

STEP 1 – We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.

SUPPORTING VERSE: *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

- [Romans 7:1](#)

STORY/PARABLE: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector - Luke 18:9-14

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

THE HUMILITY OF HITTING ROCK BOTTOM

Recovery from addiction requires the spiritual discipline of *humility*. Many people find humility through the inevitable “undoing” of their lives as the negative consequences of their addictive behaviors compound with such weight as to bring them to a point of absolute surrender. This might be the experience of a painful and embarrassing event such as a DUI, a jail sentence, a wrecked car, a physical altercation, a severe physical illness, the loss of a job, a divorce, etc. Some people don’t need an event like this as they simply become exhausted from the process of trying to keep their lives together while lying, hiding and manipulating others to keep their addiction under control. This realization is affectionately called “*rock bottom*” by many who have experienced it and have made the successful turn towards recovery. Whatever name it is given, it is the *spiritual turning point* when we fully recognize our own *inability* to successfully and enjoyably experience life. This sense of humility arrives when we have come to the end of ourselves, recognizing that we truly are *powerless* over our addiction and that our lives have become *unmanageable*.

The Pharisee in this parable is affirming his own self-righteousness with a selfish prayer acknowledging a short laundry list of common sins that he proudly avoids: “stealing,” “adultery,” and general “evil-doing.” He is looking outwardly at others and comparing himself with them in order to affirm his own value, thankful that he is “not like that tax collector.” He is exhibiting the *opposite* of humility, the spiritual malady of *pride*, which blinds him from taking an honest look at himself to consider his own shortcomings. He cannot be *real with himself*. The Pharisee does not *acknowledge his need* for the power of God to accomplish the righteous acts he carries out - he believes he is able to do it on his own. This is an example of a person completely separated from the heart of God, fully held captive by his own religious acts.

The tax collector, on the other hand, is exhibiting the spiritual discipline of *humility*. While we don’t know the specific back story of his experience, we do know much about him based on the other details of Jesus’ parable and the culture in general. Tax collectors were hated and despised in first century Roman life. They were engaged in legal extortion – collecting Caesar’s tax for Rome while adding a “commission” for themselves in the process, all done under the threat of Roman law upon their subjects. They had terrible reputations and were hated and feared by almost everyone. This tax collector was obviously at the end of himself. He is at his own, personal “rock bottom.” He has found himself in such spiritual bankruptcy that he can’t even bring himself to look upward to heaven as he pleads for God’s forgiveness. He is engaged in a serious moment of self-reflection and is appalled and horrified by the realization as he beats his chest and cries out to God, “*Have mercy on me because I am a sinner.*” He realizes his own efforts to make himself happy and live a successful life have failed miserably. This is a perfect example of a man being *real with self*, understanding that he is powerless indeed. This is but one of the Bible’s examples of a person at Step 1, realizing his own powerlessness.

ENGAGE AND DISCUSS

1. Based on what you’ve been learning, how would you define HUMILITY?

2. What is keeping the Pharisee from seeing his own sin?

3. What *might be* one or two NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES that the tax collector might experience as he hits rock bottom and starts to recover his true life?

4. Who is more “righteous” in God’s sight in this passage – the religious Pharisee or the sinful tax collector?

I've included some additional reading along with two suggested exercises below that will help you take this spiritual step. Both the readings and the exercises will assist in reviewing your own state of spiritual powerlessness and the unmanageability of your life and bringing it into the reality of the present physical realm. These exercises should be done on paper, hand-written and kept for future reference in your Recovery Notebook. They should also be discussed with your sponsor, guide or a close friend. God has a special purpose for the material in these exercises that He will reveal to you as you move through the 12 Steps *into a life of recovery, redemption and restoration*.

ADDITIONAL READING:

- **READ:** 12 Steps and 12 Traditions - Step 1 (pages 21 -24)
- **READ:** Alcoholics Anonymous "Big Book" –
 - Prologue: The Doctor's Opinion
 - Chapter One: Bill's Story

STEP ONE EXERCISES

In order to complete Step 1, you will need to have a full, conscious grasp of your own powerlessness over our addiction and accept that your life has truly become unmanageable to one degree or another. In order to accomplish this, we recommend the following two written exercises that are helpful to bring a "*spiritual concept*" into the physical realm as we put our experiences and thoughts on paper.

EXERCISE ONE: 20 Negative Consequences

Write out 20 (or more) negative consequences of your addiction. These might include legal or financial setbacks or damage, loss or damage to relationships, emotional or physical damage to self, loss or employment, loss of privileges, etc. Be specific and accept responsibility for your actions in the way you phrase the consequence, i.e....

- *"I was fired from my job because I drank at work while I was on duty."*
- *"My wife divorced me because I viewed pornography and cheated on her with someone else."*
- *"I had to file bankruptcy because I wasted my family's resources by buying pills."*

DO NOT type this exercise on a computer, mobile phone or electronic device. It is most powerful and effective when *handwritten*.

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES WORKSHEET

WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ADDICTION?

This spiritual exercise is designed to help you acknowledge and take responsibility for the negative consequences of your addiction and show the “unmanageability” of your current way of life. **Write down 20 or more negative consequences** that you have experienced as a result of your addiction. Write each experience in the first person and use language that **describes how you are taking responsibility for your actions** without minimizing, deflecting or excusing your behavior. Some examples would be, “I lost my job because I was drinking at work” or “My wife divorced me because I cheated on her with another woman” or “I got a DUI and went to jail because I was driving drunk.”

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“THE STORY OF MY ADDICTION” WORKSHEET

EXERCISE TWO: My Story - The Progression, Powerlessness and Unmanageability of My Addiction

Write out your own personal story of the history of your addiction. Start from as far back as you can remember when you first used (substance) or acted out (behavior) and work forward in time. Tell the story of how your use or acting out progressed over time.

- **Focus on PROGRESSION:** Mention each significant event when your use or acting out increased or progressed in some way.
- **Focus on POWERLESSNESS:** Mention the times you tried or vowed to stop, put some kind of boundaries on your addiction or quit cold-turkey only to find yourself right back using or acting out again at some point.
- **Focus on UNMANAGEABILITY:** Mention the negative consequences that you experienced as a result of your addiction and how they impacted your life and relationships.

DO NOT type this exercise on a computer, mobile phone or electronic device. It is most powerful and effective when *handwritten*. Be detailed and thorough. Your story should be 5 to 10 handwritten pages or more. Write your story on blank pages in your journal or recovery notebook.