

THE FIX

How the Twelve Steps Offer a Surprising Path
of Transformation for the Well-Adjusted, the
Down-and-Out, and Everyone In Between

IAN MORGAN CRON

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The Fix

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To Aidan

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Chapter One

DESPERATE FOR A FIX

**What drives addiction is longing—
a longing not just of brain, belly,
or loins but finally of the heart.**

Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the
Way It's Supposed to Be*

I was not born into a family of optimists. So one day, when I woke up to discover that my latest book—which my agent had said wouldn't sell, my mother had said wouldn't sell, and even I'd said probably wouldn't sell—was flying out the door, I was slack-jawed.

As my friend Derek and I were walking into a Barnes & Noble, he pointed to a front-of-store table with piles of my latest book on it. "Dude, you're blowing up," he said.

Yes, I was blowing up alright, but not in the way Derek thought.

Behind the mask of confidence, I felt like a fraud, as if I'd conned everyone else into believing I was worthy of my accomplishments when actually I was just a poser. I feared that people would soon discover I was an impostor and abandon me in disgust. And so, by 2020, I was secretly taking enough prescription medications every day to deaden my feelings of terror and self-doubt that you'd have thought my life's ambition was to become a mobile CVS pharmacy. Thankfully, a monthlong stint in rehab that same year prevented me from achieving that ill-considered goal.

"Prescription drugs? Rehab? How did this happen to you, Ian?" you might ask. "You're an Episcopal priest, a therapist, an author who writes books about spirituality, rewriting your life narrative, the mysterious workings of the personality and the human heart. You previously had decades of recovery

from alcoholism. You have a nice home in a cool neighborhood in Nashville; you take vacations to Italy; you have two new cars in the garage. Dude, you even own goldendoodles. People who own goldendoodles don't take drugs and end up in treatment!"

Well, I did.

Repair Strategies

I'll soon provide you with all the unhappy details of my rack and ruin, doodles and all. How the reappearance of unruly ghosts from a difficult childhood, which I thought I'd put to rest, once again surfaced in my heart—like a jump scare from some mad uncle in the attic yelling, "Gotcha!"

But most important is what my relapse taught me: no matter how hard we try, we can't repair the enduring problem of the human condition—the pain of living in a world that's a colossal cock-up, a world that refuses to conform to our ideal of "how things should be," a world that repeatedly proves to us that our self-written prescriptions for soothing our emotional distress eventually cause us more problems than they solve.

Relapsing after decades of sobriety triggered a great deal of humiliation and shame. Now, years later, I still periodically wake up in the middle of the night and wonder, *WTF was I thinking?* All that said, it gave me one of the most important lessons of my life: my addiction wasn't the problem but only the symptom—I was in emotional, psychological, and spiritual pain and looking for "a fix," an external solution to an

internal problem. This is a fool's errand, like going to the hardware store to buy bread. Our self-prescribed treatment plans for managing our own interior distress never, never, never work; they just keep us chasing the dragon, searching for the next "fix."

Which is why this book is about more than finding recovery from our addictions. It's a deeper exploration into the Big Ache that fuels addictions and other besetting self-defeating behaviors and how we can't fix it—at least not by ourselves. But this exploration will be teeming with hope because the solution to what ails us is always within reach and has been hidden in plain sight all along.

I begin with the assumption that you know you're broken. Why else would you buy a book titled *The Fix* if you weren't? Did you buy it for your partner? For your mentally maladjusted mother-in-law? No, you bought it for *you*—because there are days in your life that scare you, when you feel crazier than a rat in a dumpster fire. You secretly worry that if the authorities knew just how daft you were, they would pluck you out of the general population and place you in a secure location to protect the innocent. (Don't fret; you're not alone. I have so many disturbing voices in my head, my counselor has threatened to charge me for group therapy.)

Thankfully, most days you pass for harmless, along with the general populace of reasonably functional, garden-variety neurotics who can make fun of their kooky peculiarities and laugh them away. Yet if we're honest, we'll admit we can't banish the gnawing feeling that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark," as Marcellus warned in Shakespeare's

Hamlet.¹ We're uncomfortable in our own skin, in the world around us, troubled by a sensation of incompleteness—as if there really is a “hole in our soul,” as countless spiritual masters have taught.

But we can't sit around on our bums all day fussing with our angst, so we repress these unsettling feelings or devise head-scratching strategies for exiling them to the land of shadows—that sunless realm beyond the fence-line of our awareness. Unfortunately, that murky sense of existential disease won't leave us alone. It follows us around like a feral cat wrapping its tail around our calves.

When the inner restlessness worsens, some of us begin to exhibit symptoms we, and sometimes others, can't ignore. We fall into misery-making patterns of crazy thinking, feeling, and behaving that baffle us and alienate us from ourselves and others. We become depressed, angry, anxious, lonely, and empty. Our relationships and work suffer.

So, what do we do? If you're like me and the rest of the huddled masses, you burn impressive numbers of calories trying to diagnose your own problem, as if naming it will endow you with magical powers to make it disappear. You go to therapy, attend self-growth retreats, practice yoga or mindfulness meditation, escape to a spa, take up Tai Chi, go on a diet (again), or read the latest self-help book that touts a miracle cure for what ails you.

Lord, have mercy, it's exhausting, right? I should know. I've tried every newfangled curative under the sun. (I even tried veganism once until it made me homicidal.)

So, what's our problem?

The Flaws in Our Best-Laid Plans

The Buddhists have a word that perfectly describes the human condition—*dukkha*. In Pali—an ancient language used in some Buddhist texts—this word translates to *suffering*, the source of which is a vague, underlying feeling of unease, inner lack, dissatisfaction, and inquietude. But I prefer how author and teacher Ethan Nichtern translates the word *dukkha* as the feeling of “not-at-home.”²

Not since Adam and Eve were banished from Eden and the prodigal son flipped off his father have any of us really felt at home in the world. We are fractions yearning to become whole numbers. We have unnamable desires and unattended sorrows we don’t know what to do with. We are filled with an inconsolable longing for what poet Anne Porter calls that “far-off and half-forgotten country . . . we half remember,”³ and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis describes as a land we know exists, but “have never yet visited.”⁴ In short, you and I were made for paradise, but we feel like we’re stuck in a Motel 6 on the border between heaven and earth.

This feeling of spiritual homelessness also shows up in the form of the inescapable pain that comes with living in a fallen world. We struggle with unresolved trauma, unfulfilled needs, grief, resentment, fractured relationships, self-contempt, a confidence deficit, insecurities that rob us of the lives we want to enjoy, and disappointment not only in ourselves but in those who we think should have loved us better but didn’t.

“Life shouldn’t be this way!” we cry.

No, it shouldn’t. But here we are.

So, what are psychologically and emotionally limping

spiritual exiles like us to do when our self-repair strategies fail to solve our suffering?

We seek little “hits of pleasure” that distract us from facing our *dukkha* and numb the trauma from those million little emotional muggings we have experienced along life’s way.

We spend hours in front of computer screens late at night watching porn while our family sleeps. We become technology addicts (sorry if you’re reading this on your Kindle or iPad); control addicts; internet addicts; workaholics; relationship addicts; people-pleasing addicts; alcohol and drug addicts (I’ll cop to both of those); drama addicts; video game junkies; sugar addicts; sex addicts; social media addicts; perfectionism addicts; status-seeking addicts; people who are addicted to the suffering of their past; sports junkies; plastic surgery addicts; tattoo addicts; Netflix addicts (curse you, *Seinfeld!*); shopping and spending addicts who have bumper stickers on the back of their cars that read, “I Brake for Garage Sales”; fantasy addicts; love addicts; rage addicts; “I need to be right” addicts; people who compulsively fix other people’s problems (to avoid fixing their own); approval junkies; compulsive liars or exaggerators; caffeine addicts (cue grimace); nicotine addicts (I still miss it); worry addicts; compulsive helpers; exercise addicts; weight and dieting addicts; knowledge junkies; gambling addicts; news and politics addicts; money and security addicts; popularity addicts; self-improvement addicts; adventure-adrenaline addicts; productivity addicts; God and religion addicts (yeah, that’s a thing); or food addicts—people like me who compulsively eat Fritos like they’re mad at them or something.

Now listen, I understand if you skimmed over this onerously long catalog of troublesome behaviors. But sit with it for

a moment and marvel with me at the bajillion self-medicating behaviors I left off it!

You know where I'm going, right? *We're all addicts.*

It's what humans do with their pain. No one's exempt—not even Mr. Rogers or the Dalai Lama. As psychiatrist Gerald May writes, "To be alive is to be addicted, and to be alive and addicted is to stand in need of grace."⁵

I used to consume heroic amounts of alcohol and prescription meds to relieve the pain associated with the aching feeling of "not-at-homeness" I felt in the world. I used substances to deaden unexamined pain from my childhood, to soothe the existential, free-floating anxiety that every human being must contend with. Beneath my chemical addictions lay my thirst for completion, for wholeness, for union with God, for peace with myself and others.

And what did I do?

I burned my life down to the ground.

Spiritual Workarounds

Chemical or process addictions (i.e., behavioral compulsions like viewing porn, gambling, spending, and countless others) are more than merely the deeply flawed means we use to avoid our half-cracked lives. They are also spiritual workarounds or shortcuts—self-designed strategies for making our lives more tolerable apart from reliance on the love, power, and grace of God. They consume our attention, drain our desire for the Divine, and attach it to idols, leaving us with less life energy to love other people, love ourselves, and love God.⁶

Which means addiction is another word for *sin*.

Now, before you have an apoplectic fit, let me offer a definition of that word that might sit better with you than the one you heard growing up from your creepy, snake-handling aunt. Richard Rohr writes, "Sins are fixations that prevent the energy of life, God's love, from flowing freely. . . . [They are] self-erected blockades that cut us off from God and hence from our own authentic potential."⁷

I may not entirely understand the doctrine of original sin, but I find it helpful to think of it as what I call the doctrine of original vulnerability. It helps us understand one of the reasons we have addictions in the first place. We're blasted into the furnace of life without adequate psychological defenses to fend off the unavoidable traumas, hurtful messages, and emotional injuries we all sustain in childhood. We then load these burdens into our little red Radio Flyer wagons and unconsciously pull them behind us into adulthood. Unfortunately, no one tells us how to heal these wounds. So, in adulthood, we end up developing chemical addictions, behavioral addictions, or recurrent self-defeating behaviors to cope with our dis-ease.

What makes it harder is that we live in a culture that normalizes and peddles addictive fixes. What better balm for the soul than the endless pursuit of material satisfaction? Advertisers and marketers have it down to a science. They know exactly how to hook us into believing their product or service will finally provide the fix for our inner turmoil. Years ago, I remember seeing an ad for a very expensive German sports car that proclaimed, "You can't buy happiness, but you can lease it." Or how about the T-shirt I once saw on an infant's

onesie: “I’m the reason Mommy drinks wine”? (It’s too bad there’s no fix for stupid.)

And how many online marketing campaigns have you seen that appeal to our universal addiction to trying to control people, places, or things? Go ahead. Type “take back control of your life” into the search field on your computer’s browser and see how many results pop up.

Don’t worry, I’ll be here when you get back.

Don’t all these messages sound like a drug dealer’s sales pitch: “The first taste is free, pal!?”

The reason we’re powerless over our addictions is that—like alcoholism, drug addiction, or gambling—sin (addiction) is a disease. It’s a deadly spiritual illness we inherited from our ancestors. Seriously, I wasn’t consulted about the moral and spiritual shortcomings that were handed down to me. I’ve tried with everything in my power to defeat the potpourri of habitual sins, nutty self-limiting behaviors, and addictions that regularly torment me. Trust me, I’d empty my bank account if I could pay to get rid of even a handful of them. Alas, I can’t. We can’t control or overcome sin on our own unaided willpower any more than we can cure our own asthma. We need help.

Four mornings a week, I drag myself out of bed and go to a church basement where my boozy confederates and I sit in a circle on freezing-cold metal folding chairs to offer each other support as we recover from alcohol and drug addictions (and our many other fixations). Why? Because we have found a design for living that creates the natural soil in which we can grow in our relationship with God and so have the power to face the chronic sense of inner lack that landed us in that room in the first place.

I know firsthand what happens when we devise our own treatment plans to cure our spiritual homesickness on our own terms, without God's help. Bypassing God leads us to try other means of coping—the compulsive, self-defeating behaviors we use to anesthetize the Big Ache and make life more bearable *without God's involvement*. These strategies will eventually take us hostage. Take it from a guy who used to eat mood-altering substances like they were Tic Tacs—it's a really, really bad idea not to expose and dispose of your idols and adopt a new program of living to replace the one that's slowly (or not so slowly) cratering your life. God is the Great Physician, not us.

It can take ages before we realize just how much our addictions to things like food, drinking, work, trawling social media or doomscrolling the news on our smartphones, repeatedly returning to a hopelessly dysfunctional relationship, or any other compulsion is ravishing our emotional and spiritual life. As Gabor Maté says, "The attempt to escape from pain is what creates more pain."⁸

This is not what God had in mind for us.

The Bypass Tool of Denial

My later-in-life relapse came about because, in part, I forgot what life was like when I was in my active addiction years earlier. I began to think, *I've never been one of "those people." I've never curled up under a bridge asleep with a quart-sized plastic bottle of Smirnoff Vodka in my hands.* Oh dear, this is a well-worn script.

I had been in treatment for a week when I told my therapist, Jamie, “I’ve had some time to reflect on it, and I think my coming here was an overreaction. I’m sure my substance use isn’t as big a problem as I thought it was. All I need is more self-discipline and a can-do spirit! I can go home and lick this thing on my own, right?”

Jamie smiled and said, “If I had a nickel for every addict who said that to me, I could buy Europe.”

It took me a little while to warm up to Jamie.

This line of thinking is called *denial*, and everyone contends with this refusal to know what they know—that they have an addiction problem. Remember Faust? You know, the guy who made a deal with the devil? When he asked Mephistopheles, his visitor, who he was, he replied, “*I am the spirit who always denies.*”⁹

Addiction, like Mephistopheles, always denies that it’s slinking around in your psyche laying waste to your life. It is the only disease that will daily tell you that you don’t have a disease. In fact, your addiction gets a kick out of encouraging you to make New Year’s resolutions or promises to yourself to give up whatever your fix of choice is because it knows you can’t keep them—which, by the way, only makes your attachment to them stronger.

Unfortunately, denial often has a stronger grip on those with so-called “less obvious problems.”

Let me explain. I remember attending my first Twelve-Step recovery meeting and hearing people introduce themselves by saying, “My name is so-and-so, and I’m a grateful recovering alcoholic.”

Grateful? I thought. *Is this person still sozzled?*

But recovering chemical addicts like me have a reason to feel more grateful than people with secret, seemingly “less grave” addictions or crazy-making behavior patterns. My pharmaceutical misadventures eventually became glaringly apparent to family and friends, and I was eventually given the “you’re becoming a socially indigestible sod” lecture and carted off to treatment, where I could find sobriety and recovery again. In rehab, I was afforded the luxury of time and support to uncover the “underlying causes and conditions” of the physical, emotional, and spiritual dis-ease that fed my addictions.

Sadly, people don’t generally stage interventions for friends who are addicted to work, approval-seeking behavior, or the internet and send them somewhere where they can tend to their broken hearts and spirits and find freedom and joy. As a result, many people with less obvious but equally soul-killing addictions go to their graves without ever embarking on a healing journey.

I beg you—don’t do that!

On Awakening

No one checks themselves into rehab because they’re on a winning streak. At least I didn’t. By the time I stumbled into treatment for my addiction to prescription drugs, I wanted nothing more to do with me. As my dear friend Mary says, “You know you’ve hit bottom when you break your own heart.” Trust me, by the end of my last pharmaceutical jag, my heart was shattered.

When I first arrived at the treatment center nestled in the mountains of Utah, where I would spend the next thirty days working to recover the person I had lost, I'd hardly removed my coat before one of the staff people handed me a copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (a.k.a. *The Big Book*—the name I'll use from here on out) in which the Twelve Steps are laid out.

Perhaps you've heard of the Twelve Steps but don't really know what they are. The coauthor of the Twelve Steps was a hopeless alcoholic named Bill Wilson who found recovery as the result of a Damascus Road–like spiritual experience in a hospital room where he was dying from alcoholism. From that day forward, Bill never drank again.

The Twelve Steps derived from the teachings of a Christian organization called the Oxford Group, but Wilson rewrote them in such a way that people, regardless of their religious background or spiritual orientation, could benefit from them. What Bill Wilson came to understand was that the addict's problem was principally spiritual, not psychological or moral, and therefore required a spiritual solution. Thus, the purpose of the Twelve Steps was to enable alcoholics (or anyone else who wanted fixing and a better life) to have a spiritual awakening. Here's an amended version of the Twelve Steps. I've left the word *alcohol* out of the first Step so you can insert your chemical or behavioral "fixes of choice."

1. We admitted we were powerless over _____
—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 [our fellow sufferers], and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Don't worry if your first read of the Twelve Steps makes you think, *This is the fix? It seems too simple.* Well, thank Almighty God for that! The Twelve Steps were written in such a way that anyone, regardless of their social or educational background, could understand and work them.

People in recovery often say, “It’s a simple program for complicated people.” This Enneagram Four wouldn’t be sober today if this weren’t the case.

More importantly, the Twelve Steps aren’t snake oil. Lord forbid they become another wellness hack that those preternaturally attractive people wearing wide-brimmed hats blather about on TikTok. The Twelve Steps is a proven program that has literally saved millions of lives since these Steps were first published in 1939. All to say, there’s oodles of evidence that they can deliver on their promise to profoundly transform the human heart.

According to Bill Wilson, if you committedly “work the Steps,” you will eventually have a vital spiritual experience that will give you an entirely new and radically beautiful orientation toward life. When practiced as a way of life, they can expel your addictions and recurrent self-defeating behaviors and give you a “new pair of glasses” through which you will see yourself, others, and the world in a startlingly fresh way. The Twelve Steps will displace the broken old ideas that were once the guiding force of your life and replace them with a whole “new set of conceptions and motives.”¹⁰ This renewed relationship with God or a “Power greater than ourselves” will reconfigure your personality (your all too predictable and habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, and interpreting your experience of the world) and render your addictions unnecessary.

The Steps don’t just help a person abstain from a substance or habitual self-limiting behavior, *though that’s obviously the first order of business*. More importantly, they address the underlying emotional, spiritual, and psychological issues that caused the addiction in the first place. The aim of the Twelve Steps is to

draw us as close to God, ourselves, and others in this lifetime as possible. They teach us how to live joyfully in a riven world where we will never feel quite at home. They work.

Furthermore, the Steps are not abstract concepts, but straightforward and practical. They are not liberal, conservative, Protestant, Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, New Age, or Zoroastrian. You can be a Christian, a Jew, a Zen Buddhist, or an agnostic flat-earther and benefit enormously from working the Twelve Steps.

I'm a "Jesus guy," but some aspects of my tradition make my teeth hurt. Christianity is often long on "the what" but short on "the how." For instance, contemporary Christianity is often primarily a *belief-based* religion in which salvation is found merely by offering assent to a set of theological propositions.

The genius of the Twelve Steps is that it's predominantly a *practice-based* program that brings about the profound psychological and spiritual shift that mere intellectual belief in God cannot. Moreover, the Twelve Steps are completely consistent with the gospel. They put wheels on the teachings of Jesus. They transform faith from a belief system into a lifestyle.

For me, the Twelve Steps have made me a better follower of Jesus. They have complemented and illuminated my understanding of the gospel; I know scores of Christians in recovery who would say the same thing. Given how helpful they are for the Christian, I'm amazed at how long the church has overlooked them as a design for living.

I have a pal named Gene (not his real name) who was fired from his role as senior pastor of a large, theologically conservative, nondenominational congregation for showing up drunk

to church one Sunday. (I would have paid a hundred bucks for a front seat to that show.) He was only a minute or two into his slurred sermon when the elders realized he was completely potted and escorted him out of the sanctuary. There were no altar calls that week. Sadly, rather than help Gene find help, his church showed him the door.

One night after a meeting, he said to me, “Isn’t it ironic that I have found more grace, forgiveness, acceptance, and healing in the basement of churches where Twelve-Step recovery groups meet than I ever did upstairs in the sanctuary where so-called ‘normies’ gather to worship? I wish they knew what they’re missing!”

Now, here’s the good news. Bill Wilson said that the Twelve Steps offered a spiritual solution for not only the alcoholics and addicts meeting downstairs in the church basement but also for everyone upstairs in the sanctuary and beyond who is searching for “home”—a solution to the Big Ache—which is all of us. I have seen the Twelve Steps unscrew countless people’s screwed-up lives. And, yes, you can be one of them.

The Promise of Recovery

A Twelve-Step program is not a quick fix; it’s a way of life. You don’t work through the Steps once; you draw on their wisdom every day. This miraculous program isn’t only for alcoholics, drug addicts, or for people trapped in recurring cycles of self-damaging behaviors; it’s also for *anyone* who is “sick and tired of being sick and tired”—those who want to stop doing things to make themselves feel better that eventually do more harm

than good, who desperately want to learn how to live healthily in a world that doesn't feel quite right, who want to heal from their old wounds rather than resort to hidden or obvious addictions to try to numb or distract themselves. It's for folks who want to be free to love God, themselves, and others.

In this book, I'm going to tell you about a genuine, time-tested, evidence-based, Spirit-inspired "fix." It's not the failed quick fixes you currently subscribe to. In applying the Twelve Steps to your life, I'll show you the fix that can break you out of the prison of your addictions, warped thinking, and quackish behaviors, one that will finally help you get your life together the way you were meant to live it. In other words, I wrote this book to help you find recovery.

Recovery is a word you're going to see pop up in this book repeatedly, so let me tell you what it means for me. Recovery has meant infinitely more than learning to give up mood-altering substances and behaviors. That's just the beginning! If the terms *addiction* and *sin* are synonymous, then for me, the word *recovery* is interchangeable with the word *salvation*.

People often get all worked up when I tell them I believe Christianity is an enlightenment religion. But isn't the point of our faith journey to become filled with the light of Christ? For me, as a Christian, the goal of recovery is enlightenment, to enjoy the marvelous adventure of a divinely directed life, to have a daily reprieve from my addictions, and to become truly useful to God and of service to my fellows. I think my friends who come at the Twelve Steps from other spiritual points of view would agree with me.

In my experience, recovery is all about what you do with your pain and emptiness. Will you numb it and slowly

(or quickly) shipwreck your life? Or will you learn to walk with God in the often-painful tension of it all? Recovery is about discovering or rediscovering God in a way that will interrupt the circuit on your self-destructive behaviors and addictive strategies for making your life more tolerable. It is a new state of consciousness.

Unless you vacation in Sedona or you're into drum circles and crystals, you may not thrill to the idea of realizing a "new state of consciousness." But what if I told you it's the only way to satisfy the deepest longings of your soul for the fix it needs but can't get for itself? In the next chapter, we'll look at the ways chemical or process addictions offer a false fix for these deepest longings. Addiction feeds you the lie that it can fix those longings by temporarily deadening the pain or drawing your attention away from it.

Now, to be clear, this is not a self-help book (if your "self" could have helped your "self," wouldn't your "self" have done it by now?). I suspect you've repeatedly tried to overcome your addictions and negative habitual behaviors on your own and have discovered it didn't work. There's a reason for that. We don't heal ourselves. We heal each other.

Interestingly, the pronoun *I* appears nowhere in the Twelve Steps. Everything is written in the first-person plural. That's because recovery is a "we," not "me," proposition. You can't overcome your addictions and live this new way of life without help. This highlights how important it is for anyone embarking on a journey of recovery to find a Twelve-Step community of people who will walk alongside them on the path toward a life of healing and sobriety.

For some people, finding this community will be easy.

There are hundreds of Twelve-Step fellowships that address different addictions, compulsions, mental health challenges, or self-defeating behaviors. You can hop on the internet and look up a program and meeting times for the Twelve-Step group that focuses on your particular addiction or self-medicating behavior.

Once you're connected to a Twelve-Step recovery community, try to find a sponsor as quickly as you can. A sponsor is a person who has been around the program for a while who can guide you through the Steps and help you navigate early recovery. Throughout this book, you'll hear me talk a lot about my sponsor, Steve, and how much I've come to rely on his wisdom over the years. May you all find your own "Sponsor Steve"!

Okay, now don't go all wibbly-wobbly if you're not ready to check out a local Twelve-Step group yet. Start small. Ask one or two friends if they'll read this book (and workbook!) and explore the Twelve Steps together with you. You can do that, right?

Now, one last thing. My somewhat recent fall off the wagon might make you ask, "Why should I listen to this backslid delinquent?" Or, "How could a reputable publisher give this guy a contract to write a book on *any* topic, much less one that's about Twelve-Step spirituality and putting your life back together?" Heck, I've asked these questions too.

I'm not an addiction counselor. I'm not an expert in the neuroscience of addiction. I'm not a clinical psychologist who specializes in treating people with substance use disorders. But my relapse and the solution I found for it are still fresh and vivid in my mind. My friend Becca reassured me,

“Your relapse didn’t erase everything you previously learned over thirty years as a priest and therapist or a person in recovery. Maybe you have more wisdom to offer now than ever.”

I’m in no position to evaluate that statement, but I can say that what I’ve gleaned from living a life organized around the Twelve Steps is worth more to me now than ever. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have asked you to join me on this adventure.

All to say, if you don’t mind walking alongside a gimpy guide who can accompany you on the road to recovery, then I’m your guy.

“There is a solution,” Bill Wilson famously wrote of this spiritual awakening near the beginning of *The Big Book*.¹¹ This solution is yours—and mine—for the taking, my new friend. Read on, and let’s find out how.