

# Step Twelve: Awakening, Message & Principles

Adult Children of Alcoholics · The Recovery Files

For Adult Children of Alcoholics in SUD & Mental Health Recovery

"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."

Your progress 0 of 7 parts done · The Three Components of Step Twelve · Awakening · Transformation from Within · Message · Sharing Without Losing Self · Principles · Living What Was Never Taught

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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 6 · READING

## What Is Step Twelve? The Culmination for the ACoA in Triple Recovery

Step Twelve states: "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." This is the step that transforms recovery from something you work on into something you live.

For the Adult Child of an Alcoholic who is also recovering from a substance use disorder and managing co-occurring mental health conditions, Step Twelve carries a weight and a promise that is unlike anything else in the recovery landscape.

### THE THREE COMPONENTS

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps" — This is not a declaration that you have arrived at enlightenment. It is a recognition that something has changed inside you as a result of doing this work. For the ACoA, spiritual awakening often looks like this: you begin to see your childhood with clarity rather than confusion. You recognize that the survival patterns that kept you alive are no longer necessary. You experience moments of genuine peace, self-acceptance, and connection that were never available to you before.

"We tried to carry this message to others" — For the ACoA, this component is simultaneously the most natural and the most dangerous part of Step Twelve. It is natural because ACoA are world-class caretakers — you have been carrying other people's burdens since childhood. It is dangerous for exactly the same reason. The ACoA must learn to distinguish between carrying the message (sharing your experience, strength, and hope) and carrying the person (absorbing their pain, taking responsibility for their recovery, and losing yourself in the process).

"And to practice these principles in all our affairs" — This is where recovery becomes a way of life rather than a program you attend. The principles of the steps — honesty, humility, accountability, surrender, service, self-awareness, and compassion — must be practiced not just in meetings, not just in therapy, but in every domain of your life.

For the ACoA, this means practicing principles that were never modeled for you — which makes Step Twelve both the most challenging and the most revolutionary step of all. You are building from scratch what should have been given to you as a birthright.

### Reflection Questions

1. When you hear the phrase "spiritual awakening," what comes to mind? Has your understanding of this concept changed since beginning recovery?

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2. Can you identify specific, concrete ways that you have changed as a result of working the steps? Name at least three — be specific about what was different before.

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3. How does your ACoA history complicate the idea of "carrying the message"? Do you recognize the difference between helping and rescuing in your own behavior?

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4. Which recovery principle (honesty, humility, accountability, surrender, service, self-awareness, compassion) is most difficult for you to practice consistently? Why?

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5. What does "practicing these principles in all your affairs" mean for someone who was never taught these principles in the first place? What are you building from scratch?

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#### **YOUR EXERCISE**

### **Before & After — Evidence of Transformation**

Documenting the Change That Step Twelve Celebrates

Proof Your Inner Critic Cannot Deny

The ACoA inner critic will insist nothing has changed. This exercise creates written evidence of transformation across six life dimensions.

#### **How I See Myself**

BEFORE: Before recovery, I believed about myself...

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AFTER: Today, I understand about myself...

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### **How I Handle Emotions**

BEFORE: Before recovery, when I felt painful emotions I...

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AFTER: Today, when I feel painful emotions I...

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### **How I Relate to Others**

BEFORE: Before recovery, my relationships were characterized by...

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AFTER: Today, my relationships are characterized by...

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### **How I Cope with Stress**

BEFORE: Before recovery, when life became overwhelming I...

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AFTER: Today, when life becomes overwhelming I...

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### **How I Think About My Family**

BEFORE: Before recovery, I believed about my family of origin...

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AFTER: Today, I understand about my family of origin...

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### **How I See the Future**

BEFORE: Before recovery, I expected my future to look like...

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AFTER: Today, I envision my future as...

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## PART 2 OF 6 · READING

## Spiritual Awakening for the ACoA: What It Actually Looks Like

The phrase "spiritual awakening" intimidates many people in recovery. But the spiritual awakening described in Step Twelve is far more accessible than any mystical experience could be.

For the Adult Child of an Alcoholic, spiritual awakening is the process of waking up from the trance of the dysfunctional family. It is realizing — not just intellectually, but in the marrow of your being — that the rules you lived by as a child are not the rules of reality.

### AWAKENING HAPPENS IN LAYERS

The first layer: recognizing that your family was dysfunctional — that what happened to you was not normal and was not your fault.

The second layer: connecting your substance use to your childhood pain — seeing for the first time that you were not weak or morally defective but were a wounded person using the only coping strategy available.

The third layer: the slow, gradual development of self-compassion — the ability to look at yourself with kindness rather than the harsh judgment your family installed.

The fourth layer: the experience of genuine connection with others — not the performance-based, fear-driven connection of the dysfunctional family, but authentic intimacy where you are seen and accepted as you actually are.

For the person in SUD recovery, spiritual awakening includes the recognition that you are not your addiction. Spiritual awakening is the lived experience of discovering that you can feel without using, connect without performing, cope without chemicals, and live without the constant management of your own destruction.

For the person with co-occurring mental health conditions, spiritual awakening may include the acceptance that your mental health condition is not a punishment, a character flaw, or evidence that you are broken beyond repair. You can be spiritually awake and clinically depressed. You can have a meaningful relationship with a Higher Power and still need medication. These are not contradictions. They are the reality of being human.

The most profound spiritual awakening for the ACoA in triple recovery may be the simplest: the realization that you are allowed to exist. Not perform. Not manage. Not serve. Not fix. Not control. Exist. As you are. With your wounds, your recovery, your mental health, your imperfections, your hard-won wisdom, and your increasingly authentic self.

### Reflection Questions

1. Describe your spiritual awakening in your own words. It does not have to be dramatic — what has shifted inside you as a result of this recovery work?

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2. Which "layer" of awakening resonates most with where you are right now?

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3. How has your understanding of yourself changed? Write a "before and after" — who you believed yourself to be before recovery versus who you are discovering yourself to be now.

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4. Have you integrated your mental health into your spiritual recovery, or do you still experience them as contradictory? How would full integration change your daily experience?

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5. If spiritual awakening means "being allowed to exist as you are," what parts of yourself are you still not allowing? What remains hidden, suppressed, or apologized for?

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#### CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

### Spiritual Awakening & Transformation

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

1. I have experienced a meaningful shift in how I see myself, others, and the world as a result of working the steps

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I understand that spiritual awakening is a process of gradual change, not a single dramatic event

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can identify specific ways my thinking, feeling, and behaving have changed since beginning this recovery journey

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have moments of genuine peace, clarity, or connection that were not available to me before recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I recognize that my awakening includes healing my ACoA wounds, not just addressing my substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am developing a sense of meaning and purpose that goes beyond mere abstinence from substances

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can see how my suffering — including my childhood, addiction, and mental health struggles — has given me something valuable to offer others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I trust the process of recovery even when I cannot see the full picture of where it is leading

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

#### YOUR EXERCISE

### My Spiritual Awakening Map

Tracing the Moments That Changed You

Awakening Happens in Moments

Spiritual awakening is rarely one moment. It is a series of moments — cracks in the wall of denial, flickers of self-compassion, experiences of genuine connection — that accumulate into transformation.

#### The First Crack — When Denial Broke

Describe the moment you first realized the truth about your family, your addiction, or your mental health. What cracked open? What did you see?

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What changed in you as a result of this moment?

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### **The Surrender — When You Stopped Fighting**

Describe the moment you stopped trying to control everything and accepted that you needed help. What did surrender feel like?

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What changed in you as a result of this moment?

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### **The Connection — When You Were Finally Seen**

Describe a moment when someone truly saw you — your pain, your history, your authentic self — and did not leave. How did that change what you believed about yourself?

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What changed in you as a result of this moment?

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### **The Mirror — When You Saw Your Family Clearly**

Describe the moment you recognized, with clarity rather than denial, what your family of origin actually was. When did the ACoA awareness become real rather than theoretical?

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What changed in you as a result of this moment?

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### **The Self-Compassion — When You Stopped Punishing Yourself**

Describe a moment when you treated yourself with kindness instead of criticism. When you gave yourself the grace your family never gave you.

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What changed in you as a result of this moment?

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### **The Emergence — Who You Are Becoming**

Describe who you are becoming — not the wounded child, not the active addict, not the diagnosis — but the person emerging from recovery. Who is that person?

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What changed in you as a result of this moment?

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## PART 3 OF 6 · READING

## Carrying the Message vs. Carrying the Person: The ACoA's Critical Distinction

For Adult Children of Alcoholics, the instruction to "carry the message to others" activates the deepest and most familiar pattern in the ACoA repertoire: caretaking. You have been carrying other people's emotional weight since childhood.

### THE CRITICAL DISTINCTION

Carrying the message means sharing your experience, strength, and hope. It means telling your story honestly — including the ACoA dimensions that traditional recovery culture sometimes overlooks. It means being available when someone reaches out, offering what was freely given to you, and serving as evidence that recovery is possible for people who come from where you come from.

Carrying the person means absorbing their pain, managing their recovery, making decisions for them, protecting them from consequences, losing sleep over their choices, feeling responsible when they relapse, and sacrificing your own wellbeing to ensure theirs. It means becoming their higher power. It means replicating the exact dynamic that defined your childhood: your needs disappear, their needs consume everything, and you measure your worth by how well you kept them alive.

The difference between these two is the difference between recovery and relapse — because for the ACoA, compulsive caretaking IS relapse. It is a return to the pattern that preceded and drove the substance use.

Learning to carry the message without carrying the person requires specific skills the ACoA was never taught: the ability to be present with someone's pain without absorbing it; boundaries — the capacity to say "I care about you, and this is not mine to carry"; the willingness to let other people experience consequences.

The healthiest Step Twelve service comes from overflow, not depletion. You give from what you have in excess — the experience, the hope, the gratitude — rather than from what you cannot afford to lose. When service starts costing you your sobriety, your mental health, your relationships, or your self-care, it has crossed from carrying the message to carrying the person.

### Reflection Questions

1. When you imagine "carrying the message," does your mind go to healthy sharing or to the familiar pattern of caretaking? What is the difference in how each feels in your body?

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2. Describe a time when you carried a person rather than a message. What happened to you — to your recovery, your energy, your mental health, your own needs?

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3. What boundaries do you need in place to serve others without losing yourself? Be specific — what are you willing to give, and what is off-limits?

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4. How could you carry the message of ACoA recovery specifically? What would you tell someone who grew up in the kind of family you grew up in?

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5. If your worth is not determined by how much you sacrifice for others, then what IS it determined by? This is one of the most important questions an ACoA will ever answer.

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#### CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

### Carrying the Message with Healthy Boundaries

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

1. I can share my experience, strength, and hope without taking responsibility for another person's recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I distinguish between healthy service and compulsive caretaking — I know when I am helping versus rescuing

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I carry the message through my behavior and example, not just through words

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can set boundaries around my service without guilt, recognizing that depleted helpers cannot help anyone

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I share my ACoA recovery as part of my message, not just my sobriety date or clean time  
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I can be present with someone in pain without needing to fix, rescue, or absorb their emotion  
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I am honest about my ongoing struggles when sharing my story, rather than presenting a polished performance of recovery  
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I recognize that I cannot carry the message if I am not working my own program consistently  
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

### YOUR EXERCISE

## Service vs. Caretaking Inventory

The ACoA's Most Critical Step Twelve Distinction

When Helping Is Hurting

For ACoA, compulsive caretaking IS relapse. Service comes from overflow; caretaking comes from compulsion. Service respects boundaries; caretaking erases them.

### Helping a newcomer in recovery

HEALTHY SERVICE

I share my experience, answer questions, and make myself available while maintaining my own program and boundaries.

COMPULSIVE CARETAKING

I call them every day, worry about them between calls, feel responsible for their relapses, and neglect my own needs to manage theirs.

Which pattern is more active in this area of your life? Be brutally honest.

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What boundary would shift you from caretaking to service in this area?

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### A friend in crisis

HEALTHY SERVICE

I listen, validate, offer resources, and trust them to make their own decisions. I check in without taking over.

#### COMPULSIVE CARETAKING

I absorb their panic, cancel my own plans, try to solve the problem for them, and feel anxious until they feel better.

Which pattern is more active in this area of your life? Be brutally honest.

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What boundary would shift you from caretaking to service in this area?

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### Family of origin contact

#### HEALTHY SERVICE

I maintain boundaries, offer love from a safe distance, and do not absorb responsibility for dysfunction I did not create.

#### COMPULSIVE CARETAKING

I re-enter the family system, try to fix the dysfunction, take on old roles, and sacrifice my recovery to manage their chaos.

Which pattern is more active in this area of your life? Be brutally honest.

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What boundary would shift you from caretaking to service in this area?

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### Being a sponsor or mentor

#### HEALTHY SERVICE

I guide through experience, hold the person accountable, and maintain healthy limits on my time and emotional investment.

### COMPULSIVE CARETAKING

I become their therapist, parent, and higher power. I carry their recovery as if it is mine. I feel failure when they struggle.

Which pattern is more active in this area of your life? Be brutally honest.

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What boundary would shift you from caretaking to service in this area?

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### Community or meeting service

#### HEALTHY SERVICE

I volunteer for commitments I can sustain, contribute from abundance, and say no when my plate is full.

#### COMPULSIVE CARETAKING

I take on every commitment, cannot say no, feel indispensable, and burn out while telling myself this is what "good recovery" looks like.

Which pattern is more active in this area of your life? Be brutally honest.

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What boundary would shift you from caretaking to service in this area?

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### YOUR EXERCISE

## Writing My Message — The Story I Carry

Crafting Your Triple Recovery Narrative

Your Story Is Your Message

Step Twelve says 'carry this message' — but what IS the message? It is not a sermon or a lecture. It is your story: where you came from, what happened, and what life is like now.

### **Part 1: Where I Came From**

Describe the family you grew up in and how it shaped you. What were the rules, roles, and realities of your childhood?

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### **Part 2: What Happened**

How did the ACoA wounds connect to your substance use? How did both connect to your mental health? Trace the progression without shame.

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### **Part 3: The Turning Point**

What brought you to recovery? What was the moment, the crisis, the whisper that said "this cannot continue"?

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### **Part 4: What Life Is Like Now**

Describe your recovery today — honestly, including both the gains and the ongoing struggles. What has changed? What is still hard?

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### **Part 5: The Message I Carry**

If you had five minutes to speak to someone who is exactly where you were at your worst — same family, same addiction, same mental health struggle — what would you tell them?

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## PART 4 OF 6 · READING

## Practicing Principles You Were Never Taught

"Practice these principles in all our affairs" is perhaps the most ambitious instruction in all twelve steps. It asks you to take everything you have learned — honesty, humility, accountability, surrender, compassion, service, self-awareness, faith, and courage — and apply it everywhere.

For the Adult Child of an Alcoholic, this instruction carries an additional weight: you are being asked to practice principles that were never modeled for you. In your family of origin, the operating principles were likely some combination of denial, control, performance, suppression, and self-erasure.

### THE PRINCIPLES AND THEIR CHALLENGES FOR THE ACoA

**Honesty:** Telling the truth when your family taught you that truth was dangerous. Saying "I am struggling" when your childhood said struggle equals weakness.

**Humility:** Accepting your limitations when your ACoA hyperfunction taught you that you must be capable of everything. Asking for help when your childhood said help never comes.

**Accountability:** Owning your impact when your family system blamed everyone except itself. Making amends when your inner child expects punishment rather than repair.

**Self-Compassion:** Perhaps the most radical principle for the ACoA — treating yourself with the same kindness you extend to others. Speaking to yourself the way a loving parent would speak to a struggling child. Recognizing that your recovery is an act of extraordinary courage, not an obligation you are barely meeting.

For the person managing mental health conditions, practicing principles in all affairs means maintaining your treatment not as a concession to weakness but as a principle of self-care. Taking your medication is practicing the principle of responsibility. Attending therapy is practicing the principle of honesty. These are not separate from your recovery — they ARE your recovery in action.

The beauty of "in all our affairs" is that it provides unlimited opportunities for practice. Every conflict is a chance to respond differently than your family of origin would have. Every morning is a chance to begin again. You will not practice perfectly. The point is not perfection — the point is practice.

### Reflection Questions

1. Which recovery principle (honesty, humility, accountability, surrender, compassion, service, self-awareness) feels most foreign to you — the one your family least modeled? How do you practice it now?

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2. Describe a recent situation where you successfully chose a recovery principle over an ACoA survival pattern. What happened? How did it feel?

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3. Describe a recent situation where you reverted to an ACoA pattern despite knowing the recovery principle. What triggered the reversion? What would you do differently?

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4. How do you practice self-compassion as a principle? Or do you still treat it as an indulgence you have not earned?

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5. What does "in all your affairs" mean practically for your life right now? Pick the three areas where principled living would make the biggest difference.

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#### CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

#### Practicing Principles in All Affairs

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

1. I practice honesty consistently — with myself, with others, and in my relationship with my Higher Power

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I apply recovery principles at work, in relationships, and with family — not just in meetings or therapy

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can manage conflict using recovery principles rather than reverting to ACoA survival patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I practice self-compassion as a principle, not just a technique — treating myself with the kindness I am learning to give others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I recognize when I am slipping into old patterns and use recovery principles to course-correct rather than spiraling into shame

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I practice the principle of surrender in daily life — letting go of control, outcomes, and other people's behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I live by principles even when no one is watching — my private life matches my recovery persona

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am growing in my capacity to sit with discomfort, uncertainty, and imperfection without abandoning my principles

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

### YOUR EXERCISE

## Principles in All Affairs Assessment

Examining Core Principles Across Three Life Domains

Principles Are Practiced Everywhere

It is easy to practice principles in a meeting room. The real test is at home, at work, and in your private relationship with yourself.

### Honesty

At Home / In Relationships

Am I honest with my partner, family, and close friends — even when the truth is uncomfortable?

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At Work / In the World

Am I honest at work — about my capacity, my mistakes, and my limitations?

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With Myself

Am I honest with myself about where I really am in my recovery — not where I perform being?

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## Humility

At Home / In Relationships

Can I admit when I am wrong at home without it becoming a shame spiral or a defensive battle?

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At Work / In the World

Can I ask for help, accept feedback, and acknowledge limitations without feeling like a failure?

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With Myself

Can I see myself accurately — neither inflated nor diminished — as a human being in progress?

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## Self-Compassion

At Home / In Relationships

Do I treat myself with the same kindness I extend to the people I love — or am I the harshest person in the room?

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At Work / In the World

Do I allow myself to be imperfect at work, or does the ACoA perfectionism still demand flawless performance?

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With Myself

Do I genuinely believe I deserve recovery, happiness, and rest?

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## Service

At Home / In Relationships

Do I contribute to my household from generosity rather than compulsion? Can I serve without losing myself?

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At Work / In the World

Do I use my recovery experience to help others informally — not through caretaking but through example?

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With Myself

Do I attend to my own recovery as an act of service?

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## Surrender

At Home / In Relationships

Can I let go of controlling my partner, my children, and the outcomes of situations I cannot manage?

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At Work / In the World

Can I do my best and release the outcome — trusting that my worth is not determined by results alone?

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With Myself

Can I accept that I am a work in progress, that healing takes time?

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## PART 5 OF 6 · READING

## Breaking the Cycle: Step Twelve as Intergenerational Healing

There is a dimension of Step Twelve that is rarely discussed in traditional recovery literature but that is central to the ACoA experience: intergenerational healing. When you practice these principles in all your affairs, you are not only changing your own life. You are breaking a cycle that may have been spinning for generations.

Your parents did not wake up one morning and decide to create a dysfunctional family. They were, in most cases, repeating what was done to them. Your family's dysfunction was not invented in your generation — it was inherited. And without intervention, it would have been passed on to the next. You are the intervention.

By doing this work — by working the steps, by healing your ACoA wounds, by addressing your substance use, by managing your mental health, by learning principles your family never taught you — you are stopping a transmission that may have been running for five, six, seven generations.

Every time you respond to your child with patience instead of rage, you break the cycle. Every time you allow yourself to feel an emotion instead of numbing it, you break the cycle. Every time you set a boundary instead of people-pleasing, you break the cycle. Every time you tell the truth instead of maintaining a facade, you break the cycle.

This is not an abstraction. This is the most concrete, tangible, measurable impact of your recovery. Your children — if you have them or will have them — are growing up in a different family than the one you grew up in. Not a perfect family. But a family where emotions are acknowledged rather than suppressed. Where conflict is addressed rather than denied. Where each person's needs are valid rather than invisible.

For the person with co-occurring conditions, breaking the cycle includes normalizing mental health treatment within your family and community. Your willingness to manage your condition openly and without shame is itself a revolutionary act of intergenerational healing.

This is the ultimate message of Step Twelve for the ACoA: your recovery is not just for you. It is for every person who comes after you.

### Reflection Questions

1. Can you trace the cycle of dysfunction in your family across generations? What patterns repeat — addiction, emotional suppression, abandonment, abuse, denial?

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2. In what specific ways are you already breaking the cycle? Name at least three concrete changes you have made that your family of origin never made.

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3. If you have children: What are you giving them that was never given to you? What are you still struggling to provide? Be honest about both.

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4. If you do not have children: In what other relationships or contexts are you breaking the cycle? Who is witnessing your transformation?

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5. What message would you send back in time to the child you were — the child who could not have imagined the recovery you are living today?

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#### CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

#### ACoA Recovery Integration

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

1. I am breaking the cycle of dysfunction — my relationships, parenting, and daily life are fundamentally different from my family of origin

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I attend to my inner child's needs with compassion rather than ignoring, criticizing, or overwhelming them

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can recognize when ACoA patterns (people-pleasing, hypervigilance, control) are driving my behavior and choose differently

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am building a "chosen family" of healthy relationships that provide what my family of origin could not

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have grieved — or am actively grieving — the childhood I deserved but did not receive

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am developing an identity separate from my roles as "adult child," "addict," or "patient" — I am becoming a whole person

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have compassion for my family of origin, even as I maintain the boundaries necessary for my recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I carry the message of ACoA recovery to others who grew up in dysfunctional families, helping them see they are not alone

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

### YOUR EXERCISE

## Breaking the Cycle — Intergenerational Map

Seeing What Was Passed Down and What You Are Changing

You Are the Intervention

The dysfunction in your family did not begin with your parents. It was inherited — and without your recovery, it would have been passed on. This exercise maps what was transmitted and documents the specific ways you are changing the legacy.

### What Was Passed Down: Addiction Patterns

Trace the history of substance use, addiction, or compulsive behavior in your family across generations. Who used? What? How was it handled?

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### What Was Passed Down: Emotional Patterns

How were emotions handled in your family across generations? Suppression? Explosion? Denial? What was the family's emotional "operating system"?

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### What Was Passed Down: Relationship Patterns

What relationship patterns repeat across generations? Codependence? Abandonment? Control? Violence? Emotional unavailability?

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### **What Was Passed Down: Mental Health Patterns**

What mental health conditions or symptoms appear across generations — diagnosed or not? Depression? Anxiety? Trauma responses? How were they handled?

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### **What I Am Changing: My Recovery Legacy**

For each pattern above, describe specifically how you are changing it. What are you doing differently? What will your children, relationships, and community inherit from you instead?

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### **What Still Needs Work**

Honestly — which family patterns are still active in you? Where does the cycle still spin despite your recovery?

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### **YOUR EXERCISE**

## **The Legacy Letter — What You Leave Behind**

Writing Your Message for Those Who Come After You

Your Life Is the Message

Step Twelve says 'carry this message.' The most powerful version of that message is not spoken in a meeting — it is lived in a life. Write three letters that capture the legacy of your recovery.

### **Letter to My Inner Child**

Write to the child you were — the one who survived the family, the addiction, the pain. Tell them what you have built. Tell them they are safe now. Tell them they matter.

Dear younger me...

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### **Letter to Someone Just Beginning**

Write to someone who is where you were at your lowest — same family wounds, same addiction, same despair. What do they need to hear?

Dear friend who is just beginning...

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### **Letter to the Future**

Write to the person you are becoming — the future you, five or ten years further into recovery. What do you hope for them? What legacy are you building?

Dear future me...

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## PART 6 OF 6 · READING

## A Life Beyond Recovery: Wholeness, Purpose & Daily Practice

Step Twelve points toward something that many people in early recovery cannot yet imagine: a life that is not defined by what you are recovering from but by what you are recovering into.

There comes a point in the journey — not a fixed point, not a destination, but a gradual emergence — where you begin to experience yourself as a whole person rather than a collection of diagnoses, wounds, and recovery milestones. You are not only an Adult Child of an Alcoholic. You are not only a person in recovery. You are not only a person with a mental health condition. You are a person — complex, evolving, imperfect, and whole.

### WHOLENESS

Wholeness for the ACoA means developing an identity that is not organized around dysfunction. Wholeness means building an identity that includes but transcends these experiences — an identity based on your values, your relationships, your purpose, your creativity, your contributions, and your authentic self.

### PURPOSE

Purpose in Step Twelve extends beyond service to others. Purpose means finding meaningful work that uses your gifts and reflects your values. It means cultivating relationships that nourish rather than deplete. It means pursuing interests, hobbies, and passions that were impossible during active addiction. It means answering the question that recovery ultimately poses: "Now that you are free — what will you do with your freedom?"

### DAILY PRACTICE

Step Twelve does not graduate you from the daily work of recovery. It integrates that work into a life that is increasingly rich, meaningful, and expansive. The morning prayer or meditation continues. The daily inventory continues. But these practices are no longer the emergency measures of early recovery — they are the maintenance practices of a life that is working.

The paradox of Step Twelve is that the more you give away what you have learned, the more you have. The more you carry the message, the more you understand it yourself.

You began this journey as a wounded child in a dysfunctional family. You survived it. You medicated it. You nearly destroyed yourself over it. And then — through a combination of desperation, willingness, grace, and the hardest work you have ever done — you began to heal. Step Twelve is the acknowledgment that the healing has taken root.

### Reflection Questions

1. Beyond your recovery identities (ACoA, person in recovery, person with mental health condition), who are you? What parts of yourself are emerging that have nothing to do with your diagnosis?

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2. What gives you a sense of purpose beyond staying sober and managing symptoms? What would you pursue if you believed you were free to pursue anything?

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3. What daily practices are non-negotiable for maintaining the life you are building? What happens when you neglect them?

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4. What is the most meaningful change your recovery has produced — not the most dramatic, but the most meaningful to YOU personally?

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5. Write a statement of wholeness — not a declaration of perfection, but an acknowledgment of who you are becoming: "I am a person who..."

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#### CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

### Sustainable Recovery & Daily Living

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

1. I have a daily routine that includes spiritual practice, self-care, and recovery maintenance

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I manage my mental health proactively — medication, therapy, and wellness practices — rather than waiting for crisis

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have relationships that support my recovery and I have reduced or eliminated relationships that undermine it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I find joy, meaning, and satisfaction in daily life that is not dependent on substances, chaos, or external validation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can navigate difficult emotions, challenging situations, and unexpected setbacks without relapsing or decompensating

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I continue to grow, learn, and deepen my recovery rather than coasting on past progress

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I balance service to others with care for myself — I do not sacrifice my wellbeing in the name of helping

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I live one day at a time with genuine intention rather than white-knuckling through days I am merely surviving

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

### YOUR EXERCISE

## Seven-Day Step Twelve Living Journal

Practicing the Three Components Daily

Living It, Not Just Knowing It

Step Twelve is lived, not studied. This seven-day journal tracks your daily practice of all three components — awakening, message, and principles.

### Day 1

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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## Day 2

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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### **Day 3**

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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## Day 4

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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## Day 5

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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## Day 6

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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## Day 7

Date:

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How did I experience conscious contact with my Higher Power today?

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How did I carry the message today — through words or through example?

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Which recovery principle did I practice most consciously? In what situation?

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Where did an ACoA pattern show up, and how did I respond?

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How is my SUD recovery and my mental health today — honestly?

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What am I grateful for today?

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#### **YOUR EXERCISE**

### **Beyond Recovery — Wholeness Inventory**

Discovering Who You Are Beyond Your Diagnoses

You Are More Than Your Wounds

Recovery can become its own identity trap — where 'ACoA,' 'addict,' and 'person with depression' become the totality of who you are. Step Twelve points toward wholeness: a life that includes but transcends your recovery story.

#### **My Values**

Beyond recovery principles, what do I value most? What matters to me as a whole person?

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### **My Passions & Interests**

What do I enjoy, pursue, or wonder about that has nothing to do with recovery or diagnosis?

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### **My Relationships**

Who am I in my relationships — not as a caretaker, not as a patient, but as a partner, friend, parent, or community member?

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### **My Creativity**

How do I express myself creatively? What would I create if I believed I had permission?

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### **My Contribution**

Beyond recovery service, how do I contribute to the world? What do I offer that is uniquely mine?

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### **My Joy**

What brings me genuine joy — not performance of happiness, but authentic delight, laughter, and peace?

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### **My Growth Edge**

Where am I still growing, learning, and expanding? What is the frontier of my development as a whole person?

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### **YOUR EXERCISE**

## **Personal Step Twelve Blueprint**

Designing Your Life of Awakening, Message & Principles

The Design for the Rest of Your Life

This is where the entire journey culminates. Design the daily life that sustains awakening, service, and principled living. This blueprint is not a rigid plan — it is a living document that grows with you.

### **My Awakening Practice**

1. How will I maintain and deepen my spiritual awakening on a daily basis? (Prayer, meditation, gratitude, conscious contact — be specific)

Design your awakening practice...

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2. How will I stay alert to the ACoA patterns that threaten to pull me back into unconsciousness? What are my early warning signs?

Design your awakening practice...

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3. What practices keep me connected to the meaning and purpose that recovery has given me?

Design your awakening practice...

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### **My Service & Message Plan**

1. What forms of service are sustainable for me right now — given my recovery, mental health, and life demands?

Design your service plan...

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2. What boundaries protect me from crossing into compulsive caretaking? How will I monitor this?

Design your service plan...

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3. Where and how will I share my triple recovery message (ACoA + SUD + Mental Health)? Who needs to hear it?

Design your service plan...

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### **My Step Twelve Commitment**

Your Commitment Statement

This is the culmination of everything — a personal declaration that captures who you are becoming and how you will live. Not a promise of perfection. A statement of intention from someone who has earned the right to live freely, serve generously, and practice principles that were never taught but are now being learned, one day at a time.

Having had a spiritual awakening, I commit to living Step Twelve by...

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Today's date:

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Witnessed by:

Sponsor, therapist, trusted friend...

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"You began as a wounded child. You survived. You medicated. You nearly destroyed yourself. And then you began to heal."

Step Twelve is the acknowledgment that the healing has taken root. Not that it is finished. Not that you are cured. But that something fundamental has changed — and that the change is worth sharing, protecting, and living into every single day. You are not just in recovery. You are becoming the person the wounded child inside you always needed. One day at a time.