

THE **LIFE**
RECOVERY[®]

— WORKBOOK FOR —

Grief

A Bible-Centered
Approach for Taking
Your Life Back

**STEPHEN ARTERBURN
& DAVID STOOP**

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The Life Recovery Workbook for Grief: A Bible-Centered Approach for Taking Your Life Back

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The profiles in this workbook are composite characteristics of persons who have had the courage to work the steps on various issues in their lives and on their own addictive behaviors. Names, ages, and situations have been modified to protect their anonymity.

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This workbook is dedicated to every fellow struggler who has had the courage to face the truth about themselves, the humility to abandon their flawed attempts at living, and the willingness to find God's truth and live accordingly.

CONTENTS

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous	vi
The Twelve Steps	vii
Introduction	ix
STEP ONE	1
STEP TWO	13
STEP THREE	21
STEP FOUR	29
STEP FIVE	39
STEP SIX	47
STEP SEVEN	57
STEP EIGHT	67
STEP NINE	77
STEP TEN	87
STEP ELEVEN	97
STEP TWELVE	107
Scripture Index	117

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our problems and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Steps used in *The Life Recovery Workbook* have been adapted with permission from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

INTRODUCTION

I am bent over and racked with pain. All day long I walk around filled with grief. (Psalm 38:6)

This workbook is about transformation from the death grip of grief to the restoration of life. It's about walking humbly, righteously, and mercifully with God while accepting his will. Often in our grief we oppose God, argue with him, plead with him for healing, and methodically cut other people out of our lives. We end up separated from God and from the people who care for us. We feel abandoned by all. The Twelve Steps are a path of finding that humble walk that leads us out of self-centered grief to acceptance and to a closer relationship with God.

We will be examining the Twelve Steps individually to consider the challenging spiritual lessons that allow us to move beyond our grief. Each step has a new task for us in our recovery from grief, but none of the steps stand alone. To effectively move through our grief to acceptance, we will work the steps in order. Each step prepares us for the next one, as we develop a greater sense of openness to God's plan and purpose in our lives.

We can get stuck in the grief process. But the path of recovery leads us through the grief process to a healthy acceptance of our loss. We see the Twelve Steps as a path and a process that makes us better disciples and more committed followers of Jesus Christ. Honesty, humility, and courage are vital components of faith that can move us beyond the grief of our losses back to a vibrant way of living as a follower of Jesus. Welcome to the journey.

STARTING AND LEADING A GROUP

Recovery is best experienced in the context of a group. Two or more willing people can form a powerful bond as they study and work these steps together. With little effort on your part, your struggles, problems, and hang-ups become a blessing to the group. As you open up, everyone else will feel more free to share from their own lives.

Being the leader of a group is actually quite simple. You can find many books on how to lead a small group, but here's a simple and effective way to do it:

1. Find a location in your home, a church, workplace, or school, and obtain permission (if necessary) to form the group.
2. Put up a few flyers announcing the time and place, calling it a grief support group, recovery group, or Twelve Step group.
3. Show up early, arrange the chairs, make some coffee, and welcome people as they arrive.
4. Start when you say you will start by opening in prayer and by reading the Twelve Steps and the correlating Scriptures.
5. Ask if anyone would like to share for three or four minutes. Don't allow others to "fix" the speaker, and if he or she goes on too long, be sure to enforce the time limit.
6. Make sure everyone has a copy of the workbook. Ask them to study Step One for discussion at the next meeting.
7. End when you say you will end by reading the Lord's Prayer.
8. Be sure that everyone knows where to get a workbook and a *Life Recovery Bible*, if they don't already have one.
9. E-mail Stephen Arterburn (Steve) at sarterburn@newlife.com, and tell him how it's going.
10. Feel good that you are allowing God to use you.

Please remember that working the steps is an art, not a formula. Most often, it is an individualized process.

God be with you on this journey. We pray that you will find healing, serenity, and peace of mind.



STEP 1

PROFILE

Sarah had a problem with anger. She had no idea where her anger came from. She just figured she was an angry person. But when she ruined her second computer by throwing it against the wall in anger, she realized she had a problem, and she didn't know what to do about it. Nothing she tried had reduced the intensity of her rage. She finally faced the reality that she needed someone to help her, so she made an appointment with a counselor.

Listening to Sarah's life story, the counselor took notice of the early death of Sarah's father and the relatively early death of her mother. When Sarah finished describing her background, the counselor returned to the subject of her parents' deaths. The counselor was particularly struck by the fact that whenever Sarah talked about her father, she would weep. But whenever she talked about her mother, she tried to hide the undercurrent of rage that she was experiencing.

Sarah's father had died when she was nine years old. He was her hero. He had lost one of his legs in the Korean War, but he had never let that slow him down. She was his little princess, and she was devastated when he died. But no one seemed to notice that Sarah was struggling with her emotions because all the adults were consumed by their own grief, especially her mother. So Sarah had to deal with the loss of her father on her

own. She recalled how she would cry herself to sleep, night after night, for what felt like several years.

Her mother's response to her husband's death was to begin living her life through Sarah. Sarah was an only child, and everywhere her mother went, Sarah went with her. At first this was okay, but when Sarah became a teenager, she was often humiliated in front of her friends by how controlling her mother was. Even when they went to church, Sarah was forced to sit with her mother, whereas all the other teenage girls sat as a group. Sarah begged and pleaded with her mother to let her sit with her friends in church and to spend time with her friends during the week, but Sarah's mother always responded with sadness and tears. Soon Sarah's begging and pleading turned into yelling and screaming. When Sarah was twenty-five, her mother died. Sarah felt relieved and had to force herself to go to the funeral.

Her counselor understood that complete grieving involves the experience of both anger as a protest and sadness as a sense of resignation. Acceptance of the loss is the final stage of grieving. The counselor realized that Sarah was experiencing incomplete grieving in relation to the deaths of both her father and her mother. In relationship to her father, she experienced only sadness. In response to her mother's death, she experienced only anger as a protest.

So the counselor began to talk to Sarah about things that she had missed due to her father's early death. When the counselor hit on the fact that, due to her father's early death, she was exposed to her mother's smothering behavior, it rang a bell in Sarah. If her dad had lived, she'd have had a very different relationship with her mother. Gradually Sarah began to see her father's death as both sad and something to protest with anger.

In the same way, the counselor began to challenge her to see her mother as being weak and needy and unable to acknowledge her own problems. Sarah began to feel a sense of sadness

for what she had lost in her relationship with her mother. Eventually, Sarah was able to feel some anger as protest over the incredible loss of her father at such a young age and to feel some sadness at the limitations she experienced in her relationship with her mother.

It took some time for Sarah to complete the grieving process for each of her parents. But along the way, she noticed that she was not as troubled by the out-of-control anger that she had experienced previously, which led her to get into counseling. Now, ten years later, Sarah hasn't ruined a single computer. In fact, she very seldomly gets angry, and she can talk about her father without crying. She can also talk about her mother without getting angry. She worked through the process of grieving to reach acceptance. Sarah was powerless to solve the issue by herself, but she wisely chose to get help, and God worked through her counselor to help Sarah get beyond her powerlessness.

STEP ONE

We admitted we were powerless over our problems and that our lives had become unmanageable.

It's interesting that the first word in the first step is *we*. I can't work on my problems in my life on my own. The resolution comes through the *we*. One of the things Sarah had done over the years was to increasingly isolate herself from relationships with other people in order to hide her rage. Then, if her rage suddenly got out of control, no one would be around to see it. She was powerless, but she was not helpless. So she got help. The Twelve Steps teach us that recovery and healing always take place in the context of the *we*.

Spiritual transformation always begins in community. At the start of Jesus' ministry, he began to gather people around him as his disciples. The power of the early church in the book of Acts is directly related to their reputation for how they loved one

another. So even grieving needs to take place in some sort of community, whether that community is an official grief support group or simply a family gathering around each other and staying connected as they grieve.

The key point of Step One is the reality of our powerlessness. It's not a term we like. In fact, it's an experience that we seek to avoid as much as possible. But when it comes to grieving over our losses, we are all too often confronted with the reality of our powerlessness to do anything about what has been lost. When we have lost someone or something important, especially a loved one, we are truly powerless.

We can even experience powerlessness when we lose something that seems small. One time, I (Dave) lost a treasured old fountain pen in a restaurant. But no matter how many times I went back to the restaurant to look for it, it was gone. I was powerless to do anything about it. I even offered a reward for its return. I talked to the waiters and waitresses. But no matter what I did, I was confronted with the fact that I had no power. I was powerless.

When someone I love is lying in a hospital bed on the verge of death, no matter how much I plead with the doctors or how much I pray, I am confronted with my own powerlessness in the face of loss. In those circumstances, even the doctors often acknowledge their powerlessness to do anything to avoid the inevitable. So the first step of grieving is to come to terms with our powerlessness.

Some of our losses are obvious: I lost my fountain pen; I lost my friend to cancer. But there are other losses that are not so obvious. For example, I lost my image of myself when I lost my fountain pen because I thought I was so careful with that pen. I lost a sense of connection when my friend died and left me here without him. When my children grew up and moved out of our house, I lost the sense of connection we had when we lived under the same roof. When we moved across the country,

I lost a sense of familiarity with where I lived, and I lost a circle of friends.

When we look at how people grieved in the Bible, they had certain rituals and behaviors that they followed. Perhaps that mitigated some of the powerlessness they were feeling. For example, when someone died, those who were mourning tore their clothes and put on burlap. Sometimes they shaved their heads or they threw ashes on themselves. It's almost as if they felt like they had to do something in the midst of their grief to avoid the feeling of powerlessness.

The account of Job's suffering teaches us some important things about grief. When Job received word that all of his animals were gone, that his sons and daughters were all dead, that all his sheep and the shepherds were gone, that all his camels were gone, and that almost all of his servants were killed, the Bible says that Job "stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship" (Job 1:20). Job responded, "I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!" (Job 1:21). It's interesting that in his grief Job also worshiped—he stayed connected to God.

Job had to acknowledge his powerlessness because everything had already happened by the time he heard, and there was nothing he could do. All his cattle were gone, his servants were gone, all his children were gone, and all his wealth was gone. There was nothing he could do about any of it!

But he had friends, and three of them came to comfort and console him. He wasn't going to be alone. The three friends sat in silence with him, which was the perfect response. When you're grieving, you don't want a lot of conversation. The passage says, "They sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words" (Job 2:13). Then Job spoke, and the silence was broken.

Then Job was angry. When he spoke, he first cursed the day of his birth. He wished he had never been born. From the sadness of chapters 1 and 2 to the anger of chapter 3, Job has been grieving. And Job's friends are going to make him even more angry. At one point, Job says to them, "How long will you torture me? How long will you try to crush me with your words? You have already insulted me ten times. You should be ashamed of treating me so badly" (Job 19:2-3). The friends meant well, but their responses didn't comfort Job.

Job was protesting his innocence, and he directed his arguments at God. And finally, when God begins to respond to Job, he doesn't criticize Job for arguing. Instead, God asks Job a series of questions that cover four chapters—questions Job cannot answer, for the questions are too profound. We cannot answer some of these questions to this day. God confronted Job with his powerlessness. When God is finished, Job says,

"I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. You asked, 'Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?' It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me. You said, 'Listen and I will speak! I have some questions for you, and you must answer them.' *I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.* I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance." (Job 42:1-6, emphasis added).

What is it that Job learned from his powerlessness? For one, even though he was powerless, he was talking to a very powerful God. And he repented for having too small an image of God. That's something we can learn from Job. When we are truly powerless, we are open to the almighty power of God himself. There's no sense by which I can do it myself: I can do it only with God's help.

But is it okay to argue with God? God says it is. He told Job to go pray for his friends because they did not speak rightly about him. But Job was not corrected or criticized for all of his arguing with God! So Job teaches us that it's okay to argue with God as long as we remember that we are arguing with a very big, powerful God.

One more important thing about powerlessness we learn from Jesus. In his ministry he highlighted the importance of children. At one point, some little children tried to come and visit Jesus, but his disciples tried to turn them away. Jesus stopped his disciples and said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children" (Matthew 19:14). The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the little children who were basically powerless.

We sometimes think that being powerless is like being a victim. It doesn't make us a victim: It really just gets us out of the way for God to work. One of the major tasks in our grieving is to come to terms with our powerlessness, for we are truly powerless when we are dealing with our losses. But remember, like Sarah and Job, we are not helpless.

QUESTIONS FOR STEP ONE

Trapped *Genesis 16:1-15*

1. How is my experience of powerlessness similar to Hagar's experience? How is it different?

LIFE RECOVERY: GRIEF

2. How have I tried to escape from the pain of my grief?

3. What has been my experience of anger in my grief? What scares me about my anger?

4. How have I experienced sadness in my grief? What scares me about my sadness?

5. What are some of my fears about grieving this loss?

6. Where can I see God in this process of grieving right now?

The Fruit of Grieving *Genesis 41:50-52*

1. Due to the jealousy and hatred of his brothers, Joseph was sold into slavery and ended up in Egypt. He managed to excel in serving his master, but his master's wife accused him of attempted rape. He spent several years in prison, until he was finally released by Pharaoh. He became the second most powerful man in Egypt, and when he had children, he gave them meaningful names. Joseph named his second son Ephraim, which sounds like a Hebrew word meaning "fruitful," because he said "God has made me fruitful in this land of my grief" (Genesis 41:52). What was Joseph's fruitfulness in Egypt, the land of his grief?

2. What are some ways I can see God producing fruit in my life in the midst of my grief?

LIFE RECOVERY: GRIEF

All Is Darkness *Job 6:2-13*

1. Job is very clear about the pain he was feeling. Describe the pain you're experiencing in your grieving.

2. In what ways have I felt totally powerless in my grief?

3. In what ways have I tried to be faithful to God in the midst of my pain?

4. How has Job's experience helped me in experiencing my grief?

Worn Out from Sobbing *Psalms 6:1-10*

1. How does my sadness affect my relationships?

2. In what ways have others misunderstood my grief?

3. David seems to project his anger onto God. That's why we need to get comfortable expressing our anger in relationships, especially in our relationship with God. Remember, anger is a protest. In what ways have I brought my protest into relationship?

4. Who in my circle of friends would be able to help me restore my confidence in God?

Like Little Children *Mark 10:13-16*

1. When I feel powerless, do I feel like a little child? How does that feel?

2. When do I feel most cared for?

LIFE RECOVERY: GRIEF

3. How does being childlike help me depend on God?

The Paradox of Powerlessness 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

1. Remember some examples of when you have accepted your own powerlessness and embraced God's powerfulness. Describe them in this space below.

2. How do I respond to trouble?

3. How do I respond to being perplexed?

4. What do I do when it feels like God has abandoned me?

*There is great power in realizing
that we are powerless.*