

beginning your journey toward lasting change

# WORKBOOK



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JOHN ORTBERG  
ALYSSA CHANDLER

beginning your journey toward lasting change

# WORKBOOK

# STEP



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# Introduction

Thank you for choosing to take the next step in your twelve-step journey with this workbook. We're so glad you're here.

This workbook is meant to accompany *Steps: A Guide to Transforming Your Life When Willpower Isn't Enough* by John Ortberg. *Steps* and this workbook are designed to help you practice the Twelve Steps as a program for life and spiritual formation. The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are not only for alcoholics or addicts, as many envision them. The Twelve Steps are a framework for spiritual formation. The truth is, if you are a human being with a pulse, you are a hopeless addict. “We are all overly attached to something—starting with our egos—that we are powerless to control” (*Steps*, 8).

The workbook you're holding has twelve sections, mirroring the Twelve Steps covered in the *Steps* book. As you read *Steps*, you can stop after each step (and its subchapters) to go deeper into practical application, using this workbook as a guide. There are QR codes at the beginning of each section of this workbook. If you scan the codes, you will be able to access the video curriculum John teaches on each step to go deeper into the book's ideas.

Every section of this workbook includes the same elements: some short opening thoughts and a prayer, a video that walks you through the step, and questions for either group discussion or self-reflection. Then you'll find activities to help you put the step into practice. These activities are where the rubber meets the road, but you don't have to complete them all—feel free to

respond to only the ones that feel applicable to you. Finally, we provide relevant Scripture, closing thoughts, and a journal space for reflection.

If you're engaging with this study in a small group, we recommend having one person play the video for all participants and then using the teachings as a launching point for discussion. (For more, see "Leader Tips" on page 3.)

John writes in *Steps* that it "is written for anyone hungry for more, whether you have an identified addiction or not. It is not a 'recovery' book. It's written to help *anyone* enter into an actionable, non-legalistic, spiritual way of life that—oh, by the way—has had the empirically verified side effect of freeing millions of people from addictions when random 'spirituality' could not" (page 7).

Sound like it could help? We think so too. Let's get to work.

# Leader Tips

The following tips will help you as you lead your group through the *Steps Workbook*.

## BEFORE THE SESSION

- Watch the video and look over the discussion questions and key activities in the workbook in advance of the meeting.
- Pray by name for each person who will be attending. Ask that God would help them carry out the steps with honesty and vulnerability.
- Consider arranging food for the session. Snacks can loosen the atmosphere and make people more comfortable with sharing. Bonus points if you serve stale coffee and donuts, like an AA meeting (kidding).
- Encourage participants to read the appropriate chapters in *Steps* before you meet.

## AT THE SESSION

- Welcome each person to the group when they arrive and carry that spirit of warmth throughout the session.
- Play the video teaching for the group and encourage them to take notes in their workbooks. (You can scan the QR code in each chapter

to access the video for that step, or you can find all the videos at [becomenew.com/steps](http://becomenew.com/steps).)

- Encourage each person to speak during the discussion. Don't leave anyone out.
- Don't be afraid to adapt the material provided in this study—cutting questions or lingering on a topic—to provide the best experience for your group.
- Be mindful of participants' time and do your best to keep the study within the parameters you've set for the group. That being said, if the Holy Spirit is moving, do what you can to allow extra time and space to minister.
- Remind participants of the activities that accompany each session, which can be accomplished throughout the week. Highlight one or more of these activities and request reports at your next session.
- Consider taking prayer requests at the close of your session or breaking into smaller groups for prayer.

## STEP 1

# The Problem: I Can't

*We admitted we were powerless over our deepest problems—  
that our lives had become unmanageable.*

STEPS, PAGES 1–32

## OPENING REFLECTION

*Steps* and this workbook are designed to help you practice the Twelve Steps as a program for life and spiritual formation. The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are not only for addicts in the traditional sense. They are a framework for spiritual formation. The truth is, if you are a human being with a pulse, you are a hopeless addict. As John writes, “We are all overly attached to something—starting with our egos—that we are powerless to control” (*Steps*, 8).

Step 1 says this plainly, right off the bat: We are powerless. We can't control our life. They have become unmanageable for us on our own.

We can't control our life, but God can. (We'll get into that in Step 2.)

So before we begin, let's pause to pray together:

*God, as I enter this space, help me to be honest with myself, with others,  
and with you. Meet me in my weakness. Show me that it is okay to be  
powerless because I am not God. And thank God for that. Amen.*

## VIDEO NOTES

*As you watch the video, use the space below to take notes.*

*We've included some key points to get you started.*



SCAN HERE TO WATCH  
THE VIDEO FOR STEP 1.

Step 1 is about admitting powerlessness at the core, gut level of who we are.

In AA, this deep experience is sometimes called “the gift of desperation” because it becomes the very thing that leads us to God.

A wimpy Step 1 leads to wimpy Steps 2 through 12. Experiencing powerlessness is what opens us to transformation.

“The recognition and public acknowledgment of personal inadequacy is a spiritual achievement that must be ritualized and celebrated.” (Paraphrased from Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue* [IVP Academic, 2025], 186.)

Scripture is full of people experiencing this step:

- Acts 2 (the people of Jerusalem)
- Luke 5 (Simon Peter)
- Isaiah 6 (Isaiah)
- Romans 7 (Paul)

A key to spiritual growth that's present in addiction is unforced, desperate awareness of need.

Step 1 is the foundation of spiritual life for everybody.

We don't end up in hopelessness, but we start there.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to discuss in a small group or reflect individually in your workbook.

1. In terms of powerlessness, how much or how little do you believe your life is unmanageable on your own right now? Why did you answer this way?
2. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous says that acceptance is the answer to all our problems. Does that resonate with you today? Why or why not?
3. What is one significant reality in your life that you often resist accepting? Why?
4. John writes, “AA got the Twelve Steps from the church. And now the church needs them back” (*Steps*, 7). Think of a time when you hid parts of yourself from others in the church out of fear or shame. Why did you do this?

5. Step 1 helps us break through denial and accept reality. It helps us become willing to change. So . . . on a scale of 1–10, how willing to change do you feel today? Explain the number you chose.

## KEY ACTIVITIES

### *Naming Powerlessness*

The first step is the only one we're told we must do perfectly: *Admit we are powerless*. In *Steps*, John begins by acknowledging that all sorts of things—from family, job, and reputation to friends, temper, and money; from the silly or mundane to the serious and deeply troubling—are beyond our control (see page 1). This honesty is painful, but it's the door into freedom for all of us.

Take a moment to write down three “I can't . . .” statements for yourself. Don't fix or explain them—just consider and then write.

1. I can't \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I can't \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I can't \_\_\_\_\_.

### *Admitting It*

Writer Stephen Haynes describes Step 0 like this: “We admitted that, despite all appearances, we were not fine” (*Steps*, 15). For many of us—especially those of us in religious settings—this may be the hardest confession. We want to appear spiritually mature. We want to maintain an image of holiness and put-together-ness.

But God deals in honesty, not appearances. Pretending is a lie, and it only keeps us trapped. So Step 1 is not just an intellectual agreement; it's a gut-level acknowledgment of inadequacy. We have to do this with our whole heart.

Try this as a prayer: *God, I admit that, despite all appearances, I am not fine.*

How does saying those words make you feel? Write down or share your experience with others.

### *Addressing Shame*

Stigma marked culture in Jesus' time on earth, and it's still part of society today (see *Steps*, 13). But Jesus turns stigma into welcome. The Fellowship of the Withered Hand is not a community of people who are perfectly polished and put-together. It's a fellowship of the broken.

Sociologist Erving Goffman wrote that the word *stigma* used to refer to the brand marking a disgraced individual as either a criminal or a slave (see *Steps*, 13). Jesus himself bore a stigma in the wounds of the cross. Those same scars became his glory.

What scar in your life do you see as shame?

How might it become a place of strength in God's hands?

### *Your Withered Hand*

John invites you to identify your own place of powerlessness (see *Steps*, 16). This is the beginning of the Fellowship of the Withered Hand: a community where brokenness is not hidden but revealed and celebrated. It's the inadequacy that unites us. "What God asks us to do—what we know we *should* do—is precisely what we are unable to do" (*Steps*, 12).

What part of yourself do you most want to hide?

How might God be inviting you to bring it into the open?

Pray simply, *God, here is my withered hand. I cannot stretch it out without you.*

### *Manageability*

Chapter 1B challenges us to consider what "unmanageable" really means. It's not just about crisis; it's about realizing self-will is not enough. John writes, "Our lives are unmanageable. We have all been idiots and will be idiots again. It *is* 'that bad'" (*Steps*, 20).

Rate each area of your life from 1 to 5 (1 = not manageable at all; 5 = completely manageable).

- Thought life: \_\_/5
- Emotions: \_\_/5
- Words/mouth: \_\_/5
- Habits/impulses: \_\_/5
- Time/money: \_\_/5

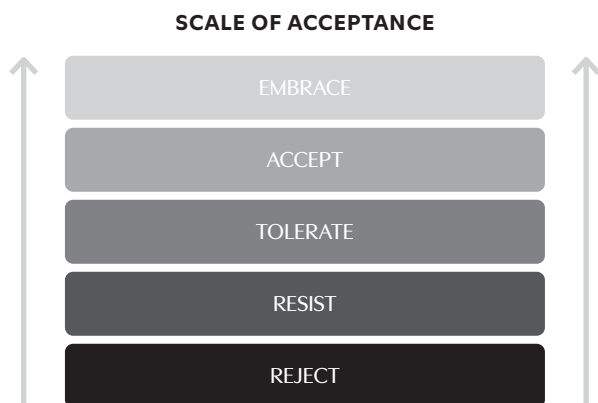
Which number surprised you most?

Which one do you sense God wants to bring clarity to first?

### *Acceptance*

On pages 27–28, *Steps* introduces a tool called the Scale of Acceptance for recognizing your feelings about the circumstances in your life. You can use this scale to locate your feelings about anything you are powerless over.

It goes like this:



Consider the items below:

- My inadequacy (name it): \_\_\_\_\_
- Where I am on the scale: \_\_\_\_\_
- One step I can take to move up: \_\_\_\_\_

Pray: *God, help me move one step closer to embracing the place where I need you most.*

## SCRIPTURE FOR REFLECTION

Use this section to reflect on some verses that shed light on this step. You might ask God to reveal what he wants you to take away from them.

On another Sabbath day, a man with a deformed right hand was in the synagogue while Jesus was teaching. The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees watched Jesus closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.

But Jesus knew their thoughts. He said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone." So the man came forward. Then Jesus said to his critics, "I have a question for you. Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?"

He looked around at them one by one and then said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! At this, the enemies of Jesus were wild with rage and began to discuss what to do with him.

**LUKE 6:6-11**

What details stand out in this story?

Why do you think Jesus asked the man to reveal his weakness publicly?

I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**2 CORINTHIANS 12:10**

What words or phrases stand out?

Can you think of a time your weakness felt like strength? What happened?

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

As you embark on this journey through the Twelve Steps, remember that we begin recovery not in strength but in powerlessness. When we feel vulnerable or uneasy or even uncomfortably seen, we are getting somewhere! Often naming our “withered hand” is the first act of honesty that unlocks the rest of the process.

The most frequently asked question is, “How long will it take me to tackle the steps?”

The answer will frustrate you. Ready?

This will take your whole life. (How’s that for a commitment?) It’s an ongoing, continuous process that will reveal where your heart truly lies and will open up a pathway to fellowship with God like you’ve never experienced.

The Fellowship of the Withered Hand is a community where weakness is strength. Inadequacy is welcome. No one has it all figured out.

And you are invited.

So keep reading. As they say in AA, “Keep coming back. It works if you work it.”

## JOURNAL SPACE

After completing this section, take five to ten minutes of silence. Then think through these questions in the journaling space that follows:

- What do I sense God saying to me through this material?
- What part(s) of me am I ready to bring into the open?
- What next step will I take?