

## Twelve Steps: Step 8 Zacchaeus, Poster Child of 8<sup>th</sup> Step Aug. 6-7 2004

We're in a year long trek thru 12 Steps—spiritual discipline of real-life transformation popularized by AA, but rooted in truth trade-marked by God himself. (Resource: Big Book, !2 Steps/Traditions, The Book)

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 to another 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.

Which leads us to **Step 8: “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”**

Begin with an imaginative exercise. Think of someone near & dear. Or near but not so dear. Or dear but not so near. One of those someones who has so much promise, but is **derailed** by fatal flaw (addiction, character defect, missing value or two, blind spot.) Might be married to that someone. A parent, sibling, friend. Maybe **givenup** trying to fix 'em. Or still tied up in knots trying make 'em better.

Of course, we can all imagine such a someone , maybe quite a few. Chances are many of us are **someone else's someone**.

Then something odd begins to happen: comes to grip with himself. Faces up to who he is and impact he's having on others. Begins to look back at the **wake** his life is leaving, and **flotsam** floating in it. But this new perspective doesn't crush him; only humbles.

Imagine he comes to **you**, says, “I'm facing up to some painful truths about myself. Realize I've said & done things that have caused you real pain. I'm here because I want to make it right.”

Wouldn't that just make your day? **Flip** lid. **Knock** socks off. **Blow** mind. **Rock** world. **Float** boat. **Rev** engine. **Ignite** rockets. **Trip** your **joy switch**. Like there's something wonderful loose in world?

Step 8 is a sign that something wonderful **is** loose in the world: the dynamic, heart-changing, life-transforming reign of God.

**“Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”**

For such a spiritual book, Bible has a lot of **lists** in it. Starts with a list of days. Lists of people (genealogies); whole book (Nu.) lists families of Israel by name. King Solomon, a great botanist cataloged plant life. At dawn of time humanity is tasked by God w/ naming animals.

Almost like our **first task**, if we're to engage a **real God**, is to open our eyes and **take stock of reality**. What is. That's what a **list** is: a naming, a taking stock, **a facing what is**.

**"Made a list of all persons we had harmed"** Not a book in world with a higher view of persons than Bible. Where God himself is profoundly personal. Not just a force-principle. A complex someone.

**person**: a being with special moral value because of some spiritual status, or autonomous nature (Encarta 6.)

We are only persons, because God is personal. (God can't be love unless he's personal.)

Most complex system in universe? Stars, solar system, galaxies? Human brain. Nothing more mysterious, complex, fascinating, more dangerous when broke, more wonderful when working than a person.

**Jesus said** if we do something for even least valued person (poor), we're doing that something to God himself. Beyond God himself, nothing more **holy, sacred, marvelous** than a person!

We fix our nails, cars, computers, lawn mowers, glasses; paint & patch our walls, screen doors. What could be more important than making amends, when possible to those persons we have harmed?

But we get ahead of ourselves. Step 8: make a list...become willing to make amends.

**A list doesn't sound so bad, but what would keep us from making an accurate list of persons we harmed? Dodgeball.**

Dodge 1. We forget to keep a **laser focus** on harm we've done. Maybe there's lot of people you've harmed unilaterally. But most harm happens in relationships where tit for tat is the norm.

**Isn't it a pity? Now, isn't it a shame  
How we break each other's hearts, And cause each other pain  
How we take each other's love, Without thinking anymore  
Forgetting to give back, Isn't it a pity? -- George Harrison**

We use **Alice in Wonderland** arithmetic: one harm cancels another. But of course it doesn't. We can only amend harms we've done.

Dodge 2. We assume people have long since **gotten over it**. Ally McBeal: “Bygones!” Whether someone’s gotten over it or not is irrelevant to a good list. The getting over it may be their responsibility, but the harm is ours.

Dodge 3. We’re afraid of the harm this process will do to us. What a bummer! Might drive us to drink! With addiction, hard to see beyond own skin log enough to face harm our addiction has caused others. **All addictions isolate**: think “only hurting myself.” Every addiction leaves harm in it’s wake: we become self-absorbed, MIA. Of course we know, so we lock down awareness in basement cellar. But only grows down there. Like mushrooms feed on dark & you-know-what.

**Could use a little inspiration!** Zacchaeus, Poster Child of 8 th Step

*Luke 19: 1-4* Something light-hearted about whole scene. Wealthy & short, probably also portly. Running, child-like up tree.

*“When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today!’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’”*

Picture a **semi-public** affair, meal in courtyard; invited guests, but whole neighborhood watching, grumbling....Because Zacchaeus, chief **taxman** (organized crime, John Gotti.)

*“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! [irrepressible enthusiasm!] Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”*

For tax collector to say *“If I’ve cheated anybody...”* like a politician saying, “If I’ve spun the truth to partisan advantage...”

The wonder of it all: so sudden! (Jericho, where walls tumbling down.) An **encounter w/ Jesus** does that: walls tumbling down in Zaccheus’ heart. Defensive walls. Protective walls. Rationalization. Walls blocking off voice of conscience. Walls that say, “I’m so far gone, these people would never accept me, if I changed.”

No way to read this w/o feeling **excitement** of Zacchaeus. Something about Jesus is knocking his walls down and he could care less if he’s in process of liquidating most f his assets!

No time to do it yet, but he’s **willing**. Poster child of 8 th Step. But already sense of liberation unfolding. Resisting will of God puts enormous strain on soul. When we stop resisting, become willing, sweet relief. Oh Happy Day!

Zacchaeus should be feeling awful, right? Facing up to all that harm, great shame of his life. Alienation from his neighbors.

But there is Jesus, backing him up before the angry crowd: ***“Jesus said to him, ‘Today, salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham. [No longer exile, outsider, unclean pariah, but a son of Abraham] For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’”***

Way back from exile, from addiction, from **burning so many bridges** with so many people is a **humbling** road.

If you’re on that road today, you know it’s not an easy climb. Retracing one’s steps. Facing messes left behind. What one has become under influence of an addiction, darkness, sin. A real **Via Dolorosa**, that road you’re on.

But **all along** the long road back to sanity, road back home, repaired relationship, voice & presence of Jesus ***“Today, salvation has come to this house, because this woman too is a daughter of Abraham! For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost!”***

A theme in Luke’s gospel: more **joy in heaven** over one sinner who turns, than over 99 so-called righteous, who having it all together have no need of God

Joy of heaven **surrounds** us on the road to recovery...**buoys** us, **assures** us of Father’s acceptance—this too is a son of Abraham! **Affirms** and **secures** us as we face the anger, disappointment, frustration we’ve caused. (When you stop defending yourself, God defends you, even from what you’ve got coming.)