

The 12 Steps Through Lent

A collaborative devotional written by the LuMin-Austin community

Why the 12 Steps of Recovery?

Background and Devotional Reading Tips

The 12 Steps of AA/NA/MA/HA/Recovery are utilized by communities of people who identify as addicts to a substance for the purpose of overcoming their addiction. The LuMin-Austin community has recognized these programs as offering invaluable wisdom, not just for addicts, but for all of us in our human brokenness. We are using the structure of the 12 Steps of Recovery to guide us through the season of Lent and using this liturgical season as a time of internal healing done alongside each other.

There will be at least one installment of this devotional for each of the 12 Steps. The 12 Steps we are working through are as follows:

1.) We admitted that we are powerless over [x]*-- that our lives had become unmanageable.

*The original wording of AA uses alcohol here. As alcohol is not the same addiction we are all suffering, you are called to insert anything here that is relevant to you and your own human brokenness.

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 mediation 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 a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others*, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

*The original wording of AA uses alcoholics here. Since we are expanding these Steps to heal from any form of brokenness that we are all subject to in some form, we are also expanding this call to share this message with all.

As you read through each devotional (updated on Instagram, FaceBook, and this document), you are encouraged to do the work of these Steps internally and specifically related to whatever may be keeping you from a closer relationship to God. Journaling on the reflection questions included with each devotional is highly encouraged so you may see a documentation of

your journey through Lent as well as to bring upon focus and routine to your spiritual practices this season. Free journals are available at LuMin-Austin (2100 San Antonio Street) to all who are interested.

Step One

We admitted that we are powerless over [x]*-- that our lives had become unmanageable.
*The original wording of AA uses alcohol here. As alcohol is not the same addiction we are all suffering, you are called to insert anything here that is relevant to you and your own human brokenness.

A devotional from a LuMin-Austin community member:

"I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." (Romans, 7: 18b-20)

Some of you are probably familiar with the Greek myth about Sisyphus. He's the guy who fooled the gods by cheating death not once..but three times! His eternal punishment was to roll a massive rock up a hill, but just as he'd get to the top - oopsie daisies - it'd roll back down, forcing him to rolling it back up over, and over, over...

Anyone who's tried - under their own will or strength - to quit something that's gained an outsized place in their life can relate to this guy Sisyphus and his futile task. The narrative usually goes like this: "As hard as I tried to quit, the burden was too great...I'd grow weary and slip. I'd stare at the rock at rest, and think to myself: it's no big deal. I got this. But when I tried again it wasn't long before I was reminded otherwise: "Nope...No. I don't have this." over, and over, and over.

Sometimes entering Lent feels like this too. You get your ash in church on Wednesday. Tell yourself, "For Lent, I'm gonna give up X...or try to do Y...or take on Z."; And maybe you're successful right up until...say, the Second Sunday in Lent, when you discover just what a heavy lift it is to quit X, do Y, or take on Z.

The Sisyphean task is real: shoving up and out of our lives whatever has become massively unhealthy or burdensome - one and for all. Such is the case for like every single human EVER.

Lent, if anything, is a time that we admit, like Paul, that we cannot do that which we know to be right and good on our own. We are powerless, our lives have become unmanageable. Every single last one of us needs help.

Reflection questions:

- What habit/routine/relationship/etc. feels outsized when compared to the relationship you would like to have with God?
- How do you respond to tasks that feel Sisyphean, or unending? How would you like to respond to your burdens?
- In what areas of your own life do you feel powerless?

Step Two

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

A devotional from a Isabella G., a LuMin-Austin community member:

*“For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”
(Romans 8:6)*

“Why do you believe in God?”

Oh the age old question. I have been asked this by peers, by family, and most notably, by my campers at summer camp. This is no easy question to answer as you may imagine, however my answer usually goes a little something like this... “if I died and all of this wasn’t real, it wasn’t for nothing because I lived a life of love and hope in a power higher than myself and that brought me comfort”. I’ve gone back and forth on if this is a selfish answer or not and have recently come to accept that God would want this from me. He would want me to be dependent on him and the life-giving opportunities and hope that comes with living a life in Christ. Romans 8:6 says “For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace”. How true and fitting this is, not only in our season of lent, but in the current state of the world. In a season that feels dark and looming, we are invited to seek God’s power which is greater than ours, to ground us.

Reflection questions:

- Where do you find your mind set on the flesh and fleshly desires?
- How might you invite God into those spaces?
- What attributes of God make you pause and reflect on his higher power? How are these attributes different from things humans can do themselves?

Step Three

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

A devotional from Madi C., a LuMin community member:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit yourself to Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

(Proverbs 3:5-6)

Last year when I started college, I had a hard time trusting that God was working in my life. My first year was extremely difficult and I was struggling to understand why God would put me in a position where I felt so unhappy. I was very hesitant but ultimately made the last minute decision to return to camp for the summer to hopefully strengthen my relationship with God. In the end, it was exactly what I needed and I found that God was with me every step of the way.

While I was at camp I got to lead 4th through 6th graders in Bible study and be part of their faith journeys; I later realized that they also got to be a huge part of mine. I got to share my own experience with God and growing up in the church with campers and their adult leaders. They all accepted me for who I was. They didn't see the version of myself that I was overwhelmed by: someone who was struggling or as someone who wasn't good enough. They got to know me, heard my story, and saw someone who was wonderfully made by God.

Returning to camp and feeling that love reminded me that my relationship with God doesn't always have to be perfect for him to be present. We may not always understand what is happening, we may feel anxious about where God is leading us, and we may question if God is with us, but God is always there, and He will always guide you to people in your life that will remind you of His love. I know He has a plan for me and for you too, just remember to put your trust in Him.

Reflection Questions:

- What is a time that others have seen you through God's eyes rather than your own?
- How have you made the decision to trust God in your life?
- Where have you seen God working through you recently?

Step Four

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

A devotional from Sydney N., a LuMin-Austin community member:

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”
(Psalm 139:23)*

Making and searching for a moral inventory of ourselves is one of the most challenging steps because it demands complete honesty. As a premed student, it is easy to measure my value by numbers. My science GPA, research hours, and exam scores, all make me feel that success reflects who I am. However, this step forces me to look beneath the surface. Do I serve others out of genuine compassion, or out of a desire for recognition? In a competitive environment, pride, jealousy, anxiety, and quiet resentment can grow unnoticed. A true moral inventory means admitting when I procrastinate, judge classmates, or let ambition overshadow empathy. It also means acknowledging strengths like discipline and perseverance, not to glorify them, but to understand how I can use them well. Lent is a season of examination before renewal. Just as a physician must carefully diagnose before treating a patient, I must examine my own heart before I can grow into the kind of doctor I hope to become. Genuine self-reflection is uncomfortable, but it is the foundation of humility and transformation.

Reflection Questions:

- Take an inventory of your strengths and weaknesses in your faith. This could be a bulleted list, a longer written meditation, or whatever best suits your reflections process.
- How can you turn these strengths and weaknesses over to God in your daily life?
- How does it feel to examine yourself as the devotion author models? Do you feel like it's easier for you to examine your strengths or your weaknesses?

Step Five

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

A devotional from Virginia V., a LuMin-Austin community member:

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”
(James 5:13-16)

A prayer of thanksgiving and confession:

Dear God, thank you so much for all that you give to us in our lives. We confess that we have sinned against you in ways that are known and unknown and we ask for your forgiveness. Guide us into a life of honesty with others, ourselves, and God. *Amen.*

All are invited to speak this prayer out loud, to give to God silently, or to write it down. Take this prayer and claim these words of radical and whole confession as your own. Ask for forgiveness from God and rest in the comfort that it is freely given by the Savior. Let this model of confession and forgiveness with God be reflected in your earthly relationships as we are called to confess our shortcomings and wrongs to one another and mend brokenness between ourselves and neighbors.

Reflection Questions:

- What have you been struggling with? This could be an internal or external struggle.
- Have you done something this week that you feel you need to apologize for?
- Think of a time when you messed up and someone gave you grace. That’s what God does for all of us when we make mistakes. Take a minute to breathe deeply and ask for forgiveness.

Step Six (Part One)

We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of our character.

A devotional from Paul C., a LuMin-Austin community member and alumni:

“God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them.... God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.”
(CEB Genesis 1:27a, 31a)

I grew up a Lutheran, a preacher’s kid, and went to worship services whenever they had worship at church. This could have been really neat but given that I experienced church at a time when my home congregation emphasized sin all the time it seemed, I basically considered myself a sinner. That’s not all bad either, but I didn’t hear or internalize deeply enough that I was created good, in God’s image and likeness, and that forgiveness in Christ is always as close as my getting things wrong and missing the mark. Yes, we are saints and sinners!

It is easy to be distressed by the violence of human leaders, by greed, nationalism, the destruction of creation and the ways we project our brokenness onto others. Can I ever do enough? Much of my recovery centers in knowing and accepting the Creator’s original blessing and goodness, first of all in myself, but also in others with whom I disagree. I pray that we can more clearly see the divine image within ourselves and within our neighbors, fully restored through God’s grace in Christ our healer.

Reflection Questions:

- What aspects of yourself are easy to see as “supremely good”? What aspects are difficult? How do these reflections change when trying to see the supreme good in others?
- What does it mean to you to be *ready* for God to remove the defects of character in yourself?
- Write down your own prayer, specific to your own moral inventory from Step Four, asking God to help you see the divine image in yourself.
- Activity: Complete a loving-kindness meditation. The loving-kindness meditation is a mindfulness practice that asks participants to wish themselves grace and goodwill and then wish that goodwill onto those around you– ones that are easy to love and ones that are more difficult. There are many versions of this out there but one example can be found here: [Greater Good in Action Loving-Kindness Meditation](#)

Step Six (Part Two)

We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of our character.

A devotional from Micheal K., a LuMin-Austin community member:

*"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!"
(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

If I were to guess, I would say this would be Martin Luther's favorite step. The idea that we are justified through faith in Christ was and still is central in his theology. This step serves to remind us of this justification.

This is often the most challenging step, as it asks us to identify the negative traits we cling to, and be ready to have these traits removed. For me, it's easy to identify the defects in my character, but often, we have become so comfortable in these defects, that we don't want to let go of them. This is where I find comfort in knowing I am made in God's image. I know that all my virtues are gifts from God, and that he has the power to remove the parts about me that have hurt others and myself. All one must do is come to terms with these defects, and allow God to work through and within you so you can be the best version of yourself.

This step becomes an act of surrender. It is the moment where we admit that we cannot change our hearts on our own. Instead, we bring our imperfections before God and trust Him to work within us. When we do this, we open ourselves to His grace and allow Him to transform us into the people He created us to be.

Reflection Questions

- What defects in your character do you feel are the most difficult to let go of?
- What fears do you have in letting these traits go?
- What are your strengths and how might they replace these defects?

Step Seven

We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

A devotional from Barbara S., a LuMin-Austin community member:

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”
(Psalm 51:10)*

Step 7 reads “Humbly ask our God to remove our shortcomings.” In previous steps we have been asked to ponder the things that we consider to be our shortcomings – innate parts of ourselves that detract from our value and effectiveness as a person – things that we often try to deny or that cause us to feel ashamed. Most of us prefer not to bring these things into conscious awareness. Life is tough enough without beating ourselves up about our inadequacies! So take a moment, breathe...

Most often, the things that we consider our shortcomings are not things we have chosen to be part of our personality. They have been developed unconsciously as coping mechanisms for struggles in our early lives over which we’ve had no control. They do not affect our worth as a human being. But our shortcomings do make life more difficult, for they can separate us from each other and God.

Growing up and well into my adulthood I found myself to be very judgmental, especially about people who were not like me. Among those who made me most uncomfortable were the folks looking for handouts on street corners. I made all sorts of judgments about their shortcomings and value as human beings. I’m so ashamed to admit that to you! But a course I was taking was requiring daily spiritual reading and prayer. One day as I approached yet another ragged fellow at a corner, I felt rise from my center, “God bless you, sir.” What? Where did that come from? I began to cry tears of wonderment and gratitude! This radical shift to love and respect was not of my doing!

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10) This has become one of my most favorite prayers. It doesn’t name my shortcomings. It invites a loving and compassionate God to work within me to wash away old ways of being that no longer serve me or God and replace them with a more Christlike spirit. I believe that is the true intention of Step 7 and a blessing for which our God yearns for all of us to ask!

May you be blessed in just such a way in this Lenten season... Opening, softening, surrendering... And never forget: God loves you exactly as you are – today and always!

Reflection Questions:

- Spend some time praying Psalm 51:10. You could expand on what this verse means to you specifically or simply repeat it in your head, relaying the words of the psalmist to God in your own voice.
- How do you see your own shortcomings as a barrier between yourself, God, and others?
- How can you see Lent as a time of “opening, softening, surrendering” as the devotional author states?

Step Eight

We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

A devotional from Aubrey C., a LuMin–Austin community member:

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

(Luke 6:27-28)

I find myself very challenged by this step: to be willing to make amends to *all* persons I have hurt in my sin. Friends and family? I am more than ready to apologize when I hurt them and I often do so for even the smallest inconvenience. But to be willing to make amends with those who I disagree with? I am often uncomfortable with Jesus’ command to “bless those who curse you”.

In a Bible study I attend, we’ve spent the school year working through each book of Revelations. Although I expected a terrifying book of hellfire and brimstone, I found comfort in the visions of John of Patmos that tell of a future of complete justice and a God who wants to bring us, those who love Him from all nations, to a perfect existence with Him. We wrapped up Revelations with a few weeks left in the semester and decided to tackle the brief but rich book of Jonah. As a quick synopsis, Jonah is told by God to go and minister to the city of Nineveh. He tries to run away from his call, but ultimately, his unwillingness is unable to interfere with God’s plan to bring His presence to Nineveh.

In Scripture and VeggieTale renditions of this story, it is easy to read Jonah as simply-minded in his prejudice of these pagan. In the same way, I often see those whose ideologies differ from mine as simple-minded, stubborn, or ignorant. I ask *‘how could someone not see humanity in the poor and the immigrant and the disenfranchised the way I do?’* and chalk up to them being morally or intellectually lesser than me. This attitude leads to a sin that separates me from a whole population of God’s creation, causing harm to others that is real and often embraced by the sin in the world that the adversary wants to see drive us farther from each other and God.

As we embrace and reflect Step Eight, I encourage you all to be thorough in your examination of those you have harmed and to include not only those who are easy to make amends with but also those who we find difficult to reconcile with.

Reflection Questions:

- Act out Step Eight. Write down a list of people or groups that you have harmed as a result of sin and attempt to go beyond those who are easy to want to apologize to.
- How does it feel to make amends with someone we love? How does it feel to make amends with someone we’re not close to or even angry towards?
- Lent is not an individual journey, but rather one done within the whole community of Christ in which we can lean on and learn from one another. Ask a loved one or mentor about a time they had to make amends with someone else.

Step Nine

We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

A devotional from Aubrey C., a LuMin-Austin community member:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

(Matthew 5:23-24)

Step Nine calls us into connection with one another through mending bonds between one another. As we come to the conclusion of the Lenten season, I am called to reflect on the Sermon on the Mount. Christ’s words serve as comfort and instruction to those who listen, and I’ve always seen the above excerpt from the fifth chapter of Matthew as deeply important in how Jesus tells us to live. There’s a long history of critique among the prophets of the Bible on how worship should look; this is then continued on in the mission of Christ. These verses paint a picture of someone coming to the altar and offering a gift or sacrifice to the Lord. They’ve probably spent a lot of time and money on this gift, most likely a well bred and taken care of animal. They’ve gone out of their way to the synagogue to offer this gift, sometimes traveling very far with their family. The person at the altar is by all appearances devout and dedicated to honoring Yahweh.

But our God does not see a life of faith as an individual endeavor. In this moment of complete attention to God, Jesus tells the people that they should first and foremost be attentive to their relationships with others. It’s a shocking command, to think of others before God, to put work on your worldly relationships before one with the divine, to interrupt a sacred ritual because of a fight with your neighbor. These instructions to reconcile with one another show us how deeply God cares about humanity. God sees our relationships with one another as important, worthy of work and care, more than a distraction. A wandering mind to a fight with a friend, an argument with a loved one, a disagreement with a neighbor in a time of worship; the Lord sees these as important.

Reflection Questions:

- How do you respond to conflict with others?
- At times, apologies can feel daunting and overwhelming when we work them up in our head. Reflect about a time an apology strengthened your relationship with someone.
- Act out Step Nine. If you’ve been hesitant to reach out to someone after a fight, this is your sign to send a text/make a phone call/go for a coffee. Rebuilding broken bonds between yourself and others is Christ commanded work.

Step Ten

We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

A devotional from Craig S., A LuMin-Austin community member:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

(Matthew 18:21-22)

I grew up with the translation that read 70x7 or 490 times. Either way, 77 or 490, that's a lot of forgiving! I would like to add a number 13 to the 12 steps. Number 13: Forgive thyself. Is it easy, probably not. Forgiving another person can be equally difficult. Sometimes it may be impossible to forgive someone else who has wronged you. I am thinking of those who may have been sexually abused. I do not believe that Jesus intends us to feel guilty for not being able to forgive. Sometimes forgiving another person is not an option. I do believe that Jesus is setting before us an important aspirational virtue. Forgive as much as you are able. With regard to recovery, self realization, growth, meaningfulness and wellness, forgiving oneself is second to none. Forgiving oneself can be an incredibly difficult, daily task. It has something to do with letting go of our own hurt. Forgiving a friend or loved one is an attempt to repair what is broken. Forgiving thyself can even lead to forgiving the person beside us.

Reflection Questions:

- Who do you see as easy to forgive? Who is more difficult to forgive?
- How is forgiveness healing?
- What is something that you need to forgive *yourself* for?

Step Eleven

We sought through prayer and mediation 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.

A devotional from Rebecca G., a LuMin–Austin community member:

*He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”
(Psalm 45:10)*

I am Rebecca, parent of an alcoholic. My son began drinking at age 22, until my husband and I could no longer deny his alcoholic state at the age of 28.

Knowing intuitively that God doesn’t wave a magic wand to answer prayer, I prayed as a desperate parent for God to intervene. Please send someone to intervene. Please, give my son an aversion to alcohol. Please, please, please.... I wanted instant answers.

With no answers coming, surrender was my only option (Step 1). Listening to God daily, slowly changed my ways of coercion, blaming and enabling to God’s way of love, hope and forgiveness.

I was the one who needed to show up for my son by working on myself. Support groups gave me resources. My husband and I began to work with, not against each other. We found courage to stage a family intervention, hoping that our son would agree to rehab.

The intervention followed the slow, steady work of God... Meditation. Silence. Listening. Meeting attendees only answered 3 questions every week. What did you do for yourself? What were your triggers? What resources were helpful?

To my surprise, my son showed up for every weekly zoom meeting, mainly out of fear that we were scheming. However, we soon realized it wasn’t just about him. It was about all of us making small changes that made us healthier. Our family prayers were holding our group together, but our silence and listening, allowed God to heal our hearts, hurts, and anger, showing us another way. Finally, after 6 months and one last drunken state, he agreed to 30 days of rehab. After 2.5 years of sobriety, he did have some setbacks. It is one day at a time, like our journey with God. Daily connection to God returns us to love, forgiveness, honest conversations, healing and joy.

Richard Rohr, author of [Breathing Under Water](#), stated it best. “People’s willingness to find God in their own struggle with life - *and let it change them* - is their deepest and truest obedience to God’s eternal will. At that point, God has won, the ego lost and your prayer has already been answered.” This is my prayer for you.

Reflection Questions:

- As modeled by the author, go back to Step One and read through Steps One–Eleven. Reflect upon what you’ve worked through this Lenten season.
- How do you see your relationship with God as “one day at a time”?