

The Still Small Voice

12-Step Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

Prayer, Meditation & Conscious Contact in Recovery

Alcoholics Anonymous

Embrace · Empower · Evolve — The Recovery Files

— Step Eleven — Alcoholics Anonymous · Prayer · Speaking honestly · to a Higher Power · Meditation · Listening in · stillness · Conscious Contact · Living in connection · with something greater

"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."

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

What Step Eleven Actually Asks: Conscious Contact Explained

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: What Step Eleven Actually Asks: Conscious Contact Explained

What Step Eleven Actually Asks: Conscious Contact Explained

Step Eleven reads: "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." There is a great deal compressed into that single sentence — perhaps more than any other step in the program. Unpacking it carefully is one of the most rewarding things a person in recovery can do, because at its heart, Step Eleven is not primarily about religious practice. It is about relationship. It is about learning to live in conscious, ongoing connection with a source of wisdom, guidance, and power that is greater than our isolated, frightened, self-will-driven minds.

The word "sought" is the first thing worth pausing on. It is past tense — we sought, meaning this is something we actually did, not something we wished for or planned to do someday. Step Eleven calls for action. It demands that we do the things that develop spiritual connection — prayer, meditation, reading, quiet — with the same willingness and consistency that we brought to getting and staying high. Most people who struggled with addiction were remarkably dedicated to their disease. Meetings at 2am to score. Planning every vacation around the availability of substances. Managing relationships and jobs around the needs of the addiction. Step Eleven asks us to redirect that same dedication — that same capacity for commitment and willingness — toward our spiritual life.

The phrase "conscious contact" is the heart of the step. Unconscious contact with a Higher Power, if there is such a thing, produces very little. Many people with addiction histories grew up in religious households where they learned rituals and doctrines but never developed a living, dynamic, personal connection with the divine. Conscious contact is something different. It is aware, intentional, present, and reciprocal — meaning it involves both speaking (prayer) and listening (meditation). It is the difference between reciting the words of a prayer automatically and actually meaning them. Between sitting in meditation and genuinely opening yourself to stillness and guidance. Between going through the motions of spiritual practice and actually practicing.

"To improve" acknowledges that conscious contact is not achieved once and possessed forever. It is a living relationship that deepens or erodes depending on how much attention we give it. Like any relationship — with a person, with a community, with a craft — our relationship with a Higher Power grows with investment and withers with neglect. Early recovery often involves a significant amount of spiritual drought — the sense that one is speaking into an empty room, that prayer is hollow, that whatever higher power one believed in has gone silent or was never there. This is normal. It is part of the landscape. The invitation is to keep showing up anyway, with the same willingness you brought to early recovery, trusting that the connection will deepen with practice.

Finally, "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out" makes a radical claim about the appropriate content of prayer. Not for things. Not for outcomes we have predetermined. Not for circumstances to arrange themselves according to our preferences. Only for two things: to know what is right, and to have the strength to do it. This is the direct, deliberate inversion of self-will — the very disease that drove the addiction. Self-will says: "I know what I want and I will do whatever it takes to get it." Step Eleven says: "I release what I want, ask only to know what is right, and pray for the courage to do it." For people with addiction, who have spent years manipulating reality to serve their disease, this is nothing less than a revolution of the soul.

Reflection Questions

1. When you read the words "sought through prayer and meditation," what is your honest reaction? Does the idea feel accessible, foreign, threatening, irrelevant, or something else entirely?

2. What is your current understanding of "conscious contact"? Have you experienced moments that might qualify — times when you felt genuinely connected to something larger than yourself?

3. What is the difference between going through the motions of spiritual practice and actually practicing? Where are you on that spectrum right now?

4. The step asks us to pray for knowledge of God's will rather than for outcomes we want. How does that differ from how you have prayed in the past, if you have prayed at all?

5. If Step Eleven is ultimately about relationship — with a Higher Power, with something larger than self-will — what would it mean to take that relationship seriously in the same way you took your addiction seriously?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Conscious Contact & Spiritual Awareness

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have moments in which I feel genuinely connected to something greater than myself
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I am aware when I am spiritually disconnected — when something feels "off" or missing inside
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I can distinguish between my own self-will and what feels like guidance from a Higher Power
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have had experiences in recovery that I cannot fully explain but that feel spiritually significant
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I am growing in my ability to "let go and let God" — to release outcomes I cannot control
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I pay attention to what the AA literature calls "quiet time" — moments of stillness that can carry guidance
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. My conscious contact with a Higher Power increases when I am consistent in prayer and meditation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I believe that improving my conscious contact with a Higher Power is genuinely relevant to my recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: What Step Eleven Actually Asks: Conscious Contact Explained

My Spiritual History Inventory

Understanding where you started spiritually helps clarify where you are now and where you might go.

1

Childhood Spiritual Environment

What spiritual or religious environment did you grow up in? What were you taught about God? Was it comforting, harmful, confusing, or mixed?

2

How Your Spiritual Life Changed

When did your spiritual beliefs shift significantly? What caused the shifts? Have you had genuine spiritual connection — awe, peace, transcendence?

3

Addiction and Your Spiritual Life

How did addiction affect your spiritual life? Did addiction become its own kind of spirituality? Is there spiritual grief in your recovery?

4

Spirituality in Recovery

What spiritual resources have shown up in your recovery? What are you spiritually hungry for? What would a healthy spiritual life look like?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: What Step Eleven Actually Asks: Conscious Contact Explained

Higher Power Exploration

Develop a concept of a Higher Power that is genuinely yours — not inherited, not imposed, but personally meaningful.

1

Traditional Religious Deity

How much does this concept resonate as a possible Higher Power? (Rate 1-5) What personal history shapes your reaction?

2

The Natural World

Does this resonate? Describe experiences in nature that connected you to something larger.

3

The Recovery Group / Collective

Have you experienced the group as a power greater than yourself? Describe a specific moment.

4

Love / Universal Connection

Does the force of love and human connection resonate as a Higher Power? Where have you experienced love that transcended individual self-interest?

5

Your Higher Power Description

What qualities would your Higher Power ideally have? Write a brief, provisional description of your current working concept.

6

One Specific Way to Seek Contact

What is one specific way you could seek conscious contact with this Higher Power today?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Prayer in Recovery: Speaking Into the Silence

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Prayer in Recovery: Speaking Into the Silence

Prayer in Recovery: Speaking Into the Silence

Prayer is, at its simplest, speaking to something greater than yourself. It is an act of relationship — of reaching beyond the confines of your own isolated mind and making contact, however tentatively, with something outside and above it. For many people in addiction recovery, the idea of prayer is fraught with complication: childhood religion that felt oppressive or hypocritical, prayers that seemed to go unanswered, a sense that God (if there is a God) would have no interest in someone with an addiction, or a straightforward atheism that makes the entire enterprise feel irrational.

All of these complications are real, and none of them disqualify you from Step Eleven. The step itself accommodates them in the phrase "God as we understood Him" — which is one of the most expansive and generous phrases in spiritual literature. "God as we understood Him" does not require you to subscribe to any particular theology. It does not demand belief in the God of any specific religion. It does not even require certainty — only willingness. What it asks is that you open yourself to the possibility that there is something — a power, a force, a presence, a principle, a community, the universe itself, the wisdom of the ages — that is larger than your own ego and self-will, and that you begin to orient yourself toward that something rather than using your own isolated will as the only compass you trust.

Many people in AA have found their Higher Power in the group itself. Others in nature, in music, in the force of life that animates all living things. Others in a more traditional understanding of God. The content matters far less than the orientation — the turning of your face toward something other than yourself.

The AA literature, particularly the Big Book's chapter "Into Action," offers specific guidance on prayer in early recovery. The morning is described as a time to reflect on the coming day, to ask for clear thinking, freedom from self-pity and dishonest motives, and guidance on what to do and how to do it. Throughout the day, when agitated, doubtful, or confused, the suggestion is a simple pause: a quiet moment to ask for the right thought or action. In the evening, a review of the day — not in self-flagellation, but in honest accounting — accompanied by gratitude for what was good and a prayer for correction where we fell short.

What makes prayer different from self-talk or affirmation is the relational quality — the sense of speaking to, not just within. Many people find that this relational quality develops gradually, and that its development tracks with their willingness to be honest in prayer. Performative prayer — saying what you think you should say, presenting a managed version of yourself to God — tends to feel hollow. Authentic prayer — bringing your actual state, your actual struggles, your actual rage or grief or terror or gratitude — tends to feel very different.

There is something in the act of honest self-disclosure to a Higher Power that mirrors what happens in good therapy, in honest sponsor conversations, in genuine sharing in meetings: the

shame of secrecy lifts, the weight becomes shared, and something that felt unbearable becomes slightly more manageable.

If you do not know how to pray, or if prayer feels awkward or impossible, you are in excellent company. Many of the great spiritual traditions include accounts of people for whom prayer began as a dry, mechanical recitation and gradually became something alive. The Eleventh Step does not require you to arrive at prayer already accomplished. It invites you to seek — to practice with the willingness of a beginner, trusting that showing up honestly and repeatedly is itself the spiritual act.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your honest relationship with prayer right now — do you pray? If so, what does it look and feel like? If not, what prevents you?

2. What baggage do you bring to the idea of prayer — past religious experiences, unanswered prayers, atheism or agnosticism, shame or unworthiness? How does that baggage affect your willingness to try?

3. The text describes "performative prayer" versus "authentic prayer." Which have you practiced more? What would authentic prayer — bringing your actual state — look like for you?

4. Who or what is your Higher Power, even tentatively or experimentally? If you don't have one, what might you be willing to use as an experiment — a group, a principle, the force of nature, something else?

5. If you tried to pray honestly, right now, in this moment — what would you actually say? Write it here as if you were actually saying it.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Prayer Practice & Spiritual Dialogue

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I pray or speak to a Higher Power regularly — daily or near-daily
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. When I pray, I am honest about my struggles rather than only saying what I think I "should" say
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I pray for knowledge of God's will rather than for things to go my way
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have a sense that something hears me when I pray, even if I cannot define what that something is
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. Prayer feels meaningful to me — not just an obligation or ritual
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I pray when I am in crisis or when cravings are intense, not only when things are going well
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I struggle with resentment, doubt, or anger toward a Higher Power that gets in the way of prayer
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have a regular time and place for prayer that I generally keep
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Prayer in Recovery: Speaking Into the Silence

Prayer Style Finder

There are many ways to pray. Find the one that feels most authentic to you.

1

Conversational Prayer

Speaking to your Higher Power like a trusted friend. Have you tried this? What happened? Rate comfort level 1-5.

2

Structured/Traditional Prayers

Using established prayers (Serenity Prayer, Lord's Prayer, etc.). What is your experience? Rate 1-5.

3

Written Prayer/Journaling

Writing letters to your Higher Power. Have you tried this? What was it like? Rate 1-5.

4

Gratitude Prayer

Prayer as thanking — listing what you're grateful for. Experience? Rate 1-5.

5

Silent/Wordless Prayer

Simply being in the presence without words. Have you tried this? Rate 1-5.

6

Your Prayer Practice Commitment

Based on what resonated above, what specific prayer practice will you commit to for the next 30 days?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Prayer in Recovery: Speaking Into the Silence

Morning Ritual Builder

How you begin the day sets the tone for everything that follows.

1

Ideal Wake Time

What time would best support your recovery? Are you keeping it?

2

Morning Prayer

What will you say/ask each morning? Write a brief prayer or intention.

3

Morning Meditation

How long? What type? What makes it sustainable?

4

Morning Reading

Spiritual text, daily meditation book, recovery literature? What will you read?

5

Setting Daily Intention

How will you consciously set intention for the day ahead? What will you ask for?

6

Your Morning Ritual

Put it all together: your specific, realistic morning ritual for the next 30 days.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

Meditation: The Practice of Listening

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Meditation: The Practice of Listening

Meditation: The Practice of Listening

If prayer is speaking, meditation is listening. Or more precisely: meditation is creating the conditions in which something beyond self-will might be heard. It is the practice of intentional stillness — of quieting the relentless noise of the mind long enough to notice what was always there beneath it. This is why the Eleventh Step pairs the two practices. Prayer without meditation can become a one-sided monologue — all speaking, no listening. Meditation without prayer can become a self-improvement technique unmoored from spiritual relationship. Together, they form a complete conversation.

Most people who have never meditated have a distorted picture of what meditation is. They imagine a person sitting in lotus position, utterly serene, with a mind as still as a mountain lake — and they assume that because their mind is nothing like that, they cannot meditate. This assumption is incorrect and has discouraged many people from one of the most powerful tools available in recovery.

Meditation is not the absence of thought. It is the practice of noticing thought, releasing it gently, and returning to the present moment — repeatedly, without judgment. A meditation session in which the mind wanders fifty times and is gently redirected fifty times is not a failed meditation. It is exactly what meditation is. Every return to the present moment is the practice. Every release of a thought is the muscle being exercised.

The neuroscience of meditation is now extensive and compelling. Regular meditation practice has been shown to increase the volume of gray matter in the prefrontal cortex — the part of the brain most damaged by addiction and most necessary for recovery. It reduces the size and reactivity of the amygdala — the brain's threat-detection center that drives craving responses and emotional overwhelm. It reduces cortisol levels and inflammatory markers associated with chronic stress. It improves the connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system, meaning that over time, the thinking brain gets better at moderating the emotional brain. For people whose brains have been altered by years of substance use, this is not peripheral to recovery. It is central.

There are many forms of meditation, and the right one is the one you will actually practice. Breath-focused meditation anchors attention to the physical sensation of breathing — perhaps the most accessible starting point, because the breath is always present and requires nothing. Body scan meditation moves attention slowly through the body, noticing sensations without judgment — particularly useful for people with trauma histories or those who have been dissociated from their bodies through addiction. Walking meditation transforms ordinary movement into a mindfulness practice. Mantra-based meditation uses a repeated word or phrase to anchor and redirect attention. Prayer-based meditation integrates the two practices of Step Eleven — opening with prayer, sitting in stillness, closing with gratitude.

The research on minimum effective dose for meditation is encouraging: even ten to fifteen minutes daily, practiced consistently, produces measurable neurological and psychological benefits within eight weeks. You do not need an hour. You do not need a cushion, an app, or a particular tradition. You need a willingness to sit, a timer, and the humility to be a beginner for as long as it takes.

Many people find that the moment they begin is the hardest — that deciding to practice and beginning to practice are the most difficult steps, and that once they are in it, the session is shorter and more manageable than they feared. This is almost universally true, and worth knowing before you begin.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you tried meditation or mindfulness practices before? What was your experience? If you haven't tried, what has prevented you?

2. Does the idea that meditation is not about emptying the mind but about repeatedly returning your attention when it wanders change anything for you? Does it make it seem more possible?

3. The text describes different types of meditation — breath-focused, body scan, walking, mantra, prayer-based. Which sounds most accessible or appealing to you, and why?

4. If your brain was altered by substance use in ways that damaged impulse control and emotional regulation, and if meditation is shown to restore those capacities over time, what does that tell you about the clinical importance of a meditation practice in your recovery?

5. What is the most honest obstacle to you practicing meditation regularly — skepticism, restlessness, time, feeling like you're doing it wrong, or something else? What would it take to address that obstacle?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Meditation & Mindfulness Capacity

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I practice some form of meditation, mindfulness, or intentional stillness regularly
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I can sit with silence for more than five minutes without becoming overwhelmingly anxious or restless
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have experienced moments of genuine quiet — mental stillness — even briefly
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am able to observe my thoughts without immediately acting on them or being carried away by them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have a meditation or mindfulness practice that I have tried and returned to consistently
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I use breathwork, grounding, or body-awareness practices to support my spiritual life
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I struggle to meditate because my mind races, I feel restless, or I don't believe I "can do it"
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I understand the difference between prayer (speaking) and meditation (listening or stillness)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Meditation: The Practice of Listening

Meditation Starter Kit

Even 10-15 minutes daily produces measurable benefits. Find what works for you.

1

Breath-Focused Meditation

Anchoring attention to breathing. Have you tried? What was your experience? Comfort level 1-5?

2

Body Scan Meditation

Moving attention slowly through the body. Tried? Experience? Rate 1-5.

3

Walking Meditation

Mindful movement. Have you tried this? What happened? Rate 1-5.

4

Mantra/Word-Based

Repeating a word or phrase to anchor attention. Experience? Rate 1-5.

5

Guided Meditation

Using apps or recordings. Have you tried? What worked? Rate 1-5.

6

Your Meditation Practice Commitment

What specific meditation practice will you commit to for 30 days? When will you do it daily? How long?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Meditation: The Practice of Listening

Evening Review Practice

The Eleventh Step Tradition: reviewing the day with honesty and gratitude.

1

The Day Review

What questions will you ask yourself each evening? (e.g., Where was I selfish? Dishonest? Afraid? Where was I helpful?)

2

Gratitude Practice

What gratitude practice will close each day? Listing 5 things? Prayer of thanks?

3

Releasing the Day

How will you consciously release what cannot be changed and prepare for rest?

4

Tomorrow's Intention

Will you set intention for tomorrow? What will you ask for?

5

Your Evening Ritual

Your specific evening review practice for the next 30 days:

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Meditation: The Practice of Listening

Conscious Contact Daily Tracker (7 Days)

Track your daily spiritual practice to build consistency and awareness.

Day 1

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

Day 2

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

Day 3

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

Day 4

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

Day 5

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

Day 6

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

Day 7

Prayer practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Meditation/quiet time:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Conscious contact moments:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Surrender practice:

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Today's spiritual highlight:

Today's obstacles:

Evidence of something greater:

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

Thy Will, Not Mine: Surrender, Guidance, and the Power to Act

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Thy Will, Not Mine: Surrender, Guidance, and the Power to Act

Thy Will, Not Mine: Surrender, Guidance, and the Power to Act

The final clause of Step Eleven — "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out" — is the most challenging and the most liberating part. It is challenging because it asks us to give up the one thing that people with addiction have often spent their entire lives defending: control. The belief that if I can just arrange things the right way — if I can control enough variables, manage enough people, secure enough of what I want — I will finally be okay.

Addiction is, among many other things, a catastrophic attempt at self-sufficiency: the belief that I can chemically manufacture whatever my life is not providing, without help, without dependence, without the terrifying vulnerability of asking for what I need from something I cannot control. Step Eleven inverts this entirely. It says: your judgment about what you need is not the final word. There is a will that is greater than your will, a perspective that is larger than your perspective, a plan that you cannot see from where you currently stand. Praying for knowledge of that will — rather than for the outcomes you have decided are best — is an act of radical humility. It is the acknowledgment that you have been wrong about what would make you okay, and that perhaps something knows better.

This is terrifying for many people, and understandably so. The idea of surrendering control to a Power you cannot see or predict or guarantee feels like leaping into a void. Many people who struggled with addiction have histories in which trusting others with power — parents, partners, institutions, God — went badly. They were hurt in those moments of vulnerability. They learned that the only safe thing was to be in control of their own outcomes. Asking them to surrender that control in early recovery, when they are already more vulnerable than they have been in years, can feel like asking someone to step off a cliff.

The response of the program to this fear is not to minimize it but to point to evidence: people who have practiced this surrender, who have committed to seeking God's will rather than running their own show, tend to have lives that are remarkably better than they managed on self-will alone. The fear is real. The invitation is real. And the proof is in the living.

What does seeking God's will actually look like in practice? It looks like pausing before decisions — especially impulsive ones — and asking: Is this self-will or guidance? It looks like asking the people in your life who have demonstrated wisdom what they see. It looks like prayer — genuine, honest prayer, not for what you want but for clarity. It looks like reading spiritual literature and sitting with it. It looks like paying attention to what the program calls "God-shots": small moments in which something unexpected opened a door, provided a resource, or shifted a situation in a way that seemed to exceed what your own effort could have produced. These moments accumulate, for people who pay attention, into a growing body of evidence that surrender is not the same as passivity, and that guidance is real.

The second half of the prayer — "the power to carry that out" — is equally important and often overlooked. Knowing what the right thing is and having the strength to actually do it are two different problems. Many people in early recovery know, intellectually, what they should do. They know they should go to the meeting. Call the sponsor. Be honest with the person they've been avoiding. Address the situation they've been neglecting. The knowledge is not the obstacle — the power is.

Praying for the power to carry out right action is an acknowledgment that self-will, even well-intentioned self-will, runs out. That courage, sustained right action, and freedom from the thousand rationalizations that sabotage recovery — these require a source of power that is greater than our own isolated determination. And they are available, Step Eleven suggests, to those who seek them.

Reflection Questions

1. Be honest: when you pray, do you mostly pray for things to go your way, or do you genuinely seek guidance on what the right thing is? What would shifting that prayer look like?

2. What is your relationship with surrender? Does it feel like relief, loss, terror, wisdom, defeat, or something else? What has made surrender difficult for you?

3. Have you had "God-shots" — moments that seemed like they were arranged by something beyond your planning? Describe one. What did it feel like?

4. Is there something in your life right now where you know what the right thing is but lack the power to do it? What would praying for the power — rather than trying to manufacture it yourself — look like?

5. What would your recovery look like if you fully committed to praying only for knowledge of God's will and the power to act on it — for 30 days? What might change? What are you afraid might change?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Surrender & Openness to Guidance

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I genuinely want to know God's will for me — not just to have my own will validated
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I practice asking "What is the right thing to do?" before making significant decisions
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have experienced the difference between acting on self-will and acting from a place of surrender
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I struggle with trusting that a Higher Power's plan for me is better than my own
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have at least some willingness to be guided, even when I disagree with where the guidance points
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I recognize when self-will is running riot in my life — when I am trying to control everything
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have prayed for the power to carry out God's will, not just for knowledge of what it is
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I am growing in my ability to live "one day at a time" and to trust the present moment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: Thy Will, Not Mine: Surrender, Guidance, and the Power to Act

Obstacles to Spiritual Practice

Naming what prevents consistent practice.

1

Time Obstacles

"I don't have time" — is this true? Where is time actually going? What would you need to rearrange?

2

Skepticism

Do you doubt that prayer/meditation actually does anything? Where does the skepticism come from?

3

Restlessness

Can you sit still? What happens when you try? How might you work with the restlessness rather than letting it stop you?

4

Unworthiness

Do you feel unworthy of a Higher Power's attention? Where did that message come from?

5

Not Knowing How

What specific "how-to" questions remain? What resource or person could help answer them?

6

Addressing Obstacles

For your biggest obstacle: what is one specific action you can take this week to reduce its power?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

God As You Understand: Making the Eleventh Step Your Own

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: God As You Understand: Making the Eleventh Step Your Own

God As You Understand: Making the Eleventh Step Your Own

Perhaps no phrase in recovery literature is more important — or more misunderstood — than "God as we understood Him." It has been used to dismiss Step Eleven as naively religious, and it has been used to limit it to narrow theological definitions. But read carefully, it is neither of these things. It is an invitation. It is the program's explicit acknowledgment that no single human conception of the divine is adequate to all people in all circumstances, and that the journey of recovery includes the journey of developing your own honest, working relationship with whatever is greater than you.

This matters particularly for several groups of people. For people who grew up in religious environments that were damaging, abusive, or rigidly authoritarian, the God of their childhood may be genuinely harmful to engage — associated with shame, fear, punishment, or violation. For people who are atheists or agnostics, the language of "God" can feel like a barrier that the program has erected between them and their recovery. For people from non-Western spiritual traditions, the default Christian framing of early AA literature can feel exclusionary. And for people who are simply spiritually undeveloped — who grew up without meaningful exposure to any spiritual tradition — the step can feel like asking them to practice a skill they were never taught.

"God as we understood Him" says to all of these people: your experience is valid. Your doubts are not disqualifying. Your need to find a conception of a Higher Power that is actually yours — that you can relate to, speak to, and be guided by — is not only permitted but necessary. The program has hosted atheists who used the group as their Higher Power. Agnostics who approached God as an experiment — "I'll act as if there is a God and see what happens." People from Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Indigenous, and countless other traditions who found that their own traditions contained everything Step Eleven was pointing toward. People who found their Higher Power in the deep silence of nature, in music, in the astonishing improbability of being alive.

What the step does not permit is using "God as I understand Him" as a permission slip to keep using self-will as the final authority. The step is not asking you to replace God with yourself. It is asking you to genuinely expand beyond yourself — to find something, name it, orient toward it, and let it do what self-will demonstrably cannot: provide the guidance and power that recovery actually requires. The content of your Higher Power is deeply personal. The direction — away from self-will and toward something greater — is not negotiable.

There is also the question of how one develops a conception of a Higher Power that actually works. The Big Book suggests that if you have a prejudice against conventional religion, you can try the following: act as if a Higher Power exists. Pray to it even when you aren't sure anyone is listening. Meditate with the intention of making contact. Pay attention to what happens — to

moments of unexpected help, clarity, peace, or guidance.

Most people who have done this honestly — who have actually tried it, not just dismissed it — report that something changes. Not necessarily in dramatic, miraculous ways, but in the small and accumulating ways that make up a spiritual life: the sense of being slightly less alone; the capacity to tolerate uncertainty without immediately medicating it; the ability to make decisions from a place of relative clarity rather than driven panic. These experiences, accumulated over time, become the evidence base for a Higher Power relationship that is genuinely, authentically your own.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your current understanding of "God as you understand Him"? Have you developed your own working conception of a Higher Power, or is this territory that feels unresolved, frightening, or entirely foreign?

2. What experiences — in childhood, in your addiction, in your recovery — have shaped your relationship with God, spirituality, or the possibility of a Higher Power? How have those experiences helped or hindered your ability to work Step Eleven?

3. Is there a conception of a Higher Power — even an unconventional one — that you could experiment with? What would you call it, and what would it mean to begin orienting toward it?

4. The text says that "God as I understand Him" cannot be used as permission to keep self-will in charge. Where are you still running on self-will alone? What would it mean to genuinely let something else guide that area of your life?

5. If you committed to Step Eleven as an actual experiment — praying and meditating daily for thirty days, with genuine willingness — what would you be hoping to find? What are you afraid you might find instead?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Spiritual Strengths & Existing Resources

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have had meaningful spiritual experiences before recovery that I can draw on now
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have a faith community, spiritual director, or religious tradition that supports my recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have prayers, readings, or spiritual texts that are personally meaningful to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have experienced moments of genuine peace, serenity, or spiritual connection in recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have a sponsor or mentor who models a healthy spiritual life in recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I believe that spirituality — however I define it — is relevant to my healing
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I am willing to explore forms of spiritual practice I haven't tried before
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. My spiritual life has improved, even in small ways, since entering recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: God As You Understand: Making the Eleventh Step Your Own

Letters To/From Higher Power

Writing creates different honesty than thinking. These letters develop relationship.

1

Letter 1: My Honest State

Tell your Higher Power where you actually are right now — your doubts, fears, needs, small hopes.

2

Letter 2: What I Need to Say

Is there anger, grief, or complaint toward God/universe? Write it here. All of it.

3

Letter 3: Asking for Guidance

What are you genuinely confused about or stuck on? Ask your Higher Power directly for guidance.

4

Letter 4: From Your Higher Power to You

Write the response. What would the wisest, most loving presence say to you right now?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 11 Reading: God As You Understand: Making the Eleventh Step Your Own

My Spiritual Vision & Commitment

What spiritual life are you building? Make it specific and commit.

1

Daily Practice Vision

One year from now, what does your daily spiritual practice look like? Morning? Throughout day? Evening?

2

Relationship with Higher Power

How has your conscious contact deepened? What does the relationship feel like?

3

Living from Guidance

How are you making decisions differently — from guidance rather than self-will? What has changed?

4

Spiritual Community

What spiritual community or practice sustains you? How are you contributing?

5

My Step Eleven Commitment

Write your specific 30-day (or 90-day) Step Eleven commitment. What practices? When? How will you track?
