

Understanding our Identity

Twelve Steps, Spiritual Exercises, and ISP Retreat

12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous	Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius	ISP Retreat
1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.	Principle and Foundation First Week	Fear and Trust (First activity on Retreat)
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.	Principle and Foundation First Week	Fear and Trust
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God <i>as we understood Him</i> .	Principle and Foundation First Week	Fear and Trust
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.	Second Week	Witness / Small groups / Who am I?
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.	Second Week	Witness / Small groups / Who am I?
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.	Second Week	Healing Meditation/Rituals
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.	Second Week	Healing Meditation/Rituals
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.	Third Week	Healing Meditations/Rituals
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.	Third Week	Healing Meditations/Rituals
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.	Third Week	Creative Expression / Movie 2 nd round small groups/Partners
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God <i>as we understood Him</i> , praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.	Fourth Week	Where to Now / Spiritual Knapsack / Coming back from the mountain 2 nd round small groups/Partners
12. 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.	Fourth Week	Closing Ritual / Letter to God

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola – A Summary

The Exercises are divided into four distinct sections called "Weeks."

The First Week: The "Principle and Foundation" at the beginning of the *First Week* of the Exercises addresses the ultimate purpose of life and the created universe, making retreatants realize that the goal of their lives is to live with God forever: that God is not only their creator but is to be their eternal companion. It follows then that they should use everything at their disposal to help themselves attain that end. Everything should be ordered to God's plan for them, and they should not be too quick to make life decisions until they first see if the outcome will lead them closer to what God's will is for them. The *First Week* follows with considerations about the heinousness of sin and the havoc it wreaks in the individual and in society, about God's constant love, and about the urgency of turning from one's old ways and attitudes to gratitude and love and to a more devout life. [R. Modras]

The Second Week: "The personal love of Christ, which is the grace of the Second Week, is a love which changes and re-orientates the whole person. It is a love by which we allow the loved one to take over our lives, to lead us along his own ways towards his own objectives, the love by which we trust ourselves to the other's power to change us." [M. Ivens]

The Second Week begins with one's personal call by God to join in Christ's presence and service in the world. The Two Standards addresses the human struggle between conflicting values and seeks to understand the mind of Christ: poor, vulnerably transparent, humble. The Three Classes of Persons addresses impairment in choosing by considering three characterizations: the postponer, the compromiser who takes half measures, and the one open to do whatever it takes. The Three Modes of Humility, really three levels of self-giving love, considers what price one is willing to pay for love. Sifting through one's mindset (the Two Standards), one's impaired freedom (the Three Classes of Persons) and one's generosity of heart (the Three Modes of Humility) requires discernment. Ignatius presents rules for making a personal choice while listening to one's total person: body, mind and spirit.

The Third Week: "The Third Week presents Christ's suffering in love and our growth in compassionate love of the Living Christ. Lambert calls this Third Week "saying yes to love until the very end." John English notes: "the contemplations of the Third Week are intended to help us escape our narrow selves...Therefore, Ignatius has those making the Exercises seek the grace of 'sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me [#203].' They ask for the grace to be drawn beyond themselves. Dying to ourselves through union with Christ suffering, we gain strength and courage, freedom and conviction – all those graces that are necessary to do the desire of God."

Brackley says that "Grieving over the crosses of the world gathers our fragmented selves, centers and heals us...We were made to share each other's burdens."

The Fourth Week: The Fourth Week presents Christ's apparitions after his resurrection. One seeks to rejoice at Christ's triumph over sin and death. Hellwig sees the Exercises at this point empowering the one to take responsible action in the world with "maximum ingenuity, diligence, and creativity – all at the single-minded service of the Lord's cause."

Convergences between the Exercises and the Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps invite personal change (conversion) through interior reflection, greater reliance on God through prayer, talking with a sponsor who merely supports and guides, and taking efforts to reach out others in service.

The Spiritual Exercises invite personal change (conversion) through interior reflection, greater reliance on God through prayer, talking with a spiritual director who merely assists in the discernment process, and then making an election to serve God concretely in the world.

Dowling and presumably other Jesuits in St. Louis found the Twelve Steps to be linked with the Principle and Foundation and First Week of the Exercises through a examination of the purpose of one's life and blocks (sins) to greater freedom in doing God's will.

Changes in thinking, choosing, and feeling

The Twelve Steps aim at changing the way a person thinks, chooses and follows feelings. The process of the Twelve Steps leads a recovering alcoholic to reassess one's mindset by shifting to the perspective of wanting what God wants. The process leads a recovering alcoholic to re-orient one's will by being open to what God wants. And the process leads a recovering alcoholic to cease using alcohol as a way to avoid facing life. Addiction is rooted in attempts to change one's unpleasant feelings instead of picking up one's cross daily with courage.

The three key exercises in the Second Week: the Two Standards, the Three Persons, and the Three Modes of Humility invite a retreatant to changes similar to those in the Twelve Steps. After acknowledging one's sin and God's mercy, the retreatant is led by God's Spirit to attend to God's new invitation, God's call, to follow Christ in a new way. This call will lead to a re-assessment of the way one thinks, the way one chooses, and the way one responds to one's feelings.

In the Two Standards, Ignatius asks the retreatant to understand the differences in the values and attitudes of the Enemy of our Human Nature and of Christ. It is not in the accumulation of riches (possessions), honor (what others think) or pride (self centeredness) but in poverty (acceptance of limitations), humiliations (transparent vulnerability), and contempt (humility) that a retreatant finds peace and joy. Ignatius understood that responding to the invitation to set aside sinful ways meant first changing one's way of thinking about life, the world and oneself. Stop thinking that you are what you have and possess, what others think of you, that you are the center of creation. Instead, begin to think Christ's way of thinking which he outlined in the beatitudes. In AA's Twelve Steps recovering alcoholics have a saying: "I've got to change my way of thinking if I'm going to stay sober."

In the Three Persons, Ignatius asks the retreatant to be open to choosing what God wants. He presents three degrees (persons) of openness to doing God's will, the last degree (person) is the most open, wanting only what God wants. This person lives with a poised freedom. In AA's Twelve Steps recovering alcoholics have a saying: "if you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got." Appeal is made to changing one's choices.

Freedom from and freedom for

"...every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one's life for the salvation of the soul, is called a Spiritual Exercise." [Elder Mullan, SJ, The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola]

"Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and to help other alcoholics achieve sobriety." [A.A. Grapevine, Inc.]

The very purpose of the Exercises, according to Ignatius in his first Introductory Observation is to lead a retreatant to a freedom from "inordinate attachments" (Ignatius' wording), compulsions and obsessions and to a freedom for seeking and doing the will of God. In other words, developing a relationship with their true self, fostering relationships of responsibility and mutuality, and allowing their relationship with God to become central to their lives. This "freedom from" and "freedom for" are operative in all spiritual exercising.

Every person has some personal unfreedom, something that drains energy whether it is worry, anxiety, concern about what others think, fears, etc.

This unfreedom is energy which is unavailable for right relationship and doing God's will. The homeless addicts have become so captured by their addiction, that they have lost almost all right relationship with their true self, with others and with God. They have lost their jobs, their families, and their self respect. Their "unfreedom" has begun to take over their life, unlike most others whose unfreedom nags away as a small part of everyday living.

The Exercises and the Twelve Steps offer a process and a path to free a person from those realities that are draining of energy and life as well as offering a path to free a person for right relationships with self, others and God.

In summary, the Exercises offer a spirituality to seek and find God in all things. But they are particularly suited to those who find themselves caught in addictive behavior which thwarts many good aspirations. The Exercises offer a path, the path of the Spirit, I would maintain, which leads to freedom, freedom from addictions and compulsions, freedom for loving relationships. The Twelve Steps does the same, in almost the same progressive manner.