

Emotional Sobriety Workbook



Emotional sobriety is not about being free of emotions.
It's about letting go of our need to control.
To accept our imperfections.
To be emotionally balanced.
To take full responsibility for our emotions.
To not blame our emotional responses on other people.
To learn to soothe ourselves rather than react when things don't go our way.
In short, it's about growing up.
And maturing.

RWW26/August 2026
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Roanoke Women's Workshop 2026
A Breakout Session
The Next Frontier – Emotional Sobriety

Agenda

1. **Welcome & Opening Prayer**
Today's Purpose:
 - a. Stage II Recovery - emotional sobriety
 - b. How to develop real emotional sobriety
2. **Stage I Recovery**
 - a. Physical Sobriety - Step 1 Part 1
 - b. Influencers – Enablers or Encouragers?
3. **Alcoholism – Cunning, Baffling, Powerful**
 - a. Physical Compulsion - Allergy
 - b. Mental Obsession – Self Reliance
 - c. Spiritual Malady – Dependency
4. **Stage II Recovery – The Next Frontier – Bill W - In his own words**
5. **Definitions**
 - a. Alcoholic Handicap
 - b. What is physical and emotional sobriety?
 - c. Spiritual Malady – The Missing Piece
6. **The Solution - Into Action**
 - a. Part II – Step 1 - Same steps, deeper dive
 - b. Inward Unmanageability – Peel the Onion
 - c. Emotional Sobriety Inventory
7. **Q&A**
8. **Closing**

Resources: The Best of Bill, Language of the Heart, Emotional Sobriety I and II, The Big Book, The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Drop the Rock, The Ripple Effect, Emotional Sobriety Workbook (pdf) / [letsdothe12steps.com](https://the12steps.com).

THE NEXT FRONTIER— EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

another case. He doesn't feel frustrated or rejected. If his next case responds, and in turn starts to give love and attention to other alcoholics, yet gives none back to him, the sponsor is happy about it anyway. He still doesn't feel rejected; instead he rejoices that his one-time prospect is sober and happy. And if his next following case turns out in later time to be his best friend (or romance) then the sponsor is most joyful. But he well knows that his happiness is a by-product—the extra dividend of giving without any demand for a return.

The really stabilizing thing for him was having and offering love to that strange drunk on his doorstep. That was Francis at work, powerful and practical, minus dependency and minus demand. In the first six months of my own sobriety, I worked hard with many alcoholics. Not a one responded. Yet this work kept me sober. It wasn't a question of those

alcoholics giving me anything. My stability came out of trying to give, not out of demanding that I receive.

Thus I think it can work out with emotional sobriety. If we examine every disturbance we have, great or small, we will find at the root of it some unhealthy dependency and its consequent unhealthy demand. Let us, with God's help, continually surrender these hobbling demands. Then we can be set free to live and love; we may then be able to Twelfth Step ourselves and others into emotional sobriety.

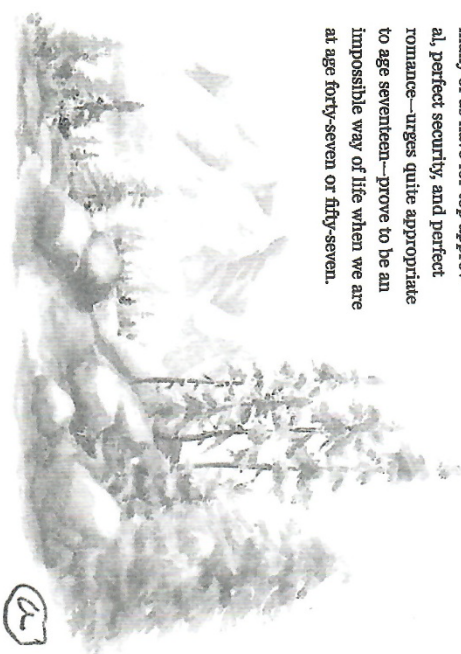
Of course I haven't offered you a really new idea—only a gimmick that has started to unhook several of my own "hexes" at depth. Nowadays my brain no longer races compulsively in either elation, grandiosity or depression. I have been given a quiet place in bright sunshine.

Bill W.

* I think that many oldsters who have put our AA "pooze cure" to severe but successful tests still find they often lack emotional sobriety. Perhaps they will be the spearhead for the next major development in AA—the development of much more real maturity and balance (which is to say, humility) in our relations with ourselves, with our fellows, and with God.

Those adolescent urges that so many of us have for top approval, perfect security, and perfect romance—urges quite appropriate to age seventeen—prove to be an impossible way of life when we are at age forty-seven or fifty-seven.

Since AA began, I've taken immense wallops in all these areas because of my failure to grow up, emotionally and spiritually. My God, how painful it is to keep demanding the impossible, and how very painful to discover finally, that all along we have had the cart before the horse! Then comes the final agony of seeing how awfully wrong we have been, but still finding ourselves unable to get off the emotional merry-go-round.



me—commencing to get results.

Last autumn [several years back—

ed], depression, having no really rational cause at all, almost took me to the cleaners. I began to be scared that I was in for another long chronic spell. Considering the grief I've had with depressions, it wasn't a bright prospect.

I kept asking myself, "Why can't the Twelve Steps work to release depression?" By the hour, I stared at the St. Francis Prayer ...

"It's better to comfort than to be comforted." Here was the formula, all right. But why didn't it work?

✱ Suddenly I realized what the matter was. My basic flaw had always been dependence—almost absolute dependence—on people or circumstances to supply me with prestige, security, and the like. Failing to get these things according to my perfectionist dreams and specifications, I had fought for them. And when defeat came, so did my depression.

There wasn't a chance of making the outgoing love of St. Francis a workable and joyous way of life until these fatal and almost abso-

lute dependencies were cut away.

Because I had over the years undergone a little spiritual development, the absolute quality of these frightful dependencies had never before been so starkly revealed. Reinforced by what Grace I could secure in prayer, I found I had to exert every ounce of will and action to cut off these faulty

emotional dependencies upon people, upon AA, indeed, upon any set of circumstances whatsoever.

Then only could I be free to love as Francis had. Emotional and instinctual satisfactions, I saw, were really the extra dividends of having love, offering love, and expressing a love appropriate to each relation of life.

✱ Plainly, I could not avail myself of God's love until I was able to offer it back to Him by loving others as He would have me. And I couldn't possibly do that so long as I was victimized by false dependencies.

✱ For my dependency meant demand—a demand for the posses-

sion and control of the people and the conditions surrounding me.

While those words "absolute dependency" may look like a gimmick, they were the ones that helped to trigger my release into my present degree of stability and quietness of mind, qualities which I am now trying to consolidate by offering love to others regardless of the return to me.

This seems to be the primary healing circuit: an outgoing love of God's creation and His people, by means of which we avail ourselves of His love for us. It is most clear that the real current can't flow until our paralyzing dependencies are broken, and broken at depth. Only then can we possibly have a glimpse of what adult love really is.

Spiritual calculus, you say? Not a bit of it. Watch any AA of six months working with a new Twelfth Step case. If the case says "To the devil with you" the Twelfth Stepper only smiles and turns to



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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.

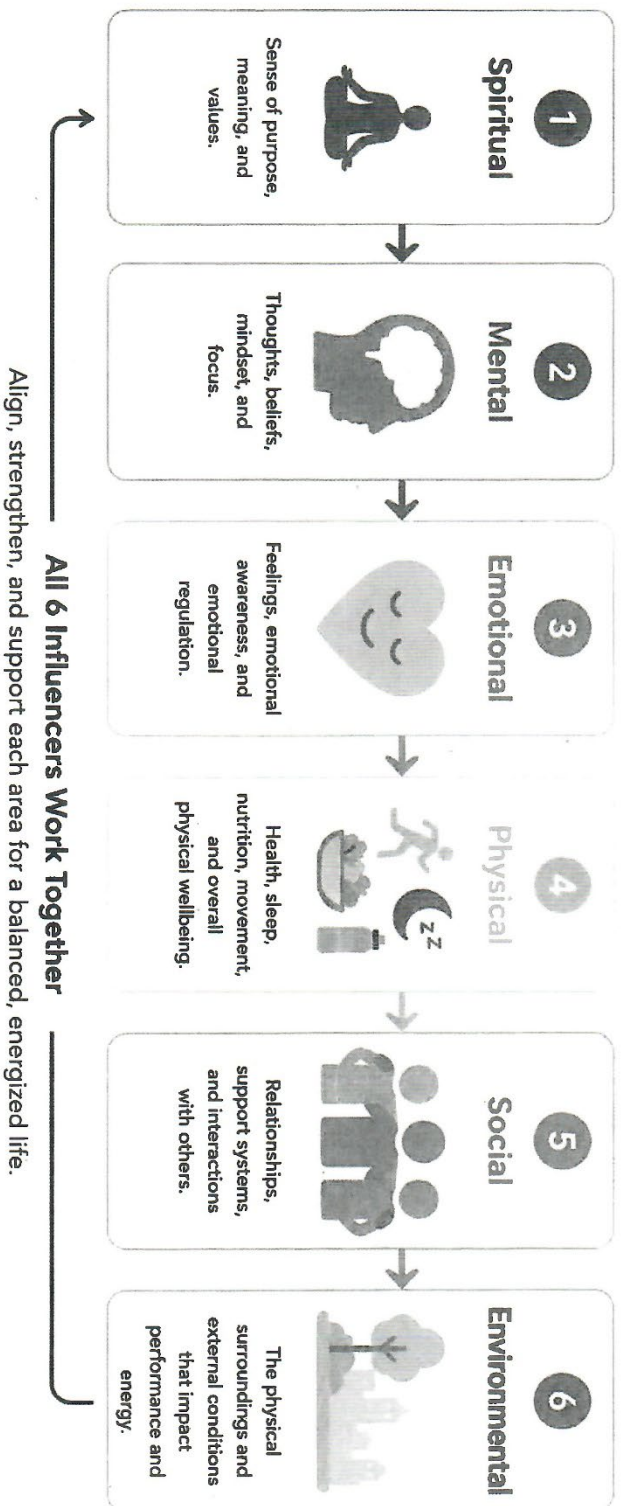
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The Twelve Steps are explained in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

www.aa.org



Life Circumstances + Events ON Life's Terms



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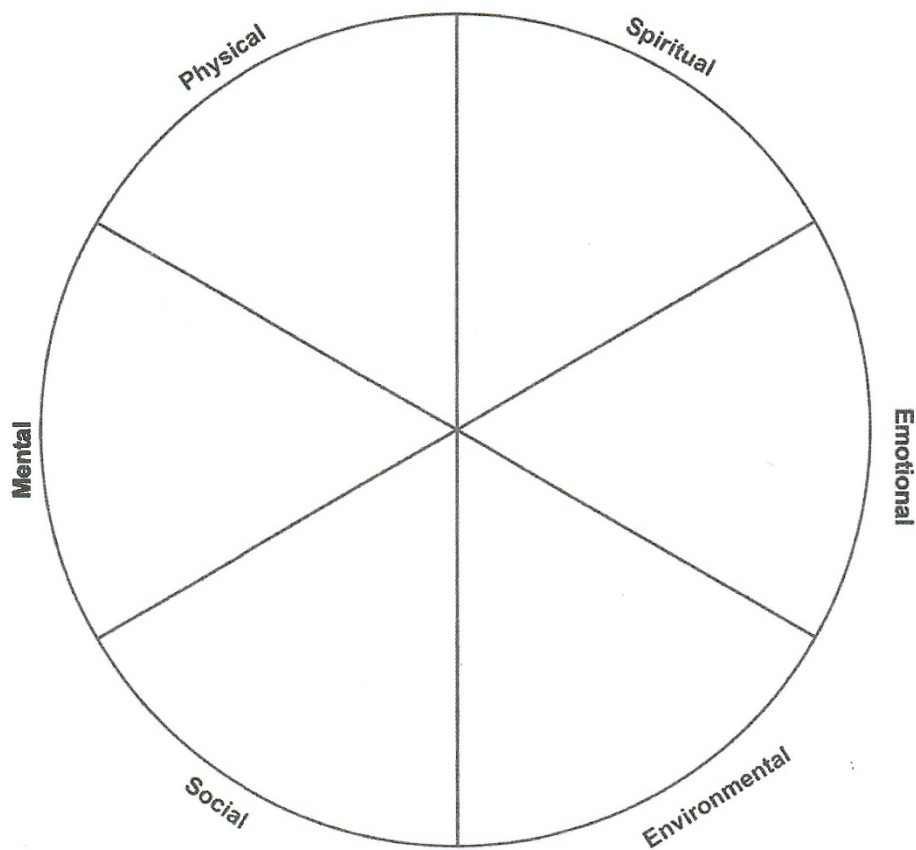
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Emotional Sobriety Workshop 2026
RWW 2026 4H Educational Conference Center

- **Alcoholism – threefold disease – body, mind, and soul/spirit.**
- **Physical sobriety** focuses on abstaining from alcohol & other harmful substances.
- **Emotional Sobriety** focuses on managing emotional dependencies & reactions.
- **Life circumstances** including people, places & things influence our mindset - sobriety and serenity.

This is a **Self-awareness/reflection** tool about how circumstances & people, places & things affect us is important. (10th step) On a scale of 1-10 ten being outstanding and 1 being no idea, rate yourself without consulting anyone. We will have a chance to talk about what we discover. Disclosure is optional.



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Definitions

What is the handicap of the alcoholic?

- Inward Unmanageability
- Emotional immaturity
- Over reliance on external resources (people, places, & things) to determine our self-worth

Symptoms of Immaturity:

- Restless, Irritable, Discontent – before we even take a drink
- Chronic sense of uneasiness
- Continually putting yourself down
- Seeking approval, acceptance and emotional security from someone or something
- Feeling like a victim
- Blaming others when needs are unmet.
- Input of others determines how I feel about me.
- Seeking others to give me a feeling of self-worth
- Expectations that the world and people in it, will "agree" with you.
- When expectations are not met, we are defeated resulting in depression.

What is physical sobriety?

- Freedom from alcohol – dependency on a substance
- Freedom from the cravings for alcohol – freedom from reliance on a relief from a substance

What is emotional sobriety?

- Mature love and intimacy in relationships and how we engage in life.
- A Dependence on a higher power as my source of well-being.
- Freedom from dependence on others as our source of well-being & self-worth
- Freedom to be honest and live our lives without people pleasing/an authentic self.

What is spiritual malady?

False dependencies on people, places, and things rather than reliance on a higher power.

Part 1 of Step 1 states "we admitted we were powerless over alcohol. Part II of Step 1 states our lives had become unmanageable.

The reality is that for a long-time life was unmanageable because of all the crazy and insane things we did while drinking.

Things like car accidents, hurting people when we did not mean to, failed relationships, loss of jobs, family dysfunction, jails, asylums, etc.

These things can be classified as "unmanageability. Some refer to the behaviors which come from page 52 of the Big Book. Page 64 refers to his as "inward

"unmanageability" as "the spiritual malady." The missing piece is unmanageability including our sober behaviors after we stop drinking. Managing our emotions. Every

thought creates a feeling, and every feeling results in an action. Reliance and trust in a higher power rather than external sources of release is the solution.

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Spiritual Malady Symptoms in the Doctor's Opinion

Dr. William D. Silkworth describes the core symptoms of the spiritual malady on page xxviii (often page xxvi in older editions).

He explains that before an alcoholic even takes a drink, they suffer from being:

- **Restless**
- **Irritable**
- **Discontent**

Because of this painful internal state, the alcoholic seeks the experience of **ease and comfort** that comes from taking a few drinks.

This creates a vicious cycle: the drink triggers a physical **allergy (craving)**, leading to a binge, followed by remorse, which returns them right back to being restless, irritable, and discontent.

How the 12 Steps Target the Spiritual Malady

The 12 Steps act as a direct psychological and spiritual surgery to remove the underlying causes of this restlessness.

- **Steps 1 to 3 (Defeating the Ego):** The alcoholic admits absolute defeat over alcohol and self-will, clearing the way to rely on a Power greater than themselves.
- **Steps 4 to 7 (Uncovering and Cleaning out Past Blocks):** A rigorous moral inventory exposes the resentments, fears, and harms that block the individual from spiritual peace. Confessing and asking to remove these defects deflates the ego.
- **Steps 8 and 9 (Restoring Relationships):** Making direct amends repairs the wreckage of the past, removing lingering guilt and rebuilding social connections.
- **Steps 10 to 12 (Daily Maintenance and Growth):** Daily self-examination, prayer, meditation, and helping other alcoholics keep the ego in check, ensuring the spiritual malady does not return.

3

An Emotional Sobriety "Inventory"



1. What is disturbing me (anything causing anxiety or worry, anything we over think or replay, things that separate you from God or block your serenity – peace of mind)?

2. My Reaction or How I Responded in a Situation
 - a. Move Against (controlling people through anger)

 - b. Move Towards (trying to please a person, people)

 - c. Move Away (Avoidance, withdrawing emotionally, what were your thoughts? Examples they think I'm a loser. What did you feel? Examples - inferior, frightened, ashamed, impatient. How did your body react? Examples – nauseous, gut upset, shaky, sweating. What did you fantasize? Examples – I wish they would disappear.

3. My Unreasonable Expectation or Demand (Control)
 - a. I expect you to follow my script.

 - b. I demand you show me respect by ...

4. My Unhealthy Dependence (Based on Fear)
 - a. I depend on someone or something.....to do something....so I feel....

5. What are my unmet needs?
 - a. I need to be

6. How do I reconnect and depend on God so I can give to others?

These pains you feel are messengers, Listen to them. Rumi

From the "Emotional Sobriety Workbook"

Shift From Self-Reliance to God-Reliance in the Big Book

The Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous* teaches that lasting sobriety requires a transition from relying on personal willpower to depending on a Higher Power.

Why Self-Reliance Fails

The alcoholic's willpower cannot overcome the physical craving or mental obsession.

- Attempts at self-control, discipline, or personal promises consistently break down.
- Emotional dependence on people or circumstances leads to insecurity and repeated disappointment.

Big Book Passages

The Doctor's Opinion

- Establishes that alcoholics cannot rely on their own will.
- Describes the physical allergy and mental obsession that make self-reliance ineffective.

2. Bill's Story

- Bill tries every form of self-reliance—logic, discipline, determination—and fails.
- Turning point accepting spiritual help.
- "Quit playing God" - the beginning of spiritual dependence.

3. There Is a Solution

- States that **no human power** could relieve the alcoholic's problem.
- Introduces the necessity of a Higher Power.

4. More About Alcoholism

- Repeated examples of alcoholics who rely on self-knowledge and fail.
- Self-reliance is a delusion for the alcoholic.

5. We Agnostics

- Directly addresses the need to find a Power greater than oneself.
- Spiritual reliance is essential for recovery.

6. How It Works (Step Three)

- Formal decision to turn one's will and life over to God as we understand God.
- Identifies self-centeredness as the root problem.

7. Into Action (Steps 10–11)

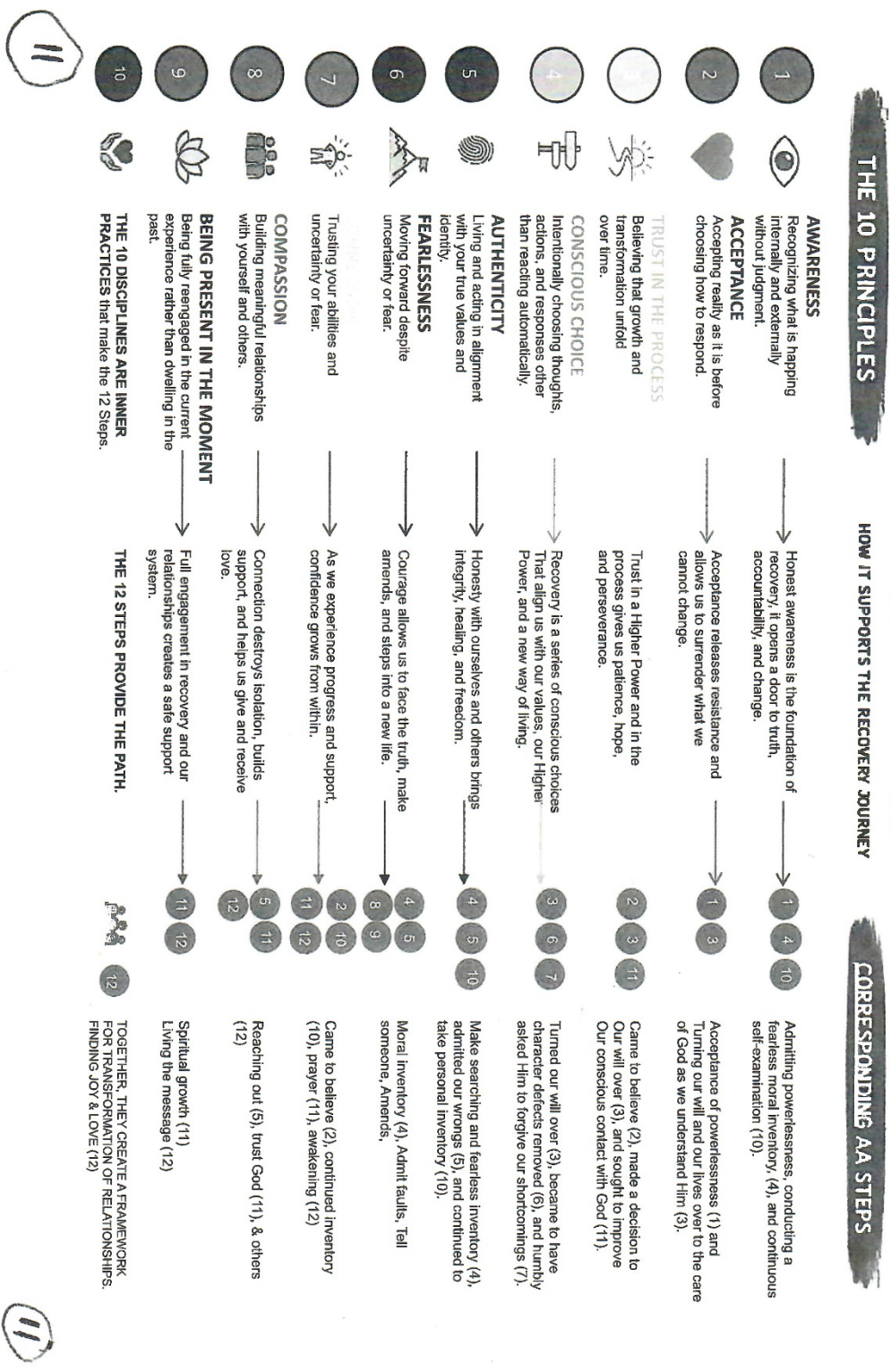
- Teaches daily reliance on a higher power through prayer, meditation, and spiritual practice.
- Shows that a God-reliance is ongoing, not a one-time event.

8. Working With Others

- Service becomes an expression of spiritual dependence.
- Strength to help others comes through God, not personal power.

10 PRINCIPLES & AA's TWELVE STEPS

Two Paths. One Journey. Lasting Freedom.



'Prayer For Today'

Take a breath.
Slowly. Again.
Now repeat after me-
May I stop fighting battles
that only exist inside my fears.
May I release what I cannot
control and protect what I can.
May I remember that a
difficult day is not a difficult life.
May I be gentler with the heart that has
carried me through every storm.
May I trust that what is meant for me
does not require me to abandon myself.
May I find courage where fear once lived.
Peace where chaos once stood.
And light where darkness thought
it would stay.
Today, I choose hope over helplessness.
Faith over fear.
And one more step forward
over standing still.

