



IMPROVING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS ONE STEP AT A TIME

Personal Workbook



INTRODUCTION

TAKING STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

There are 5 principles—5 STEPS—that will help you improve your relationships and your life. Use this workbook along with the Online Toolkit: LifeImprovementSteps.com/ImprovingRelationships

- **Surrender** – To get right with other people, start by getting right with God.
- **Transformation** – To improve your relationships, you must improve yourself.
- **Empathy** – With that foundation, you can form real relationships with others.
- **Progress** – To keep those relationships healthy, you'll need to form good habits.
- **Service** – To keep them satisfying, you need to do all this with the right motives.

You can use these 5 STEPS to improve your relationships. This introduction is meant to get you started, and this journey will be one you will enjoy while you bring happiness into the lives of others as well.



SURRENDER

TAKING STEPS TO MANAGE CONTROL IN RELATIONSHIPS

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR SURRENDER

Included below are the summary concepts and examples of small steps you can take to improve your relationships. After seeing the videos and article about this step, answer the questions below:

1. WHAT concepts are relevant for you and your life situation?

2. WHY is it important for you to improve your relationships?

3. HOW should you act on the 10 examples of small steps?

4. WHEN will you take the first step and what will it be?

SUMMARY CONCEPTS FOR SURRENDER

- **Theme:** Get right with God.
- **Big Idea:** Life works better when we let go of control.
- **Small Step:** I will memorize and use the Serenity Prayer.

The first of the 5 principles we are using as part of the STEPS life improvement methodology is called Surrender. There are a number of small steps we can take to improve our relationships which begin with a simple decision: "I will memorize and use the Serenity Prayer."

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. (Reinhold Niebuhr)"

The step of Surrender helps us improve our relationships by getting right with God. We can do that by letting go of control and using the Serenity Prayer to help us make good choices. Then we can rest easy at night because that's the best we can do—for ourselves and others.



SURRENDER

TAKING STEPS TO MANAGE CONTROL IN RELATIONSHIPS

EXAMPLES OF SMALL STEPS FOR SURRENDER

Here are examples of steps to use the Serenity Prayer to let go of control and improve your relationships.

1. **Memorize the Serenity Prayer** – This gives you a tool you can use as needed when you deal with people and relationship situations.

Serenity to accept – A tremendous weight is lifted off our shoulders when we let go of the things that are outside our control. We also become better positioned to enjoy and improve our relationships in a calm and accepting manner.

2. **Let go of people** – In your next conversation (and others that follow), consciously declare: “It’s not my job to control this person.”
3. **Let go of circumstances** – When talking with someone, set aside busyness and worry and choose peace during the conversation.
4. **Let go of outcomes** – During at least much of each conversation, relax and set aside any agenda you may have for the outcome.

Courage to change – God also wants us to take steps in our relationships. Sometimes those steps may be uncomfortable such as reaching out to someone when we don’t feel like it, getting involved when it’s the right thing to do, or setting boundaries when they are needed.

5. **Reach out to others** – Pick a few people you want to know more and muster the courage to ask them if they want to get together.
6. **Choose to go there** – Even if it feels a bit uncomfortable, ask people about their feelings and be willing to talk about their problems.
7. **Consider boundaries** – Improving relationships includes lessening negative behavior, so gently let people know when they hurt you.

Wisdom to know – Either serenity or courage may be the right choice in different situations, and it can be hard to know what to do. That’s why we need God’s wisdom and strength to help us make the right choices and follow through on those decisions.

8. **Ask God for serenity** – When you feel that you’re in a situation you should accept gracefully, ask God for patience and peace.
9. **Ask God for courage** – When you suspect you should take action but it feels uncomfortable, ask God for strength and assistance.
10. **Ask God for wisdom** – When you have no idea what to do, ask God for guidance and don’t do anything until it becomes clearer.



TRANSFORMATION

TAKING STEPS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMATION

Included below are the summary concepts and examples of small steps you can take to improve your relationships. After seeing the videos and article about this step, answer the questions below:

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2. WHY is it important for you to improve your relationships?
3. HOW should you act on the 10 examples of small steps?
4. WHEN will you take the first step and what will it be?

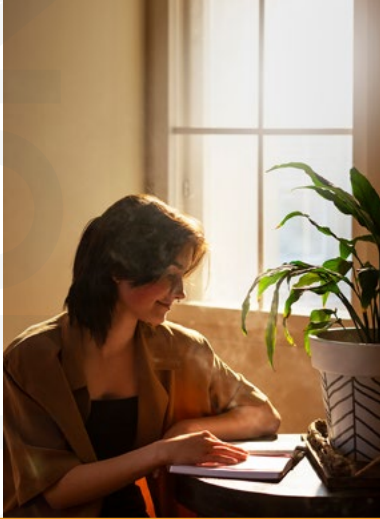
SUMMARY CONCEPTS FOR TRANSFORMATION

- **Theme:** Get right with yourself.
- **Big Idea:** Self-awareness is the beginning of transformation
- **Small Step:** I will work on my communication blind spots.

The second of the 5 key principles (called STEPS) we are applying is called Transformation. To improve our relationships, we need to improve ourselves, especially in our communication. The good news is there are small steps we can take each day that will help us do just that.

A good place to start is by declaring: "I will work on my communication blind spots." This is important because we all have issues in how we communicate. The questions are: "Do we know what they are?" and "Will we do anything to improve?"

A transformation is a dramatic conversion, and it is life-changing when improvement like that happens with our relationships. The good news is we can all make such a change by getting right with ourselves so we can get right with others. We can transform our relationships by becoming self-aware and working on our communication blind spots.



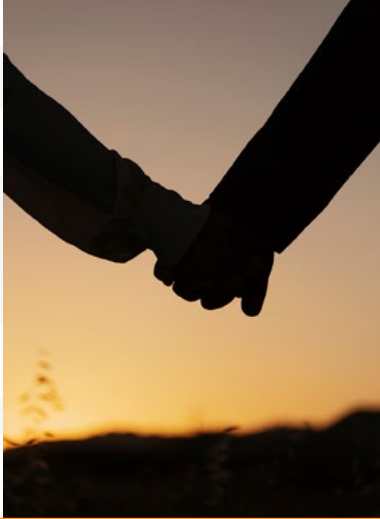
TRANSFORMATION

TAKING STEPS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

EXAMPLES OF SMALL STEPS FOR TRANSFORMATION

To help, we offer 10 examples to improve your communication.

1. **Seek to control your tongue** – Ask yourself, “Will what I’m about to say build up this person?” If the answer is no, probably stop.
2. **Always use the Golden Rule** – Consistently speak and listen to others the way you would like them to speak and listen to you.
3. **Make encouraging comments** – Be on the lookout for things others do that you can agree with or sincerely compliment them on.
4. **Avoid saying too much or little** – Ensure the other person has the space to share and expand on your own thoughts and feelings.
5. **Watch tones and expressions** – This is a big blind spot for many people, so ask others how they perceive you in your interactions.
6. **Pause to pay close attention** – The first thing to do when someone talks to you is immediately stop anything else you’re doing.
7. **Listen, and then listen more** – It’s easy to listen for a bit and lapse back into over-talking, so fight the urge and keep on listening.
8. **Stop jumping into your stories** – When someone is talking, seek to help them continue rather than hijacking the conversation.
9. **Give the other person grace** – Ignore small things you don’t agree with or that bother you in order to have a positive interaction.
10. **Avoid any over-reacting** – Many things we assume aren’t really true and most small things can easily be ignored, so just let them go.



EMPATHY

TAKING STEPS TO HAVE REAL CONVERSATIONS

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR EMPATHY

Included below are the summary concepts and examples of small steps you can take to improve your relationships. After seeing the videos and article about this step, answer the questions below:

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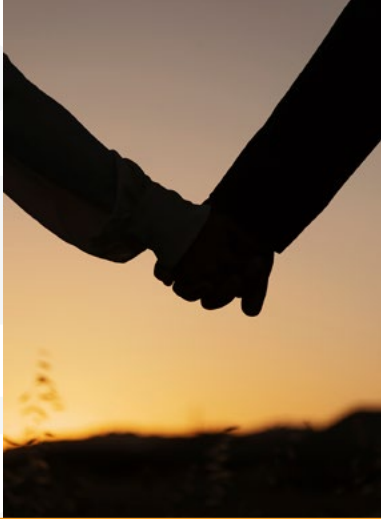
SUMMARY CONCEPTS FOR EMPATHY

- **Theme:** Get right with others.
- **Big Idea:** Relationships require investment and sacrifice
- **Small Step:** I will have real conversations with people..

The third of the 5 STEPS is named Empathy which is about working on how we interact with other people. Here, we learn how we can improve our relationships by taking small steps that begin with the decision: "I will have real conversations with people."

We are often busy and distracted these days which makes it harder to engage deeply with other people. But you can do that with family, friends, and even casual acquaintances by having conversations that are deeper and more real.

Those actions are simple and doable yet powerful and life-enhancing. In every interaction, you can be kind, help another person, and find enjoyment as well. Empathy helps you improve your relationships by getting right with others, and a good start is investing in people by having real conversations.



EMPATHY

TAKING STEPS TO HAVE REAL CONVERSATIONS

EXAMPLES OF SMALL STEPS FOR EMPATHY

Here are 10 practical examples of how to go about having more real conversations.

Tune in – Make a commitment to be totally present in the moment and focus on the other person.

1. **Eliminate distractions** – Pull out your cell phone and turn it off without looking to see if you have any texts or messages.
2. **Maintain your focus** – Don't look around and ignore any other people or activity that may be going on around you.

Listen well – Look them in the eye, think about what they say, and seek to truly understand them.

3. **Ensure you can hear** – When it's hard to hear or just to be more engaged, get closer to the other person or move the conversation.
4. **Seek to understand** – Listen deeply and try to understand what is really going on that is lying beneath the words they actually say.

Ask questions – When they pause, ask questions showing you heard them and want to know more.

5. **Ask open-ended questions** – Rather than questions that require only a yes or no, ask them to explain more about the topic.
6. **Ask validating questions** – When you aren't sure exactly what they mean or want to confirm a key point, ask them about it.

Engage deeper – To go deeper, ask questions like: "What do you think about that? How does that make you feel? What desires does that create in you? What do you think you should do?"

7. **Start slowly at first** – Some people may not be used to being vulnerable, so start with easier questions and slowly go deeper.
8. **Make it into a habit** – Stay committed to engaging deeply and sincerely, and people will come to enjoy those conversations.

Be encouraging – Smile and nod as you listen. Don't criticize or try to fix their problems. Tell them you understand and help them feel heard and safe. If it's true, say, "I've been there too, and I know how you feel."

9. **Become consistent** – Strive to be someone that people enjoy being around by being optimistic and honestly encouraging.
10. **Remain sincere** – Don't flatter people for everything but look for those instances when you truly appreciate what they are doing.



PROGRESS

TAKING STEPS TO HAVE CREATE POSITIVE HABITS

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR PROGRESS

Included below are the summary concepts and examples of small steps you can take to improve your relationships. After seeing the videos and article about this step, answer the questions below:

1. WHAT concepts are relevant for you and your life situation?

2. WHY is it important for you to improve your relationships?

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4. WHEN will you take the first step and what will it be?

SUMMARY CONCEPTS FOR PROGRESS

- **Theme:** Build the right habits.
- **Big Idea:** We can improve our lives one small step at a time.
- **Small Step:** I will make good relationship choices.

The fourth of the 5 STEPS is Progress which happens when we commit: "I will take small steps to make good relationship choices." Improving your life is a process, so focus on progress rather than perfection and enjoy the journey. As you go, remember you are building good habits one decision at a time.

Below, we show examples of small steps you can take. Doing just one of them can make a difference in your life, so pick your favorite and get started. As you move on, you will enjoy seeing your progress and how you are building positive relationship habits.

This step of Progress helps you improve your relationships and your life by building the right habits. The way to do that is to keep taking one small step at a time by making good relationship choices. If you do, you will look back on your life with joy rather than regret, and you'll sleep better at night.



PROGRESS

TAKING STEPS TO HAVE CREATE POSITIVE HABITS

EXAMPLES OF SMALL STEPS FOR PROGRESS

Here are 10 examples of small steps you can take to make good relationship choices.

1. **Choose to be pleasant** – Consciously or unconsciously, you choose your mindset each day. If you adopt a negative perspective, you will not relate to others as well. If you choose a positive mindset, the opposite will happen. Try it and you may be amazed by the results.
2. **Smile and say hello** – This choice is so simple and easy you can do it dozens of times a day. Each person you encounter, look them in the eye, smile, and say hello. Even if you “fake it till you make it” for a while, it will improve both your mood and your relationships.
3. **Give out invitations** – Reach out to people every week. Ask them to lunch or coffee, call to catch up, or text to say hello. Don’t be the one that waits for others to contact you.
4. **Accept most invitations** – As much as possible say “yes” to any type of invitation from someone to connect such as: “Got a minute? Can you talk? Want to get together sometime?”
5. **Manage your thoughts** – Discourage negative thoughts and encourage positive ones. Replace ideas about yourself such as “I’m stupid or hopeless” with affirmations like “I’m who I’m supposed to be, and I am special.” Change thoughts about others such as “Nobody likes me” to positive beliefs like “If I’m pleasant to them, it will improve their day.”
6. **Focus on your choices** – We often make choices emotionally, impulsively, or compulsively. Instead, for each choice, do these 3 things: Pause versus reacting automatically; Evaluate how you feel and what you should do; and Choose to make the best decision for the long run.
7. **Get big choices right** – Always make choices that involve positive traits such as kindness, empathy, and forgiveness to improve your well-being and your relationships.
8. **Avoid bad choices** – We all have feelings and emotions, but it’s your choice what you do with them. Here are things NOT to do: assume how others feel, over-react to small things, dwell on being hurt, hold onto resentments, feed your anger, or refuse to forgive.
9. **Take inventory** – Each evening, consider how you handled your relationship choices that day. For things you didn’t do well, commit to do better and give yourself grace. For things you did well, feel content about those choices and happy that you can impact others positively.
10. **Build good habits** – Remember, “You are what you repeatedly do.” Day by day, keep taking the next right steps one at a time to build good relationship habits.



SERVICE

TAKING STEPS TO HELP BUILD COMMUNITY

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS FOR SERVICE

Included below are the summary concepts and examples of small steps you can take to improve your relationships. After seeing the videos and article about this step, answer the questions below:

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SUMMARY CONCEPTS FOR PROGRESS

- **Theme:** Have the right motives.
- **Big Idea:** Life is better when we don't obsess on ourselves.
- **Small Step:** I will be intentional about building community.

The last of the 5 STEPS is Service. Once we have the right motives and stop obsessing on ourselves, we're on the way to improving our relationships. This step helps us move toward connection by taking small steps that start with the commitment: "I will be intentional about building community."

Life can be an exciting and enjoyable journey if we choose it to be, and we can take steps in the right direction that move us toward a deeper and more satisfying way of living.

This step of Service will help you improve your relationships by having the right motives, because life change begins in the heart. It will take sacrifices at times to let go of your obsession with self and be intentional about building community. But when you do, your life will change for the better.



SERVICE

TAKING STEPS TO HELP BUILD COMMUNITY

EXAMPLES OF SMALL STEPS FOR SERVICE

We will list 10 examples of things you can do that build community, even when they involve sacrifice.

1. **Acquaintances: Just get started** – Look for people around you to connect with (even if you're busy or distracted.)
2. **Acquaintances: Seek to spread joy** – Share kindness with those you encounter (even if you don't really feel like it.)
3. **Connection: Create opportunities** – Invite other people to lunch (even if just to be nice and make them feel good.)
4. **Connection: Become more involved** – Join a group that serves others (even if you aren't sure you'll be comfortable.)
5. **Relationship: Encourage them to talk** – In conversation, just keep listening (even if you really want to talk about you.)
6. **Relationship: Sacrifice convenience** – Be the person who volunteers to help out (even if it doesn't fit your schedule.)
7. **Belonging: Make some investments** – Commit to some relationships and groups (even if unsure how it helps you.)
8. **Belonging: Practice going deeper** – Take the risk to be transparent with others (even if it's scary to be vulnerable.)
9. **Love (agape): Engage in ministry** – Sacrifice your time and energy to those in need (even if you don't know them.)
10. **Love (agape): Show selfless love** – Pick a few people to love unconditionally (even if they upset or disappoint you.)

CLOSING

We hope you have enjoyed using this workbook and the related Online Toolkit to help you improve your relationships and your life. As a closing reminder, here is a quick summary of the 5 STEPS you learned.

- **Surrender** – To get right with other people, start by getting right with God.
- **Transformation** – To improve your relationships, you must improve yourself.
- **Empathy** – With that foundation, you can form real relationships with others.
- **Progress** – To keep those relationships healthy, you'll need to form good habits.
- **Service** – To keep them satisfying, you need to do all this with the right motives.

You have begun a wonderful journey to improve your relationships, live in a healthy manner, and bring happiness to the lives of others as well. Keep this document and refer to it regularly to stay on course and come back frequently to the Online Toolkit: LifeImprovementSteps.com/ImprovingRelationships



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