



THE  
*Life Recovery*®

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**JOURNAL**

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Becoming a New You—  
One Step at a Time

STEPHEN ARTERBURN  
and DAVID STOOP



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*The Life Recovery Journal: Becoming a New You—One Step at a Time*

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Designed by Luke Daab

Edited by Susan Taylor

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# CONTENTS

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Introduction . . . . .	vii
<b>Season1: Heart . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
Week 1: Step One . . . . .	3
Week 2: Step Two . . . . .	5
Week 3: Step Three . . . . .	7
Week 4: Step Four . . . . .	9
Week 5: Step Five . . . . .	11
Week 6: Step Six . . . . .	13
Week 7: Step Seven . . . . .	15
Week 8: Step Eight . . . . .	17
Week 9: Step Nine . . . . .	19
Week 10: Step Ten . . . . .	21
Week 11: Step Eleven . . . . .	23
Week 12: Step Twelve . . . . .	25
Week 13: Recovering My Life . . . . .	27
<b>Season2: From Heart to Soul . . . . .</b>	<b>29</b>
Week 1: Step One . . . . .	31
Week 2: Step Two . . . . .	32
Week 3: Step Three . . . . .	34
Week 4: Step Four . . . . .	35
Week 5: Step Five . . . . .	37
Week 6: Step Six . . . . .	38
Week 7: Step Seven . . . . .	40
Week 8: Step Eight . . . . .	42
Week 9: Step Nine . . . . .	43
Week 10: Step Ten . . . . .	46
Week 11: Step Eleven . . . . .	47
Week 12: Step Twelve . . . . .	50
Week 13: Recovering My Life . . . . .	52

<b>Season3: From Soul to Mind</b> . . . . .	55
Week 1: Step One . . . . .	57
Week 2: Step Two . . . . .	58
Week 3: Step Three . . . . .	60
Week 4: Step Four . . . . .	62
Week 5: Step Five . . . . .	63
Week 6: Step Six . . . . .	65
Week 7: Step Seven . . . . .	67
Week 8: Step Eight . . . . .	69
Week 9: Step Nine . . . . .	71
Week 10: Step Ten . . . . .	73
Week 11: Step Eleven . . . . .	74
Week 12: Step Twelve . . . . .	76
Week 13: Recovering My Life . . . . .	78
<b>Season4: From Mind to Strength</b> . . . . .	81
Week 1: Step One . . . . .	83
Week 2: Step Two . . . . .	85
Week 3: Step Three . . . . .	87
Week 4: Step Four . . . . .	89
Week 5: Step Five . . . . .	91
Week 6: Step Six . . . . .	93
Week 7: Step Seven . . . . .	95
Week 8: Step Eight . . . . .	97
Week 9: Step Nine . . . . .	98
Week 10: Step Ten . . . . .	101
Week 11: Step Eleven . . . . .	103
Week 12: Step Twelve . . . . .	105
Week 13: Recovering My Life . . . . .	107
Index to the Twelve Steps . . . . .	109

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# INTRODUCTION

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## **Twelve Steps**

It's impossible to go through life without experiencing hurt. Even people who seem to have all the advantages (money, family, church background) end up with pain that no one can explain. We all respond differently to these hurts. Some of us turn to harmful behaviors or addictive substances—hoping to numb the pain within. Others try to distance themselves from it by throwing themselves into more noble pursuits—hoping to stay busy enough to silence painful memories from our past.

Over the years, millions of hurting people have found help and hope by working through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. More recently, many who have not been addicted to alcohol or other addictive substances have also found healing through these steps. All of the Twelve Steps are rooted in spiritual principles that are displayed prominently in God's Word. *The Life Recovery Journal* has been designed for all of us whose lives have been touched in some way by addiction or compulsive behaviors. It is intended to help you make connections between the Twelve Steps, the truth of Scripture, and your own life. (Adapted from the Introduction to *The Twelve-Step Life Recovery Devotional*.)

## **Four Seasons: Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength**

As you work through this journal, it may be the first time you have gone through the Twelve Steps—but it probably won't be the last. As any person in recovery can tell you, the process is ongoing. It's not about racing through the Steps and crossing a finish line; recovery is a new way of living that requires reviewing and revisiting the Steps for a lifetime.

This journal is designed to guide you through the Twelve Steps four times in one year. The year is divided into four seasons, each

one focused on a different image for the self: heart, soul, mind, and strength. These are the images Jesus used in Mark 12:29-30 to illustrate how we are to love God totally, with all of ourselves. As you work through the Twelve Steps in each area of your life, you'll reinforce what you're learning, and you'll gain insight into recovering as a whole person.

### **Two Tracks**

Some people may prefer to concentrate on one step for a longer period of time. If you would rather do all the entries for each step before moving on to the next one, refer to the Index to the Twelve Steps on page 109 to find the next entry for the step you are working on.

### **Journaling Tips**

- *Be honest.* All of the questions and quotes were selected to help you write open-ended, honest reflections. Don't worry about "getting the answer right." Your journaling will be boring, frustrating, and unhelpful if you're trying to write what someone else expects you to write.
- *Keep writing.* The questions and quotes in the journal should help you keep writing if you get stuck. But if you're still stuck and would rather write about something else entirely, go ahead! Just keep up the habit of writing.
- *Don't isolate yourself.* The questions in this journal are the sorts of questions a counselor or a sponsor might ask—but they're no replacement for a real sponsor! It's a good idea to share what you've been writing with your sponsor and get feedback. He or she may see something about you that you can't see in yourself.

## SEASON 1

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# HEART

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Recovery begins with a change of heart. Other people may try to convince us that we have a problem. Inwardly, we may even agree that our lives are unmanageable and that we need to change. But recovery cannot begin until we desire it with our hearts, with the core of our wills. For many of us, that change of heart happens only after we've hit rock bottom.

Even after we experience the change of heart that starts us out on the road to recovery, we still desire many different, incompatible things. We want recovery, yes, but we also want to maintain our dignity, the appearance of being in control, our independence, and our familiar habits. On some level, we even want to hold on to the addictions that have made our lives unmanageable.

As you work the Twelve Steps in this first season, you will be challenged to redirect your heart to desire what is right. As your heart changes its direction, the rest of your life will follow.

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## WEEK 1

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**STEP ONE: We admitted that we were powerless over our problems and that our lives had become unmanageable.**

“Life doesn’t always follow our rules or any other set of rules that might help us predict how things will happen. Even the truth of the Bible leaves room for a struggle between the forces of good and evil. There are times when we do our best, try our hardest to be good, and apply ourselves completely. But life still doesn’t work out the way we think it should” (from Step One, Day 29 of *The Life Recovery Devotional*).

Right now, what isn’t working out the way I think it should? How is it different from what I expected? What are some things that could account for the differences?

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### Scripture

*I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.*

ROMANS 7:15-20



Does this passage from Romans 7 resonate with me? When have I been frustrated by being unable to accomplish what I had meant to do? What prevented me from doing so?

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### For Reflection

When in the past did I feel that I was not in control? What did I do to try to regain control? How did it turn out?

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Consider how the idea of “control” affects these relationships:

- my parents
- my spouse or significant other
- my son or daughter
- my brother or sister
- my boss
- a coworker
- a teacher
- another authority figure

### Prayer

Pray through Psalm 116.

God, I admit that I am powerless, but you are powerful. I am limited, but you are sovereign. I am weak, but you are strong. I am in

need, but you are complete. I am unfinished, but you are working in me.

God, I admit that I am out of control, but you are in control. I cannot manage, but you do all things well. I am looking for a way out, but you are looking for a way in.

God, I admit that I depend on myself, but you are more dependable. I depend on relationships, but you are more dependable. I depend on addictions and compulsions, but you are more dependable.

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## WEEK 2

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**STEP TWO: We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

How has life been unfair to me (e.g., in the areas of family, trauma, addiction)? How does this affect my trust in a God who allowed these things to happen?

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### Scripture

*Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David. See how I used him to display my power among the peoples. I made him a leader among the nations. . . . “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher*

*than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."*

ISAIAH 55:3-4, 8-9

How might God be using my experiences to display his power "among the peoples"?

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*All glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*

EPHESIANS 3:20

**For Reflection**

If my restoration is not only for my good but also for God's glory, how does that motivate me? What does it motivate me to do?

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**Prayer**

Pray through Psalm 130, making it personal for where you are in life.

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## WEEK 3

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**STEP THREE: We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.**

I use my will to make decisions. What considerations did I take into account before making the decision to turn my life over to God? (Was that different from the way I normally make decisions?) How could I use that method for other decisions?

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### Scripture

*This is what the LORD says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the LORD. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land. But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit. The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve."*

JEREMIAH 17:5-10

Where have I put my trust in the past? How does this decision in Step Three affect where I place my trust?

**For Reflection**

Trust almost always involves risk. What is there in me that I do not trust? What does it take for me to trust others? What will I have to let go of in order to trust God?

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*Give all your worries and cares to God,  
for he cares about you.*

1 PETER 5:7

**What is one thing I am worrying  
about right now? How can I begin  
entrusting it to God's care?**

**Prayer**

Use Psalm 25 to focus your prayer. Allow it to guide your thoughts about yourself and about God.

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## WEEK 4

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### STEP FOUR: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

What are the different spheres of relationship in my life? What does my moral inventory over the last few days look like for each sphere?

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#### Possible spheres:

- work
- home
- friends
- family
- church
- school

#### Scripture

*The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.*

HEBREWS 4:12-13

What insights has God's Word given me as I take moral inventory?

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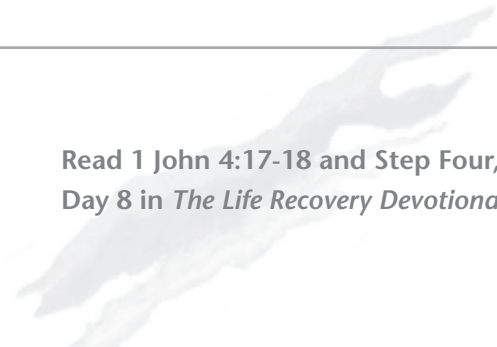
**For Reflection**

Fears can help me identify the big issues I'm facing. In what spheres of my life am I afraid to take inventory? With whom can I talk about my fears? Who can help me explore the reasons for them?

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Read 1 John 4:17-18 and Step Four,  
Day 8 in *The Life Recovery Devotional*.

**Prayer**

Lord, these are the fears that I'm facing: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. I offer them to you. Give me the strength to face each one and wisdom to decide how to resolve each one. Grant me peace and clarity as I wrestle with each of these fears. Amen.

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## WEEK 5

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

Admitting our faults and failures takes courage and humility. We face the possibility that once we have done so, those we care about will no longer accept us. In what relationships am I most worried about this?

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### Scripture

*Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

All relationships have conflict, but they can also be great sources of strength and encouragement. What conflicts am I facing right now? How can I strengthen and encourage those with whom I'm in conflict?

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**For Reflection**

I have chosen to admit my failures to another human being. What makes that person a good choice? Which of that person's qualities would I like to have? How has he or she developed them? (Consider asking him or her.)

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**What other people have qualities I admire? Can I ask them similar questions?**

*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*

JAMES 5:16

**Prayer**

Pray through the relationships and concerns you listed under the first two questions. Pray that God will move those relationships toward the goals he has for them. Pray for wisdom in developing qualities of courage, humility, and acceptance.

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# INDEX TO THE TWELVE STEPS

---

## STEP ONE

Heart . . . . .	3
Soul . . . . .	31
Mind . . . . .	57
Strength. . . . .	83

## STEP TWO

Heart . . . . .	5
Soul . . . . .	32
Mind . . . . .	58
Strength. . . . .	85

## STEP THREE

Heart . . . . .	7
Soul . . . . .	34
Mind . . . . .	60
Strength. . . . .	87

## STEP FOUR

Heart . . . . .	9
Soul . . . . .	35
Mind . . . . .	62
Strength. . . . .	89

## STEP FIVE

Heart . . . . .	11
Soul . . . . .	37
Mind . . . . .	63
Strength. . . . .	91

## STEP SIX

Heart . . . . .	13
Soul . . . . .	38
Mind . . . . .	65
Strength. . . . .	93

## STEP SEVEN

Heart . . . . .	15
Soul . . . . .	40
Mind . . . . .	67
Strength. . . . .	95

## STEP EIGHT

Heart . . . . .	17
Soul . . . . .	42
Mind . . . . .	69
Strength. . . . .	97

## STEP NINE

Heart . . . . .	19
Soul . . . . .	43
Mind . . . . .	71
Strength. . . . .	98

## STEP TEN

Heart . . . . .	21
Soul . . . . .	46
Mind . . . . .	73
Strength. . . . .	101

**STEP ELEVEN**

Heart ..... 23  
Soul ..... 47  
Mind ..... 74  
Strength..... 103

**STEP TWELVE**

Heart ..... 25  
Soul ..... 50

Mind ..... 76  
Strength..... 105

**RECOVERING MY LIFE**

Heart ..... 27  
Soul ..... 52  
Mind ..... 78  
Strength..... 107