

FROM THE EDITORS OF THE #1-BESTSELLING LIFE RECOVERY BIBLE

THE
T W E L V E
L A W S
OF LIFE
RECOVERY®

*God's wisdom and
guidance for your journey*

Stephen Arterburn | David Stoop



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The Twelve Laws of Life Recovery: God's Wisdom and Guidance for Your Journey

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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.

THE TWELVE LAWS OF LIFE RECOVERY

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 of Life Recovery

1. We admitted we were powerless over our problems and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

THE TWELVE LAWS OF LIFE RECOVERY

8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Steps used in *The Twelve Laws of Life Recovery* have been adapted with permission from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Introduction

DOES IT SEEM IRONIC that a book about twelve *laws* could provide you with more freedom than you have ever experienced? Does it seem counterintuitive that twelve *requirements* could guide you toward twelve *outcomes* that will fill every day of your life with love, gratitude, and serenity? Well, that's exactly what this book is about: finding a level of freedom that will give you a deeper and richer engagement with life and with recovery.

When we use the word *laws*, we're not referring to legislative action that is legally binding or to moral imperatives that constrain human behavior. The *laws* we have in mind are cause-and-effect relationships that have been proven over and over again. These laws are woven into the fabric of Creation and reflect the character of God. (Even if you don't associate

your higher power with a personal God, the God of the Bible, we believe you will see that the principles in this book are tried and true, and we trust you'll find them helpful and useful.)

Each law has a *requirement*, and each law produces a reliable *outcome*. If you achieve the requirement, you will experience the result—a predictable, positive result that will make your life better, draw you closer to God, and connect you more deeply to other people. These laws provide freedom where there was bondage and direction where there was confusion.

Dave and I have studied these laws since 1982, and we have observed the positive results in the lives of people we have helped. We have also found them predictable and reliable in our own recoveries over many years. If you will incorporate the study of these twelve laws into your Twelve Step life recovery program, we believe it will enrich your life—perhaps in ways you never thought possible.

In saying these laws are predictable, reliable, and positive, we're not suggesting it's going to be *easy* to put them into effect in your life. Some of these requirements are quite challenging. You may need to go to a few more meetings to find the strength to

meet a requirement. You may have to go to a workshop, work with a therapist, or get additional treatment to incorporate these requirements into your daily life. We hope and pray you will do whatever it takes to achieve each requirement and that you will find value in working for the positive outcomes that will result.

If you've gotten stuck when using other materials in the past, we hope you will find that this book is the tool you've been looking for and the resource that you need.

One final word: Don't be shocked when you see how many of these laws go against conventional wisdom. In most cases, they are countercultural—which is why they are so powerful. They are based on God's ways and wisdom, which are quite different from the ways of the world and the ways we often try to order our own private worlds.

We don't want to keep you any longer from the life-changing results that can be achieved through the twelve laws of life recovery. So let's get started.

The Law of Powerlessness

The requirement of *powerlessness* will result in *strength*.

This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:25

THIS MIGHT BE THE MOST counterintuitive of all of the twelve laws of life recovery. We struggle with the concept of powerlessness because it feels so much like *helplessness*. But God often works through our weakness to bring *healing* to our lives. It may seem like a contradiction, but there is great strength to be found in recognizing that, within ourselves, we do not have power over an aspect of our lives.

Recovery begins with an understanding of powerlessness, so we're going to spend a little more time

on this than on the other laws. The idea that powerlessness will result in strength is the most difficult law to understand and embrace, yet it is vividly portrayed throughout the Bible. Throughout the book of Judges, for example, we see a pattern in the lives of the Israelites that is similar to the pattern of our own lives.

1. We think we have everything figured out and have the strength to carry out whatever we want to do, so we do what seems right in our own eyes.¹
2. We get so caught up in our own plans and schemes (which seem so right to us) that we stop caring about other people, and we refuse to acknowledge that there is a real God, who deserves respect and obedience (which we're not willing to give).
3. Blinded to the needs of others and the commands of God, we become trapped in our deficient, defective, and devastating ways of trying to find peace and comfort in the midst of all of the problems we have caused for ourselves.

4. Refusing to give up, we try harder and harder to make things work the way we want them to. As we do, we hurt our families and communities and move further away from God.
5. Finally, we hit bottom, and there is no way to go but up. Our willingness to change is still weak, and the thought of giving up our addiction is still distasteful, but the truth starts to seep into our pores and eventually saturates enough of our being that we begin to see and feel our powerlessness—which has been there all along, throughout our egotistical rants and maniacal attempts to regain control of our lives.
6. As we awaken to our own powerlessness, we begin, for the first time, to allow God to provide us with *his* strength and to show us *his* love. As we see even the faintest hint of his strength, we begin to understand how ridiculously powerless we are and have been, and we start to allow God to work with us.
7. As we continue to rely on God's strength, we begin the step-by-step march toward recovery, transformation, restoration, and victory. As long

as we awaken each day to the reality that we are powerless to change ourselves, God will provide his strength as needed, and everything will come together for us.

One story in particular that demonstrates the law of powerlessness may become the future story of your life. It is the spectacular account in the book of Judges of a weak man named Gideon, who eventually displays miraculous strength far beyond that of any of today's superheroes. Most likely you've heard the story before, but let's look at it again in light of our recovery.

As we so often do, the Israelites brought tremendous trouble on themselves by thinking they had everything figured out and under control. Instead of following the ways of God, they did all sorts of evil and unwise things and fell into the hands of a marauding people called the Midianites. The Midianites either ate or destroyed the Israelites' crops until God's people were starving. In fact, "the Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds."² This was a far cry from the fantastic

lives they thought they would enjoy by going their own way.

Though the precise details may differ, the Israelites were just like us. We seek comfort in gluttonous amounts of food, alcohol, pornography, adultery, drugs, possessions, and many other compulsions. Rather than connecting us with God and others, these pursuits eventually send us to the hills and caves to hide our shame—that is, if we're fortunate enough to still possess a conscience.

We sometimes spend years of disconnection, fighting for our lives; until, one day, in a state of powerlessness we do what the Israelites did: We cry out to God for help.

“Oh Lord, help me and I will never go back to my old ways.”

“God, if you will allow me to live, I promise I will live for you.”

“God, if you really are God, please show up in my life and get me out of this hell I've created for myself.”

“Oh God, this time I mean it. Help me now and I will serve you forever.”

Have you spoken those very words? This is

music to God's ears, the melody of a broken heart to which God wants access in order to heal and strengthen you.

God responds to us when we finally realize that we have no power.

God heard the Israelites and responded, just as he responds to us when we finally realize that we have no power. God showed up in Gideon's life while Gideon was hiding in a winepress, afraid of being found by the Midianites. When God revealed his presence, Gideon took the opportunity to complain about all his misery and how horrible his life had become. The angel of the Lord replied, "Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!"³

Please don't miss this point.

Up until now, Gideon had done nothing but be afraid and whiny, yet God called him a *hero*. God knew what Gideon was *going* to do, and he addressed him according to what he saw Gideon becoming in the future.

What is God calling *you* today because of what he sees in your future?

Recovery Group Leader?

Recovery Pastor?

Corporate CEO with a Heart for People?

Role Model?

Servant Leader?

I don't know the specific name that God has for your future, but looking at the story of Gideon, I know it's a grand one.

Here's how I know.

Gideon explains to God—as if God has no idea—that of all of the families in the clan of Manasseh, his family is by far the weakest. Gideon's family didn't matter much to anyone and had no honor or respect at all. And in the weakest of the weak families in Israel, the weakest family member was Gideon. In order to bring about a great victory for the Israelites, God goes to the weakest clan and picks the weakest man to accomplish the miraculous.

Let's stop for a minute and look at our own situation. How often have you gotten in trouble because you felt weak and alcohol, sex, cocaine, or other addictions made you feel strong (or at least less weak)? You probably thought you were not blessed but cursed by God.

When our physical, mental, or emotional handicaps have seemed to disqualify us from making

a difference, in the pain of that rejection we have sought comfort from things that could not cure us or even help us. But if we would have read, understood, and believed God's Word, we would have known that we were perfectly situated for God to do great things through us. People would know that, because of our obvious weakness, it was the power of God and not our own power that produced the result.

Right now, if you are feeling as if there is no hope for your broken life, *you're wrong*. Maybe you're sitting on death row and thinking your life has no potential. You're missing God's invitation. Maybe you've molested a child, and your shame has brought you to the realization that you are powerless over the urges that lead you to that darkest of places. You are now invited by God to accept your powerlessness and allow him to give you the strength to confess what you have done, pay the legal penalty for the crime, and make restitution for the pain you have caused. Yes, you—a child molester, a wife beater, a murderer, an arsonist, a drug dealer, a prostitute, a swindler, or any other label I could come up with—are nonetheless a creation of an all-powerful God. When you are willing to admit to him that you are powerless and

are willing to make things right in *his* way, he will give you the strength to do it. Just as he did with Gideon, God may be thinking of you as a hero. The more impossible something seems, the more possible it is with the strength of God empowering you.

The more impossible something seems, the more possible it is with the strength of God empowering you.

We'll leave out a few details of Gideon's story, but let's just say that, when God invited him to save Manasseh, Gideon did not jump at the chance or immediately believe that God would use him to bring about the victory. The idea of "putting out a fleece" comes from Gideon's story, and it was the means by which God proved that he was God to this weak, unbelieving, powerless man.

After Gideon finally understood and believed that God wanted to use him to defeat 135,000 enemy troops, God told Gideon to send 22,000 of his own men home because they were afraid, leaving only 10,000 still available to fight. Then, to be certain that everyone would know it was God's strength that brought the victory, all but three hundred of

Gideon's troops were sent away because they had not learned how to drink water like soldiers.

So, to review the situation: The weakest man from the weakest family in the weakest clan of Israel was now put in charge of the weakest imaginable fighting force and told to go into battle—but to do it God's way. The battle wasn't pretty, but with jars and rams' horns and swords and shouts, those three hundred men, led by an unlikely hero, defeated 135,000 enemy troops.

Here is perhaps the most important part of the story.

Because of that miraculous victory, the Israelites now wanted Gideon to rule over them. They must have thought of this former weakling as the strongest person in all of Israel. This was his moment of glory. People who had seen his family as weak—and had seen Gideon as the weakest among them—were now clamoring for him to become their king.

Who could turn that down?

Gideon could. He could because he knew that without the strength of God he was still the same powerless, fearful, least-of-the-least man who had cowered in the bottom of a winepress. Instead, he

wisely told them, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son. The LORD will rule over you!”⁴

The same thing that happened in the life of Gideon has happened in our lives—Steve’s and Dave’s—as well. In the areas of our greatest weakness, God’s strength has allowed us to do the impossible. For example, neither of our recoveries was firmly in place at the time we produced *The Life Recovery Bible*. I (Steve) was still drinking uneasily and wondering if I was blind to a growing tolerance and addiction. And I (Dave) was finally coming to understand that God was in charge of my family’s recovery, not me. For years, I had been trying to set up a miracle for God to perform, but he was apparently busy with someone else. But when the change finally happened, it was all God—just as it was with Gideon.

I (Steve) was also the most unlikely person to start a movement for women. Indeed, my first attempt—a traveling conference in 1995—was a dismal failure. How dismal? Fewer than one thousand women total attended the conference, which was held in twelve locations. In Chicago, thirty-five women showed up in the largest ballroom you can imagine. What an embarrassment. But also what a gift. I had to reach

the dark place where I recognized my own powerlessness before I could allow God's strength to become the true source of my life.

The next year, we started Women of Faith (WOF), and 35,000 women showed up to laugh and cry and reconnect with God. The following year,

I had to reach the dark place where I recognized my own powerlessness before I could allow God's strength to become the true source of my life.

150,000 women attended, and over 300,000 for each year after that. To date, more than four million women have attended a WOF conference, but because of that first-year failure, I haven't fallen into the trap of believing that my talent, genius, or effort produced the conference's success.

These experiences are not anything special. We have learned that we must be willing to do what God wants us to do, because without God's strength our best efforts will come up empty, no matter how hard we try.

A glaring example of this truth is a book we wrote years ago, called *The Angry Man*. Men were (and are) angry, and we believed we had written one of the best

books to address and heal the problem. But it was a failure. Our publisher at the time believed in the book, seeing how powerful it was, and they reissued it with a new title. It still didn't sell. Then another publisher bought the rights and renamed it again. Dave and I knew how to market books and how to do interviews, and we had a subject that needed answers, but we could not make that book sell. Despite all our good intentions and all our wisdom, God was just not in it.

Where are you when it comes to the law of powerlessness? Do you still feel as if you have some power left to try a little harder and do a little better and fix yourself? We hope not. We hope you have come to the end of yourself, with just enough strength to hold on long enough for God to fill you with his power, which he has promised to do. He has not forgotten you. He has never left you. He has been waiting for you to decide to do what he will not force you to do. He has been waiting for you to call upon him, admit your powerlessness, and ask for his strength to empower your life.

The prophet Isaiah was so close to God that he was able to describe the crucifixion of Jesus hundreds

of years before it happened and before criminals were even executed by crucifixion. So if anyone could speak for God, it would be Isaiah.

If you were with Isaiah right now, and you told him that your sorry situation has finally led you to realize you are powerless over your problem, there is a good chance he would respond with these words:

Have you never heard?

Have you never understood?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of all the earth.

He never grows weak or weary.

No one can measure the depths of his
understanding.

He gives power to the weak
and strength to the powerless.

Even youths will become weak and tired,
and young men will fall in exhaustion.

But those who trust in the LORD will find
new strength.

They will soar high on wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not faint.⁵

The law of powerlessness says that, if you truly understand and acknowledge that you are powerless, you are about to be provided with real strength. If you will simply do the next right thing, one day at a time, a time will come when you will feel as if you are soaring high on eagles' wings. Don't miss the remarkable recovery and restoration that God has designed just for you.

If you feel too weak to move forward, admit your weakness to God, who says, "My power works best in weakness."⁶

If you are feeling weaker than you have ever felt, you are right in the place where God does his very best work. If you will continue to allow him to, he will do his best work *in* you, *through* you, and *with* you. That is what we desire for you, and that is what God will provide.

Don't give up or give in. Great changes are about to happen in your life and in the lives of those around you.

Here's a reminder from God of what he can do:

If you are feeling weaker than you have ever felt, you are right in the place where God does his very best work.

How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. *Their weakness was turned to strength.* They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. Women received their loved ones back again from death.⁷

We get excited just writing these words because we have personally seen examples of God's power at work. We have seen people who were as good as dead—entombed by pornography and utterly estranged at home—come back to life. Sometimes it is alcohol that makes them “walking dead.” But God has brought them back to life. We have witnessed the virtual resurrection of thousands of people who chose God's way, beginning from a position of powerlessness. If God could turn their weakness into strength, he can turn *your* weakness into strength as well.

Admitting that we're powerless is not a decision in the same way that surrendering would be. It is simply a realization of our limitations as human beings. If you're finally ready to admit your own powerlessness, take a few minutes to memorize (and begin to apply) the truth of Philippians 4:13: "*I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*"



Moving from Powerlessness to Strength

1. How is Gideon an example of powerlessness?
2. Explain in your own words how powerlessness can lead to strength.
3. How is being powerless different from being helpless?
4. In what areas do you still need to give up control? What makes it hard for you to do it?