

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES OF A.A.

“A Way of Life Infinitely More Satisfying”

## Workshop Facilitated by P.D. Van Klaveren

### Overview:

This short overview lays the foundation for our shared work together. In this session, we will explore what Spiritual Principles are and why they matter, not only within recovery, but within daily living, relationships, decision making, and personal growth. We will trace the historical development of the Spiritual Principles within A.A., examining how they emerged from the Twelve Steps and A.A. literature over time.

I will share my own journey of discovering the Spiritual Principles as living forces rather than abstract ideas, and how they became practical tools for transformation when recovery meetings, people, and certainty were not always accessible.

We will clarify the distinction between the Twelve Steps and the Spiritual Principles. We will examine how these principles appear throughout A.A. literature and how they are embedded within each Step.

Finally, we will begin our brief study of the first three Spiritual Principles: **Honesty, Hope, and Faith**. Through reflection, writing, and discussion, we will consider how each principle is aspired to, actualized, and then acted upon in our lives.

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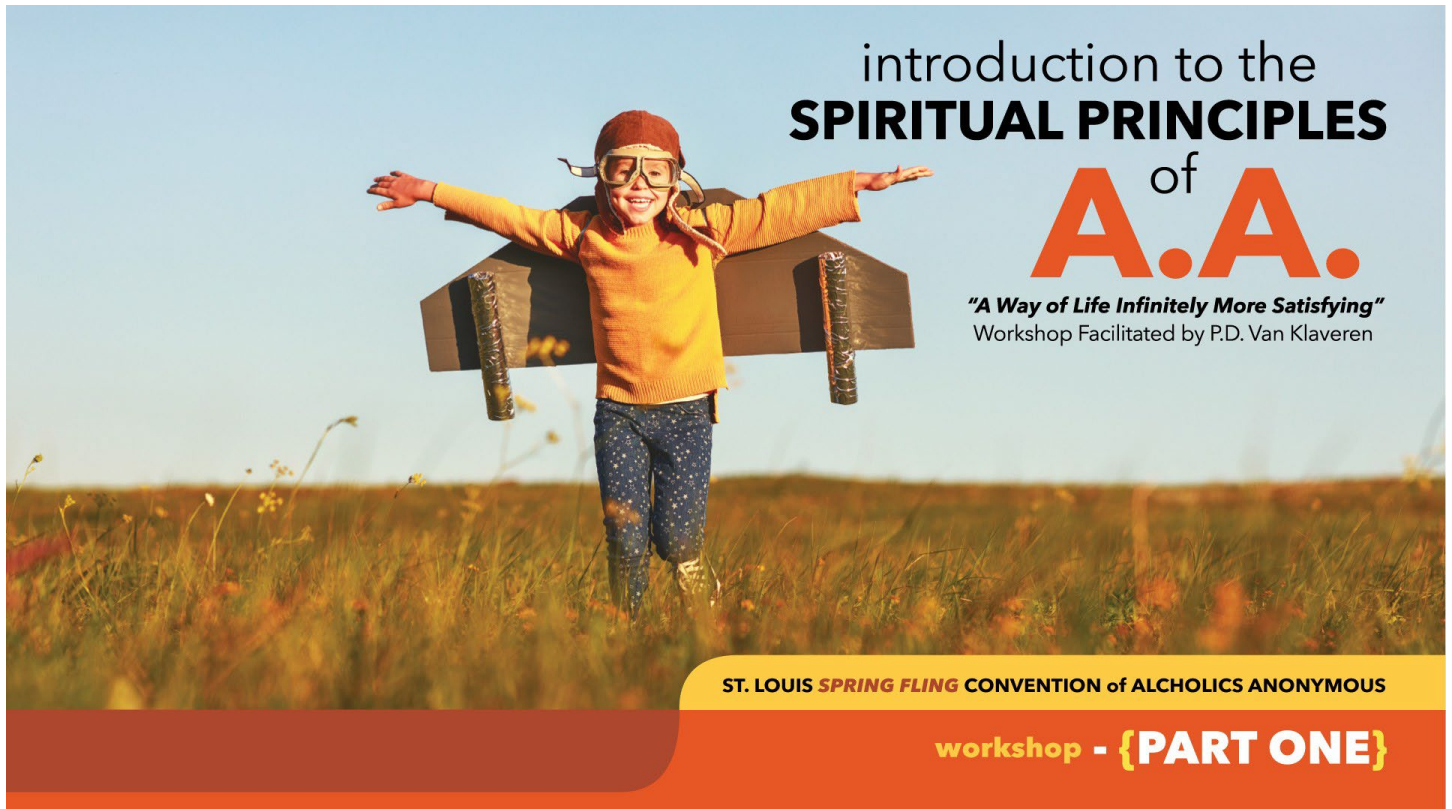
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This material is offered in the spirit of shared growth, service, and recovery.

## (1a) Cover Slide



introduction to the  
**SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**  
of  
**A.A.**  
*"A Way of Life Infinitely More Satisfying"*  
Workshop Facilitated by P.D. Van Klaveren

ST. LOUIS *SPRING FLING* CONVENTION of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

workshop - **{PART ONE}**

Good morning and welcome to the **Introduction to the Spiritual Principles of A.A. Workshop**. My name is P.D., and I am an alcoholic. Thank you for joining me here today.

To briefly qualify, my sobriety date is March 23, 2013. I have a sponsor, and with that sponsor I actively work a daily program of recovery, including ongoing twelve step work.

I am also a sponsor to others who I work with regularly in literature, step work, and spiritual matters.

I am a member of multiple programs of recovery, though I call Alcoholics Anonymous my primary program.

I have a homegroup, Artists in Recovery, held at Steps Alano Club here in St. Louis, Missouri. We meet every Sunday night at 7:00 p.m. in the downstairs room.

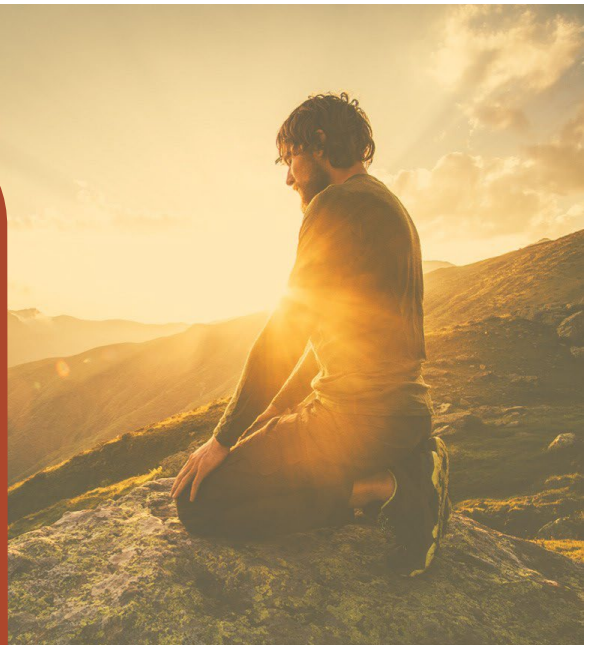
I hold multiple service commitments within the A.A. service structure and I remain committed to my recovery by participating in fellowship, Twelve Step outreach, and by carrying the message to other alcoholics who are still suffering.

## (1b) Opening Prayer

### opening prayer

God, make me a channel of Thy peace;  
that where there is hatred, I may bring love;  
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;  
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony;  
that where there is error, I may bring truth;  
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith;  
that where there is despair, I may bring hope;  
that where there are shadows, I may bring light;  
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.  
God, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted;  
to understand, than to be understood;  
to love, than to be loved.  
For it is by self forgetting that one finds.  
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.  
It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life.

– Twelve and Twelve, p. 99



#### PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.  
It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life.

## (1c) What to Expect

### what to expect: PART ONE

- General overview of Spiritual Principles
- Distinction from the Twelve Steps
- Lived Experience with Principles
- Grounded in A.A. literature
- Part One focuses on our first three Principles



**"We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe."  
Big Book; Into Action, pg.75**

In this first session, we will lay the foundation for understanding the Spiritual Principles of A.A. We will explore what Spiritual Principles are, how they developed within A.A., how they differ from the Twelve Steps, and how they are expressed throughout A.A. literature. I will also briefly share my own experience discovering these principles as practical tools for daily living.

We will then begin a brief study of the first three principles: **Honesty, Hope, and Faith.**

This workshop covers a significant amount of material in a very short time. It is my hope that you will be able to take some of what you learn here and apply it to your own continued study, as each principle warrants deeper exploration. This session is designed as a somewhat cursory overview to support ongoing personal study and daily application within recovery.

The material presented reflects a combination of A.A. literature, lived experience, and personal interpretation.

#### SLIDE CONTENT

- Overview of Spiritual Principles in A.A. and their role in Recovery
- Historical context and distinction from the Twelve Steps
- A personal account of the importance of Spiritual Principles in supporting our ongoing lives in Recovery
- Focused overview of the first five Spiritual Principles of Recovery
- A workshop grounded in A.A. literature, lived experience, and practical application

## (1d) There is but One Ultimate Authority



Before we go further, it is important to say that this workshop is guided by A.A.'s Second Tradition: ***"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience."***

This matters here because I am not claiming to be the authority on Spiritual Principles for everyone. I can only speak with authority about how these principles have come to be applied in my life. My understanding has been shaped through study, experience, and my relationship with a God of my own understanding.

Each of you has the same right. You are the authority on your own experience, your own understanding, and the way these principles come alive in your life. So, if something I share today does not fully fit for you, or if you understand it differently, I welcome that. I do not challenge your right to your own understanding, and I ask for that same respect in return.

This workshop is based on my own study, interpretation, and lived experience, especially over the past thirteen years of focused reflection on the Spiritual Principles of A.A. While I do not claim ultimate authority, I do bring deep study and serious commitment to this subject.

Within this room, the true authority is a loving God, as expressed through what is shared here today: through the material, through participation, and through each person's honest engagement. This is not meant to be a debate. It is an opportunity for all of us to better understand ourselves through shared experience.

## (1e1) What are Spiritual Principles?



what are **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**?

***Spiritual Principles*** are what break open the layers of concrete that make up our lives, creating the cracks in me where growth can emerge..

*They do not erase hardship; they make growth possible because of it!*

**"At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him."**

**Big Book; We Agnostics, p.47**

### SLIDE CONTENT

***Spiritual Principles*** are what break open the layers of concrete that make up our lives, creating the cracks in me where growth can emerge.

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### RECOVERY QUOTE

*"At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him."*

**Big Book; We Agnostics, p.47**

The literature of A.A. is always trying to convey to me something about how to live a life of sobriety and recovery. The Spiritual Principles are everywhere within our literature as we will discover.

## (1e2) What are Spiritual Principles?



### what are **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**?

- **Enduring practices that guide how we live**
- **Shape decisions, behavior, and thinking**
- **Remain steady despite changing circumstances**
- **They require intention but are revealed through action**

Spiritual principles begin as something I aim toward, but they are not proven by what I aim or intend. Intention is where they are chosen, but action is where they become real.

I can intend to be honest, but honesty is only revealed when I tell the truth in a moment where it would be easier not to.

I can intend to have faith, but faith is only seen when I act without certainty.

I can intend to be loving, but love is only known when I treat others with care, especially when it is difficult.

In this way, intention is the starting point. It sets direction, it aligns the will, it names the principle I am moving toward. But intention alone is internal and untested. It has no weight until it meets behavior.

Action is what exposes whether the principle is actually alive within me. It brings the principle out of abstraction and into lived experience. Through action, the principle is not just something I believe in or think about, it becomes something I embody.

So Spiritual Principles require intention because I must choose them consciously. But they are revealed through action because only what I do shows what I am truly practicing.

#### **SLIDE CONTENT**

- Spiritual principles are enduring practices that guide how we live, not what we believe.
- They shape our morals, decisions, behavior, emotions, and thinking, especially under pressure.
- Spiritual Principles are unchanging, even when feelings, circumstances, or outcomes are not.
- They require intention but are revealed through action

## (1e3) What are Spiritual Principles?



### what are **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**?

- **Transform suffering into meaning**
- **Replace self-will with alignment**
- **Respond instead of react**
- **Create consistency in unpredictability**
- **Become the inner structure that supports sobriety**

**"Can we transform these calamities into assets, sources of growth and comfort to ourselves and those about us?"**

**Twelve & Twelve; Step Twelve, p.113**

#### SLIDE CONTENT

##### In Recovery specifically, Spiritual Principles:

- Transform suffering into meaning and direction
- Replace self-will with alignment and restraint
- Teach us how to respond instead of react
- Create consistency when life remains unpredictable
- In recovery, Spiritual Principles become the internal architecture that supports sobriety when self-will runs riot.

#### RECOVERY QUOTE

*"Can we transform these calamities into assets, sources of growth and comfort to ourselves and those about us?"*

**Twelve & Twelve; Step Twelve, p.113**

Spiritual Principles are transformative. When practiced in conjunction with recovery, they become opportunities for growth that allow us to be of maximum service to those we share our lives with.

## (1e4) What are Spiritual Principles?



### what are **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**?

**Spiritual principles are universal practices and lived philosophies that govern healthy human living.**

*They are the moral and spiritual qualities that **already exist within us** but are often obscured by alcoholism, addiction, emotional turmoil, and unexamined character defects.*

**“The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead.”**

**Big Book; Into Action, p.82**

Spiritual Principles are universal practices and lived philosophies that govern healthy human existence.

They are the moral and spiritual qualities that already exist within us but are often obscured by alcoholism, addiction, emotional turmoil, and unexamined character defects.

In active drinking or using, these principles are difficult to see and even harder to live by.

They sit behind the guilt, the shame, and the remorse; quietly intact, waiting to be reclaimed.

Spiritual Principles are not imposed from the outside.

They are **revealed through recovery**, made actionable through practice, and embodied through consistent spiritual action.

They are not feelings or ideals; they are **real, practical guides** for how we think, decide, behave, and relate to others—especially when life is uncomfortable.

#### **RECOVERY QUOTE**

*“The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil.”*

**Big Book; Into Action, p.82**

It is difficult for the world to see us as spiritually driven people when we are drinking and using. Even though the principles reside within us, manifesting them is nearly impossible.

## (1f1) There are Hundreds of Spiritual Principles

there are **HUNDREDS** of Spiritual Principles



Can You  
List Some?

There are **hundreds of spiritual principles**, and we each have different relationships with them.

Some come naturally to one person and are challenging for another.

***What are some Spiritual Principles?***

## (1f2) There are Hundreds of Spiritual Principles

### there are **HUNDREDS** of Spiritual Principles



**Honesty, Hope, Faith, Courage, Integrity, Willingness, Humility, Justice, Perseverance, Spirituality, Service, Courtesy, Success, Thankfulness, Communication, Optimism, Selflessness, Compassion, Consideration, Problem-Solving, Foresight, Patience, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Surrender, Love, Awareness, Vigilance, Discipline, Sharing, Caring, Kindness, Positivity, Responsibility, Tolerance, Trust, Unity, Gratitude, Fun, Ability, Work, Abundance, Wonder, Achieving, Wisdom, Action, Advice, Vision, Freedom, Failure, Questioning, Ethics, Appreciation, Value, Understanding, Attitude, Balance, Trying, Change, The Present, Being True to Yourself, Choices, Decision-Making, Solitude, Simplicity, Friendship, Progress, Dreams, Respect, Silence, Education, Doing Your Best, Encouragement, Realism, Enthusiasm, Rest and Relaxation, Example, Excellence, Organizing, Experience, Opportunity, Goals, Motivation, Receiving, Mercy, Growth, Listening, Habit, Limits, Honor, Leadership, Humor, Knowledge, Ideals, Imagination, Giving**

Here is a list of Spiritual Principles that I have worked with and practiced throughout my recovery. I bet if you sat down with pencil and paper, your list would be pretty comprehensive as well.

#### SLIDE CONTENT

Honesty, Hope, Faith, Courage, Integrity, Willingness, Humility, Justice, Perseverance, Spirituality, Service, Courtesy, Success, Thankfulness, Communication, Optimism, Selflessness, Compassion, Consideration, Problem-Solving, Foresight, Patience, Forgiveness, Acceptance, Surrender, Love, Awareness, Vigilance, Discipline, Sharing, Caring, Kindness, Positive-Thinking, Responsibility, Tolerance, Trust, Unity, Gratitude, Fun, Ability, Work, Abundance, Wonder, Achieving, Wisdom, Action, Advice, Vision, Freedom, Questioning, Ethics, Appreciation, Value, Understanding, Attitude, Balance, Trying, Change, The Present, Being True to Yourself, Choices, Decision-Making, Solitude, Simplicity, Friendship, Progress, Dreams, Respect, Silence, Education, Doing Your Best, Encouragement, Realism, Enthusiasm, Rest and Relaxation, Example, Excellence, Organizing, Experience, Opportunity, Goals, Motivation, Receiving, Mercy, Growth, Listening, Habit, Limits, Honor, Leadership, Humor, Knowledge, Ideals, Imagination, Giving

## (1f3) There are Hundreds of Spiritual Principles

### there are **HUNDREDS** of Spiritual Principles



Living a life in Recovery dedicated and informed by Spiritual Principles is not about perfection, but about **learning which principles need attention, cultivation, and practice.**

*To live by spiritual principles is to allow what has always been true within us to finally become visible, usable, and lived.*

#### SLIDE CONTENT

Living a life in Recovery dedicated and informed by Spiritual Principles is not about perfection, but about **learning which principles need attention, cultivation, and practice.**

To live by Spiritual Principles is to allow what has always been true within us to finally become visible, usable, and lived.

# (1g1) The History of the A.A. Spiritual Principles?

## history of our A.A. SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

### 1939 – *Alcoholics Anonymous* (“The Big Book”)

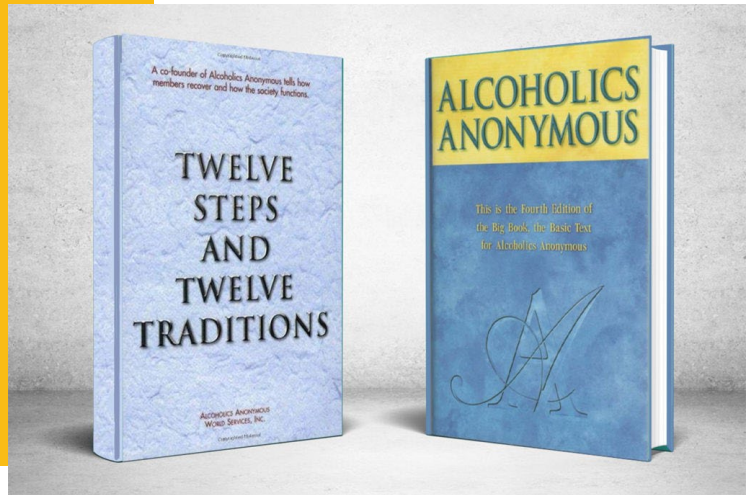
The Twelve Steps were first published as the foundation of Alcoholics Anonymous.

### 1953 – *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*

Wilson offered deeper spiritual interpretation of the Steps, frequently naming qualities such as honesty, humility, love, and service.

### 1970s – Unofficial Standardization

The familiar Spiritual Principles behind the “Steps” began appearing in meetings and workshops.



**“The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress.” Big Book; *How It Works*, p.60**

## SLIDE CONTENT

### The Timeline

- **1939 — *Alcoholics Anonymous* (“The Big Book”)**  
The Twelve Steps were first published as the foundation of **Alcoholics Anonymous**. Co-founder **Bill Wilson** understood each Step to express a spiritual principle, but no single-word virtues were assigned.
- **1953 — *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions***  
Wilson offered deeper spiritual interpretation of the Steps, frequently naming qualities such as **honesty, humility, love, and service**.  
Still, no official or standardized list of one-word principles was presented.
- **1970s — Unofficial Standardization**  
The familiar “principles behind the Steps” list began appearing in meetings and workshops. It was created organically by members and educators, not formally adopted by A.A.’s General Service Conference.

## RECOVERY QUOTE

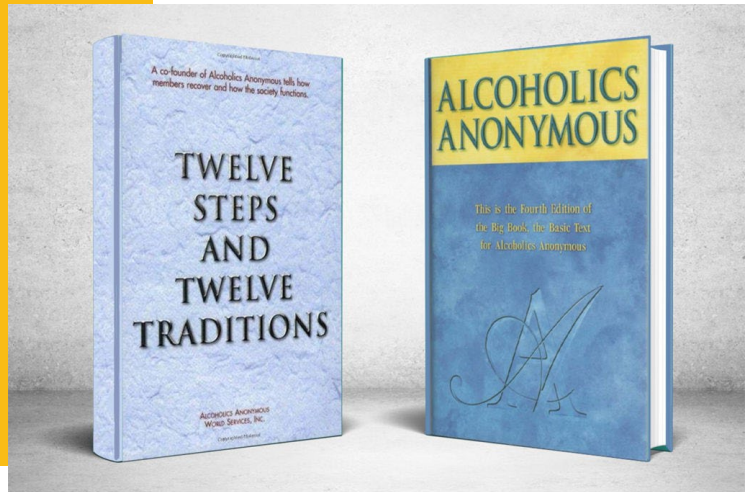
*“The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.”*

**Big Book; *How It Works*, p.60**

## (1g2) Twelve Steps vs. Twelve Spiritual Principles

### Twelve Steps vs. Twelve Spiritual Principles

- **The Twelve Spiritual Principles are *interpretive teaching tools*, not official A.A. doctrine.**
- **They help translate the Steps into lived spiritual qualities rather than replace the Steps themselves.**
- **They work together and independently, the important thing to remember is they work!**



**“All of the Twelve Steps require sustained and personal exertion to conform to their *principles* and so, we trust, to God's will. Twelve & Twelve; Step Three, p.40**

#### SLIDE CONTENT

- The Twelve Spiritual Principles are **interpretive teaching tools**, not official A.A. doctrine.
- They help translate the Steps into lived spiritual qualities rather than replace the Steps themselves.
- They work together and independently, the important thing to remember is they work!

#### RECOVERY QUOTE

*“All of the Twelve Steps require sustained and personal exertion to conform to their principles and so, we trust, to God's will. It is when we try to make our will conform with God's that we begin to use it rightly.”*

**Twelve & Twelve; Step Three, p.40**

## (1h1) What are the Twelve Primary Spiritual Principles of A.A.?

### what are the twelve primary **Spiritual Principles** of A.A.?



“The basic principles of A.A., as they are known today, were borrowed mainly from the fields of religion and medicine, though some ideas upon which success finally depended were the result of noting behavior and needs of the fellowship itself.”

**Twelve & Twelve; Forward, p.16**

The principles of A.A. did not emerge in isolation; they were drawn largely from existing ideas in religion and medicine, then shaped and refined through the lived experiences of its members. What proved most essential was not theory, but what actually worked in practice. As individuals came together in recovery, the fellowship itself revealed its own needs, patterns, and solutions. Over time, these observations helped form a set of principles that are both grounded and adaptable—rooted in tradition, yet continually clarified through real human experience.

- Rooted in religion and medicine
- Shaped by real member experience
- Evolved through fellowship needs
- Not invented; adapted and refined
- Built on what actually worked
- Practical, lived—not theoretical

#### SLIDE CONTENT

*“The basic principles of A.A., as they are known today, were borrowed mainly from the fields of religion and medicine, though some ideas upon which success finally depended were the result of noting behavior and needs of the fellowship itself.”*

**Twelve & Twelve; Forward, p.16**

## (1h2) What are the Twelve Primary Spiritual Principles of A.A.?

### the twelve **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES** of A.A.?

**STEP ONE (1) :: HONESTY**  
**STEP TWO (2) :: HOPE**  
**STEP THREE (3) :: FAITH**  
**STEP FOUR (4) :: COURAGE**  
**STEP FIVE (5) :: INTEGRITY**  
**STEP SIX (6) :: WILLINGNESS**  
**STEP SEVEN (7) :: HUMILITY**  
**STEP EIGHT (8) :: LOVE**  
**STEP NINE (9) :: JUSTICE**  
**STEP TEN (10) :: PERSEVERANCE**  
**STEP ELEVEN (11) :: AWARENESS**  
**STEP TWELVE (12) :: SERVICE**



#### SLIDE CONTENT

Step One (1): HONESTY (Big Book, *More About Alcoholism*, pg.20)

Step Two (2): HOPE (Big Book, *We Agnostics*, pg.47-53)

Step Three (3): FAITH (Big Book, *How It Works*, pg.63)

Step Four (4): COURAGE (Big Book, *How It Works*, pg.64)

Step Five (5): INTEGRITY (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.72)

Step Six (6): WILLINGNESS (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.76)

Step Seven (7): HUMILITY (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.76)

Step Eight (8): LOVE (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.76)

Step Nine (9): JUSTICE (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.76)

Step Ten (10): PERSEVERANCE (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.84)

Step Eleven (11): AWARENESS (Big Book, *Into Action*, pg.85)

Step Twelve (12): SERVICE (Big Book, *Working With Others*, pg.89)

When we talk about the Twelve Steps, we're often talking about actions, things we do. But underneath those actions are deeper currents. These currents are what we call the Spiritual Principles.

The quote on the previous slide reminds us of something important: A.A. didn't invent these principles out of nothing. They were drawn from religion, from medicine, and from the lived

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experience of alcoholics trying to stay sober together. What worked was kept. What didn't was let go. Over time, something very real began to take shape.

These Twelve Spiritual Principles are not formally listed in the original Big Book as a clean set of one-word definitions. They emerged later, as members began to recognize that each step carries a core principle within it, a kind of spiritual engine that powers the action.

So, what we have here is not doctrine. It's not something you are required to believe in exactly as written. It's a framework, an interpretation that helps us better understand what is actually happening to us as we move through the steps.

And as we move through them, these principles begin to build on one another.

These principles are not just ideas. They are lived experiences. They show up in how we think, how we act, how we relate to others, and how we understand ourselves.

And over time, they stop being something we practice... and start becoming who we are.

## (1i) Spiritual Principles Would Solve ALL My Problems

### SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES *would solve ALL my problems*



“Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems. I have since been brought into a way of living infinitely more satisfying, and, I hope, more useful than the life I lived before.”

**Big Book; More About Alcoholism, p.42-43**  
Quoted from Fred's Story

(Fred was most likely known as Harry B. of New York who got sober in 1938)

#### SLIDE CONTENT

*“Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems. I have since been brought into a way of living infinitely more satisfying, and, I hope, more useful than the life I lived before.”*

**Big Book; More About Alcoholism, p.42-43**

**Quoted from Fred's Story**

*(Fred was most likely known as Harry B. of New York who got sober in 1938)*

At about three years sober, I found myself struggling in a way I hadn't experienced before. I had spent those first years staying sober through step work, service work, and fellowship. I had worked the Steps twice, gone through book studies, served as GSR, and studied the Traditions and Concepts. I thought I knew what it meant to live sober.

But I did not yet have a spiritual life. My prayer life was absent. My meditation life was absent. I was still trying to find a God of my own understanding.

Then something happened that threw my life into chaos.

I was accused of a crime I did not commit, and through that accusation I became isolated from the recovery community I had come to rely on. For about a year, while I was under investigation, I had very little to lean on except A.A. literature and the step work I had already done.

During that year I had bouts of extreme depression, major anxiety, extreme anger, and suicidal thoughts. I didn't want to drink, but I found myself not wanting to live.

My sponsor and I had done a Step One so thoroughly that no amount of chaos or fear was going to take me back out. But my spiritual life was not strong enough to carry me through what I was facing.

To be accused of something I didn't do, to watch my life deteriorate because of that accusation, and to not be allowed to defend myself was devastating.

My lawyer gave me strict instructions not to talk about what was happening. If I felt the need to defend myself, I was not allowed to respond. I couldn't even tell people, "I didn't do this."

The kind of faith, hope, and trust required to endure the public judgment and ridicule without defending myself was something I did not yet have, because it required a relationship with God that I had not yet built.

And yet, I didn't want to drink. And somewhere deep down, I didn't really want to die either.

So, I began to pray. I began to meditate. Not because I was good at it, but because I had nothing else. But even that wasn't enough.

To survive what I was going through, I needed something more than prayer and meditation. I needed something that could guide me and show me how to live, how to act, and how to walk through what was in front of me. To walk through the fear with grace and principle.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was about to be reintroduced to concepts that had been written in the front of my Big Book since my first month of sobriety.

One afternoon, after another round of police interviews, I took my Big Book down to the creek near my home in Arkansas, where I was living at the time. That creek had become a sanctuary for me, a place where I could sit in nature, pray, and begin learning how to talk to a God of my own understanding.

That afternoon, I brought my Big Book with me and opened it randomly. It fell open to pages 42 and 43, "More About Alcoholism."

At the bottom of the page, I read: "Quite as important was the discovery that spiritual principles would solve all my problems." A closing thought and quote from the story of Fred that is one of the examples of alcoholism written in Chapter Three (3).

I stopped there.

Because I had a lot of problems. And the biggest one was this: how do I walk through one of the most painful and unjust seasons of my life without drinking, without acting out, without making things worse, without resentment, and with some kind of grace?

What struck me was this: he didn't say God would solve all my problems. He didn't say I would solve them. He didn't say my lawyer, my family, or anything external would solve them.

He said spiritual principles.

And then I remembered something.

The first day I met my sponsor, the man who took me through the Steps, he had me write a list in the front of my Big Book. Twelve Spiritual Principles, one for each Step.

So, sitting there by that creek, I turned to the front of my book.

And there it was.

A simple list. Words I knew but didn't really know how to live in a conscious way: Honesty, Hope, Faith, Courage, Integrity, Willingness, Humility, Love, Justice, Perseverance, Awareness, and Service.

I didn't understand how they would solve all my problems. But I had come to trust the process, and I became willing to begin living toward them, one day at a time.

That decision began a journey that I am still on today.

What I found is this: those principles didn't remove what I was going through, but they gave me a way to walk through it without destroying myself.

I didn't have to drink. I didn't have to lie. I didn't have to manipulate, gossip, fight, or argue.

I could walk through it with something like grace.

And in the end, I was found innocent. My integrity remained intact. My sobriety remained intact.

Spiritual Principles didn't change my circumstances.

They changed the way I lived inside of them.

And in doing that, they solved all my problems.

## (1j) The Spiritual Principles in A.A. Literature

### the SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES in A.A. literature



- **Spiritual Principles are woven throughout the text; not listed in one place**
- **The A.A. stories show how principles are lived**
- **Supporting Spiritual Principles deepens our understanding and practice**
- **Curiosity drives the work: read, reflect, apply**
- **Use the A.A. literature as a foundation for further growth and exploration**

Early in my recovery, an old-timer named Joyce told me something that stayed with me. She said, *everything we need to know about living a spiritual life in recovery can be found in our A.A. literature.*

At the time, she had 32 years sober. I trusted that. I still do.

Now, that doesn't mean we can't grow beyond the literature. Sobriety opens the world to us. We can read anything, study anything, explore anything. The difference is, when we're sober, we're actually available to receive it.

The Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve gave me a foundation. And what I found is that these principles, honesty, hope, faith, and all the rest, are not listed neatly in one place. They are woven throughout the text. They show up in stories, in paragraphs loaded with instructions, in suggestions, in lived experience on paper.

And alongside them are a multitude of supporting principles, things like patience, acceptance, willingness, and curiosity, that help me actually practice the primary ones.

Curiosity, especially, became essential. It allowed me to approach the literature differently, not as something I already knew, but as something I could continue to discover. Curiosity softens fear. It opens the door to learning, to reflection, and ultimately to action. Curiosity turns out to be one of the primary supporting principles of Step Eleven.

So today, we're going to use the literature as our guide, not as a rigid authority, but as a living resource. And my hope is that you will continue to return to it, not just to read it, but to engage with it... and to let it shape how you live through Spiritual Principles.

## (1k1-5) The Three A's of our A.A. Spiritual Principles

SLIDE CONTENT (Flip through the four slides while reading the 3 A's)

(1k1) 1.2.3

### the three A's of our A.A. SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

1.2.3.

These are what I call the **Three A's of our A.A. Spiritual Principles: Aspire, Actualize, and Action.**

As I studied the Spiritual Principles throughout our literature, I kept seeing the same pattern of practice over and over again. We are called to do three things with these principles. We are called to **aspire** toward them, to **actualize** them within ourselves, and then to take **action** on them in our lives.

The primary short principles, honesty, hope, faith, courage, integrity, and so on, are the principles we **aspire** toward. They are the lofty aims. They are the stars in the sky that help guide us toward a more spiritual way of living. They point us toward right action, toward God, and toward a more authentic self. These aspirations matter, but it is important to remember that they are not mastered all at once. They are practiced over time.

## (1k2) ASPIRE

### the three A's of our A.A. SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

# ASPIRE

So first, there is **aspiration**. That is where I hold the goal of how I want to live in relation to a principle. If the principle is honesty, then I ask: What does honesty really mean to me? How do I want to live honestly? What would it look like for honesty to shape my life? Aspiration gives me a direction. It gives me something to keep my eyes on, even when I fall short, get distracted, or lose sight of it for a time.

## (1K3) ACTUALIZE

the three A's of our A.A. **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**

# ACTUALIZE

Second, there is **actualization**. This is the inner work. To actualize a spiritual principle is to internalize it, study it, pray over it, meditate on it, and begin to embody it inwardly. It is one thing to admire a principle. It is another thing to let it settle into the center of who I am. Actualization is where a Spiritual Principle becomes personal. It becomes rooted in my own understanding, my own conscience, and my own innermost self.

## (1k4) ACTION

### the three A's of our A.A. SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

# ACTION

Then third, there is **action**. This is the outward expression of what I have aspired to and what I have begun to actualize. Spiritual Principles do me no good if they remain only ideas I admire or truths I quietly hold within. At some point, I have to act on them. I have to live them. I have to practice them in the world.

And that action can be frightening, because spiritual action often asks me to move against fear, ego, and self-protection. But this is where the principles become real. Once I have set my sights on a principle, and once I have begun to let it take root within me, I am then called to act. That is how the spiritual life leaves theory and becomes practice.

## the three A's of our A.A. **SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES**

*"Next came the expression of an aspiration and a hope for himself."*

**Twelve & Twelve; Step Eleven, pg.101**

- 1. ASPIRE:** To set the Spiritual Principle before me as a goal, guide, or standard for how I want to live.
- 2. ACTUALIZE:** To inwardly realize, understand, and embody that Spiritual Principle within my own life and innermost self.
- 3. ACTION:** To put that principle into practice through concrete choices, behavior, and conduct.

So, when we talk about Spiritual Principles in this workshop, I want you to keep this framework in mind: **Aspire, Actualize, Action**. It is not as complicated as it may sound. In fact, many of you are already doing this whether you have language for it or not. If you have been working the Steps, you have already been doing this. If you have been coming to meetings and then leaving those meetings and trying to live contrary to your alcoholic nature, you have already been doing this.

These words simply give us a framework. They help describe the work we are already engaged in. And for me, they have helped me better understand what I am doing when I apply both the Steps and the Spiritual Principles to my life.

- 1. ASPIRE:** To set the Spiritual Principle before me as a goal, guide, or standard for how I want to live.
- 2. ACTUALIZE:** To inwardly realize, understand, and embody that Spiritual Principle within my own life and innermost self.
- 3. ACTION:** To put that principle into practice through concrete choices, behavior, and conduct.

### RECOVERY QUOTE

*"Next came the expression of an aspiration and a hope for himself."*

**Twelve & Twelve; Step Eleven, pg.101**

## (2a) HONESTY Introduction Slide

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—  
that our lives had become unmanageable.

**step one (1):**  
**HONESTY**  
**Big Book, More About Alcoholism, pg.30**

“Nothing counted  
but thoroughness  
and **honesty**.”  
**Big Book; How It Works, pg.65**

The first Spiritual Principle, and foundation for all other principles to come, is **Honesty**.

Everything that follows in recovery depends on our ability to practice this first simple yet complicated principle.

The Big Book calls out the significance of Honesty and crystalizes the foundational relevance this principle plays to our ability to recover; *How It Works* on page 58:

*“Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty.”*

It is telling us right out of the gate how important honesty is, “rigorous honesty.” If honesty is missing, nothing we build has stability.

We find this principle embodied in Step One:

*“We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.”*

But to understand Honesty as it applies to our recovery, we have to look at how Step One is actually lived, not just stated. The key to that understanding is found on countless pages throughout our texts but is made most clear on page 30 of the Big Book, which we will come back to in a few moments.

### RECOVERY QUOTE

*“Nothing counted but thoroughness and **honesty**.”*

**Big Book; How It Works, p.65**

## (2b) What is Honesty?



# WHAT IS HONESTY?

But first, we need to ask a more basic question:

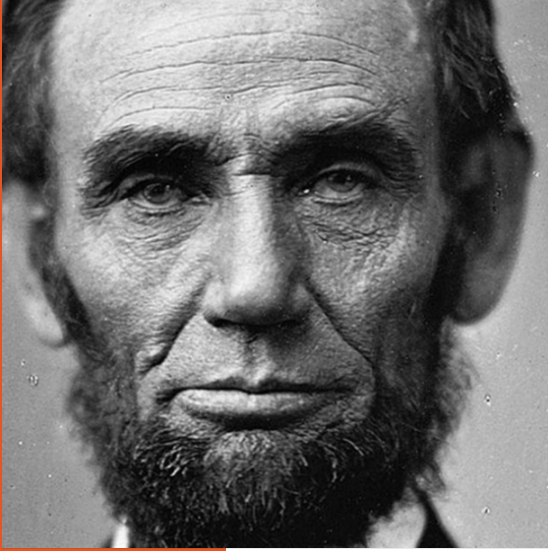
**What is honesty?**

What does it mean to me—not in theory, but in lived experience?

Let's approach that together.

## (2c1) The Most Honest Person I Know (Written Exercise)

### the most **HONEST** person I know (Exercise)



#### An Exercise in Recognizing **HONESTY**

- Write down the name of a person you consider to be honest (not yourself)
- Write down the qualities that make you believe they are honest
- Be specific—focus on behaviors, not just ideas
- What do they do that demonstrates honesty?

Think of the most honest person you have ever known. Not yourself—someone else. It could be a family member, a friend, a sponsor, a coworker, even a public figure.

Who is that person?

And more importantly—**why** do you consider them honest?

What is it about their personality...

their actions...

their way of speaking...

their way of showing up...

What are the characteristics that lead you to trust their honesty?

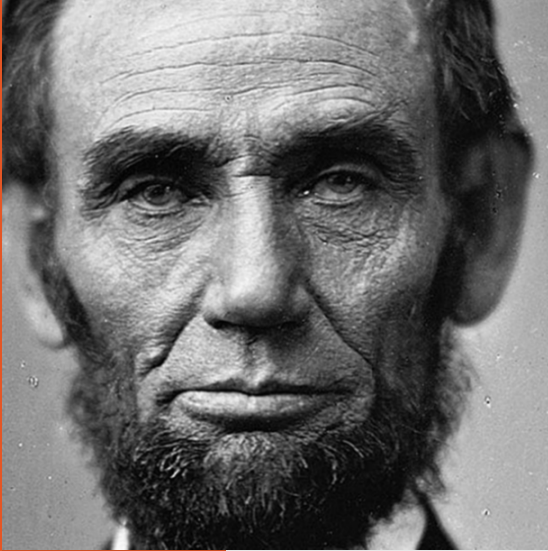
#### SLIDE CONTENT

##### An Exercise in Recognizing Honesty

- Write down the name of a person you consider to be honest (**not yourself**)
- Write down the qualities that make you believe they are honest
- Be specific—focus on behaviors, not just ideas
- What do they do that demonstrates honesty?
- How do they live it in their actions and interactions?
- Do their words and actions align?
- How do they handle truth in difficult situations?

## (2c2) The most Honest person I know (P.D.'s Answer)

## the most **HONEST** person I know (P.D.'s Answer)



### My Mom is the Most **HONEST** Person I know

- **She is honest about her feelings, her thoughts, and her actions.**
- **She is self-sufficient and does not take from others.**
- **She values fairness and makes sure she contributes her share.**
- **She tells the truth consistently, without manipulation or distortion.**
- **She respects other people's time, energy, and boundaries.**
- **Her words and actions align.**

My example is my mom. She is the most honest person I know.

- She speaks her mind, even when it's uncomfortable.
- She is honest about her feelings, her thoughts, and her actions.
- She is transparent with her finances and lives with integrity in how she handles money.
- She is self-sufficient and does not take from others.
- She values fairness and makes sure she contributes her share.
- She tells the truth consistently, without manipulation or distortion.
- She respects other people's time, energy, and boundaries.
- Her words and actions align.
- She doesn't just talk about honesty—she lives it in how she handles life every day.

## (2d1) Characteristics of an Honest Person

### *characteristics of an* **HONEST PERSON**

**truthful, sincere,  
transparent, authentic,  
trustworthy, reliable,  
genuine, direct, plain,  
consistent, accountable,  
forthright, principled,  
straightforward, humble,  
open, ethical, simple,  
candid, responsible, fair,  
clear, aligned, integrous**



From that exercise we might get a more complete list of attributes we might associate with the word honesty, like...truthful, sincere, transparent, authentic, trustworthy, reliable, genuine, direct, plain, consistent, accountable, forthright, principled, straightforward, humble, open, ethical, simple, candid, responsible, fair, clear, aligned, integrous

## (2d2) Are They Really an Honest Person?

### are they really an HONEST PERSON?



- **Have they ever lied?**
- **Have they ever manipulated a situation?**
- **Have they ever cheated... even in small ways?**
- **Driven over the speed limit?**
- **Taken something that wasn't theirs?**
- **Told someone something different than what they truly felt—just to avoid hurting them?**

Now let's take this a step further...

Is the person I believe to be honest, *actually* honest?

Have they ever lied?

Have they ever manipulated a situation?

Have they ever cheated... even in small ways?

Driven over the speed limit?

Taken something that wasn't theirs?

Told someone something different than what they truly felt—just to avoid hurting them?

We do this all the time.

So then let's ask a deeper question:

If someone is not truthful 100% of the time...

does that make them a dishonest person?

Or... do they remain an honest person in my mind—because I understand them in the context of the whole of who they are?

And if that's true...

Then what is honesty, really?

Is honesty a rigid perfection?

A state of never deviating from truth?

Or is honesty something we **strive toward**...

something we **practice**...

something we **embody over time**?

Is it defined by isolated moments of truth or deception...or by a consistent orientation toward truth, even when it's uncomfortable?

## **STORY ABOUT HONESTY**

This past Easter Sunday I went to church with my mom, someone I have always known to be honest, the person I consider to be the most honest person I know.

The church service itself was long. The sermon didn't quite land, and the music felt uninspiring and more drawn out than it needed to be. On the drive to brunch, my mom talked about it openly. She said the minister could have shortened things, that the message didn't fully connect, and that she had hoped for different songs. She told me in no uncertain terms that the Easter Service wasn't good for her, and she had hoped for better. It wasn't harsh, just honest. Thoughtful and real, the way she usually speaks when it's just the two of us.

We carried that conversation into the restaurant, still reflecting on what we had experienced. Then, as we were sitting at our table, a woman from our congregation walked over on her way out. She smiled warmly and said, "Wasn't that the most beautiful Easter service you've ever attended?"

Without hesitation, my mom smiled back and said, "Yes, it was."

I knew immediately that it wasn't true, at least not in the way she had just described the service to me. And in that moment, I felt something shift. The most honest person I know had just said something that didn't match her experience.

It wasn't dramatic, and it wasn't harmful, but it was clear. And it left me with a real question. If someone I trust as honest can have a moment like that, what does honesty actually mean? Is it something absolute, where any deviation changes who a person is? Or is it something broader than that?

What I came to understand is that honesty isn't perfection. It isn't the absence of every small inconsistency or social response. It's a pattern. A way of living that, over time, points toward truth.

My mom didn't become dishonest in that moment. She remained who she has always been. Someone who, in the overall direction of her life, values truth and returns to it again and again.

And that's why honesty is something I aspire toward. Not something I can claim in a perfect sense, but something I practice. Something I move toward, knowing that I won't always get it right, but that the direction still matters.

## (2e) The Definition of Honesty (Long Version)

### the definition of **HONESTY** (long version)



#### **Honest (adjective)**

1a: free from fraud or deception: **LEGITIMATE, TRUTHFUL**

1b: of unquestioned authenticity: **GENUINE, REAL**

1c: free of ostentation or pretense: **HUMBLE**

2. Free of ornament or disguise: **PLAIN**

2a *obs*: of good repute: **ESTIMABLE**

2b: virtuous in the eyes of society: **REPUTABLE**

2c: good, worthy

3a: of a credible nature: **PRAISEWORTHY**

3b: of good reputation: **RESPECTABLE**

4a: characterized by integrity: adhering to principle: **UPRIGHT**

4b: frank and straight forward: **SINCERE**

4c: direct and uncomplicated: **INNOCENT, SIMPLE**

As I work through these definitions, I begin to see what I am actually aiming for when I practice the Spiritual Principle of Honesty in my life. It also reveals a set of supporting principles that help guide me toward it. Principles like truth, legitimacy, genuineness, realness, humility, simplicity, worthiness, respect, sincerity, and innocence. These become practical directions and behaviors that I can apply as I grow in honesty.

Going through the longer versions of definitions is an important part of this work. Understanding the words we use is essential in recovery. I personally use Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged for my word work. It includes definitions that date back to before our literature was written, which helps me better understand what our founders may have meant when they chose specific words. It also allows me to develop a more personal understanding of those same words.

I find it equally important to hold both of these together. What was originally intended, and what the word means to me today.

For the purposes of our work here, we do not have the time to go through full definitions for every principle. So any working definition we use today comes from a much longer form definition based on that deeper research.

## (2f) The Definition of Honesty (Working Version)

### the definition of **HONESTY** (working version)

Honesty is the consistent practice of living in alignment with truth; being genuine, sincere, and straightforward in thought, word, and action, free from deception, pretense, or disguise.



For the purposes of our work today, this is what I mean when I refer to Honesty.

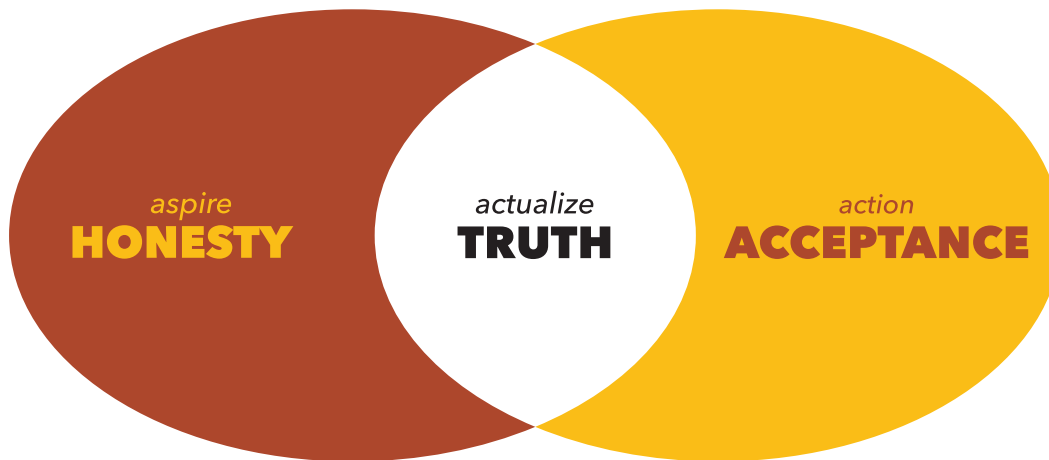
Honesty is the consistent practice of living in alignment with truth; being genuine, sincere, and straightforward in thought, word, and action, free from deception, pretense, or disguise.

This is a working definition drawn from a deeper, more comprehensive understanding.

Now let's look at how this definition is supported in the Three A's of Honesty.

## (2g1) The Three A's of HONESTY

# the three A's: HONESTY



Remember, the Three A's are just one way of understanding that our Spiritual Principles often present themselves, or are structured throughout our Steps and literature, as having three expectations of us when practicing them.

Again and again, our recovery asks us to do three things. To set our sights and aspire toward a principle. To actualize, or internalize it. And to take action based on the first two.

When reading through the Steps and our literature, it was my finding that these three movements are often supported by different Spiritual Principles that work together, but most readily support the aspiring principle. When it comes to the Steps, the Aspiring Principle is always one of the primary twelve.

You can do your own reading and step work and find your own principles in each of these areas. Be your own authority and find words that work for you. But the work always seems to be the same. We are called to Aspire, Actualize, and Action.

For the purposes of today, we will use my personal experience as a point of reference and what I have discovered with the Spiritual Principle of HONESTY is as follows.

### **The Three A's of Honesty are:**

**Aspire:** Honesty

**Actualize:** Truth

**Action:** Acceptance

## (2g2) Aspire Toward HONESTY

### *aspire toward* **HONESTY**

- **Treat honesty as a daily target**
- **Choose not to lie, cheat, or steal**
- **Let honesty guide my decisions**
- **Practice honesty in small, consistent ways every day**
- **Correct myself when I fall short**
- **Rely on willingness and humility to keep growing in honesty**

*“Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, **honesty**, and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements.”*

**Big Book; Bill's Story, 13-14**

Honesty, in our literature, is often paired with other spiritual principles like willingness, and humility but it is a powerful principle and stands readily on its own.

Honesty is my foundation. It is not something I arrive at, it is something I aim toward.

If I simplify it, honesty means I am no longer willing to lie, cheat, or steal in my life. That is the direction I set. That is the standard I begin to move toward.

But honesty is not perfection. It is not something I achieve once and hold onto. It is something I practice over time.

These Spiritual Principles are not achievements of merit. They are directions. They are the stars in the sky that I navigate toward. Honesty is one of those stars.

So I set my sights on honesty, knowing that I will fall short, but continuing to move in that direction anyway.

*“Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, **honesty**, and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the essential requirements.”*

**Big Book; Bill's Story, 13-14**

## (2g3i) To Actualize TRUTH

### to actualize **TRUTH**

- **Truth must be lived, not just understood**
- **Truth is often uncomfortable and difficult to face**
- **Dishonesty can still arise under stress and fear**
- **When it happens, notice it, correct it, and own it**
- **Dishonesty points to unresolved wounds and fear**
- **Avoiding inner truth leads to outward dishonesty**
- **I must become honest with myself first**
- **Inner truth is the foundation for real change**

*"We have seen the **truth** demonstrated again and again: 'Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic.' Commencing to drink after a period of sobriety, we are in a short time as bad as ever."*

**Big Book; More About Alcoholism, pg.33**

Aspiring toward honesty is different than being perfectly honest or even embodying honesty. To embody honesty takes time; to consider myself an honest person takes time as well, especially after decades of drinking and using.

If honesty is what I aspire toward, then truth is where the work actually begins.

I have to come into contact with truth, not as an idea, but as a lived, internal experience.

And I can tell you from my own life, this is not always clean or comfortable.

I consider myself an honest person. I strive toward honesty every day. My level of practice today is far greater than it was when I first got sober. And yet, even today, under the right conditions, fear, stress, exhaustion, hunger, or emotional turmoil, I can still find myself telling lies.

Sometimes I catch it. Sometimes I correct it. But always, I try to own it.

Because my lies tell me something. They point to where there is still work to be done. They reveal unhealed wounds and unresolved fear.

There was a time early in my sobriety, about four months in, when I was given a suggestion to pray on my knees every morning. I wanted to be accepted. I wanted approval. I wanted to do this right.

What I did not understand yet was the level of trauma I was carrying.

When I attempted to follow that suggestion, I experienced intense panic. I could not breathe. I would dissociate. My body reacted in ways I did not understand.

And instead of facing that truth, I hid from it.

For an entire year, I told my Grand Sponsor that I was praying on my knees every day. I spoke about it publicly. I even passed that suggestion on to others.

The truth was, I wasn't praying at all. I couldn't even say the words "Dear God" without shutting down.

That was my reality.

But I could not face it yet.

So I lived in outward dishonesty because I was not yet capable of inner truth.

For me, I had to become honest with myself first. I had to see what was actually happening inside of me before anything on the outside could change.

That is the work of truth.

*“We have seen the **truth** demonstrated again and again: ‘Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic.’ Commencing to drink after a period of sobriety, we are in a short time as bad as ever.”*

**Big Book; More About Alcoholism, pg.33**

## **SLIDE CONTENT**

- Aspiring to honesty is not the same as embodying it
- Embodiment takes time, especially in recovery
- Truth is where the real work begins
- Truth must be lived, not just understood
- Truth is often uncomfortable and difficult to face
- Dishonesty can still arise under stress and fear
- When it happens, notice it, correct it, and own it
- Dishonesty points to unresolved wounds and fear
- Avoiding inner truth leads to outward dishonesty
- I must become honest with myself first
- Inner truth is the foundation for real change

## (2g3ii) Step One, TRUTH, and my INNERMOST SELF

### Step One, TRUTH, and my INNERMOST SELF



“We learned that we had to fully concede to our **innermost selves** that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.”

**Big Book; More About Alcoholics, pg.30**

#### Step One (1) in the Literature

*“We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery.”*

**Big Book; More About Alcoholism, pg.30, ¶ 2.**

In recovery, especially early on, we are learning how to tell the truth and be honest with the world. This takes time, which is why we begin by actualizing truth as an inner expression. This is where Step One becomes a critical distinction in understanding the Spiritual Principle of Honesty. My first practice is to stop lying to myself and to hold that truth within my “innermost self,” a place I have come to know well over years of recovery.

So what is my innermost self? Is it a place, a version of me, something I hold or move toward? Is it where God, emotions, and thoughts live?

Let’s begin with a simple exercise. Close your eyes. Relax your thoughts and emotions. Let go of the room and everything happening in your life. Now think of your innermost self and what it means to you. With your eyes closed, place your hands on the part of your body where you believe that innermost-self lives. Then open your eyes. Where are your hands? Wherever you placed your hands, that is where truth begins for you.

For me, it’s in my stomach. When I am dishonest, I feel it there first. I get nauseous, my appetite shifts, and something in me becomes unsettled. I’ve noticed this pattern over time, both in reflection and in the present moment. I’ve also seen others experience it differently. A close friend would feel it in her head—confusion, headaches, trouble sleeping, even vision problems.

I’ve come to believe that spiritual principles live throughout the body, and that the body often tells us when we are aligned with them or not. As we move through these principles, part of the work is noticing where they show up physically. In Step One, the place where I feel my innermost self is the place where honesty and truth begin.

We learn that we must fully concede to our innermost selves that we are alcoholics. That concession is my first real truth. It is embodied in Step One and understood through reflection on the unmanageability of my life. We admitted we were alcoholics, that our lives had become unmanageable. That truth has to be internal before anything external can change.

When working Step One, we actualize truth because we can no longer lie to ourselves. It may take time to become fully honest with the world, and I've learned to give myself permission to be human. If I fall short, I don't punish myself, but I also don't ignore it. I don't allow my lies to become internalized as truth.

This becomes especially important later in Step Four. Many of my resentments were built on lies I had accepted as truth.

So in Step One, the work of honesty is clear. I begin to live from an inner truth, one that does not allow for self-deception or the comfort of dishonesty.

## (2g4) The Action of ACCEPTANCE

### *the action of* **ACCEPTANCE**

- **Acceptance means acting on what is real**
- **Acceptance is active, not passive**
- **Acceptance is letting go without resistance**
- **Acceptance is choosing alignment over avoidance**
- **Acceptance is daily action in recovery**
- **Acceptance replaces self-deception**
- **Acceptance is inner and outer work**
- **Acceptance allows truth to take root**

*"We know that little good can come to any alcoholic who joins A.A. unless he has first **accepted** his devastating weakness and all its consequences".*

**Twelve & Twelve; Step One, pg.21**

When I practice the spiritual principle as an action, I begin to act in accordance with that acceptance. Simply internalizing something is different from what we do when actualizing truth. We actualize the truth, internalize it, and embed it into our innermost self, and then we begin to practice the action of acceptance. This can also be thought of as right action. I begin to act as though I have accepted a truth. It may look like resignation, but it is a form of active letting go.

What does acceptance look like in action? The answer is often simple for the recovering alcoholic to recognize. Instead of going to the bar, I go to meetings. Instead of obsessing, I sit down and meditate. I pick up a book and read with another alcoholic. I make myself available for service. I participate in fellowship. The list is endless when it comes to actionable Acceptance.

The action of acceptance is found in the choices I make that support the inner truth I have discovered. It can also be thought of as **providence**, with a small p. I begin to act upon my inner truth in ways that are transformative and honest. It is one thing to come to know a truth, but for it to truly settle into my innermost self, I must act upon it through acceptance.

In Step One, the action is not performance. It is not about proving anything to anyone else. The action is acceptance. "We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics." This is an inner admission. This is where honesty becomes real. I can no longer lie to myself. I can no longer cheat myself out of change. I can no longer steal from my own recovery by avoiding what is true.

Acceptance is allowing truth to exist within me without resistance. It is letting in an unobstructed, unaltered truth about my condition, my experience, and my life. I do not have to be outwardly honest with the world yet; that will come with time. But if I cannot accept the truth within myself, then nothing else has a foundation.

So in Step One, I aspire toward honesty, develop an inner relationship with the truth, and take action through acceptance. That is where recovery begins.

## (2h) The Movement of HONESTY in Recovery

### the movement of **HONESTY** in recovery

**Honesty** sets me on a path of right action

**Truth** keeps me grounded in reality

**Acceptance** allows me to embody these principles more fully



When I think about the movement of honesty in recovery, I see it as something active, something that unfolds in a sequence. It begins with honesty. Honesty sets me on a path of right action. It is the decision to stop lying, to stop distorting, and to begin orienting my life toward what is real. I may not be fully there yet, but I have chosen a direction.

Once I step onto that path, truth is what keeps me grounded. Truth brings me into contact with reality as it actually is, not as I wish it to be or fear it to be. It is not abstract. It is lived. It shows up in my thoughts, my emotions, my body, and my experiences. And often, it is uncomfortable. But without truth, my honesty has no foundation. I can intend to be honest, but if I am not grounded in truth, I can still deceive myself.

Then comes acceptance. Acceptance is how I begin to embody these principles more fully. It is not passive, and it is not resignation. It is an active alignment with what is true. It is the willingness to let truth exist within me without resistance and to act in accordance with it. This is where change begins to take root. Not because I forced it, but because I stopped fighting what is real.

So the movement is clear. Honesty sets the direction. Truth grounds me in reality. And acceptance allows me to live it. This is how honesty becomes something more than an idea. It becomes a way of being.

## (2i) What Am I Not Letting In? (Written Exercise)



Other supporting spiritual principles in A.A. Step One begin to emerge as we do the work of honesty. One of these is the spiritual principle of admitting. It is directly tied to honesty, truth, and acceptance. Admitting, in this step, is not about outward confession. It is not about telling other people. In Step One, admitting is about opening a door and letting something in.

I become more honest by practicing admitting. These principles work together to build a stronger inner world rooted in truth. Admitting is the action that allows truth to enter.

Here is the exercise. Take a piece of paper and fold it in half. On the front, draw a door. However you want it to look. Mine has a doorknob and a keyhole. I imagine that I am going to open this door and allow certain truths to come in.

I ask God to help me see what I cannot see. To reveal truths that will deepen my honesty and strengthen my acceptance. I sit with it. I pray. I meditate. Sometimes the answers are already there, ready to be written.

I think of this as a doorway to my innermost self. I remind myself that admitting, in Step One, is about admitting to myself. It is not outward. I do not need to tell anyone else at this stage. But I do need to admit to myself that I am an alcoholic.

And beyond that, there are many smaller admissions that continue to shape my recovery. Thousands of moments where I let truth in and allow it to change me.

So take the paper, draw the door, and ask yourself a simple question:  
What am I not letting in?

Then begin to open the door and allow those truths to enter.

## (2j) HONESTY In Conclusion

# HONESTY

**In Step One, Honesty is not about being perfectly truthful.**

*It is about choosing to stop lying to myself, coming into contact with what is real, and allowing that truth to exist within me.*

Honesty, in Step One, is not about being perfectly truthful.

It is about choosing to stop lying to myself, coming into contact with what is real, and allowing that truth to exist within me.

When I do that, honesty becomes practical.

It becomes something I can live, observe, and correct over time.

And in doing so, I begin to move from denial and self-deception toward clarity and real change.

## (3a) HOPE: Introduction Slide

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

**step two (2):**  
**HOPE**  
Big Book, *We Agnostics*, pg.47-53

“But with the alcoholic whose **hope** is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience...”  
Big Book; *How It Works*, pg.66

### Hope is the second Spiritual Principle of A.A.

It is associated with Step Two: *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

**We find this step in the Big Book in *We Agnostics*, pages 47–53.**

One of the most powerful references to hope in the Big Book appears in *How It Works*, page 66:

*“But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die.”*

I know this passage appears as part of the Fourth Step, but it carries qualifications for hope that help teach me what hope is—or at least what hope can be.

When I came into recovery, I did not fully understand hope. I didn’t feel as though I had much hope left to offer. I was physically, mentally, and spiritually depleted of any kind of real hope. Decades of alcoholism and drug addiction had confused and distorted my understanding of hope, making it difficult to grasp. I needed help finding things to hope for. I needed time for my hope to be restored.

Passages like this one in *How It Works* showed me what my hope could be, as an alcoholic in recovery: the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience. But it also allows me to see that I can also hope for a relationship with the sunlight of the Spirit. It gives me hope there might be something different from the insanity of my drinking. It gives me hope that there are solutions to apply to my alcoholism and that I might not have to die from this disease.

It gives my hope direction. It shows me what I am growing toward, what I am placing my belief in, and what recovery is asking me to trust is possible.

## (3b1) What Do we Hope For? (Written Exercise)

### what do we **HOPE** for? (written exercise)



**Today:** Write one thing you hope will happen in the next 24 hours.

**This Year:** Write one hope you have between now and the end of 2026.

**Life:** Write one hope that reaches into your long-term future.

To better understand hope, it can be helpful to look at the things we are currently hoping for.

Go ahead and grab a pen and paper. We're going to write a few things down.

(1) First, I want you to think about something you are hoping for in the very near future—something you hope will happen today.

**Examples:**

- I hope I make it through today without picking up a drink or a drug.
- I hope I can pause before reacting and not let my emotions run me.
- I hope I can experience a little bit of connection instead of isolation.
- I hope I get some peace and quiet tonight.
- I hope I feel some connection to my Higher Power today.

(2) Next, think of one thing you are hoping for between now and the end of this year, 2026. Something within reach, but not immediate.

**Examples:**

- I hope to get through the Twelve Step.
- I hope to develop a more consistent prayer or meditation practice.
- I hope to have a new job or career.
- I hope to repair or strengthen my relationship with my (spouse, friend, co-workers, parents, boss).
- I hope to improve my living situation.

(3) Finally, write down something you are hoping for long-term, something that will take time, hope that is further out into the future of your life.

- I hope to be free from my historical trauma.
- I hope my kids grow up to be healthy, productive, and successful.
- I hope that I can retire early.
- I hope to be able to finally write that book I have been thinking about.
- I hope that my life is free from major disease and health issues.

## (3b2) What Do We Hope For? (P.D.'s Answers)

### what do we **HOPE** for? (P.D.'s Answers)



**Today:** I hope that I do a good job with this presentation and workshop, and that I don't make any major mistakes.

**This Year:** I hope to get a better handle on my diabetes and bring my blood sugar under control.

**Life:** I hope to live a long, prosperous, and healthy life as a sober human being.

I'll share my three as examples:

- **Today:** I hope that I do a good job with this presentation and workshop, and that I don't make any major mistakes.
- **End of the year:** I hope to get a better handle on my diabetes and bring my blood sugar under control.
- **Long-term:** I hope to live a long, prosperous, and healthy life as a sober human being.

Those are my three.

#### **What are some of yours? Would anyone be willing to share?**

Go ahead and set those aside for a few minutes. We're going to come back to them after we walk through the definitions and the Three A's of Hope.

## (3c) The Definition of Hope (Long Version)

### the definition of **HOPE** (long version)



#### Hope (verb)

1a: to cherish a desire with expectation

1b: to desire with expectation or with belief in the possibility of obtaining: **DESIRE, TRUST**

2a: to place confidence or trust

**2b: WISH, EXPECT – hope against hope: to hope without any basis for expecting fulfillment**

#### hope (noun)

1: **TRUST, RELIANCE**

2a: desire accompanied with expectation of obtaining what is desired or belief that it is obtainable

2b: one on whom hopes are centered

2c: a source of hopeful expectation: **PROMISE**

2d: something that is hoped for: an object of hope

So, what is the definition of hope? Let's look at the long version.

Just like with **Honesty**, the dictionary offers us additional words that help us understand the concept of hope. It gives us supporting spiritual principles, but it also provides some clear direction at the same time.

#### Hope (verb):

- To cherish a desire ***with expectation***.
- To desire with expectation, or ***with belief in the possibility of obtaining***—**DESIRE, TRUST**.
- To place confidence or trust.
- To **WISH** or **EXPECT**: ***“hope against hope”*** as hoping without any basis for expecting fulfillment.

#### Hope (noun):

- **TRUST, RELIANCE**.
- A desire accompanied by the expectation of obtaining what is desired, or a belief that it is obtainable.
- A source of hopeful expectation—a **PROMISE**.
- Something that is hoped for—an object of hope.

In these definitions, an important point stands out: our desire must be accompanied by an expectation of actually obtaining that desire—that it is possible. I have to trust the thing I am placing my hope into.

But before we go further into that, I want to focus on one part of the definition—*hope against hope*. To hope without any basis for expecting fulfillment. This is still considered a form of hope, or at least a kind of hope. And for me, this definition opened my eyes to a lifetime of frustration, resentment, heartache, and pain.

This is the kind of hope I lived in. This is the hope of the alcoholic. And this is where we are going to begin.

## (3d1) Hope Against Hope — the quietest threat to my recovery

### HOPE AGAINST HOPE

*the quietest threat to my recovery*



“At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, **hoping against hope** we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life—or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you.”

**Big Book; We Agnostics, pg.44**

Living in hope against hope is living in a way where I should not, or cannot, reasonably expect fulfillment. It begins to look like hope, but it slowly turns into wishing.

And when my life is built on wishing instead of grounded hope, it leads me into frustration, resentment, and eventually back into the same patterns that keep me sick.

*“At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, **hoping against hope** we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life—or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you.”*

**Big Book; We Agnostics, pg.44**

## (3d2) Hope Against Hope — the quietest threat to my recovery

### HOPE AGAINST HOPE

*the quietest threat to my recovery*



#### What does this look like?

- Not drinking tomorrow, without changing anything today
- Trusting someone who has proven untrustworthy
- Avoiding medical help, expecting perfect health
- Expecting punctuality without preparation
- Expecting different results from the same experience

**\*HOPE AGAINST HOPE IS INSANITY**

#### What does this look like?

- In my active drinking, I would hope that I wouldn't drink the next day—but I was unwilling to do anything different. I wasn't changing my behavior, my environment, or my thinking. I was just hoping, or wishing, that somehow the way I drank would be different.
- I would hope that my ex would be faithful, even though everything about them showed me they were not trustworthy.
- I hoped that my psychiatric conditions would go away on their own, without medication or therapy.
- I hoped I would get somewhere on time, even though I left late, unprepared, and ignored the reality of traffic.
- I hoped the pastries at my local coffee shop would be good, even though they almost never are—but I keep going because I don't want to go out of my way somewhere else.

Hope against hope perpetuates insanity—how it feels, how it's practiced, and how we participate in it. It actively works against the promise of Step Two: that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

For that restoration to be possible, I have to stop engaging in the practice of hope against hope.

## (3d3) Hope Against Hope — the quietest threat to my recovery

### HOPE AGAINST HOPE

*the quietest threat to my recovery*



#### **All of these have something in common:**

- I know the truth and I choose to ignore it.
- Instead of placing my hope in something grounded and real, I place it in chance.
- Or I place it in God in a way that asks God to override reality, rather than align me with it.
- ***I am hoping for the truth to not be the truth.***

#### **All of these have something in common:**

- I know the truth and I choose to ignore it.
- Instead of placing my hope in something grounded and real, I place it in chance. Or I place it in God in a way that asks God to override reality, rather than align me with it.
- I am hoping for the truth to not be the truth.

And when I act in contradiction to what I know, I am no longer operating in trust.

I am not actually hoping—I am wishing.

And for me, that path always leads to resentment.

And eventually, in the most extreme cases it can lead me back to a drink...and for us to drink is to die.

## (3d4) Hope Against Hope — the quietest threat to my recovery



When it comes to the Spiritual Principle of Hope, one of the first things I always do when it comes to this principle is to ask myself...

### **AM I WISHING OR AM I HOPING?**

How can I tell the difference?

Because those two can feel the same on the surface, but they are very different in practice.

Wishing is passive. It wants something to change without requiring anything from me. It leans on chance, on luck, on something outside of my participation. Wishing says, "I hope this gets better," but there is no movement behind it. No grounding. No responsibility. It often avoids reality rather than engaging it.

Hope is different. Hope is active. It is grounded in something real, even if that reality is small. Hope asks something of me. It requires alignment, patience, and effort over time. Hope says, "I believe something can change, and I am willing to live in a way that supports that change."

Wishing disconnects me from reality. Hope brings me into relationship with it.

One of the ways I can tell the difference is by asking:

- Is this based on something real that I can point to, even if it's small?
- Am I willing to take action in support of this?
- Does this require patience and participation from me?

If the answer is no, I'm probably wishing. If the answer is yes, even a little, I'm moving into hope. And that matters in recovery, because wishing keeps me stuck, while hope moves me forward.

## (3e) The Definition of Hope (Working Version)

### the definition of **HOPE** (working version)

Hope is a trusted belief, grounded in reality, that carries a genuine possibility of realization through confidence, patience, and personal effort.



My working definition of Hope is as follows:

Hope is a trusted belief, grounded in reality, that carries a genuine possibility of realization through confidence, patience, and personal effort.

- Hope requires trust—I must believe in what I am placing my hope into
- Hope must be grounded in reality—it aligns with truth, not denial
- Hope carries possibility—what I hope for must be attainable
- Hope asks for participation—confidence, patience, and personal effort

## (3f1) The Three A's: HOPE

# the three A's: HOPE



Step Two has so much to do with our belief systems and how those beliefs support us in recovery. Unfortunately, we don't have enough time to go into that today, but it is important to understand that this is not just about what we believe.

It is also about learning what is worthy of belief. And we can use the Spiritual Principle of Hope to guide us in that learning.

This is where we engage the Three A's to better understand how Hope is practiced in accordance with Step Two. We begin to look at what we are aspiring toward, what we are actualizing within ourselves, and the actions we take to embody this Spiritual Principle of Hope.

**In this movement of the Three A's, we are working with:**

- an aspiration of Hope
- an actualization of Trust
- an actionable practice of Agreement

**Let's break those down into their individual parts.**

## (3f2) Aspire Toward HOPE

### *aspire toward* **HOPE**

- Lifts my perspective
- Keeps me open to possibility
- Allows me to consider something better
- Combats the dark by letting light in
- Holds my focus on my growth
- Propels me forward without requiring full clarity or understanding
- Allows new beliefs to initiate change

*"Yet it is our **great hope** that all those who have as yet found no answer may begin to find one in the pages of this book and will presently join us on the high road to a new freedom."*

**Big Book; Forward to Second Edition, pg.xxi**

Remember, when we are *aspiring* toward something, we are setting our eyes on it and walking through the experience of embodying it over time—not harnessing it or wielding it for our own gain through ownership or force.

Hope is the star in the sky we are navigating by, and this is where I begin to look up and out of my current condition.

Hope is the first movement away from despair.

It is the sense that something different is possible—that I am not permanently stuck in the *insanity* of my thinking, my behavior, and my old patterns.

Hope is not something I have to fully grasp yet.

It is something I begin to understand, embody, and radiate over time.

I set my sights on hope, and I practice letting it in.

It brings light into places that have been dark for a long time.

It offers a sense of grounding, even before anything has fully changed.

And in that movement, I begin to experience the possibility that my life *can* be different.

*Yet it is our **great hope** that all those who have as yet found no answer may begin to find one in the pages of this book and will presently join us on the high road to a new freedom.*

**Big Book; Forward to Second Edition, pg.xxi**

## (3f3) Actualize TRUST

### to actualize **TRUST**

- Trust is personal, considered, earned
- Trust is based on experience
- Trust examines, tests, and verifies
- Trust is something I can give or take away, it is fluid
- Without trust, hope becomes wishing
- Doubt often reveals misplaced trust
- Trust is the measure of “real” hope

*“For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We **trust** infinite God rather than our finite selves.”*

**Big Book; How It Works, pg.68**

This is where hope becomes **real, stable, and grounded**.

Trust is what determines whether my hope is true or misplaced.

If I do not trust what I am hoping in, then I am not actually hoping, I am wishing.

And wishing cannot sustain recovery.

To actualize trust means:

- I examine what I am placing my hope in
- I test it against reality and experience
- I come to believe it is reliable, consistent, and possible

Because without trust, hope collapses under pressure.

When I find myself resentful, doubtful, or internally conflicted about something I “hope” for, it is often because I never truly trusted it.

And the truth is:

**It is impossible to have real hope in something I do not trust.**

Trust is the embodiment of hope.

It is what gives hope weight.

*For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We **trust** infinite God rather than our finite selves.*

**Big Book; How It Works, pg.68**

## (3f4) The Action of Agreement

# *the action of* **AGREEMENT**

***Agreement means I bring my beliefs, thoughts, actions, and expectations into harmony with what is true and attainable.***

**It is the ongoing practice of asking:**

- Is what I hope for grounded in reality?
- Is it consistent with what I know to be true?
- Does it reflect who I am becoming?

*“The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely **agree**, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action.”*

**Big Book; There Is A Solution, pg.17**

This is how I live in hope in a way that restores me.

**Agreement** means I bring my:

- beliefs
- thoughts
- actions
- expectations

into harmony with what is true and attainable.

It is the ongoing practice of asking:

- Is what I hope for grounded in reality?
- Is it consistent with what I know to be true?
- Does it reflect who I am becoming?

Because Step Two speaks of restoration to sanity.

And in this framing, sanity is not conformity.

It is a return to authenticity.

Agreement becomes the action of:

- making sure my hope is rooted in truth
- making sure my life reflects what I say I believe
- making sure I am not passively wishing, but actively living toward what is possible

Hope without agreement becomes fantasy. Hope with agreement becomes transformation.

*The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action.*

**Big Book; There Is A Solution, pg.17**

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## (3g) The Movement of HOPE in Recovery

### the movement of **HOPE** in recovery



To simplify the Three A's, I refer to this as the "movement of Hope" in recovery; how I walk through this Spiritual Principle as a practice and an embodiment.

This is how I have come to understand Hope.

- **Hope** opens the possibility of restoration
- **Trust** grounds that hope in reality
- **Agreement** brings my life into harmony with that belief

## (3h1) What Do We Hope For? (Written Exercise REVIEW)

### what do we **HOPE** for? (written exercise)



#### For each hope, ask yourself:

- Is this hope grounded in reality, or am I reaching for something that isn't there?
- Do I trust what I am placing this hope in?
- Is there agreement between this hope and what I know to be true?
- Am I in agreement with this hope, or am I expecting it without participation?

Going back to our original exercise, we each wrote down three hopes: one for today, one for the end of this year, and one life hope without a defined end.

Go ahead and bring those back in front of you, and let's reexamine them based on what we have learned.

For each hope, ask yourself:

- Is this hope grounded in reality, or am I reaching for something that isn't there?
- Do I trust what I am placing this hope in?
- Is there agreement between this hope and what I know to be true?
- Am I in agreement with this hope, or am I expecting it without participation?

## (3h2) What Do We Hope For? (P.D.'s Answers In Review)

### what do we **HOPE** for? (P.D.'s Answers)



**Today:** I hope that I do a good job with this presentation and workshop, and that I don't make any major mistakes.

**This Year:** I hope to get a better handle on my diabetes and bring my blood sugar under control.

**Life:** I hope to live a long, prosperous, and healthy life as a sober human being.

To show how I work through this, I will briefly walk through my own answers.

**Today:** I hope that I do a good job with this presentation and workshop, and that I don't make any major mistakes.

This hope feels grounded in reality. While I cannot control your perception, and mistakes are subjective, I know that I have prepared. I am showing up honestly and authentically. I have prayed, I have put in the work, and I am doing my best. For me, this hope feels spiritually principled and supported.

**This Year:** I hope to get a better handle on my diabetes and bring my blood sugar under control.

When I look at this one more closely, I start to see some breakdown.

I don't fully trust my willingness or commitment here. I have expectations of a perfect diet, but I am also resentful that I even have diabetes. I have given up alcohol, drugs, smoking, gambling, and unhealthy relationships—and I am not really willing to give up sugar.

The truth is, I want the outcome, but I am not fully willing to participate in the process. I have tried to manage it by increasing insulin and medication so I can keep eating the way I want, and that isn't working.

So here, I can see that I am misusing hope. I am hoping for something I am not willing to live in agreement with.

But this isn't a failure—it's clarity.

What I can change is what I hope for. Instead of hoping to "get my diabetes under control," I can hope for the willingness to reduce my sugar intake. I can hope for acceptance of my condition. I can hope for small, realistic changes that move me in the right direction.

My original hope becomes more of a long-term outcome. My hope today becomes something I can actually live into.

**Life:** I hope to live a long, prosperous, and healthy life as a sober human being.

This hope is meaningful, but it is also connected to the others. If I want this kind of life, then how I care for myself—including my diabetes—matters.

So even this hope may need to be revisited and understood in connection with the rest of my life. It is not separate. It is supported by the smaller, more immediate hopes I am working on today.

This is how I use this process.

I examine.

I reexamine.

And when necessary, I adjust.

So that my hope becomes grounded in reality, supported by trust, and something I can actually live into.

## (3i) HOPE In Conclusion

# HOPE

**In Step Two, Hope is *not* about believing anything blindly.**

*It is about placing hope in what is real, developing trust in what can restore me, and living in agreement with that truth.*

Hope, in Step Two, is not about believing anything blindly.

It is about placing hope in what is real, developing trust in what can restore me, and living in agreement with that truth.

When I do that, hope becomes practical.

It becomes something I can apply, examine, and adjust.

And in doing so, I begin to move from confusion and instability toward clarity and sanity.

## (4a) FAITH: Introduction Slide

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

**step three (3):**  
**FAITH**  
Big Book, *How It Works*, pg.63

"We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which **faith** can be acquired."

Big Book; *There Is A Solution*, pg.28

### Faith is the third Spiritual Principle of A.A.

It is associated with Step Three: *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.* We find this step in the Big Book in *How It Works*, page 63.

A key passage about faith in our literature comes from *There Is A Solution*, page 28.

*We have no desire to convince anyone that there is only one way by which **faith** can be acquired. If what we have learned and felt and seen means anything at all, it means that all of us, whatever our race, creed, or color are the children of a living Creator with whom we may form a relationship upon simple and understandable terms as soon as we are willing and honest enough to try.*

**Big Book; *There Is A Solution*, pg.28**

It shows us that faith is not confined to a single approach, and that each of us has the ability to build a relationship with the principle of Faith and a higher power through simple, understandable actions, so long as we are willing and honest enough to begin. This framing is important because it shifts our understanding of faith. Faith is not something reserved for a select few, nor is it something that must be inherited or fully understood before it can be practiced. It is available. It is accessible. And more importantly, it is something that can be acquired.

The word *acquired* matters. It implies effort, participation, and experience. Faith is not passive. It does not simply appear fully formed. While the capacity for faith may exist within us, it requires a decision to engage with it. We can apply it, or we can choose not to. That choice becomes central to our recovery.

Throughout our literature, we are reminded that "faith without works is dead." This raises an essential question: what is the work of faith? What am I actually being asked to do? Step Three begins to answer that. The work of faith is not about belief alone—it is about action. It is about making a decision and then living in alignment with that decision.

Faith, then, is not just something I think or feel. It is something I do. And this section begins to explore what that looks like in real, lived experience.

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## (4b1) The Definition of Faith (Long Version)

### the definition of **FAITH** (long version)



#### **Faith (noun)**

**1a:** the act or state of wholeheartedly and steadfastly believing in the existence, power, and benevolence of a supreme being, of having confidence in his providential care, and of being loyal to his will as revealed or believed in: belief and trust in and loyalty to God.

**1b (1):** an act or attitude of intellectual assent to the traditional doctrines of one's religion: orthodox religious belief.

**1b (2):** a decision of an individual entrusting his life to God's transforming care in response to an experience of God's mercy.

**1c:** a supernatural virtue by which one believes on the authority of God himself all that God has revealed or proposes through the Church for belief.

**2a (1):** firm or unquestioning belief in something for which there is no proof.

**2a (2):** uncritical grounds for belief.

**2b:** CONFIDENCE; especially firm or unquestioning trust or confidence in the value, power, or efficacy of something.

**3a:** an assurance, promise, or pledge of fidelity, loyalty, or performance; to keep faith or break faith.

**3b:** fidelity to one's promises; allegiance to a duty or a person: sincerity or honesty of intentions: LOYALTY; often used with the qualifiers *good* or *bad* to specify the state of mind of one trying to be honest and faithful.

**4:** AUTHORITY, CREDIT, CREDIBILITY

**5:** something that is believed or adhered to especially with strong conviction: as (a1): a system of religious beliefs: RELIGION (a2): the body of believers: an organized church or denomination (b): the cherished values, ideals, or beliefs of an individual or people: WELTANSCHAUUNG, CREED, CREDO (c): the fundamental tenets, views, or beliefs of an individual or group on a particular subject or in a particular field.

**6:** the true religion from the point of view of the speaker, often capitalized; my Faith is: BELIEF, RELIGION, TRUST

With Faith, we are going to look at the long version of the definition before we engage in our writing exercise. DON'T WORRY, YOU DON'T NEED TO READ THIS SLIDE: It is a long definition, this is actually the edited definition of the word Faith. Let's look at the highlights.

## (4b2) The Definition of Faith (Long Version)

### the definition of **FAITH** (long version)



- Faith is described as an attitude.
- It is something we project toward or directed at—most often a higher power or a God of our own understanding.
- It involves a decision to entrust.
- It is described as firm, even unquestioning.
- It doesn't rely on constant analysis or critical thinking.
- It carries a sense of confidence.
- It can even be understood as a kind of promise, or a pledge of loyalty.

This is one of those words where the dictionary isn't exactly helpful.

It gives us points of reference, but it misses the nuance that our recovery literature—and lived experience—bring to the understanding of faith. So what we're doing here is not relying on the dictionary alone but using it as a starting point. A working definition of faith has to be built from a blend of definition, literature, and practice.

Some highlights that are important to note about the word Faith from the long version are as follows.

- Faith is described as an attitude.
- It is something we project toward or directed at—most often a higher power or a God of our own understanding.
- It involves a decision to entrust.
- It is described as firm, even unquestioning.
- It doesn't rely on constant analysis or critical thinking.
- It carries a sense of confidence.
- And it can even be understood as a kind of promise, or a pledge of loyalty.

All of these give us something to work with.

But taken on their own, they can feel incomplete—or even misleading—especially in the context of recovery.

Because in our work, faith is not just belief without proof, and it is not blind acceptance.

It is something more grounded. More lived. More practiced.

So, while the dictionary gives us language like belief, trust, confidence, and loyalty, what we begin to see—especially when we bring in our literature—is that faith is not just something I hold.

It is something I do. It is a decision to entrust my life to something greater than myself, and then to live in alignment with that decision.

That is where faith begins to move from definition into experience.

## (4c1) An Exercise In FAITH (Written Exercise)

### an exercise in **FAITH** (written exercise)



#### **FOUR SHORT REFLECTIONS ON FAITH:**

1. Where in your life is your faith currently strong and consistent?
2. Where do you find yourself taking control back, or struggling to let go?
3. Where in your recovery has your faith grown, something that once felt uncertain but now feels more grounded?
4. Where in your recovery is faith difficult to access?

Based on what we've covered so far, and your own personal experience with this word, each of you already has a relationship with faith.

In truth, you already have a relationship with all of these spiritual principles. But faith, in particular, tends to carry a unique weight. Most of us identify in some way as either being a person that tends to faith or a person that tends to self-reliance.

I know for myself, being from Missouri, I lean into that "show me" mindset. I often want proof before I practice faith. But if I wait for proof before I act, I never actually practice faith, and that is not the kind of movement we are aiming for here.

So instead of trying to define faith intellectually, we are going to look at how it already exists in your life, where it is active and where it may still be developing.

**I want you to take a few minutes and write down four short reflections:**

1. Where in your life is your faith currently strong and consistent?
2. Where do you find yourself taking control back, or struggling to let go?
3. Where in your recovery has your faith grown, something that once felt uncertain but now feels more grounded?
4. Where in your recovery is faith difficult to access?

This is not about getting the right answers. It is about becoming aware of how faith is already working in your life and where there is room for growth.

## (4c2) An Exercise In FAITH (P.D.'s Answers)

### an exercise in **FAITH** (P.D.'s Answers)



#### **Strong Faith:**

My sobriety and daily recovery practice.

#### **Struggle with Faith:**

Finances and control over money.

#### **Faith That Has Grown:**

My relationship with a higher power.

#### **Faith Still Developing:**

Trusting others in recovery.

Here are some examples of my answers to these questions:

**1. Today, my faith is strong and consistent in my sobriety.**

I feel like I am in the center of the boat right now. I am working my program, staying engaged, and actively participating in my recovery. I am in daily contact with others, not isolating, and involved in service, fellowship, and meetings in a way that feels mostly balanced. I have faith in my sobriety today because I made a decision this morning to practice recovery and spiritual principles for the next twenty-four hours. I trust that I will make that same decision again tomorrow.

**2. An area where I take back control is my finances.**

I find myself trying to manage and control everything around money. I spend a lot of time thinking about it, worrying about it, and trying to secure more of it. The reality is that I have enough. I am stable, I own my home, and my needs are met, which is something sobriety has made possible. Yet I still feel as though I am lacking or inadequate. There is fear there, and I can see that I am struggling to trust that what I have is enough and that I will continue to be provided for.

**3. In early recovery, I had little to no faith in a Higher Power.**

It felt distant and uncomfortable. I believed I was unlovable in the eyes of God because of my sexuality, and because of that, I did not believe I could have a relationship with a higher power. The only thing I knew how to rely on was myself, and even that was unstable. Over time, this has changed. Today, I have a real and growing faith in my ability to have a relationship with a God of my own understanding.

**4. An area where faith is still difficult for me is in relationships with others in recovery.**

I still struggle with trust. I find it hard at times to fully open up, to rely on others, and to build deeper connections. This is an area where my faith is still developing, and it is something I am actively working on.

## (4d1) The Three A's: FAITH

# the three A's: **FAITH**



Step Three moves us from belief into lived relationship.

While Step Two centers on belief and what is worthy of belief, Step Three is about what I do with that belief. It is not just about what I think is true, but how I begin to live in alignment with that truth.

This is where Faith becomes active.

We are no longer considering the possibility of a Power greater than ourselves. We are making a decision to trust that Power and begin building a relationship with it.

This is where we engage the Three A's to better understand how Faith is practiced in accordance with Step Three. We begin to look at what we are aspiring toward, what we are actualizing within ourselves, and the actions we take to embody this Spiritual Principle of Faith.

In this movement of the Three A's, we are working with:

- an aspiration of Faith
- an actualization of Friendship
- an actionable practice of Strength

Let's break those down into their individual parts.

## (4d2) Aspire Toward Faith

### *aspire toward* **FAITH**

- Faith begins when I turn toward something greater than myself
- Faith is not certainty, it is a willingness to believe
- Faith is moving away from self-reliance
- It is beginning to consider that I am not in control
- Faith allows me to entrust my life to something greater
- Faith is a decision I make daily

*"We can have **faith**, yet keep God out of our lives. Therefore our problem now becomes just how and by what specific means shall we be able to let Him in?"*

**Twelve & Twelve; Step Three, pg.34**

*"We can have faith, yet keep God out of our lives. Therefore our problem now becomes just how and by what specific means shall we be able to let Him in?"*

**Twelve & Twelve, Step Three, p.34**

When we aspire toward Faith, we begin to turn toward something beyond ourselves and start acting in alignment with that direction.

But what does that actually look like?

How do I make this Spiritual Principle personal and lived in my own life?

Faith, at this stage, is not certainty.

It is the willingness to believe that there is a Power capable of caring for me, even if I do not fully understand it yet.

The first movement is a shift away from self-reliance as the only solution.

I begin to consider:

- "Maybe I am not the highest authority in my life."
- "Maybe there is something that can guide me better than my fear, my thinking, or my need for control."

Faith opens the possibility that I can entrust my will and my life to something greater.

Aspiring toward Faith becomes an act of decision.

A decision I make daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes moment by moment, to turn toward grace, toward love, and toward a relationship with a Power that is greater than me, yet also present within me.

And that is why the next part of this process becomes so important to our understanding of Faith.

## (4d3) To Actualize Friendship

### to actualize **FRIENDSHIP**

- Friendship makes Faith sustainable
- I become willing to establish a friendship with my Higher Power
- I begin to believe that the Universe is conspiring in my favor
- Growth is loving and purposeful, not a punishment
- I begin to see the world as friendly and filled with opportunity
- Friendship changes the way I perceive Faith

*“I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my **new-found Friend** take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since.”*

**Big Book; Bill's Story, pg.13**

*“I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have **my new-found Friend** take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since.”*

**Big Book; Bill's Story, pg.13**

This is where faith becomes real.

Where it becomes sustainable, enduring, and even something that can feel peaceful and loving.

If I am going to turn my will and my life over to a Power greater than myself, that Power must be experienced as friendly.

Not necessarily easy. Not always comfortable.

But ultimately for me, not against me.

I often say, the Universe is always conspiring in my favor. And this connects to a well-known idea from page 417 of the Big Book, *Acceptance Is The Answer*:

*“Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake.”*

I was taught this early in recovery, even encouraged to read that page daily. I internalized it, but at first, I misunderstood it. I believed that the pain I was experiencing was God's punishment. That it was no mistake I felt the way I did, because of what I had done.

Today, I still believe that nothing happens by mistake. I believe there is purpose and meaning. But in order to move out of that feeling of punishment, I had to shift my understanding. I had to begin seeing my Higher Power as friendly.

That shift did not come from changing God.

It came from changing my relationship to God.

I had to do the inner work of making that relationship one of friendship. I had to learn to see the sunlight of the spirit, the God of my understanding, as something I could walk with.

That meant making friends with things I once resisted.

Making friends with discomfort.

Making friends with change.

Making friends with life on life's terms.

I remember rereading Bill's story and being struck by a line where he describes God as a "newfound Friend." That idea changed everything for me. I had never thought of God in that way.

To begin to see God as a Friend, something caring, something present, something with me rather than against me, was a complete shift in perception.

And I began to notice something. Every time my faith was challenged, every time I wanted to take control back, it was almost always tied to an area where I believed God was not being friendly toward me. Where I saw pain as punishment instead of part of the process.

So the work became this...to stop seeing God as unfriendly, and to begin seeing even the difficult parts of life as something I could move through in relationship, not in opposition.

Because friendship changes everything.

Friendship here means:

- I come to know this Power as caring
- I begin to trust its intentions toward me
- I experience guidance not as punishment, but as direction

If what I place my faith in feels hostile, distant, or unsafe, I will take my will back.

Faith rooted in fear produces compliance, not transformation.

It cannot be sustained.

But faith grounded in friendship allows me to relax into trust.

I am no longer handing my life over to an abstract force.

I am entering into a relationship with something I can walk with.

## (4d4) The Action of Strength

### *the action of* **STRENGTH**

- We ask for strength and begin to practice it
- Strength allows me to face myself, let go, and change
- Strength is developed over time, not forced
- I am not doing this alone, support adds to my strength
- Strength allows me to let go of control, move forward, and stay the course
- Strength keeps me living in faith when life becomes difficult

*“Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given **strength** and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be.”*

**Big Book; Into Action, pg.79**

*“Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be.”*

**Big Book, Into Action, p.79**

We are aspiring toward Faith, and we are beginning to experience a more friendly relationship with the world around us, with our God concept, and with life itself.

Now we ask for strength.

And after asking, we begin to practice it.

Recovery is not easy. It requires forms of strength we did not know we had. Faith itself becomes something like a muscle, and if we are truly engaged in recovery, that muscle is going to be exercised.

- The strength to not pick up a drink in early recovery is significant.
- The strength to face ourselves in the Fourth Step.
- To look at our harms, our resentments, our fears.
- To take responsibility.
- To forgive.
- To let go.
- To choose love over anger.
- To set aside ego in service to others.

None of this is natural to us. And to do all of it sober requires real strength.

But strength is not the same as stubbornness.

It is not force.

It is something that is developed over time.

We do not begin by lifting heavy weight. But we quickly learn something important. We are stronger than we thought, because we are no longer doing this alone.

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We have a Higher Power that we are beginning to experience as friendly and supportive.

We have a fellowship willing to walk with us.

And we begin to see that life itself is not as hostile as we once believed.

There is support available to us, and it adds to our strength.

This is how I live out that relationship over time.

Building strength allows me to:

- let go of control
- move forward without certainty
- stay the course when outcomes are unclear

Strength is what allows me to remain in the decision I have made.

It is the ability to continue turning my will over, again and again, especially when fear returns.

And it becomes life-changing when I realize I do not have to carry everything alone.


I still have to stay the course.

But I do so with support, with guidance, and with a strength that is no longer just my own.

This is what keeps me from abandoning faith when life becomes uncomfortable or confusing.

## (4e) The Movement of FAITH in Recovery

### the movement of **FAITH** in recovery



**Faith** is letting go and turning toward something greater

**Friendship** makes that act of faith possible

**Strength** gives me the endurance to live and grow in that faith over time

To simplify the Three A's, I refer to this as the "movement of Faith" in recovery; how I walk through this Spiritual Principle as a practice and an embodiment.

**This is how I have come to understand Faith.**

- Faith is letting go and turning toward something greater
- Friendship makes that act of faith possible
- Strength gives me the endurance to live and grow in that faith over time

## (4f) The Definition of Faith (Working Version)

### the definition of **FAITH** (working version)

*Faith is a conscious decision to entrust my will and my life to a Power greater than myself, sustained through friendship and deepened through strength over time.*



#### **My working definition of Faith is as follows:**

*Faith is a conscious decision to entrust my will and my life to a Power greater than myself, sustained through friendship, and deepened through strength over time.*

- Faith establishes direction. I orient my life toward something greater than my own thinking and control.
- Faith is grounded in friendship. I come to know this Power as for me, not against me, through lived experience.
- Faith requires strength. I remain in that trust, especially when challenged by fear, uncertainty, or discomfort.
- Faith is practiced. It is expressed through consistent action, surrender, and reliance over time.

## (4g1) An exercise in FAITH (Written Exercise) REVIEW

### an exercise in **FAITH** (written exercise)



#### LET'S REVIEW YOUR ANSWERS ON FAITH:

- Am I practicing faith here, or am I relying on self-will and determination?
- Do I experience this as friendly? Am I allowing my Higher Power to be present in this, or does it feel distant, hostile, or unsafe?
- Am I practicing strength in this area? Am I using the support available to me, such as my Higher Power, fellowship, and others, or am I trying to do this alone?

Going back to our original reflections, we looked at:

- where faith is strong
- where we take control back
- where faith has grown
- where faith is difficult to access

Now let's revisit those same areas through the lens of what we've just discussed.

Take a moment to consider:

- Am I practicing faith here, or am I relying on self-will and determination?
- Do I experience this as friendly? Am I allowing my Higher Power to be present in this, or does it feel distant, hostile, or unsafe?
- Am I practicing strength in this area? Am I using the support available to me, such as my Higher Power, fellowship, and others, or am I trying to do this alone?

**This is where we begin to see not just where faith exists, but how we are practicing it.**

## (4g2) An exercise in FAITH (P.D.'s Answers) REVIEW

### an exercise in **FAITH** (P.D.'s Answers)



#### **Strong Faith:**

My sobriety and daily recovery practice.

#### **Struggle with Faith:**

Finances and control over money.

#### **Faith That Has Grown:**

My relationship with a higher power.

#### **Faith Still Developing:**

Trusting others in recovery.

#### **1. Sobriety**

In my sobriety, I am practicing faith consistently. I make a daily decision to trust something greater than myself rather than relying on self-will alone. I experience friendship here through my relationship with my Higher Power, my connection to others, and my engagement in recovery. I am practicing strength by showing up, staying engaged, and continuing to live in that decision each day.

#### **2. Finances**

In my finances, my faith is inconsistent. I can see that I am provided for, but I am not fully trusting that reality. I tend to rely on control rather than faith. I do not always experience this area as friendly, and fear often takes the place of trust. I am using strength, but it shows up as effort and control rather than grounded reliance. This is an area where I need to shift toward friendship and allow support.

#### **3. Relationship with a Higher Power**

In my relationship with a Higher Power, my faith has grown significantly. What was once absent is now present and active. I have developed a sense of friendship where I once felt distance and rejection. I am practicing strength by continuing to build and stay in this relationship over time. This is an area where all three are working together in a meaningful way.

#### **4. Relationships in Recovery**

In my relationships with others in recovery, my faith is still developing. I want connection, but I do not always trust it. I do not always experience these relationships as fully safe or friendly. I am practicing strength by continuing to show up and work on this area, but I can see that I am not fully supported by faith yet. This is an area where I have room to grow in all three.

## (4h) FAITH In Conclusion

# FAITH

**Faith, in Step Three, is an opportunity to move beyond self-reliance and begin living in connection.**

*It is about making a decision to entrust my will and my life to something greater than myself, developing a relationship with that Power through the practice of friendship, and living a life filled with strength that supports my Faith practice.*

**Faith, in Step Three, is an opportunity to move beyond self-reliance and begin living in connection.**

It is about making a decision to entrust my will and my life to something greater than myself, developing a relationship with that Power through the practice of friendship, and living a life filled with strength that supports my Faith practice.

When I do that, faith becomes lived.

It becomes something I practice, return to, and grow in over time.

And in doing so, I begin to move from self-reliance and control toward friendship, stability, and guided faithful action.