

"Why I Love the 12 Steps . . . for Everyone"

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The power of the gospel principles taught in the 12 Steps applies to every one of us and can help us more profoundly come unto Christ. Since we all have unhealthy habits and need help putting off our "natural man" tendencies toward sin, anyone can benefit from more fully trusting in God and turning our lives over to Him to access His enabling, redeeming and strengthening power.

Stop for a minute and just think of a couple things you maybe struggle with and have tried to change or would like to change but just have not been able to do so on your own. This could include weaknesses, habits or challenges we face, such as struggling with physical or mental health issues, worrying about a wayward child or spouse, being on your cell phone too much, always running late to things, yelling at your kids more than you'd like, nagging or trying to "fix" your spouse, not getting to the temple as often as you would like, overeating, not being able to lose weight, comparing yourself to others too much, feeling like you are not good enough, or being overly critical or judgmental of others.

Anytime we struggle with something that has more control over us than we have over it then we are especially in need of God's enabling and healing power.

We're all familiar with the wonderful scripture in the Book of Mormon found in Ether 12:27 that says, "And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them."

We all have weaknesses that are designed to help us be more humble and to turn to our Savior, Jesus Christ. God's grace can help us overcome or endure any challenge or weakness we may face.

12 Steps at Church

Some time ago I was called to teach the Sunday School Marriage and Family Relations course. After completing the 16-week class, I asked if I might teach the Church's Twelve Step Addiction Recovery Program (ARP) as a Sunday School course and call it, "Coming Unto Christ through the 12 Steps."

Now some may wonder why we would teach that as a Sunday School class? Isn't it just for people with an addiction? There are many reasons the 12 Steps are a much-needed resource for anyone who would like to partner with Jesus Christ more fully to help overcome the many 'natural man' struggles we all face.

Another ward I recently heard of decided to work the 12 Steps together by sending out weekly emails highlighting one of the 12 Steps each week to encourage members to study and integrate the 12 Step principles in their lives.

In their introduction of this new emphasis they shared that the program was for those seeking to change their lives and become a better person. They reminded their ward members that while some people consider addictions to simply be bad habits that can be conquered by willpower alone, that many people become so dependent on a behavior or a substance that they lose the ability to choose and no longer see how to abstain from it. Through Jesus Christ and His Atonement and the principles taught in the 12 Steps we can overcome and enjoy all the blessings of the gospel.

Some of the many potential areas of focus for the 12 Steps that they suggested included: selfishness, depression, pornography, anger, laziness, Word of Wisdom issues, anxiety, fear, resentment/ grudges, overeating, making excuses, communication, coveting, gossiping, language/vulgarity, lying, exercise, daily prayer, daily scripture study, etc. Truly the Atonement of Jesus Christ—accessed through working the 12 Steps—can help any of us in so many different ways.

As a therapist, it really hit me when one of my clients reflected on how sad it was that she had to go to a separate "12-step meeting" to finally develop a real relationship with her Savior as a true friend and Redeemer and be able to overcome her addiction through Him. She asked, "Why aren't we able to do that just through living the Gospel itself?"

I had also had a conversation with a fellow therapist about the addiction recovery process. I asked his thoughts on why we needed separate 12-step meetings to overcome such difficulties. We came up with a few ideas. At Church we are sometimes more surface oriented, keeping our personal problems mostly hidden—though the 1st Sunday Council Meetings started to change that a bit. In contrast, at 12-step meetings there tends to be a more open and honest sharing of one's struggles.

Secondly, the way the 12 Steps package the gospel principles is quite different than how we might understand and apply those same principles through a Gospel

Doctrine class. The 12 Steps beautifully help the sincere striver understand how to come unto Christ in a way that is not always fully comprehended through other means.

As we become more honest with ourselves and others without necessarily having to air all our dirty laundry, of course, we make it easier for all of us to be a little more real, feel a little safer being real and are a little more accepting of our human weaknesses and imperfections.

I just couldn't help but want to share the incredibly powerful yet humbling process of turning one's life over to Christ that I've seen so many experience by working the 12 Steps. Thus, by teaching the principles in a Sunday School format, I wanted to open up the possibilities to everyone that was in need of an extra dose of God's enabling, healing, redeeming and strengthening power.

In teaching the "Coming Unto Christ through the 12 Steps" Sunday School course our purpose was to help us all realize the power of the gospel principles taught in the 12 Steps, and how they apply to every one of us.

The 12 Steps can help each of us more profoundly "come unto Christ, and be perfected in Him, and deny [ourselves] of all ungodliness" knowing that His grace is sufficient for us to be perfect and perfected in partnership with Him (Moroni 10:32).

We All Need Christ More Profoundly in Our Lives

As we all probably noticed in answering my opening question, we all have unhealthy habits and need help putting off our "natural man" tendencies toward sin. Any of us can benefit from more fully trusting in God and turning our lives and our will over to Him to access His enabling and redeeming power. For many struggling with addiction, coming unto Christ through the 12 Steps is often their only true hope for real recovery.

Addiction recovery often feels so hopeless and overwhelming given its compulsive, agency-robbing nature that the gift of the 12 Steps becomes such a blessing to those who embark on that journey.

I have often said to clients working through the arduous process of active addiction recovery that I sometimes feel a little sad for those who don't have to deal with an "official" addiction because they often miss out on the profound transformative process of how the 12 Steps require us to turn to Christ in such a significant and empowering way helping us access His grace.

I was pleasantly surprised to learn from another one of my clients recently that in his 12-step group the missionaries that are called to lead the meetings are starting to *not* use the word "addiction" so that more people will realize that these steps apply to everyone. Addiction might instead be thought of as simply "weakness or sin."

In the Addiction Recovery Program (ARP) guide produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints it

states, "Virtually everyone living in these perilous times could benefit by learning and applying [these] gospel principles."¹

Those same principles that bless the lives of those dealing with addiction can also bless the lives of those dealing with their own everyday weaknesses and challenges. These everyday struggles also often feel outside our control but can be muted by increasing our conscious contact and personal relationship with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Being "More" with Christ

As I worked with an LDS client to help him make some changes in how he interacted with his wife, he said, "How am I going to change any of this (having patience, being kinder, putting her first, etc.)? This is just how I am?" I said, "That's where God comes in. If we yoke ourselves to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and His atoning power, He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves."

I reminded him that there *is* a cost to having the Lord step in and help us with things that we've tried and failed to do on our own. The cost is humility and submission to God.

Working through the gospel principles neatly packaged in the 12 Steps allows us to be and do more than we could be and do on our own. President Ezra Taft Benson taught, "Men and women who turn their lives over to God will discover that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can."²

Each of us struggle with difficulties that prevent us from drawing closer to Jesus Christ. Whether it be an addiction, bad habit, or other type of challenge, the Lord gives us all a few things we can't fix or endure on our own inviting us to turn to Him and His enabling, healing and redeeming power. All adversity is divinely designed to turn us to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The beauty of the Gospel and of Christ's Atonement is that we can partner with Christ accessing His power so that we can become what we otherwise couldn't be through our own sheer grit and willpower. God's matchless power can heal us and help us overcome our mortal weaknesses as we turn our lives and our will over to Jesus Christ and partner with Him.

The Missing Piece – Submission to God

There seems to be something about the step of turning our lives and our will over to God that we tend to miss picking up on and applying from our regular Sunday School gospel teachings. Clients have often asked why they are still struggling and why God isn't "helping them" despite all the "right things" they are doing gospel-wise. They just can't seem to access the power of the Atonement despite all the good they are currently doing.

I have come to learn that the "Thy will be done...not mine" piece is often missing from our efforts to access God's

enabling and healing power (see Doctrine & Covenants 109:44). The humility, the submission to “not my will,” the broken heart and contrite spirit (see 3 Nephi 9:20) and the willingness to repent and do or endure whatever the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon us (see Mosiah 3:19) seems to be the missing element of accessing God’s atoning power.

There is great healing and peace in recognizing our powerlessness and surrendering our will to Him. When we turn our will over to God, He can fill us with love and peace making it easier to endure, repent of or change a personal weakness or other difficulty.

You’ll know whether you have accessed His power because you’ll feel peace despite any particular outcome or circumstances.

The 12 Step process seems to help people surrender to God more consciously and more profoundly—unlocking the ability to endure and/or overcome something that prior to was seemingly out of their reach. Of all the gospel principles, step 3 - submitting our will to God’s will on a moment-to-moment kind of basis like they do in the 12 Steps, seems to be the one least applied in many of our lives.

The Twelve Steps

Each of the 12 Steps contains gospel principles uniquely designed and uniquely needed in order to come unto Christ and access His power over our human frailties. The following are the 12 Steps adapted from the original 12 Steps:³

STEP 1: Honesty, Powerlessness and Unmanageability (“I can’t”)

Admit that you, of yourself, are powerless to overcome your [weaknesses] and that your life has become unmanageable.

STEP 2: Hope/Belief – Emotional and Spiritual Healing through Christ (“God can”)

Come to believe that the power of God can restore you to complete spiritual [and emotional] health.

STEP 3: Trust in God – Surrendering My Will and Life to God (“I will let Him”)

Decide to turn your will and your life over to the care of God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

STEP 4: Truth – Writing Our Personal Inventories

Make a searching and fearless written moral inventory of yourself.

STEP 5: Confession – Self-Understanding and Receiving the Mercy of Christ

Admit to yourself, to your Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ, to proper priesthood authority, and to another person the exact nature of your wrongs.

STEP 6: Change of Heart – Becoming Willing to Give Up Our Weaknesses

Become entirely ready to have God remove all your character weaknesses.

STEP 7: Humility – Surrendering Our Weaknesses to God

Humbly ask Heavenly Father to remove your shortcomings.

STEP 8: Seeking Forgiveness – Preparing to Make Amends

Make a written list of all persons you have harmed and become willing to make restitution to them.

STEP 9: Restitution and Reconciliation – Making Amends

Wherever possible, make direct restitution to all persons you have harmed.

STEP 10: Daily Accountability – Doing a Daily Review

Continue to take personal inventory, and when you are wrong promptly admit it.

STEP 11: Personal Revelation – Daily Contact with God through Prayer, Scripture Study and Meditation

Seek through prayer and meditation to [improve your conscious contact with God], know the Lord’s will and to have the power to carry it out.

STEP 12: Service – Helping Others Find Hope and Healing

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, share this message with others and practice these principles in all you do.

As it states in the Introduction of the *Addiction Recovery Program* guide book, “Whether you yourself struggle with addiction [weakness] or associate with someone who does, this guide [the 12 Steps] can be a blessing in your life. The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been adapted into a framework of the doctrines, principles, and beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They are presented in this guide as key principles at the beginning of each section. This guide will help you learn how to apply these key principles; they can change your life.”⁴

Practical Application of the Atonement of Christ

You might think of these 12 Steps as a perfectly packaged practical application of the Atonement of Jesus Christ in your life. For those who actively and repeatedly work the 12 Steps, it’s more of a lifestyle of turning to Christ every day than it is a “program.” Living the 12 Steps on a regular basis helps you to live a “fearless life” enveloped in the arms of God’s wise and loving care.

By living the 12 Steps, God becomes your primary attachment figure—your secure home base. When you clean out your life as the 12 Steps teach and God

becomes your go-to guy, your life and your relationships with everyone else are so different and better.

It can make you immune to many of the vicissitudes of life and idiosyncrasies of human relationships that might otherwise throw you for a loop. It doesn't really matter what anyone else thinks when God's your teammate.

How to Work the 12 Steps

For most people dealing with addictions the process of working the 12 Steps includes attending regular 12-step meetings (the Church's [ARP meetings](#), [AA meetings](#), [SA meetings](#), [OA meetings](#), [NA meetings](#), etc.) and finding a sponsor.

A sponsor is someone who has worked through all the steps, knows how to work each step individually and no longer has to lean on their particular "drug of choice" or weakness to function on a day-to-day basis. Most sponsors are found by attending 12-step meetings.

If that is too much for you to start with, another approach could be to get the Church's [Addiction Recovery Program](#) guide book and start studying and doing each of the writing/ processing exercises it contains. Many of my clients have found using Dr. Patrick Carnes' book, [A Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps: The Classic Guide for All People in the Process of Recovery](#) helpful in guiding them through actively learning and applying the 12 Steps.

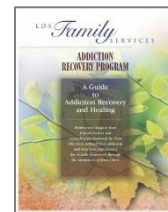
A therapist who specializes in addiction recovery or even an ecclesiastical leader can serve as a "guide" or check-in person as you work the steps—maybe even having you share a brief overview of what you are learning each week in your step work. Step 5, the step of sharing your "searching moral inventory" is often done with the help of a bishop anyway.

"The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. That progress is accelerated when you willingly allow Him to lead you through every growth experience you encounter, whether initially it be to your individual liking or not. When you trust in the Lord, when you are willing to let your heart and your mind be centered in His will, when you ask to be led by the Spirit to do His will, you are assured of the greatest happiness along the way and the most fulfilling attainment from this mortal experience."⁵

Like fully living the Gospel of Jesus Christ every day of our lives, actively working the 12 Steps can be an additionally incredible spiritually transformative process. I encourage

anyone that finds themselves reading this article to consider embarking on a journey of working the 12 Steps.

You are invited to give up your sins and weaknesses embracing and relying on the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ instead knowing that it will dramatically change your life and bring peace to your life regardless of any unpleasant challenges or circumstances you may be facing.



Additional Resources:

- [Addiction Recovery Program: A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing](#) or you can find the (ARP) [PDF online](#) for free!
- [Healing through Christ: Help, Hope and Healing for Those Who Have a Loved One in Addiction](#) compiled by The Healing Through Christ Institute, LLC
- [He Restoreth My Soul: Understanding and Breaking the Chemical and Spiritual Chains of Pornography Addiction Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ](#) by Donald L. Hilton
- [Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps](#) by Richard Rohr
- [A Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps: The Classic Guide for All People in the Process of Recovery](#) by Patrick J. Carnes, PhD
- [A Gentle Path through the Twelve Principles: Living the Values Behind the Steps](#) by Patrick J. Carnes, PhD

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Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and Certified Sex Therapist, Laura M. Brotherson is the founder of [The Marital Intimacy Institute](#) with a mission to help couples create "Sextraordinary Marriages." She counsels with couples, individuals and families in private practice (and online). Laura is the author of the best-selling book, [And They Were Not Ashamed: Strengthening Marriage through Sexual Fulfillment](#), and her latest book, [Knowing HER Intimately: 12 Keys for Creating a Sextraordinary Marriage](#).

Laura is actively engaged in providing marriage education through [Couples' Cruises](#), [articles](#), [newsletters](#), radio and television broadcasts, and presenting at [conferences and workshops](#). Laura is passionate about helping couples navigate the intricacies of intimacy to help build strong marriages and families. Laura and her husband are the founders of [StrengtheningMarriage.com](#)—*your trusted resource for education, products and services to strengthen marriages ... intimately!*

¹ *Addiction Recovery Program: A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing*, (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2005), 71.

² *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Ezra Taft Benson* (2014), 42–43.

³ *Addiction Recovery Program: A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing*, (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 2005), iv.

⁴ *Ibid*, v.

⁵ Elder Richard G. Scott, "Finding Joy in Life," *Ensign*, May 1996.