

Biblical resources for pastoral care

The 12 steps in scripture

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Introduction

This paper presents a list of Bible (including Apocrypha) passages that the writer would use if he were to write a comprehensive theology of pastoral care.

This list is based on the 12 steps. Although usually associated with Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) and similar organisations, the underlying principles may be useful to everybody, not just those suffering from addictions, and may be used as a basis for pastoral care in many situations.

The 12 steps were derived from the principles of surrender, restitution and sharing espoused by the Oxford Group, an evangelical movement that was the forerunner of AA. (Hemfelt & Fowler 1990:19). This paper uses the writer's inclusive adaptation of the 12 steps. (See Appendices).

Although the 12 steps are written in the first person, one is usually assisted by a 'sponsor', meaning that there is ongoing pastoral care involved.

While similar work has also been done by others (and there is some overlap here with Hemfelt & Fowler), the writer has searched the scriptures for himself.

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless - that our lives had become unmanageable.

Paradoxically, admitting our powerlessness facilitates change so that we can progress towards wholeness.

¹²The Israelites said to Moses, 'We are perishing; we are lost, all of us are lost!
(Numbers 17:12)

Other passages that may assist with step one include Job 17; Psalm 22; Psalm 38; Psalm 55:4-8; Psalm 88; Psalm 120; Proverbs 18:14; Ecclesiastes 2:11; Romans 7:18-20; and 2 Peter 2:19.

Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

The realisation that we are not the master of the universe is the logical progression from our admission of powerlessness.

"Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power – that One is God. May you find Him now!" (AA 1939: 59). Open mindedness is the key.

“Whether agnostic, atheist or former believer, we can stand together on this step. True humility and an open mind can lead us to faith, and every A.A. meeting is an assurance that God will restore us to sanity if we rightly relate ourselves to Him”. (AA 1952:33).

²³Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.’ ²⁴Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ (Mark 9:23-24)

Other passages that may assist with step two include: Exodus 4:1-9; Psalm 34:18; Ezekiel 34:16a; Jonah 2:2b; Matthew 9:28; Mark 5:36; Mark 11:22-24; Luke 1:37; Luke 11:9-10; Luke 18:35-43; John 1:1-5; John 3:16; John 6:69; John 7:37-38; John 8:12; John 11:25-27; John 12:46; and Acts 3:16.

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God of our understanding.

Surrender to “God of our understanding” requires a conscious decision. Although this paper is focussed on the Bible, this decision does not require conversion to any particular religious tradition.

⁴Then the Lord called, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ and he said, ‘Here I am!’ (1 Samuel 3:4)

Other passages that may assist with step three include: Job 8:5-6; Psalm 9:9-10; Psalm 17; Psalm 23; Psalm 86:11; Isaiah 45:22-23; Joel 2:32; Matthew 6:33; John 5:24; Acts 2:21; Acts 9:1-22; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 2:8; and 1 Peter 2:25.

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

Once we have handed over to God, we need to have a clear understanding of ourselves, our assets and liabilities, before we can progress further.

⁴⁰Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the Lord. (Lamentations 3:40)

Other passages that may assist with step four include: Psalm 90:8; Psalm 139; Luke 11:33-36; Luke 12:2-3; Romans 3:23; 1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 10:12; 2 Corinthians 13:5a; Galatians 6:3-5; and Hebrews 4:13.

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

This is where pastoral care is at its most interactive, and sharing one's inventory with another person is extremely liberating.

⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Other passages that may assist with step five include: Psalm 51:3-4; Proverbs 28:13; Jeremiah 14:20; The Prayer of Manasseh 9-12; Hebrews 4:16; and James 5:16.

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

Our inventory will reveal some positive traits but will also reveal some defects of character. Step six requires us to be genuinely willing to let go of all these defects, without holding back any.

¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. (Revelation 22:14)

Other passages that may assist with step six include: Job 5:17-26; Job 22:21; Psalm 119:29-30; Jeremiah 15:19; Jonah 3:10; Romans 6:12-14; Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:5-11; Titus 2:11-12; and James 1:21.

Step 7: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

When we are ready, we humbly ask God to actually remove these defects.

⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

Other passages that may assist with step seven include: 2 Chronicles 32:26; Lamentations 5:21; Hosea 14:4; The Prayer of Manasseh 13-14; Luke 15; Acts 3:19; and Revelation 3:3.

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

We prepare to make amends to others, regardless of whether they have harmed us. It is up to us to keep clean our side of the street clean, and we must be prepared to forgive others if we expect forgiveness for ourselves.

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Other passages that may assist with step eight include: Psalm 133; Matthew 5:44; Matthew 18:21-25; Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37-42; John 13:34-35; Romans 12:17; and 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13.

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

We now make our amends with others, usually by unconditional apology. (Amends are not made in situations where they would cause further harm).

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

Other passages that may assist with step nine include: Proverbs 3:27; Proverbs 16:6-7; Proverbs 25:11; Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:27-36; Luke 19:8; Colossians 3:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

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

We now reach the final three steps, which are often referred to as the “maintenance steps”. (Hemfelt & Fowler 1990:67).

The writer usually describes step ten as “taking steps one to nine on a daily basis”. Although we have put things right with God and with other people, we will still get it wrong. “Learning daily to spot, admit and correct these flaws is the essence of character-building and good living”. (AA 1952:95).

²⁴When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting-place, but not finding any, it says, “I will return to my house from which I came.” ²⁵When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. ²⁶Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first.’ (Luke 11:24-26)

Other passages that may assist with step ten include: Psalm 25:4-5; Psalm 85:8; Luke 6:41-42; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 4:9; Galatians 5:1; and 2 John 8.

Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God of our understanding, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

We must maintain our relationship with God of our understanding, and emphasis must be given to praying for God's will to be done, not our own.

⁹Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13)

Other passages that may assist with step eleven include: Psalm 1; Psalm 119:131-133; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:42; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; and 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5.

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practise these principles in all our affairs.

One of the earliest misconceptions the writer had about AA was that he could 'do the steps', get the certificate and go away cured. This was incorrect. A 12 step programme is practised on an ongoing basis, and this includes sharing the freedom it brings with those who seek it.

6 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Other passages that may assist with step twelve include: Exodus 33:19; Deuteronomy 32:3; 1 Chronicles 16:23; Psalm 22:22-23; Matthew 5:13-16; Mark 5:18-20; Luke 4:16-21; 2 Corinthians 5:20; and 1 Timothy 1:12-16.

Conclusion

The above is a useful (but not exhaustive) list of Bible passages that may be of use when assisting a person to journey through the 12 steps (or when taking this journey ourselves).

The 12 steps can be adapted to deal with many pastoral issues and as a framework for a spiritually based life for anybody. The most transformative pastoral care the writer has ever received was based on the 12 steps, and he wholeheartedly endorses applying these principles in all aspects of our lives, to bring wholeness and reconciliation to both others and to ourselves.

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Appendix 1

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.

From Chapter 5 'How It Works', *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Appendix 2

An inclusive adaptation of the twelve steps by the writer

1. We admitted we were powerless - 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 of our understanding.
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 God 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 of our understanding, praying only for knowledge of God's 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 others and to practise these principles in all our affairs.