

Mastering Recovery

Rooted in the Steps. Growing Through Connection

With Barry Lehman



#5.04- Freedom: The Fourth Arc of Mastering Recovery July 23, 2025

What I'm Thinking



The fourth arc of Mastering Recovery — the process of getting better at something important — is **Freedom**.

We've explored **Connection**, **Foundation**, and **Flow**.

Now we come to **Freedom** — not as a reward, but as a responsibility.

What Freedom Really Means

It's promised in the Big Book of AA, especially in the 9th Step promises:

"We are going to know a new freedom..."

At first, it might be easy to think that freedom comes from letting go of resentments or finally making amends. Or from releasing the need to blame or control others.

And that's partly true. Those actions ease the mind and settle the spirit — especially through the admissions of Step Five and the asking for them to be removed in Step Seven.

The Real Source of Freedom

The real source of freedom is found in the opening line of Step 12:

*“Having had a spiritual awakening
as **the result** of these steps...”*

That line points us beyond relief — toward something deeper.

Freedom isn’t just the absence of pain.

It’s the **presence of spiritual openness** — the sense that we’re no longer bound by fear, control, or reactivity.

A New Definition of Freedom

Years before I was sober, I had the chance to meet several deeply spiritual people — one from East Germany, two from apartheid-era South Africa.

Their governments were repressive. Their systems unjust. And yet, they carried themselves with extraordinary grace.

They challenged me:

*Barry, you’re thinking about freedom from the wrong angle.
True freedom is what happens when you are spiritually free.*

That stuck with me.

I had always seen freedom as the absence of something: addiction, oppression, blame. But they showed me something more:

Spiritual freedom isn’t about escape.

It’s about being grounded in something larger than the systems around us.

It’s the freedom to live with integrity, purpose, and courage — even when the world doesn’t change.

What Freedom Meant in Sobriety

Of course, that was all before I got sober.

In early recovery, freedom meant escape.

- Not being chained to old habits and stinking thinking...
- Not being stuck in cycles of shame or secrets...
- Not waking up with dread.

That was real. But it wasn't the full picture.

Over time, I realized:

Sobriety isn't the finish line. It's the beginning of freedom.

When we live the structure and rhythm of recovery, we eventually reach a place where **our spirit can breathe again and we have spiritual space.**

That's when we move from freedom from... to freedom to:

- To choose how we want to live
- To align our time and energy with what matters
- To build something meaningful — not just maintain something functional

Many of us existed for years as "functioning addicts or alcoholics." At one time it was even called "high-functioning." All that meant was that we were managing to hide from ourselves and others how dysfunctional we truly were. Now, after two or more years in sobriety and early recovery we realize that we were only hiding behind our masks of survival. We were heading toward a moment when we would have lost it and gone over whatever edge we were nearing.

That meant that we now were able to make different decisions, head in different directions, be a person who had a meaning. We had found the beginnings of a spiritual freedom.

And that kind of freedom- always leads to purpose. Not a job title but a way of showing up in the world that matters.

That purpose leads to a life, built on direction and values. It is what makes deep freedom possible — even when circumstances don't change.

And it's always built on the **foundations** with **practice** in **connection and community**

Spiritual freedom isn't about escape.

It's about being grounded in something larger than the systems around us.

A Quiet Invitation

This summer, I've been quietly working on something new — a way to gather a small group of people navigating this exact space:

The space between long-term sobriety and long-term growth.

To locate that space in my life *today*, I have been spending a lot of time exploring my foundations. In that I have been experiencing in new ways the flow of the practices of recovery. This has brought me to a space that calls for honesty, reflection, and the freedom to ask:

What now?

If you've ever found yourself wondering how to bring more purpose into your recovery — not just to stay sober, but to grow — you're not alone.

If you're unfamiliar with the term, a **Mastermind group** is a small, focused circle of people committed to growing together.

It's not coaching. It's not a class. It's a space where each person brings their experience, insights, and goals — and gains momentum from others doing the same.

In long-term recovery, it can be a powerful tool to:

- strengthen purpose,
- deepen accountability, and
- practice the Steps in real-time, today, not just in review.
-

That's the kind of freedom we're after in a Mastermind group — the freedom to grow, together.

You'll hear more next week, but if this already sounds like you, I'd love to hear from you. Just [email me](#) and tell me what freedom is opening up in your life.

📌 What do you need to move into Purpose?

Before you stretch into the ideas and direction of purpose, take this week to revisit what's grounding you.

The **Connections Checklist** and **Foundations Self-Check** can help you reset your rhythm.

- What's working?
- What needs work?
- What needs to be added?

Focus your personal inventory time this week on these in your practice of recovery.

✓ Taking a Step Beyond

**You must be free not because of what you escape,
but because of what you choose to become.**

— Krishnamurti



Next week: Purpose.

Where freedom leads us when we listen.

✿ I'll also be sharing a new "Flow Readiness" checklist — a simple way to see what kind of stretch might be right for you now.

Thanks for being on the road with me. There's a lot more to come.



Do you like the newsletter? Forward it!

A blue ink signature of Barry Lehman.

Wherever you are in the journey- come back to what grounds you.
You're not alone.

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