

life change
for couples

*A Biblical 12-Step Journey
for Marriage Enrichment*

A WORKBOOK

life change
for couples

JAMES M. REEVES



If you would like to have James M. Reeves come to your church or conference to do on-site training or consultation, you can contact him by email or at his website. At the time of this writing, James is able and willing to come without charge. Email: james@jamesmreeves.com; website: www.jamesmreeves.com.

Life Change For Couples: A Biblical 12-Step Journey for Marriage Enrichment
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For the purposes of this book, the word “alcohol” in Step One has been changed to read spouse’s name. In Step Three the phrase “God as we understood Him” has been deleted. In Step Twelve the word “alcoholics” has been changed to read “others.”

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and one other human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for the knowledge of His will and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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*To my wife, Laura,
my hero and life partner for over thirty years.
There is no one I would rather be in a foxhole or crisis with than her.*

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Foreword

The pages you are about to read can be captured in two words: *blessed wisdom*. This workbook reveals the wisdom of the Word of God as it is expressed in the principles of the Twelve Steps.

I have seen personally and professionally the miracle of God's Word come alive along with the process of healing that the Twelve Steps has offered people across the world. *Life Change for Couples* takes a couple on a unique but intelligent journey toward a better marriage.

Dr. Reeves utilizes what he has learned through decades of guiding people as they grow beyond their past. James is a practical applier of the Word of God. On page after page you will be introduced to both principles and practices.

As a Christian and a licensed psychologist, I truly enjoy what Dr. Reeves has done. He takes the hands of readers and biblically and thoughtfully directs them through each of the Twelve Steps.

I love his approach to helping marriages because it focuses on the part of the marriage spouses can change—themselves.

When people go through this time-tested process of life change, they can expect that they will be different. A different self can influence a different marriage.

Any person would benefit from reading and doing the exercises in *Life Change for Couples*. I also believe as churches embrace this material in ministry to couples, they can lay a foundation for God-purposed, healthier marriages that actually can last over the decades of life.

Great marriages not only help a couple but also their family. As one couple gets healthier and stronger, it can be the DNA of healthier marriages for generations to come, building healthy churches and communities for the future.

I encourage you to do the work in these pages and be part of the miracle God intends for your life, your marriage, and your generation.

—Douglas Weiss, PhD

Licensed Psychologist and Executive Director of Heart to Heart Counseling Center

Preface

HOW THE WORKBOOK IS DESIGNED

One of the inadequacies of many workbooks is that they are long on “filling in the blanks,” but short on the explanation and illustration of important truths. The participant/reader seems to be left on his/her own to figure out the truth or to understand the depths of meaning that the principle holds. I have attempted to provide more for the reader, as the following illustrations of my workbook show.

As a Three-Legged Stool

This is neither a book simply to be read, nor is it a workbook where you just fill in the blanks. It is, in fact, a hybrid of the two. You can think of it as a three-legged stool; all three legs are important for the stability of the stool. The three legs are:

Leg One: Instruction

Each one of the steps in this process is based upon biblical principles and concepts that will be explained, illustrated, and applied, in order to make sure the participant understands the core truths upon which each chapter is based. Therefore, I have given a good portion of each chapter to that instruction and application. Some chapters have more instruction than others, depending upon the nature of the specific principle being discussed in that chapter. Instruction is necessary to make sure the participant understands what the step is about. With understanding he/she can make application.

Leg Two: Introspection

As important as the instruction and an understanding of the principles are, ultimately they are of no value for change unless the participant takes the time to do the personal introspection to see what each principle has to say to him/her. We need to ask questions such as, “How does that apply to my life right now? What change do I need in

this area of my life?" What responsibility do I have according to this principle?" When instruction is joined with introspection, the stage is set for the third leg of the stool.

Leg Three: Interaction

The workbook is based upon the truth that "life change" happens best in community. I would go so far as to say that real and lasting life change happens only in the context of relationships. As we hear each other tell our stories, share insights, and confess struggles, we gain encouragement from and learn from one another. I like to say that when I am in this kind of open and honest process with you, another Christian, the Holy Spirit who is in you speaks to the Holy Spirit in me. Through you He teaches, convicts, encourages, and ultimately changes me. It is important that each person has all three legs of the stool on the ground for each step.

Another way of expressing this triad is "Teaching, Thinking, and Talking." All three are important in order to experience the full benefit of the process. When each member of the group "Suits up" (Does the work), "Shows up" (Comes to the meetings), and "Speaks up" (Shares), then the environment is created for the beginning of life change for every person in the process.

I do believe that all three legs are important. However, I have designed the workbook in such a way that if there is a person who does not have a group available to go through this process with, he or she could do it alone and receive some benefit. That would not be the optimum, but it is an option when no group is available.

As a Two-Step Dance

In Texas, we have a famous dance called the Two-Step. In fact, its full name is the "Texas Two-Step." I don't know if it originated in Texas, but we Texans at least like to think it did. So, we take credit for it, as we do with many other things.

The chapters in this workbook are like the Two-Step. Each chapter is divided into two basic parts. The first is the problem of the step. As you will see, each of the steps presents a unique and difficult challenge. I feel it best to state these challenges right up front. We know they exist for two reasons: Scripture indicates it, and experience bears it out. At the end of the day, we all have the same basic sin nature that we must do battle with. Therefore, we all have the same basic struggles and challenges. They just come at different levels. So, each chapter opens with a recognition of the challenge.

The rest of each chapter is made up of the explanation of the process. Each one of the steps has its own unique process that is required in order to work through the step. There are guidelines and instructions for each step that have been discovered over many years of practice and with the input of many people who have gone before. In other words, "This is not our first rodeo." We have been here before and have ridden this bull many times. We know him well and can help keep you from getting bucked off and stomped into the dirt, if you will listen.

As Alphabet Soup

There are twelve steps, but only ten chapters that begin with a consecutive letter of the alphabet. That is because steps 6 and 7 and steps 8 and 9 have been combined in this workbook. When we come to them you will understand why I have done that.

In each chapter there is a basic, core principle upon which that step is based. Each one of the principles is a tool. A tool for life change. When you have completed this workbook you will not be finished. You will have just begun. This workbook is designed to introduce you to these tools and teach you how to use the tools on an ongoing basis. This is just like a technical school where you learn the things you will need in order to go out and become successful in life change. As you use these tools every day of your life, you will become more effective in their use and they will become more effective in your life. In other words, these tools are being provided for you to use for the rest of your life.

For that reason, I wanted a mechanism by which anyone could learn these principles and be able to recall them at any time in sequential order. Since most of us know the first ten letters of the alphabet, I thought that would be a good structure to use.

The first step is "A"—Admitted Powerlessness. Step two is "B"—Believe the Truth, and so on, to the last step which is "J"—Just Do It! You will find this won't take much memorization skill. It will come naturally as you work through each chapter. When we come to "H," "Heed the Weeds," in chapter 8 you will see specifically how this ability to recall the steps at any time and any place will have practical application.

As a Picture Collage

Because the information in this workbook has to be easily recalled in order for it to be practical and usable, most steps have at least one visual picture to illustrate the core principle of that step. It has been proved that the mind thinks in pictures. That is why successful memory systems teach us to turn concepts and thoughts into pictures in order to be able to remember them over long periods of time. Not only that, but many of us are visual learners. I have discovered that in my own learning. If I can see something as well as hear it, I learn and retain it much more effectively. So, as you move through these steps you will be developing mental pictures that will aid your understanding and recall of the principles for application in daily life.

As a Toolbox

I carry a toolbox in the back of my truck. It is with me everywhere I go. For that toolbox to do me any good three things must happen. First, I must know how each tool works. If I don't know how the tool works it can do me no good. Second, I must have the tool with me when I need it. If it's at home in the garage when my truck breaks down it can't do me any good at all. Third, I must take the tool out and use it.

I may know how a tool works and even have it with me, but until I take it out and use it I will remain stuck by the side of the road.

The process in this book is about acquiring tools for life change. There are different tools for different purposes. I must know how each tool works, have it with me at all times, and then take it out and use it when the need arises! If even one of those three things is not accomplished, I stay stuck where I am and life change can't happen.

In *Life Change for Couples*, you will learn how each tool works and what it is for. You will be given mechanisms by which you can carry these tools with you everywhere you go. It will then be your decision whether or not you use the tool when and where it is needed to accomplish real and lasting life change.

So, there you have it. A three-legged stool, two-step dance, alphabet soup, a picture collage, and a toolbox! All the tools for Life Change? Not quite. There is one more.

As Table Talk

Historically, the dinner table has been the time when families connected. There is something about sitting around the table together with a meal, or just a cup of coffee, that is conducive to open and honest communication and sharing. During the Table Talk section, husbands' and wives' groups will meet separately. The husbands will have a male facilitator and the wives will have a female facilitator. They will do their individual work separately and their groups will meet separately. However, at the end of the main chapters I have provided a question for Table Talk. This is a time for husband and wife to share together during the week what they are discovering about themselves through this process. The focus of the time is for each individual to speak about himself or herself, not his/her spouse. It's a time for honesty, transparency, and vulnerability. This is the kind of thing we all did when we were dating, isn't it? We talked. Somehow over the years of marriage we tend to lose our ability to talk to each other. That is the beginning of separation and the drift away from each other that has brought many of us to the place we are. So, let's get around the table each week and reconnect. The facilitator will begin the session each week with the question, "How did Table Talk go this week?" This will help get the discussion started and will provide some accountability for each person to do Table Talk each week. It has been my experience in three years of field testing this material in churches all over the country that couples who do not do Table Talk do not get near as much benefit as couples who do. Without Table Talk, it is easy for this to become just another intellectual exercise where very little real life change happens. COUPLES MUST DO TABLE TALK!!!

Acknowledgments

So many people have had a part in the development of this book. I want to thank my friend, Chuck Youngman, who first took me through the Twelve Steps. His example, mentorship, and partnership in the work have been invaluable in my life and laid the foundation for this workbook.

Thanks to the brave warriors of City on a Hill and churches around the country who field tested and improved this material. They were the test pilots who took the first risks of practicing these principles. Thank you City on a Hill for being a hospital for the hurting.

Thanks to Barbara Geyer, who was part of the very first group who ever used this material with me. Barbara graciously volunteered to edit the material for me (it was pretty bad), and she became a true blessing to this process.

Thanks to my talented daughter, Tiffany, a pediatric trauma nurse practitioner, vocalist extraordinaire, wonderful mother and, as it turns out, a very talented designer and formatter. Tiffany designed the first cover for *Life Change for Couples* and was responsible for the initial layout and formatting of the entire workbook when it was first self-published. When she got her hands on it, the workbook went from plain vanilla to double chocolate almond! She's also the best daughter a father could ever have.

Thanks to my wife and life partner, Laura, who has put up with me for over thirty years. She has walked with me through every step of the process of help, hope, and healing in my life. I recognize that very much of it has been with great sacrifice on her part.

Most importantly, thank you, Lord Jesus, for being the Great Physician who is our *help, hope, and healing* and for giving us eternal truths in your Word.

Freedom Group Guidelines

TO BE REFERRED TO EACH WEEK BEFORE GROUP BEGINS

- Anonymity: We protect the identities of all group members.
- Confidentiality: Nothing that is said in the group or done in the group is ever discussed with others without permission from those involved.
- Self-Focus: We are here to work on ourselves, not on others.
- Respect for others: We do not advise, analyze, or try to “fix” others.
- Letting God work: We do not preach to others in the group but only share from our own experience, strength, and hope.
- Limited sharing: We will be considerate of the need for others to share.
- Allowance of feelings: We avoid minimizing hurts, by explaining them away, ignoring them, or avoiding them.
- Regular attendance: We agree to be here unless absolutely unable because of emergency or unavoidable circumstances.
- Listening: We will not cross-talk with another person when someone is sharing.
- Staying on the subject: We avoid discussions that do not relate to the material that we are working through that week.

- Consideration of others: We guard against offending others in the group. If someone offends us, we work it out directly with him/her.
- Taking responsibility: We will be responsible to do our work individually during the week so we have something to share in the group

APPROPRIATE SHARING

Remember: Our sharing is to be ABOUT OURSELVES, not our spouse. Behavior of our spouse is to be talked about in the group only to the extent necessary in order to discuss our own need to change or grow. Before you share something specific about your spouse, put yourself in his/her place and ask yourself, "Would I feel dishonored, betrayed, or humiliated, if he/she shared something like this with a group of people when I was not there to speak on my own behalf?" If you would not want it shared about you, then don't share it about your spouse.

It is possible to speak about behavior of your spouse in general terms and in a way that is not dishonoring to him/her and still accomplish the ultimate goal of only telling that information in order to bring the sharing back around to yourself.

For instance, if there has been marriage infidelity by your spouse, you can say that without going into graphic detail with the group. The statement of infidelity is enough to allow you to share YOUR own hurt, discuss how YOU reacted, and what YOU need to do from here.

Remember, the purpose of this group is not to give an EXPOSÉ of your spouse but to address your own issues and need for change. If both spouses are following these guidelines, then no one is dishonored and the appropriate focus is maintained.

It will be the FACILITATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY to assure that this guideline is followed.