

Spiritual Trust Deficiency

Deep Dives · The Recovery Files

Rebuilding the Foundation of Spiritual Trust in Recovery

4 Readings

1 Assessment · 10 Exercises

In this workbook

- Part 1 · What Is Spiritual Trust Deficiency?
- Part 2 · Why We Struggle to Trust
- Part 3 · Collaborative Surrender: Trust Is Not Passivity
- Part 4 · Rebuilding Spiritual Trust

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 4 · READING

What Is Spiritual Trust Deficiency?

Spiritual trust deficiency is the persistent difficulty trusting in, relying upon, and surrendering to a higher power within the context of recovery.

Many people with spiritual trust deficiency believe in a higher power. They may pray. They may attend meetings. But underneath, there is doubt: "Is this really working? Does my higher power actually care?"

For people in recovery, spiritual trust deficiency creates a dangerous problem. The twelve-step tradition asks participants to surrender control, trust a power greater than themselves, and believe that this power has their best interests at heart.

For someone with deep spiritual trust deficiency, these steps feel not just difficult but terrifying. The result is often spiritual performance without spiritual substance.

Spiritual trust deficiency operates across multiple dimensions: doubting that your higher power cares, fearing the consequences of surrender, believing you must do it all yourself, questioning whether spiritual guidance is real, and dismissing evidence of spiritual involvement.

The good news is that spiritual trust deficiency is not permanent. Like a muscle that has atrophied, spiritual trust can be rebuilt — gradually, deliberately, and experientially.

Reflection Questions

1. How does "spiritual trust deficiency" describe something you recognize in your recovery?

2. Have you experienced "spiritual performance without spiritual substance"?

3. What life experiences taught you that trust leads to disappointment?

4. Which dimension of spiritual trust deficiency resonates most strongly?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Higher Power Care Doubt

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

1. I doubt that my higher power is genuinely concerned about my daily problems

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I believe my higher power is too distant to be involved in my personal life

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. During difficult periods, I feel like my higher power has abandoned me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I struggle to believe that my higher power has a personal interest in my recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

What I Believe My Higher Power Thinks of Me

Naming the care doubt underneath

The Belief Underneath

Many of us say we believe in a caring Higher Power while privately expecting judgment, disappointment or indifference. That hidden belief shapes how much we can trust. Write what you actually believe, not what you think you should.

What I Honestly Believe

1. Finish the sentence: "When my Higher Power looks at me, it sees..."

2. How do I imagine it reacts when I mess up?

3. Do I believe I am cared for — or tolerated, watched or forgotten?

How Strongly I Hold These

Rate how true each is for you right now.

I am too much trouble to be cared for

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

Care has to be earned

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

I will be punished for my past

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

I am on my own

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

Where It Came From

1. Whose voice does this belief sound like — a parent, a church, a past relationship?

2. What evidence from my recovery argues against it?

3. One sentence I would like to believe instead:

PART 2 OF 4 · READING

Why We Struggle to Trust

Spiritual trust deficiency does not emerge from nowhere. It is rooted in experiences that taught your nervous system that trust is dangerous.

The most common root is relational betrayal. Trust is first learned in relationships with primary caregivers. Children who experienced neglect, abuse, or inconsistency develop insecure attachment patterns.

These attachment patterns transfer directly to spiritual relationship. If your parents were unreliable, you tend to experience your higher power as unreliable.

Addiction itself deepens spiritual trust deficiency. During active addiction, many people prayed for help — and the addiction continued. This creates a cycle of spiritual shame and mistrust.

Cultural and religious wounding adds another layer. Many people carry wounds from religious institutions that used God as a tool of control, shame, or punishment.

Understanding these roots changes the conversation from "Why can't I just trust?" to "Of course this is hard — look at what I learned."

Reflection Questions

1. What were your earliest experiences with trust and reliability?

2. Can you see connections between your attachment patterns and your relationship with your higher power?

3. During active addiction, did you pray or bargain with your higher power? What happened?

4. Have you experienced religious or spiritual wounding?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5**Surrender Consequence Fear**

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

1. I fear that surrendering control will lead to negative outcomes
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I believe my personal control is necessary to prevent disasters
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. When I think about "turning it over," I feel anxiety rather than relief
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am afraid that if I stop trying to control outcomes, everything will fall apart
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5**Self-Reliance Beliefs**

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

1. I believe most problems must be solved through personal effort alone
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I feel that relying on spiritual guidance is a sign of weakness
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I believe personal solutions are more reliable than spiritual ones
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. Even in recovery programs, I secretly believe I need to figure things out myself
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE**Trust History Timeline****Childhood (Ages 0-12)**

1. Who were the most important people you trusted during this period?

2. Was trust rewarded or punished? What specific experiences taught you about whether trust was safe?

3. What was your relationship with God or spirituality during this period?

Adolescence (Ages 13-18)

1. Who were the most important people you trusted during this period?

2. Was trust rewarded or punished? What specific experiences taught you about whether trust was safe?

3. What was your relationship with God or spirituality during this period?

Early Adulthood / Active Addiction

1. Who were the most important people you trusted during this period?

2. Was trust rewarded or punished? What specific experiences taught you about whether trust was safe?

3. What was your relationship with God or spirituality during this period?

Recovery Period

1. Who were the most important people you trusted during this period?

2. Was trust rewarded or punished? What specific experiences taught you about whether trust was safe?

3. What was your relationship with God or spirituality during this period?

YOUR EXERCISE

If I Let Go, Then...

The specific things I fear will happen if I surrender

Fear Is Usually Specific

Resistance to trust often hides a list of very particular fears: that things will fall apart, that I will be taken advantage of, that I will lose who I am. Vague fear runs us; named fear can be looked at.

My If-Then List

1. If I really let go of ___, then I am afraid that...

2. If I stop managing ___, then I am afraid that...

3. If I trust ___, then I am afraid that...

Testing the Fears

1. Which of these fears has actually happened before? What did I survive?

2. Which are predictions, not facts?

3. What has happened when I let go of something smaller?

4. Which fear do I most need to say out loud to someone, and to whom?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Self-Reliance Ledger

What running it myself has given me and what it has cost

Self-Reliance Kept Us Alive

Self-reliance often began as a survival skill. It may have kept you safe once. In recovery the question is what it costs now. This ledger looks honestly at both columns.

What It Gave Me

1. What did relying only on myself protect me from?

2. When did it genuinely help?

What It Has Cost

1. Where has relying only on myself led back to using or to the edge of it?

2. Which relationships has it kept at arm's length?

3. What help have I refused that I needed?

4. What has it cost my spiritual life?

The Balance Today

1. Looking at both columns, what do I conclude?

2. One area where I will try depending on something beyond me this week:

PART 3 OF 4 · READING

Collaborative Surrender: Trust Is Not Passivity

One of the most damaging misconceptions is that surrender means passivity — that trusting a higher power means doing nothing.

This creates a false dichotomy: either I am in control and taking action, OR I am surrendering and becoming passive.

Authentic spiritual surrender is not the elimination of personal responsibility — it is the transformation of it. It is doing everything you can while releasing attachment to the outcome.

Think of a farmer. A farmer cannot make crops grow. The farmer can prepare soil, plant seeds, water the field — but the actual growth happens through processes the farmer doesn't control.

Recovery works the same way. You are responsible for showing up, doing the work, being honest. You are NOT responsible for controlling every outcome or single-handedly producing your own spiritual transformation.

Step Three captures this: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the CARE of God." Not control — CARE. There is a profound difference.

This collaborative understanding resolves the false dichotomy. You can do everything within your power while trusting that the power beyond yours is doing what you cannot.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you confused spiritual surrender with passivity?

2. Does the "farmer" metaphor help clarify the difference between effort and control?

3. What is your "footwork" — the things within your power in recovery?

4. What does it mean that Step Three says "care" rather than "control"?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Guidance Reliability Questions

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

1. I question whether spiritual guidance is actually real or just my imagination
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I doubt my ability to distinguish genuine spiritual guidance from my own thoughts
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I wonder if spiritual guidance is reliable enough for important life decisions
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. When I make a decision based on spiritual prompting, I second-guess myself
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

My Part, Its Part

A collaborative surrender plan for one real situation

Trust Is Collaborative

Surrender is not sitting back and waiting. It is doing your part fully and leaving the outcome. This exercise separates the two for one situation you are facing now.

The Situation

1. A real situation I am worried about right now:

2. The outcome I want:

Sorting the Parts

1. My part — the actions, calls and footwork that are mine to do:

2. Not my part — outcomes, other people's choices, timing:

3. Where I keep crossing the line from my part into trying to control the result:

The Plan

1. My next three actions, with when I will do them:

2. What I will say or pray when I notice myself grabbing the outcome:

3. Who will I check in with about this?

YOUR EXERCISE

How I Ask, How I Listen

Building a guidance practice and checking it with others

Guidance Takes Practice

Many of us doubt guidance because we have never had a steady way to ask for it or check it. A simple practice — asking, waiting, checking with trusted people — makes guidance something you can test rather than guess at.

How I Ask

1. When and how do I currently ask for guidance, if at all?

2. What gets in the way — doubt, hurry, fear of the answer?

3. A simple daily way I could ask (a time, a place, a few words):

How I Listen

1. How has guidance come to me before — a thought, a person, a reading, a door opening or closing?

2. How can I tell guidance from my own wishes or fears?

Checking It With Others

1. Who are two people I trust to check my sense of direction with?

2. A decision I am facing that I will bring to them this week:

PART 4 OF 4 · READING

Rebuilding Spiritual Trust

Rebuilding spiritual trust is not accomplished through argument or willpower. You cannot think your way into spiritual trust — you can only experience your way into it.

Trust is built through experience, not through intellectual assent.

The process begins with small experiments. You don't start by surrendering your entire life. You start by surrendering one small thing and observing what happens.

The process continues with honest observation. After each experiment, you pay attention to results. These observations become data points that begin to shift your nervous system.

The process deepens through gratitude practice. One of the most powerful antidotes to evidence dismissal is deliberately noticing and recording evidence of spiritual care.

The process matures through spiritual relationship practices. Telling your higher power the truth about your doubts, fears, and anger is more spiritually authentic than reciting polished prayers.

Finally, the process is sustained through community. Spiritual trust is almost impossible to build in isolation.

The goal is not blind faith. The goal is informed trust — trust based on accumulated evidence, practiced surrender, and genuine relationship.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond to the idea that spiritual trust is built through experience?

2. What "small experiment" could you conduct this week?

3. What evidence of spiritual care have you dismissed or failed to notice?

4. How honest are you in your prayer or meditation practice?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Evidence Dismissal

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

1. When positive things happen, I dismiss them as coincidence rather than spiritual care

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I tend to focus on my problems as evidence that my higher power isn't helping

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I overlook or minimize examples of spiritual protection or guidance in my life

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I notice that I am quicker to attribute negative events to my higher power's absence

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Higher Power Portrait

The One I Inherited and the One I Can Trust

Why a Portrait

Most of us are not refusing to trust a loving Higher Power. We are refusing to trust the one we were handed — often painted by a harsh parent, a frightening church, or the loneliness of active addiction. It makes sense not to trust that picture. This exercise draws the old portrait honestly first, then asks what kind of power you could actually lean on.

You Do Not Have to Believe in God to Do This

The program asks only for a power greater than yourself. For many people that is the group, the fellowship, or the accumulated wisdom of the people who got sober before them. Answer in whatever language is honest for you. An honest "I don't know" is worth more to your recovery than a borrowed belief.

The Portrait I Inherited

1. Describe the Higher Power (or God, or the universe) you grew up with — or the absence of one. What did it look like, sound like, want from you?

2. Where did that picture come from? Name the people, places, and experiences that painted it.

3. According to that picture, how does this power respond when you fail, relapse, or fall short?

4. Does this picture resemble anyone in your life — a parent, a teacher, an authority figure? Who, and how?

Six Common Distortions

These are the pictures people most often bring into recovery. For each, write whether any of it lives in your portrait — and how it shows up in how you pray, ask for help, or brace for bad news.

The Judge

Keeps score, waits for you to fail, and is never satisfied.

The Absent Parent

Might exist, but is not paying attention to you.

The Vending Machine

Delivers if you put in the right prayers, and owes you when you do.

The Cosmic Cop

Mainly interested in catching you and punishing you.

The Fair-Weather Friend

Present when things go well, gone when they fall apart.

The One Who Helps Everyone But Me

Real for other people in the rooms, just not for you.

The Portrait I Can Trust

1. If you could describe a power worth trusting, what qualities would it have? List at least five.

2. How would that power respond to you on your worst day — after a relapse, a lie, a failure?

3. How would it respond when you are afraid about something you cannot control?

4. Where have you already seen something like this in action — in the fellowship, a sponsor, a stranger, a moment you were carried through?

5. Write a short description of your Higher Power as you understand it today, in plain words. Leave room for it to change.

Between the Two Portraits

1. Which parts of the old portrait still show up when you are under stress?

Be honest about where you are...

2. What would you do differently this week if you acted as though the new portrait were true — even before you fully believe it?

Be honest about where you are...

3. Who could you share both portraits with?

Be honest about where you are...

YOUR EXERCISE

Evidence of Care Log (7 Days)

0 of 7 days logged

Training the Eye

A mind shaped by disappointment gets very good at spotting evidence that no one is coming. It does not notice the phone call that came at the right time, the meeting that said exactly what you needed, the day that went better than you feared. This log is not asking you to prove God exists. It is asking you to notice care that is already present, one day at a time, and let the evidence pile up.

On Hard Days

Some days the only evidence will be small — you got through it, someone answered, you did not use. Write that down. A hard day is not proof you are forgotten, and you do not have to pretend it was a good one.

Day 1

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

Day 2

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

Day 3

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

Day 4

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

Day 5

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

Day 6

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

Day 7

One moment today I was cared for, helped, protected, or given what I needed — by anyone or anything:

Did I notice it at the time, or only now looking back?

What was my part? (Trust is collaborative — what did I show up and do?)

One thing I worried about today that I could not control. What actually happened?

How much did I trust that I would be okay today?

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

Completely

End-of-Week Review

Trust ratings this week: - - - - -

1. Read all seven days together. What kind of care showed up most often, and through whom?

2. How many of the moments did you notice at the time, and how many only looking back? What does that say about where your attention goes?

3. What happened to the worries you could not control? How many turned out the way you feared?

4. Did your trust ratings move? What seemed to raise them or lower them?

5. What does this week's evidence suggest about the portrait of a Higher Power you drew in Exercise 2?

YOUR EXERCISE**Small Trust Experiments**

One low-stakes area to trust a little more each week

Trust Grows by Testing

Trust that has been broken does not come back all at once. It is rebuilt in small experiments where the stakes are low and the results can be noticed. Start small and write down what actually happens.

Choosing Experiments

1. Three low-stakes areas where I could trust a little more (a plan, a person, a prayer, a timeline):

2. The one I will start with this week:

3. Exactly what I will do differently:

What Happened

1. What happened when I tried it?

2. What did I expect to happen, and how did that compare?

3. What does this add to my evidence that trust is possible?

4. My experiment for next week:

YOUR EXERCISE

Letter to My Higher Power, and the Reply

Writing both sides

A Conversation on Paper

Write honestly to your Higher Power as you understand it — doubts, anger and hopes included. Then write the reply you believe a caring Higher Power would give. You do not need to be certain; you only need to be honest.

My Letter

1. What I have wanted to say to you:

2. What I am angry or confused about:

3. What I am asking for:

The Reply

1. Write the reply a caring Higher Power would give you:

2. Which line in the reply is hardest to believe?

3. Which line will I keep with me this week?
