

12 Steps in the Orthodox Church

Steps of Transformation by Archimandrite Meletios
Webber

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 a 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.

Requirements and challenges

29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." [a]--Mk. 9:29

Step 1:

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

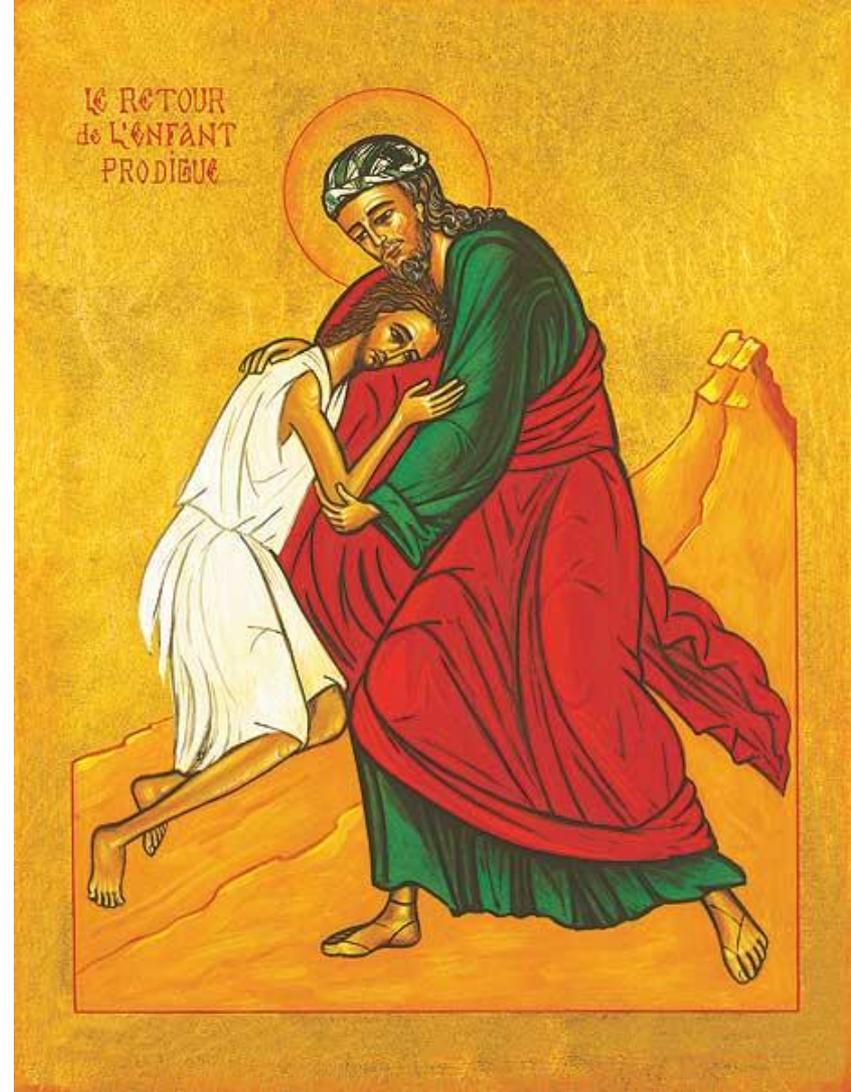
¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.--Romans 7:18-19

Like the Prodigal Son we must "come to ourselves".

The Prodigal Son

Step One is the Coming to Oneself.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"--Luke 15: 17-19



Step One Sunday

Sunday of the Prodigal Son, during the pre-Lent season, for the addicted person, is “Step One Sunday”.

The Jesus Prayer as a Step One Prayer

Oh Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Oh Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me an addict.

-God is God

-I am telling the truth about myself

-This is the essence of the beginning of the 12 steps.

Step 2

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

Prodigal Son again:

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, **19** and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."--Luke 15: 17-19

And so a journey begins...

The Prayer of the Publican

No room for denial

No room for creating our own reality

No room for playing God

“He who humbles himself will be exalted.”

¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”--Luke 18:13-14

Pharisee and the Publican: Step Two Sunday

In step two the addict comes to believe that a power greater than herself can restore her to sanity.

- prodigal son returning to the Father

- Publican's prayer of Repentance

Jesus Prayer as Step Two Prayer

“Have mercy on me”

Turning to God.

An Aside: Zacchaeus Sunday

-Step Zero: “Stuff” has to stop

It takes a certain amount of clear headedness to even begin to work the steps. The fact that Zacchaeus Sunday comes before the Lenten tridion is significant, in that it teaches in the Church the same thing that is a profound truth in 12 step programs: In order for the path of repentance to begin, one must repent. This is called step zero.

Step Three:

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

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

And lean not on your own understanding;

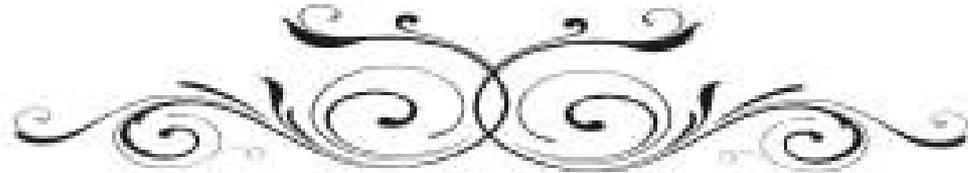
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,

And He shall direct^[a] your paths.--Proverbs 3:5-6

Luke 12:29-31

29 “And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. **30** For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. **31** *But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things[[a](#)] shall be added to you.*

Step Three Prayer



**God, I offer myself to Thee-
To build with me
and to do with me as Thou wilt.
Relieve me of the bondage of self,
that I may better do Thy will.
Take away my difficulties,
that victory over them may bear witness
to those I would help of Thy Power,
Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.
May I do Thy will always!**



Prayer of St. Philaret of Moscow

O Lord,
grant that I may meet the coming day in peace.
Help me in all things
to rely upon Thy Holy Will.
In every hour of the day,
reveal Thy will to me.
Bless my dealings with all who surround me.
Teach me to treat all that comes to me
throughout the day with peace of soul,
and with the firm conviction that Thy will governs all.
In all my deeds and words,
guide my thoughts and feelings.
In unforeseen events, let me not forget
that all are sent by Thee.
Teach me to act firmly and wisely,
without embittering and embarrassing others.
Give me the strength to bear the fatigue
of the coming day with all that it shall bring.
Direct my will.
Teach me to pray.
Pray Thou Thyself in me.
Amen.

A morning prayer for the Will of God

O LORD, I know not what ask of Thee. Thou alone knowest what are my true needs. Thou lovest me more then I myself know how to love. Help me to see my real needs which are concealed from me. I dare not ask either a cross of consolation. I can only wait on Thee. My heart is open to Thee. Visit and help me, for thy great mercy 's sake. Strike me and heal me, cast me down and raise me up. I worship in silence Thy holy will and Thine inscrutable ways. I offer myself as a sacrifice to thee. I put all my trust in Thee. I have no other desire then to fulfill thy will. Teach me how to pray. Pray Thou Thyself in me. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

“Thy will be done.”

Steps 4 and 5: The Doors of Repentance

Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

That these two steps are preparation for, and going to confession is obvious.

Matthew 23:26 “First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of the may be clean also.”

-with food addiction, this is especially evident. The outside reflects, in a very obvious and literal way, what is going on on the inside.

-it is the spiritual work going on on the inside that will bring recovery for the addict.

Resentment

In 12 step work, we come at our moral inventory from the angle of “What are my resentments?” (what things in my life am I re-feeling? Mulling over and over and getting stuck on how others have wronged one.)

But then we turn it around and ask: What is my part in this?

The focus shifts from how others have harmed us, and onto our own responsibility. We look at our own sins and bring our own sins to confession, and not how others have harmed us.

James 5: 16 “Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.”

For the Orthodox Christian in a 12 step program, taking the 5th step with one’s priest goes without saying.

Psalms 41:4 “I said ‘Lord be merciful to me. Heal my soul for I have sinned against You.’”

Steps 6 and 7: The Turning Point

Step 6: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step 7: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

The significance is that God is our healer. We don't heal ourselves. We repent, we turn to God, but GOD is the one who heals us.

The action here is God's. He is the Savior. He is the agent. He is God.

Psalm 37:7 "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Romans 6:11

Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.- Eph. 4: 22-23

At the beginning of the Liturgy:

“It is time for the Lord to act.”

We make ourselves ready and we wait.

But the waiting is an *ACTIVE* waiting...just as the people of God gathered in the Divine Liturgy are actively waiting for God while offering prayers, praises and the gifts, so too the recovering addict is waiting for God in the context of offering prayers, surrender and the gift of self to God.

7th Step Prayer

My Creator,

I am now willing that You should have all of me,
good and bad.

I pray that You now remove from me
every single defect of character which stands in the way
of my usefulness to You and my fellows.

Grant me strength, as I go out from here,
to do Your bidding.

Amen

Prayer of St. Dmitri of Rostov (pre-communion)

"Open, O doors and bolts of my heart, that Christ the King of Glory may enter!

Enter, O my Light, and enlighten my darkness;

Enter, O my Life, and resurrect my deadness;

Enter, O my Physician, and heal my wounds;

Enter, O Divine Fire, and burn up the thorns of my sins;

Ignite my inward parts and my heart with the flame of Thy love;

Enter, O my King, and destroy in me the kingdom of sin;

Sit on the throne of my heart and reign in me alone, O Thou, my King and Lord."

An Expectation of Inner Healing

The addiction behavior (drinking, eating, using) is just the symptom of the inner disease. Steps six and seven give the inner disease to the healer for healing.

“I said: Lord have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.”-Great Doxology

Making Amends: Steps 8 and 9

Step 8: Made a list of all the persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

The Sermon on the Mount

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”-Mat. 5:9

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” -Mat. 5: 23-24

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”-Mat. 5:44

Zacchaeus: A Model of Making Amends

-Zacchaeus was an example of “step zero” but he is also an example of steps 8 and 9: The willingness to make amends and the making of amends.

The amends process is not about saving other people, but rather it is about being honest about the impact of our poor choices on the people around us, and taking that honesty to them, and saying: I did wrong, please forgive me, and here is what I am going to do to make it right.

Honestly is the only way an addict can find recovery and move forward.

Forgiveness Vespers

We live out the 9th step every year, and continuously. The 9th step is a non-religious version of Forgiveness Vespers.

Steps 10 & 11: The Dailies

These are the steps that an addict who is living in recovery must do/take daily (especially steps 10 and 11) in order to maintain sobriety and be in good spiritual condition.

Step 10: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

Step 10

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”-Mark 14:38

“And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” -Luke 11:4

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” -Psalm 103:12

How this works:

A person working the 12 steps takes a daily inventory and is honest about what crops up.

Resentment? Dishonesty? Hiding things/emotions? Selfish? Anxious/Afraid? Do for others? Could do better?

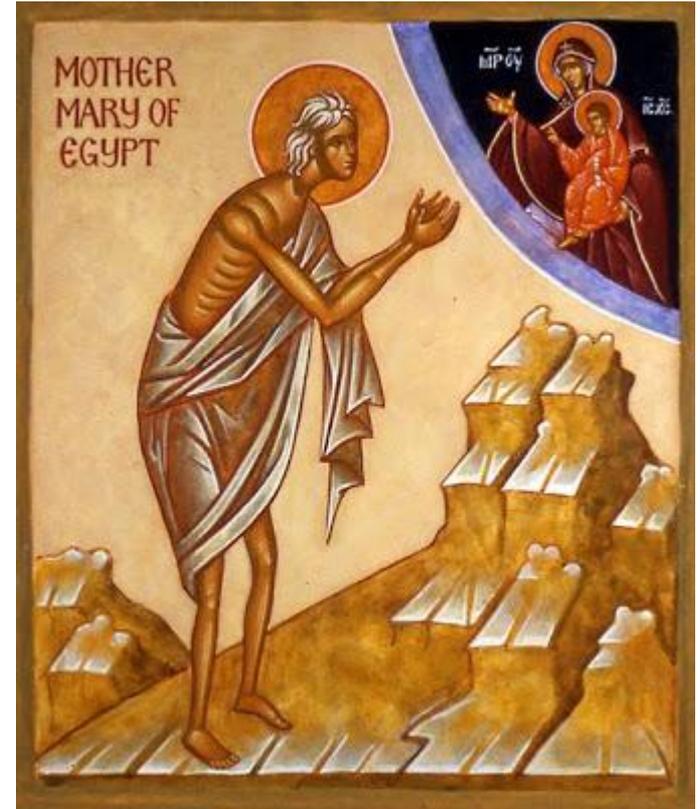
The inventory in the evening prayers is also a very helpful on the daily, and the evening prayers can be a big part of the way an Orthodox Christian takes step ten each day.

St. Mary of Egypt

A model for ongoing lifestyle of repentance.

Metanoia.

It takes daily work.



Getting to Know God

Step 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.

Constant prayer

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; -Phil 4:6

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” -1 John 5:14

“Whatever thing you ask for in prayer, believing, you will receive.”
-Matthew 21:22

Seeking not Certainty

Prayer is not dealmaking.

Step 11 means seeking God....not being certain about God's will. It is in the seeking that the alcoholic finds ongoing sobriety.

The priest prays: "Lord remember x"

We pray: "Lord have mercy on x"

We pray: "Thy will be done".

We pray the Jesus Prayer.

Jesus Prayer as Meditation

The Orthodox tradition of meditation centers around the Jesus prayer.

“O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Spreading the Good News

Step 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.

“Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”-Mark 5:19

A final thought

A man who stands on a high place breathing fresh air is filled with more cheerfulness and strength than someone who stands below in darkness breathing gloomy, stagnant air. Likewise the man who, because of his hope on the promises of the Spirit, labors with steadfast faith, receives greater consolation, joy, encouragement, and is more sanctified by the Spirit, than the man with remorse, sorrow, bitterness and distress of heart labors in self-applied compulsion without the consolation of reaching the harbor of hope.--St. Isaac the Syrian