point of feeling humiliated if and when necessary—becomes the slippery slope back into our addiction.

What does it mean to be humble enough to endure “absolute humiliation”? I feel the witness of the truth that it means to be willing to not manipulate the truth in any way—not to dress it up or down, not to hedge on it, or hide it. It means to give up any attempt to manage our image before others—to imply or pretend anything, to hide anything.

I feel the witness to my mind and heart (at least for myself) that it means to let go of secrecy. It is the willingness to no longer regret the past in the sense of wanting to hide it. It is the willingness to tell our own story truthfully, willing to hold nothing back, if and when the Spirit of the Lord calls us to tell it. It is a willingness to say, “This is what I was like, this is what happened and this is what I [my life] is like now.”

It is being willing to put my life in the terms (words) of truth—all of my life—my past and my present. To put my life, past, present and future in the hands of God by telling the truth at all times and in all things and in all places.

How paradoxical it is that “powerlessness” becomes the “firm bedrock” upon which *true* living can begin. How paradoxical it is that being *anything* else but absolutely powerless, absolutely humble—even to the point of feeling humiliated if and when necessary—becomes the slippery slope back into our addiction.

That slippery slope is the aggrandizement (to make to appear great) of the self in all its forms: self-pity, self-will, self-sufficiency, self...(I looked up “self” in the dictionary and found nearly three and a half pages of self-words!!), self-serving, self-appointed, self-absorbed, self-centered, self-assured, self-content, self-control, self-defense, self-determination, self-esteem, self-fulfillment...and on and on and on...and on. You get the picture. Or at least I hope I am getting it, because I spend a heck of a lot of time on that slippery slope of self-something.

In **Alma 32:13-14** we find a perfect second witness to the phrase at the bottom of this page of the *12&12*, wherein it speaks of how our sobriety or abstinence “will be precarious,” until such time as we are willing to “humble [our]self.” In both witnesses we are taught this

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Step Study: Step One

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truth: humility is a choice *we* make. God allows things to happen to us that *may* either humble us or make

Humility is a choice *we* make. God allows things to happen that *may* either humble us or make us bitter, resentful. The choice is ours.

us bitter and resentful. The choice is our own.

How we react to life's opportunities is an indication of our own character development. Immaturity of character manifests in bitterness, resentment or fear, often disguised as anger or depression. Maturity—progress towards being like our Savior and our Heavenly Parents—manifests in humility, teachableness, cooperation, patience, trust, hope, openness to the larger vision of eternal progression.

Growth toward godliness and eventual Godhood all begins with humility. It begins with coming to truly realize that without God (and the Family of God that He represents), we are without heritage or inheritance. He wants to give us all

that He has,...and more marvelous than that: *all that He IS.*

This understanding began for me when I faced the devastatingly humiliation of admitting I had allowed a behavior in my life to become an "addiction." My search for God was, like Alma's, fulfilled in the abyss of my own fallen self.

For this humiliating paradox of losing my dignity, my "face" (countenance), my name (reputation) in order to begin to inherit His, I will remain ever grateful.

I pray we may all realize the firm bedrock of 100% hopelessness *without Him.*

What part of hopeless don't we understand? □

"Having Gone the Way of All the Earth"—Alma 1:1

How final is death. As inhabitants of this earth, as partakers of this fall from a celestial to a teletial degree of life, energy and glory (all of which are synonymous terms), we have committed ourselves to the reality that we, too, must go "the way of all the earth." This earth is in a state of ebbing and flowing on a very short time cycle. The one eternal round of all creation is reduced, miniaturized into its spinning seasons. So much in this world is a microcosmic model of greater applications of the same principles in eternity.

President Hinckley, in the April, 1999, General Conference, said this of death:

"I...reflected on the lives of those who were once buoyant and happy, who were creative and distin-

guished, who gave much to the world in which they lived. They have all passed into the oblivion of the grave. All who have lived upon the earth before us are now gone. They have stepped over the threshold of silent death. None has escaped." (*Ensign*, May, 1999, p. 70)

The way of eternity is that there are comings and goings, going out to do a specific assignment by the Father, by the Gods—and then coming back to report. There are times of work and times of rest. This is the time, in mortality, to prepare to meet God (*again*). And to meet Him at a higher and more mature and prepared state of existence, as much like Him as we have

been able to grow into in this life. This is the "good warfare" spoken of in the next phrase (Alma 1:1).

Father God, grant me the blessing of remembering that when I left Thee and all my beloved Family and Home, I was—just like Peter, James and John, and even as my Savior Jesus Christ—sent on a mission to observe, to learn and to teach. Grant me to remember that I, too, will have the opportunity of returning and reporting to my Savior and to Thee what I observed, what I learned and how much of what I learned I shared with others. I pray I may have all the experiences I need while here to progress and become as much like Thee and our precious Mother as possible. Ebbing and flowing, coming and going, it is all good—of God and Godliness.

—C.H. □

The Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness

Isaiah 61:1-3, speaking of Christ's mission:

to give unto them... the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;...

The "spirit of heaviness"—what better way to describe depression? It certainly feels that way to me! I've struggled with depression my whole adult life. I've tried everything to cure it—prescriptions, herbs, allergy treatments, dietary changes, exercise, relaxation, positive thinking, ignoring it, hypnosis, therapy, the 12 Steps, fasting and prayer, service to others, priesthood blessings...But always, the depression—that spirit of heaviness—has returned.

I've been in a current struggle with a new bout of depression for the past few months now. At times I've been able to throw it off for a few days and live in a positive, faithful manner; other times I've found myself looking down into the abyss. I've searched the scriptures many times for help—and found some relief. But I've never, until today, found a reference that described depression.

And there, preceding the reference to heaviness, is a reference to its "cure"—the "garment of praise."

I wanted to be sure I understood what the scriptures were telling me, so I looked up the key words in my dictionary:

Praise—express warm approval or admiration; glorify (God) in words; an exclamation of pious gratitude.

Pious—devout, religious.

Gratitude—being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for

and to return kindness.

I began to see a new antidote for depression! Putting on the "garment of praise" doesn't mean losing myself in service. It doesn't mean to buck up and take it or "snap out of it." It doesn't mean I need more faith. It means I need to express gratitude in praising the Lord.

Could this really be an answer? There is only one way to determine that—put it to the test, experiment upon it.

Looking back at the verse I see that it is found in the description of Christ's eternal mission. That means, that I can find my garment of praise, my cure for depression, in Him. It is His mission to supply it for me, to give it to me.

Heavenly Father, please may I have that garment of praise spoken of in the scriptures?

I am so grateful for all the blessings thou has given me. I look back over my life and I see the many times and ways and places you have given me beauty for ashes, and joy in the place of mourning. I see where thou hast bound up my broken heart and made it whole again; where thou hast given me liberty and released me from the bondage of addictions. Every bit of peace and comfort in my life has come from Thy hand. Thank you for applying your atoning sacrifice to me. Thank you for healing the damage I've done—both accidentally and on purpose. And thank you for healing me of the ways I've been damaged. My heart is so full to overflowing that right now, at this moment, there is no room for fear, or doubt, or worry, or depression. I do indeed feel that I wear the garment of praise—and it is the most lovely and beautiful garment I have ever worn.

So what happened? After writing the above, I got up and took my vitamins and an herbal remedy for depression. This is significant because one of the first symptoms of depression is I stop taking care of myself and stop doing the things I know I need to do to be well. I haven't taken the vitamins and herbs for several weeks. And today, I took them—and it was almost as if I was on automatic pilot. I didn't really think about it until I was in the middle of doing it. And when I realized what I was doing, I was filled with gratitude for the science and technology the Lord has blessed us with that developed these products which help me to be healthy and well.

Then I went into the kitchen and told my husband I had taken my pills.

He asked, "New Year's resolution?"

And I replied, "No. Gift from God."

Miracles like this have been happening all week. I start to feel depressed and I stop—right then—and think of something, anything, I can praise God for. The worst of the feeling of heaviness lifts, and I find myself being proactive—doing something to make my life better. Yes, I still feel depression descend on me like a thick, wet storm cloud. But now I know to go put on the "garment of praise"—which acts like a raincoat, to protect me from the worst of the storm.

—K.B. □

Lessons God Taught Through the Truck

Some of God's best lessons have been taught through my 1994 Mazda Pickup.

Back in June 2002, one of the headlights went out. I purchased a new one but did not put it in. The brights still worked and the dim on the driver's side still worked, so I let it go for a couple of weeks. Then one night, I got in the truck and started it up, turned on the light switch and heard a poof sound as the dim light on the driver's side went out. I had to "bright light" everyone all the way to my destination and back.

The next morning, I bought another light for the truck and replaced both headlights. I was just finishing up when my wife came home. I asked her to go around to the front of the truck and see if the headlights came on when I pulled the knob. She looked and said she couldn't see any light. I got out of the cab and walked around to check for myself. Sure enough, no light.

I thought for a minute that maybe I should turn the key on to send power to the lights. I knew I shouldn't need to, but just to be

sure, I turned the key on anyway. I asked my wife to look again and she did. Still no light. I got out of the cab and walked around to the front of the truck to see for myself. Again, she was right. No light.

I thought, "Well the brights were working before. I'll check them." I turned the brights on and got out and walked around to the front of the truck. My wife had gone in the house by this time, tired, I suppose, of playing the light game with me. Still no lights.

I was getting frustrated. It wasn't a hard job to put the lights in. You just lifted the hood and unscrewed the old light and twisted the new ones into place. It was so much easier than the lights on older model trucks, where you had to take the whole headlight and cover off to replace the globes.

As I headed back to the cab of the truck to retrieve my keys, I almost stumbled over something. I looked to see what it was.

It was the battery!

I had removed the battery to get to one of the lights and forgotten to replace it. I had walked right past it

every time I got out of the truck to check the lights. Pretty crazy, but that is how much of my life has been.

For years I attended church, paid tithes and offerings, but didn't feel a contact with God. Sometimes I still don't have my spiritual battery hooked up. I go around trying to see what I should do in my life, but feel I am getting no inspiration. I need to hook up my battery and turn my light on to get in contact with God. Just like the truck, all the parts are there waiting to be turned on—they just need me to make the connection, to hook up the battery. The Lord has been good to me and often shows me where I have left my battery and how to hook it back up to receive that which I desire. It was a good lesson to learn. —CJS □

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What’s inside this issue of Heartbeats...

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- **Having Gone the Way of All the Earth:** Looking at the finality of death.
- **The Garment of Praise for the Spirit of Heaviness:** A “cure” for depression can be found in the description of Christ’s mission.
- **Lessons God Taught Through the Truck:** God can teach us valuable lessons through every day objects.

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