

Session 1: Kick-off and Overview of the 7-Week Series and Chapter Readings for Each Week

Week of October 10--Session 1: Introductions, Overview of the Series, Group Agreements, Choosing Prayer Partners
Chapter 1: *Powerlessness*

Week of October 17--Session 2: Chapter 2: *Desperate Desiring* &
Chapter 3: *Sweet Surrender*

Week of October 24--Session 3: Chapter 4: *A Good Lamp* &
Chapter 5: *Accountability IS Sustainability*

Week of October 31--Session 4: Chapter 6: *The Chicken or the Egg: Which Comes First?* &
Chapter 7: *Why Do We Need to Ask?*

Week of November 7--Session 5: Chapter 8: *Payback Time* &
Chapter 9: *Skillful Means*

Week of November 14--Session 6: Chapter 10: *Is This Overkill?* &
Chapter 11: *An Alternative Mind*

Week of November 21--Session 7: Chapter 12: *What Comes Around Must Go Around;*
Wrap Up, Social and Service Project Decisions

The on-going genius of the 12 Step Program is the integration of spiritual principles with practical steps to transform our lives. During this 7-week series, you're invited to explore and to release whatever limits you. Enjoy expanding your experience of true inner freedom.

Chapter 1: *Powerlessness*

AA Step 1: *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (or narcotics, eating, over-working, compulsively on electronic media, wanting to be right, etc.)—and that our lives had become unmanageable.*

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the title: "*Breathing Under Water*" mean to you?
2. When you hear the words "powerless" and "unmanageable," what are your immediate reactions?
3. Describe your experience of wanting to control something, someone, or yourself, and being powerless to do so.
4. Share your response to this Scripture: *I cannot understand my own behavior. I fail to carry out the very things I want to do, and find myself doing the very things I hate. . . for although the will to do it is good, the performance is not.* (Romans 7:15, 18)
5. Briefly share a dark or difficult time in your life. What did it feel like to "bottom out" and to experience the limits of your own capacities, or lack of resources?

6. Give an example of when you recognized that you needed to “switch to a higher octane of fuel” and to call upon a Larger Source or a Higher Power?
7. Think of a time you felt pain or failure. How did this experience change you?
8. Give an example of how you applied this insight from Albert Einstein: *No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused the problem in the first place.*

Weekly Invitation for Reflection, Journaling, Prayer and Action Steps:

1. Read the assigned chapter(s) for each week.
2. Spend time journaling during the week your insights about what you’ve read, and your responses to the discussion questions. For example, reflect upon these paradoxes:
 - *When I am weak, I am strong.*
 - *There is power in my weakness.*
 - *In letting go, I receive.*
 - *Let go and let God.*
 - *I die to live.*

Fall 2021 Spirit Group Overview for *Breathing Under Water*:

Spirituality and the 12 Steps (for ALL types of addictions)

Based on the book: *Breathing Under Water* and the *Companion Journal* by Fr. Richard Rohr.

Week of October 17--Session 2: Chapter **Two**: *Desperate Desiring*

Chapter **Three**: *Sweet Surrender*

Fr. Rohr writes: "To finally surrender ourselves to healing, we have to have three spaces opened up within us--and all at the same time. This includes our opinionated head, our closed-down heart, and our defensive and defended body. That is the work of spirituality—and it is work." The intent of AA Spirituality is the ongoing liberation of our head, heart, and body, that empowers us to live our life as fully as possible.

Acceptance is difficult—it does not have to mean agreement. Our typical reaction is to resist, fight or flee what we refuse to accept. "Surrender" is often a very charged word. Although it feels like dying, it is the necessary pathway to liberation. Surrender does not happen in one moment, but it is an extended journey of letting go, unlearning, and a handing over. Fr. Rohr describes the genius of the Twelves Steps as "being the refusal to bless and reward what looks like any moral worthiness game, or a heroic expression of willpower and sacrifice." Instead, we're invited to experience the amazing grace of being loved and accepted--just as we are.

Check-in Question: When did you notice being powerless during the last week? How did you respond?

AA Step 2: "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Review Chapter 2: *Desperate Desiring*

1. What does the phrase "a Power greater than ourselves" mean to you?
2. Where do you instinctively make decisions—your head, heart or gut? If you were to have a dialogue with each of these three areas, what would each of them want to tell you?
3. Briefly share a time when someone supported you through a difficult time. How did their compassion and faith in you carry you through your darkness?
4. How do you get in the way of your own healing and growth? Name a defensive behavior, as well as an action step, that you're willing to take to support your well-being.

AA Step 3: "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God."

Review Chapter 3: *Sweet Surrender*

1. Share what the word "surrender" means to you.
2. What you resist, persists. Who, or what situation, has been the most difficult for you to accept, release, and to surrender?
3. What helps you to discern how to love others in healthy, generous ways vs in an unhealthy, sacrificial manner?
4. Give an example of how you understand Paul's quote: "It is when I am weak that I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10)

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Week of October 24--Session 3: Chapter 4: *A Good Lamp*

Chapter 5: *Accountability Is Sustainability*

Fr. Rohr writes: "Yes, the truth will set you free, but first it tends to make you miserable." The goal of "Shadow Boxing" is at the heart of spiritual awakening. Your shadow is that part of you that you don't want to see because it feels unacceptable. Instead of denying or minimizing it, expand your unconsciousness with an ever-deepening awareness. The intent is not to beat yourself up with self-condemnation, but to look for the truth at the heart of any behavior.

Any type of behavior can disguise itself as good, necessary or helpful. Expand your light by being willing to face your darkness. Conflicts and moral failures can be mirrors to spot and track your Shadow Self that betrays yourself and others. A thorough self-evaluation notices the behaviors, clears the slate, and prepares a pathway for living your sacred purpose more fully.

You cannot heal what you do not acknowledge. Make a list of all of the people or situations that you most resent or are upset about. Ask yourself: "How does this person or situation reflect parts of me that I've harshly judged or found unacceptable? Awareness and confession can heal our soul.

Fr. Rohr writes: "God does not love us IF we change; God loves us so that we CAN change. . . Shame for our actions is replaced by a sense of response-ability. We move from powerless to strength. It's no surprise that almost two thirds of Jesus' teaching is directly, or indirectly, about compassion and forgiveness."

Check-in Question: What encourages you to want to be willing to complete a fearless moral inventory or self-evaluation?

AA Step # 4: *We have made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

1. Discuss your insights about the phrase: "Shadow Boxing is at the heart of spiritual awakening."
2. Share one part of your Shadow Self that has been difficult to face because it feels unacceptable.
3. Give an example of how a painful behavior can often disguise itself as good, necessary or helpful.
4. What expands your awareness and courage to face your own darkness?

AA Step #5: *We admitted to a Higher Power, to ourselves, and to another human being, that exact nature of our wrongs.*

1. Share your reflections re: "God loves us so that we CAN change."
2. Why do you think it is important to admit to another human being the "exact nature of our wrongs?"
3. Briefly describe an experience of when you admitted to a wrongdoing and experienced forgiveness.
4. Discuss how self-compassion and forgiveness can release us personally, and also collectively, from past mistakes.

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Week of October 31--Session 4: Chapter Six: *The Chicken of the Egg: Which Comes First*

Chapter Seven: *What Do We Need to Ask?*

We accept that our lack of integrity does not truly represent who we really are. We commit to a process of healing. Fr. Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation integrates the paradox of surrendering AND accepting response-ability for our life. Depending on our temperament style, we might prefer one activity over the other. However, Fr. Rohr writes that we "must build a bridge between the two . . . Or, to reverse an old aphorism: 'We must pray as if it all depends on us, and work as if it all depends on God.'" He invites us recognize that God is humble and never comes to us without an invitation. Yet, Spirit will find some clever way to get invited!

Prayer is not about changing God, but changing ourselves. Fr. Rohr writes: "God's totally positive and lasting way of removing our shortcomings is to fill up the hole with something much better, more luminous, and more satisfying. Then, your old shortcomings are not driven away, or pushed underground, as much as they are exposed and starved for the false program for happiness that they are." Similar to used scaffolding, old behaviors fall away as unneeded and unhelpful, because a new and better building is being created.

Check-in Question: How do you integrate the paradox of surrendering with also accepting response-ability?

AA Step 6: *We're entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character.*

1. Discuss the paradox of Step 6 of fully owning "your defects of character," yet letting go and allowing God to do the job of healing.
2. Are you more comfortable with action or contemplation? How would your life be different if you tried the opposite approach?
3. What supports you "building a bridge" to integrate contemplation with action?
4. Describe a time when you experienced God as "finding a clever way to get invited into your life."

AA Step 7: *We humbly asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings.*

1. Share how you've experienced prayer as changing you—not God.
2. Describe what the verse from Philippians 4:6-7 means to you: "If there is anything you need, pray for it, asking God for it with thanksgiving; and the peace of God, which is greater than understanding will guard both your thoughts and your heart."
3. In what ways does being in recovery support a healthy "scaffolding" as you let go, and let God?
4. Give an example of how you practice gratitude on a daily basis to see everything as a gift. Describe how this practice supports you to let go of your shortcomings?

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Week of November 7--Session 5: Chapter 8: *Payback Time*

Chapter 9: *Skillful Means*

Although God fully forgives us, the “karma” or residue of our mistakes remains. Thus, it is necessary to repair any relationships that we have broken by making amends to others, as well as to ourselves. Being “willing” to make amends includes seeing any hurt from both sides. Remember, Einstein’s insight that “no problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused the problem in the first place.” We are called to fundamentally change our consciousness from one that feeds resentments, to a mindset that is compassionate and forgiving. Fr. Rohr describes “grace” as being like a new software and processing program, that creates a new pattern, with a new mind (Colossians 3:10-11)

Instead of making lists of those who have mistreated you, make a list of those you have hurt. Make amends in practical ways--emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. It might be through a note, a call, or a visit. Seek Spirit’s guidance for the best way, time and words that support healing. Be careful to make amends in skillful ways that do not cause further injury to others. Accept full response-ability for your actions, express your remorse, and provide restitution as best you can. Seek wise discernment about what is yours to do. Be honest about your motives in revealing your personal details to others. If you are unable to make direct amends, make a special effort to hold that person in prayer on a regular basis. When appropriate, consider making amends to someone else in order to pay it forward.

Check-in Question: What encourages you to have the desire to want to be “willing” to change negative behavior, and to make amends?

AA Step # 8: *We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.*

1. Share a positive experience of making amends that felt healing to the person receiving it.
2. Describe some practical things you’ve done to set the tone and environment for making amends emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually.
3. What encourages you to practice Einstein’s insight of changing your consciousness to see a problem with a different mindset?
4. Give an example of when you experienced “grace” as being like a new software processing program?

AA Step # 9: *We made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

1. What does the term “skillful amends” mean to you?
2. What supports you to practice wise discernment about what is yours to do when making amends?
3. Give an example of when it might cause injury, or harm to another, by making *direct* amends.
4. Share your experience in holding a person(s) in prayer as a way of making *indirect* amends.

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Week of November 14--Session 6: Chapter 10: *Is This Overkill?*

Chapter 11: *An Alternative Mind*

AA Step #10 is Step #4 in action. We move from insight to publicly admitting our wrong-doing. Fr. Rohr describes this process for continuing a personal inventory. He writes: "You must step back from your compulsiveness, and your attachment to yourself, to be truly conscious. For some people, a deeper consciousness comes naturally. They recognize their soul, or deepest self—and easily access a Larger Knowing beyond themselves." Soul, consciousness, and the Holy Spirit all describe a similar concept of this Larger Knowing. We are invited to experience this All-embracing Mystery within, and between everything.

Most people don't see things as they truly are, but through a lens of who *they* are. Because our perspective is limited, we need support from others to expand our awareness. Prayer removes our blinders by emptying our mind to fill the heart. Surrendering to the "mind of Christ" transforms us with a new way of knowing, seeing, understanding, accepting and behaving. This pathway to freedom is grounded in four dimensions: physical health, emotional integration, intellectual awareness and spiritual practice. A willingness to find God in your own struggle with life, and allowing it to change you, is the true obedience to God's will. Fr. Rohr states: "Remember: God comes disguised to us as our life."

Check-in Question: What expands your awareness, and encourages you to act upon what you know?

AA Step #10: Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

1. How might a daily review and examination of conscience support you to notice, detach from any compulsive behaviors, and to make amends by admitting any errors?
2. Describe the practices you use to access a Larger Knowing, and an All-Embracing Mystery.
3. Discuss Fr. Rohr's quote: "Don't judge, just look, can be our motto—and now with the very eyes of God."
4. In what ways does Jesus' command to "love your enemies" encourage you to love and accept your imperfections, and internal "enemies"? How does this encourage you to admit any wrongdoing more quickly?

AA Step #11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us, and the power to carry it out.

1. How has learning to be more honest with yourself influenced how you pray?
2. In what ways has your understanding of God evolved?
3. What helps you to discern, and to recognize God's will for you?
4. Describe the practices you use to expand your insight, feel empowered to carry it out, and act in inspired ways.

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Week of November 21--Session 7: Chapter 12: *What Comes Around Must Go Around*

AA Step #12: *“Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics (and others impacted by addictions/compulsions) and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.”*

AA treats addictions as both an illness, as well as a spiritual disease—rather than a moral failure or an issue of mere willpower. Addicts are souls searching for love in all the wrong places. Our soul longs for deep connection. As a result, Step 12 calls for a spiritual awakening that transforms all of the dimensions in our life.

A healthy spirituality integrates two freedoms: it keeps our image of God free from being bound by any of our formulas, and it keeps us free from our own limitations. Fr. Rohr describes these freedoms as being like two super magnets that grab onto one another. Similar to nuclear fusion, they create an explosion. This changes everything. It is both divine lovemaking and human ecstasy. Bill Wilson realized there is no real sobriety, nor long-lasting recovery without a “vital spiritual experience.” Until we experience our own grounded connection to the Whole, we remain unsettled and grouchy. When we feel held by a Larger Force, this love creates a deeper connection that absorbs any negativity toward ourselves and others.

A spiritual awakening inspires and encourages us to find ways to serve others. We pay it forward without proselytizing—attracting, rather than promoting. Spirituality without a commitment to service can become a “spiritual consumerism.” People suffocate if they only breathe inwards, and neglect breathing out. AA recognizes the need for “tough love” to grow beyond our self-focus. We do not truly comprehend any spiritual thing until we give it away. Spiritual gifts only increase when we use them.

Fr. Rohr writes: “With these 12 important breathing lessons, you now know for yourself that you can breathe, and even breathe under water. Because the breath of God is everywhere. . . Only those who have tried to breathe under water know how important breathing really is, and will never take it for granted again.”

Check-in Question: What has been your most significant insight during the last 7 weeks while studying together *Breathing Underwater: Spirituality and the 12 Steps*?

1. Share your thoughts about addictions being a “spiritual disease” requiring a spiritual awakening for healing.
2. In what ways have you experienced your spirituality inviting you to enjoy greater freedom—within yourself, your relationships with others, and in your experience of the Divine?
3. What have you learned from making mistakes and starting over, falling, and getting up again?
4. How has participating in this Spirit Group deepened your understanding of what it means to “breathe underwater”?

Concluding Spirit Group Activities:

- Pick a **Service Project** as a small group. As Fr. Rohr encourages us, find a way to be of service!
- Also, pick a time to enjoy doing a **Social Activity** as a group.
- Explore possibilities for continuing your **Prayer Support** for one another.