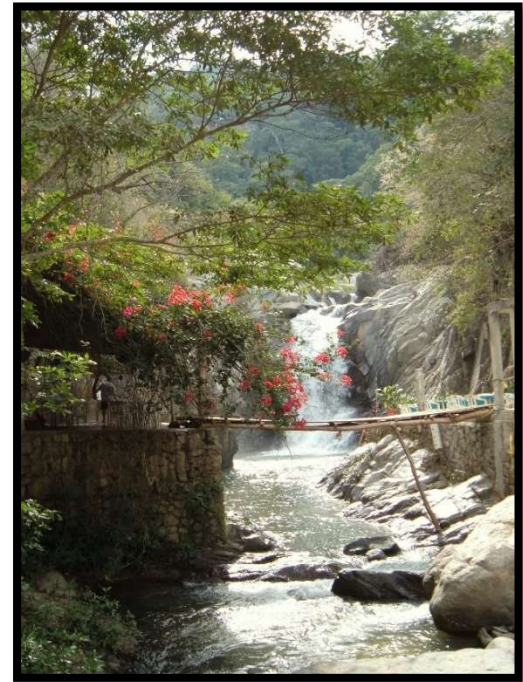


Life With God In Recovery

STEP FOUR: Selfishness



SELFISHNESS

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

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (Philippians 2:3-4 NLT)

Life in addiction narrowed our primary focus to a self-centered vision of what we wanted or what we thought we needed. Life in recovery is a journey of recognizing the familiar selfish ways we have behaved in the past and seeking God's help to teach us how to live respectfully towards others in the future.

The founders of AA were not wrong when they described the selfishness problem this way: *"Selfishness – self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt. Above everything, we must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!"* (Big Book pages 62-63)

Selfish people have difficulty seeing things from someone else's point of view. Persons in addiction are seldom concerned with what is in the best interest of others. Unfortunately, this mindset does not automatically change when we choose to give up our destructive habits. Unless we intentionally come to know and put into effect a Godly way of living, we will simply act out our selfish mindset in a different capacity. We will merely substitute our former selfish life focus of "me and my addiction" for an equally harmful self-focused life of "me and my recovery".

While it is important to concentrate on our beliefs and behaviours in early recovery, it's more important to seek recovery from God's viewpoint. God's perspective is what we see when we look at ourselves through the mirror of His word. **I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.** (John 13:34 NLT) We learn how to love others by receiving God's love and forgiveness which He offers through the finished work of Jesus on the cross. As we come to know and live in the security of God's love, we find strength and a new desire to live in unselfish ways.

Stopping destructive practises or abusing ourselves with harmful substances is a great beginning to life in recovery. However, we need to deal with the underlying root that caused us to turn to those habits and addictive substances in the first place or else we

may find ourselves doomed to failure over and over again. That's why, in the Bible, the mindset of selfishness is included along with drunkenness as one of the many harmful desires of our sinful nature.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. (Galatians 5:19-20 NLT)

Selfishness, self-will and self-centeredness are characteristics that run deep in all of us. These traits are clearly evident in our past unwillingness to follow God's principles. They are also the root of most of our sinful behaviour in active addiction. Minus our addictive attachments, where do we see evidence that selfishness might still have roots in our hearts and hinder us from having healthy relationships with others? The Bible gives us the following answers:

An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. (Proverbs 18:1 NIV, James 3:16 NLT)

The Big Book continues: *"Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help ... First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life."* (Big Book pages 62-63)

The Bible gives us the solution to our self-centeredness which the founders of AA referred to: **By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.** (2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT)

Following are some specific principles God has given to help us leave behind self-centeredness and enter into a satisfying way of living:

1. Be Humble: Combating the sin of selfishness requires genuine humility. This means having a true perspective about ourselves in relation to God and to others. **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.** (Romans 12:3 NIV).

2. Pray and Study God's Word: Prayer and meditation on God's word are necessary to our well-being in recovery. The Bible teaches us to pray: **"Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain"** (Psalm 119:36 NIV).

3. Intentionally Honor Others: As we live with God in recovery our attitude towards others becomes one of genuine care and concern rather than personal approval seeking. **Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.** (Romans 12:9-10 NLT)

4. Give Generously: An unselfish person knows that money and possessions are for sharing not hoarding. A sure cure for selfishness is the practice of giving. **You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**" (Acts 20:35 NLT).

Let's learn from God's word contained in the Bible. Let's also learn from those who've gone before us and whose wisdom is contained in the Big Book of AA. Let's receive the love that God has for us and allow that all-encompassing love to overflow from us to others. Let's look beyond ourselves to loving God and loving others. Let's become the people God created us to be rather than remaining selfish self-centered people.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Do I agree with the founders of AA that selfishness and self-centeredness are at the root of all my problems?
2. Where do I recognize the damaging effects of self-centeredness during my time in active addiction?
3. How am I learning to seek God's perspective in situations rather than concentrating on my own viewpoint?
4. What does it mean to "quit playing God" and live for God's purposes rather than my own selfish interests and plans?
5. In what areas of my life am I allowing God to change my self-centered ways? Where do I continue to struggle?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask forgiveness for my selfish and insensitive ways towards You and towards others. Thank You for pursuing me with Your unfailing love even when my self-centered mindset was far from You. As You have loved and cared for me, I ask that You now teach me how to love and care for others. Please strengthen me with the power of Your Holy Spirit so I can persevere and exhibit patience in every circumstance. Thank You for Your faithful promises to sustain me. Lord, my desire is to glorify You with my life. Please help me to achieve this goal. AMEN