

Love & Service

by dave m.

**A Meditation Guide
for People in Recovery**

Sit quietly for 15 minutes before you begin

...

Look at the Lord.

Let him look at you.

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FORWARD

The purpose of this work is to provide my fellows in recovery an effective means to deepen their relationship with a God of their understanding through prayer and meditation.

While facilitating retreats and workshops, folks have expressed to me their desire for more. They've been through the basics, found self-help information that garners more self-centeredness than God-consciousness and suspect they're ready to move on.

LOVE & SERVICE provides access to God-consciousness in a spiritual rather than specifically religious format. It shares the wisdom of ages past with coaching and insight on the specifics of abandoning ones self to God. The inspiration for *LOVE & SERVICE* came from *Imitation of Christ (IOC)*.

The *Imitation of Christ* is second only to the Bible as the most read book in the world. *LOVE & SERVICE* continues *IOC*'s tradition of a candid and conversational style. This work is meant to be a liberation from worldly inclinations; as well as a recollection as a preparation for prayer and the consolations of prayer. Thomas A. Kempis was the author who entitled the book: *The Imitation of Christ*. Its publisher is Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola, New York.

References will appear periodically to *Alcoholics Anonymous* along with the page number; it may be referred to as the *Big Book*. It remains the basic text for Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and has been translated into forty-three languages throughout some 150 countries.

PART ONE
LORD,
HELP ME KEEP MY THINKING STRAIGHT

CHAPTER 1
IMITATING HIGHER POWER & DESPISING VANITIES

“Those who follow me walk not in darkness,”¹ says the Lord. With these words we’re told the path to God-consciousness can be found by studying the life of the Lord.

“Abandon yourself to God”² we must pattern our whole lives on love and service to the Lord and our fellows. Life will take on new meaning. Issues of money, jobs and relationships will be resolved beyond any expectation on our part. What’s the point of being Bible or *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)* smart while lacking humility?

It’s not learning that makes us spiritually fit so much as it is living for others. How often have we seen some of our fellows quoting specifics of the *Big Book* or Bible while their actions manifest the self in various disguises? Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve him through our fellows.

St. Benedict puts it this way: “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of the Christ.”³ It’s vanity to seek and trust in riches, to court honor and be puffed up with pride. It’s vanity to be prey to lusts of the body, to be enslaved to any master of our flesh. It’s vanity to love what passes in a flash with no thought of where we’ll spend eternity.

We speak of the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it when addressing the futility of false gods. How often have we seen folks lost to romance and finance who began their venture of belief with such great promise only to die drunk or get locked up? We come out of the fog and face that fork in the road. We have two paths to choose from: one path looks wide, slick and inviting; while the other road is narrow with steps to climb and obstacles in the way. The wide road is called “I did it my way.” The narrow road is called “God’s way.”

Those who follow “I did it my way” stain their consciences and lose the grace of God. We ask, “as to your choices so far: how’s that working for you?”

1 John 8:12

2 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

3 *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you living for yourself or others?
2. Are you being humble and responsible?
3. Are you plugged-in with love and service?

RESOLVED: Today, do a simple, loving thing for your fellows without getting caught.

CHAPTER 2

STAYING RIGHT-SIZED

Everyone desires knowledge, but what good is knowledge without the “fear of God?”

A humble newcomer who exhibits willingness born of desperation serves God better than the proud old-timer who neglects his soul while leap-frogging over mouse turds and majoring in minors. Those who know themselves all too well become mean in their own eyes and are not happy when praised by their fellows. If we knew it all, what good would it do us before God without love? Our Higher Power will judge us by our deeds by asking questions like: “did you love and serve Me in your fellows?”

Self-knowledge avails us nothing.⁴ Much fretting, analysis-paralysis comes in its wake followed up by a need to sound good at discussion meetings while doing very little for the soul. The more we know, the more that’s given to us, the more will be expected of us. We can’t let expertise go to our heads. We must realize at the same time that there is much we don’t know. Most of our fellows are just hungry for a good listener.

Truly staying right-sized requires us to practice our beloved anonymity. To know and despise self is the best and most perfect counsel for egomaniacs with an inferiority complex. Just to think of ourselves less and to think well and highly of others is the best and most perfect counsel. How can we possibly consider ourselves better than our fellows as we know not for how long we can stay sober and loving? All folks are frail, but we must confess that none are frailer than ourselves.

⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 39

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you desire to sound good at meetings?
2. Do you have a need to one-up your fellows?

RESOLVED: Today, seek out another with a need to talk and try to be a good listener.

CHAPTER 3

HONESTY

The happiest folks met in recovery seem to be the ones who see the truth of their life. For most of the rest, it seems their main source of physical exercise is jumping to conclusions; those that are deceptive and cause them to discern very little. We have eyes and do not see.

Why wander into psychobabble and analysis-paralysis? The Lord speaks to us through our thoughts, our sponsors or spiritual mentors. Using these folks leads us to remain at peace with God. We remain focused on the simple choice of living life on a spiritual basis or dying a horrible alcoholic death.

“O God, You who are the truth, make us one with You in love everlasting. We are often wearied by the many things we hear and read, but in You is all that we long for. Let the learned be still, let all creatures be silent before You; do You alone speak to us?”⁵

Keeping it simple opens us up for divine insights. We are not distracted by many tasks as we commend them all to God’s care. We can enjoy interior peace as we seek no selfish end in anything. What gives us more grief and heartache than uncontrolled desires of the heart?

Staying sober, being of maximum service to God and our fellows is our main purpose for being here on this earth. The battle to master self is a struggle requiring effort, vigilance, avoiding beginnings and infusions of grace. It’s still in the dying that we’re born to eternal life.

“We are not saints.”⁶ No amount of *Big Book* learning will upstage a humble knowledge of self. Of course we must master the basics, but preferring a clear conscience and a life of active love and service ought to be the fruit of these pursuits. Many try to sound good rather than to live well. On the Day of Judgment our actions will judge us rather than our knowledge.

⁵ *Imitation of Christ*, 3

⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 60

How many there are among our fellow alcoholics who get locked up or covered up due to vain, useless worldly knowledge and too little care for serving God in their fellows? Is it really enough to mouth “keep coming back” to newcomers without taking them through *The Big Book*?

“The greatest among you will be the servants of the rest,” said the Lord to His original band.⁷ Does that not speak directly to our hearts, which have been described as childish, over-sensitive and grandiose?

Greatness consists in being little in our own eyes, making nothing of the highest honor. They are truly wise who look upon all earthly things as folly that they may gain the Lord. Those who do God’s will and turn their backs on self are truly very learned.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Is your faith ablaze with love and service?
2. Are you distracted by too many tasks?
3. Do you have and are you using a sponsor?

RESOLVED: Today, eliminate tasks and time-wasters in order to make room for God- consciousness.

CHAPTER 4

THINKING BEFORE WE ACT

Living on instinct has its limitations as it throws caution to the wind. Waiting patiently for knowledge of God's will and the power to carry it out requires a faith we seem to lack. We find gossip and join in about which we know very little. We err in denial of our human frailty and tendency to mirror it in the bad things we say about our fellows.

We are, after all, to “cease fighting anything or anybody,”⁸ and we are not to believe everything folks say about others. This is “the wisdom to know the difference” we pray for when we say the Serenity Prayer.

Mentoring by spiritual advisers and sponsors causes us to seek the coaching and insight in place of the trial and error of fellows. Living life on God's terms rather than merely on life's terms makes us wise according to God.

⁷ Mark 9:35

⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

The more humble we are and the closer to God we become, the wiser and the more at peace we will be in all things.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you realize in finding fault that: if we spot it, we got it?
2. Are you simply allowing things to be as they are?

RESOLVED: Just for today, cease fighting anything or anybody.

CHAPTER 5

READING THE "OTHER" BIG BOOK

Truth and serenity come from reading God's words in holy scriptures. We seek the simplicity of His message as we listen with the ears of our hearts as if the lesson is directed to us.

Our new-found love of truth should open up to us simple and devout books. We place principles before personalities as we focus on the message rather than its messenger. God speaks to us in many ways without regard for persons.

We forgo analysis-paralysis as we simply focus on the meaning of what's being said without getting impaled on the framework of how it's being delivered. To get the most out of it, we read with humility, simplicity and faith. We never seek repute for being learned. We seek and listen attentively to the words of the saints; we do not get displeased with the sayings of the ancients, for they were made to guide our feet on further along the "Road of Happy Destiny."⁹

⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you take time for Bible reading?
2. Can you see your story in the Psalms?

RESOLVED: Spend 30 minutes each day prayerfully reflecting on scripture.

CHAPTER 6

ADDICTED TO “MORE”

“We want what we want when we want it” leads to restlessness, irritability and discontent. A big shot who is greedy never rests, whereas one who sobers up has no more big deals and lives in a world of peace. An un-mortified person is quickly tempted, plagued with issues and prone to leapfrog over mouse turds and major in minors. That person is weak, carnal and inclined to sensual things. They are prey to their instinct-gratification. The thought of giving them up is frightening and they lash out with justifications in anger, mostly against “them people.” The issues-laden victim litany is often heard. Yet, if they give in to their passions, remorse of conscience overwhelms them as they fail to satisfy the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it...it does not lead to the peace they sought.

True peace of heart is found in “avoiding beginnings” by resisting passions, not in satisfying them. There is no peace in the carnal person, in the one given to vain attractions, but there is genuine peace and joy in the fervent and spiritual person.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Is your venture of belief on cruise-control?
2. Have you sobered up to better indulge your instincts or serve your fellows?
3. Are you giving in to your passions?

RESOLVED: Just for today, practice mortification by simply allowing things to be as they are.

CHAPTER 7
GETTING REAL

It's vanity to put our trust in others, in created things.

Live to give with love to our fellows. Others' opinions of us are still none of our concern. Self-reliance needs to be replaced by living life on God's terms. When all you can do is all you can do, God will aid our good will. Our own learning along with the cunning of others will be no match for God's grace. The Lord comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

When we glory in our wealth, our job, our relationships and not in the God who gave them to us and continues to give us His all – success becomes a failure experience. Romance or finance has claimed too many of our brothers and sisters in recovery.

Too often we tend toward an exaggerated sense of our own importance. We've been described as egomaniacs with an inferiority complex. God knows who we are. Our good deeds could often mask the actions of a busybody. If there is good in us, we will seek and look for the good in others, so that we can stay right-sized. The humble live in continuous peace while the hearts of the proud are plagued by restlessness, irritability and chronic discontent.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you put others on a pedestal?
2. Are you awash in romance and finance?
3. Do you really see the truth of your life?

RESOLVED: Today, look for the good in your fellows, especially those most toxic.

CHAPTER 8
BEING TRUE TO OURSELVES

We'll be careful and selective with whom we open up our hearts. Sponsors are God's voice speaking on

matters relating directly to recovery. We'll stick with the winners. We can not drool over the rich and famous. We let our crowd consist of the humble and the simple, with the devout and virtuous, and with them speak of edifying things. Men work with men, women work with women. We abandon ourselves to God and love Him in our fellows without fanfare and press conferences.

Loving our neighbor in no way requires familiarity with all. We put up with our fellows in hope they put up with us. Sometimes the less folks know us – the better our repute with them. Familiarity still can breed contempt. The Lord sees the truth of our life and who we are on the inside where we live. When we begin to see the truth of our life – we begin the path of being true to ourselves.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you sticking with the winners or the whiners?
2. Have you abandoned yourself to God?
3. Do you see the Lord in your fellows?

RESOLVED: Today, call your sponsor to make a time for sharing your unsolvable problem.

CHAPTER 9

OBEDIENCE

The greatest imitation of the Lord is obedience. He came to serve at His Father's direction and not to be self-directed, self-actualized or self-centered. It's far better to comply with authority out of love rather than grudging necessity. This foot-dragging can be the seedbed of chronic discontent unless a person follows God's will wholeheartedly. Clearly this is an example of where “half measures avail us nothing.”¹⁰

Regardless of where we may go for a geographic cure, we will find no rest except in humble obedience to the rule of authority. There are many of us who have been deceived by the illusions of “greener pastures” only to discover that they took ourselves with us.

Of course we all want to do what we want and seek out like-minded companions. But the blessings of peace often require giving up our opinions. After all, we've “ceased fighting anything or anybody.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 95

¹¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

Are we now wise in all things since sober for a while? People are so often wrong about so many things. We must not trust too much in our own opinions and not take as gospel the opinions of all others. But we sure do need to listen more than we need to talk and editorialize. We gain merit by being willing to listen to others even when our opinion is good. It's still safer to listen to advice and take it than to give it. Refusal to agree with others when reason and occasion demand it, is a sign of pride and stubbornness.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still as teachable and willing to listen as when you began?
2. Are you an expert beyond your capacity now that you're sober?

RESOLVED: Today, follow directions and give up “my way.”

CHAPTER 10

GOSSIPING

Shun the gossip-mongers as much as possible, for chit-chat about our fellows in recovery often leads us to, “how come they're not as cool as us?” and we're captivated by vanity.

Oftentimes, we jump in with our take on people, places and things only to leave with a troubled conscience. We do so to seek comfort from one another and out of our need for exclusivity. Hence, we talk of our fellows' minor faults while the personal “elephant herds” of our own making roar by us. But unfortunately, the attempt to build ourselves up at the expense of our fellows bars inward and divine consolation; it may in fact occasion the need for making amends.

Christ said, “watch and pray that you may not undergo the test.”¹² When the right and opportune moment comes for speaking, say something that will edify.

“Restraint of pen and tongue”¹³ doesn't come so easy to us and can be hampered by bad habits as well as indifference to spiritual progress. Devout conversation on spiritual matters, on the contrary, is a great aid to spiritual progress, especially when persons of the same mind and spirit associate together in God. Sticking with winners enhances our venture of belief every time.

¹² Matthew 26:41

¹³ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 91

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you gossip? Why?
2. Are you taking others' inventory and neglecting your own?
3. How important is it if you're bested in an argument?

RESOLVED: Today, avoid talking or listening to gossip about others without them being present to hear it.

CHAPTER 11

HEARTREST

What others may think of us is no concern of ours. How can one have any peace otherwise? Blessed are the simple of heart for they shall enjoy peace in abundance.

Why does it seem that some of the saints were so “happy, joyous and free?”¹⁴ They were, with time and grace, able to mortify in themselves all earthly desires and were thus free to attach themselves to God with their whole heart. Freely they could focus on God consciousness as they abandoned the “bondage of self.”

We're awash in our own agenda, too taken with trivialities. Without gut-level willingness, we rarely conquer even one vice preferring instead “spiritual cruise control” which confines us to cold indifference. If we mortify our bodies and screen out distractions, the spiritual will take on new meaning and give us new purpose (some may require a digital detox).

The greatest obstacle is our self-will. When we're crossed, we're upset, we're irked and we irk others. We're easily dejected and prone through long force of habit to deal with life by turning to human consolations. If, we stayed the course with courage, the help of the Lord would sustain us. Problems are still vehicles to God.

If we let our venture of belief rely on mere externals alone, our devotion will quickly come to an end. Let us then lay the ax of willingness to the root that we may be freed from the prison of our script-writing and thus have peace of mind, as well as harmony with our fellows.

The status-quo is very often spiritual-paralysis rather than spiritual progress. We feel we were better perhaps and more focused when we were new in recovery. Our walk should enable us to know that we're moving forward and that while we're not what we ought to be, we're not what we used to be. Those of us who

¹⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

take their oars out of the water can soon hear the roar of the falls downrange.

If we're hard on ourselves at the start, we'd be better able to foster God-consciousness. Without God's help and grace, breaking old habits and spurning self-will seems impossible.

Avoid beginnings. Practice self-denial. For most of us “self-will run rioters”¹⁵ the practice of acceptance represents the greatest fast we could possibly undertake. How much peace would flow in the wake of simply allowing things to be as they are?

Free us, Lord, from the bondage of self, from concerns for human respect, from outcomes, fears, hidden faults, from anger and need to control people, places and things. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you settling for status-quo-spirituality?
2. Are issues of money, jobs and relationships choking out your venture of belief?
3. Are you practicing self-denial restraint of pen and tongue and emails?

RESOLVED: Today, if you're not getting your way, simply give up your way.

CHAPTER 12

THE GOOD COMING FROM THE BAD

Problems are vehicles to God and remind us not to rely on any worldly thing. It's not fatal if we suffer contradiction or are misjudged by others, though we do well and mean well. Those things enable us to stay right-sized. The less our fellows think of us or give us no credit, then we are more prone to seek God. He sees the truth of our lives. After all, a person ought to root themselves so firmly in God that they need not the consolations of men.

God still enters through the wounds of man's indifference, torments and temptations. It's the one that realizes their need for God more than ever. Saddened by their miseries and sufferings, they lament and pray. Then they understand fully that perfect security and complete peace cannot be found on earth.

¹⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 62

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still too wrapped up in what others think of you?
2. How important is it if you are ignored or rebuffed?

RESOLVED: Today, avoid over-reacting to other's slings and arrows and focus on what God thinks of you instead.

CHAPTER 13

AVOIDING BEGINNINGS

Living life on God's terms will entail suffering and temptation. Vigilance is the price required for the venture of belief. The devil never sleeps, but goes about seeking those whom he may devour.

We're humbled, purified as we learn just how spiritually fragile we are. Even the Lord and His saints were surely tempted, tested and tried. We're never safe from the allurements of the world, the flesh and the devil; in sin we were born.

Many there are who try to escape temptations only to fall more deeply. Patience and true humility help us to grow stronger than our enemies. God's grace and help will do for us what we can't do for ourselves. We learn tolerance of our fellows who suffer like trials.

If we lack direction in our venture of belief and approach living our lives on a spiritual basis with a "willy-nilly," half-measure attitude, then we're tempted in many ways. We learn the real truth of our spiritual condition when faced with enticements that look good at the moment.

Avoiding beginnings has proven to be the most reliable way to stay the course of God's path to "happy, joyous and free:"¹⁶

Resist the beginnings;

remedies come too late,

When by long delay

The evil has gained strength.

¹⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

The longer one delays resisting,
so much weaker does one become each day.

- Thomas A. Kempis¹⁷

These trials can be vehicles to God “who shelters us under His wing.”¹⁸ Chances are they reveal both our goodness and the good we're offering our fellows. The Lord hears the cry of the poor, the humble, the needy. In temptations and trials the progress of a person is measured; in them opportunity for merit and virtue is made more manifest.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Is your spirituality “willy-nilly” and are you prone to return to your old self-destructive ways?
2. Are you “avoiding beginnings” or playing Russian Roulette while skirting along the edges?

RESOLVED: Today, visit a half-way house and offer to take folks to a meeting.

CHAPTER 14

JUDGE NOT

If we're not the problem, there is no solution. Others' misdeeds require one to simply allow things to be as they are. We're so often wrong in our take on others and can so easily sin whereas focusing on our part in things can prove beneficial.

If one were able to develop God-consciousness, then it would be no big task to “cease fighting anything or anybody.”¹⁹ But alas, our human condition and flawed nature draws us into petty disturbances.

Many unknowingly seek themselves in their affairs. If all folks are agreeable with them and see things their way, all's well indeed. But let some minor opposition arise and they're ready for battle. Differences of feelings and opinions can come up between the saints, angels, even the religious and devout.

Self-reliance will be a poor substitute for living life on God's terms as a path to enlightenment. The Lord

¹⁷ *Imitation of Christ*, 10-11

¹⁸ Psalm 91:4

¹⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

wants all of us and is a jealous lover. Human wisdom alone may not inflame our unconditional love enough for our fellows to enable us to use “restraint of pen and tongue.”²⁰

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still seeking self or serving others?
2. Are you focused on your part in things or are you still a victim?

RESOLVED: Today, give your all for all.

CHAPTER 15

LOVE & SERVICE

“To thine own self be true”²¹ will ensure avoiding evil or having a loved one push us in that direction. Helping others in recovery can entail “helping them down” by not interfering with the consequences of their addictions. Tough love involves, at times, that we exercise patience.

Without love we merely run our course with no value, but when we act with love in matters large or small, we bear much fruit as the Lord weighs the love we act with rather than the deed itself.

We do much who are tremendous lovers. We do much who do a thing well. We do much who serve the common good rather than our own interests.

At times, however, being a busybody can mask garden-variety sensuality as we manifest our true hidden agenda. The better way is to seek God's greater honor and glory rather than self. “He must increase, we must decrease.”²² Such a fellow envies no one nor does he attempt to “get caught doing it” as he seeks only God's glory. With a healthy contempt for self and a gut-level realization of what the Lord has done for him, he stays right-sized and gives the credit where it is due.

If we have but a bit of true love, we would surely sense that all the things of earth are full of vanity.

20 *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 91

21 *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

22 John 3:30

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Can you detach with love?
2. Are you loving in all you do?
3. How do you love those closest to you?

RESOLVED: Your spirituality will be gauged by how you treat your loved ones.

CHAPTER 16

TOLERANCE

We must live and let live with self and others. Their shortcomings and defects of character will serve to teach us patience and tolerance. However, when faced with these challenges to our merits we should pray the Lord help us exercise restraint of pen and tongue, email and Facebook.

Why continue to fill a vase that has a crack in it? We turn it over to Him who sees the real truth of the situation. God knows how to turn evil to good. We hope to bear with others' faults in hope that others bear with our misdeeds.

If our self-will is unable to overcome our self-will how can we hope to bend others'? Are we not powerless over people, places and things? We want "them people" to "shape up" while we're blind and passive with our part in things. We'd have them severely corrected while we fail to amend our waywardness. We want them bound by laws while we remain free spirits held back by nothing. Rarely are we as hard on ourselves as we are on others.

If we were all perfect, what would we have to test our merits and mirror the truth of our spiritual condition? God wills that we bear one another's burdens, console one another, mutually help, counsel and share experience as well as be compassionate to the hurts being doled out by hurt people. Then we learn just how loving and spiritually fit we truly are. If we're not the problem, there's no solution.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. You spot it, you got it. If you see some undesirable quality in others, you may have it yourself. Reflect.
2. Why not simply allow things to be as they are?
- 3.

RESOLVED: Look for the good today.

CHAPTER 17

LIFE IN RECOVERY

Live and let live leads to peace. To navigate among the folks in recovery who exhibit varying conditions of spiritual repair, to remain on the path of recovery without whining and complaint is no minor task. Happy indeed, are we who continue to trudge; we will know peace as well as be reasonably happy and useful.

If we would persevere with progress, then we may think of ourselves as journeymen. Good actions will produce right-thinking. We will experience loneliness, and at times resistance from some we've supported in the past. Talking-the-talk will be upstaged by how we walk-the-walk. What we are should be so evident that folks can't hear so much what we're saying.

Any recovering person who seeks self rather than God alone and the salvation of their soul will find only restlessness, irritability and discontentedness. Greatness, as described by the Lord, is still being of maximum service to God and our fellows.

Live to give. We're not in charge of the rotation of the planet anymore. We must take up our crosses, deny ourselves and engage with complete abandonment without conditions or fearfulness. We won't stay the course without prayer, without humility. "He must increase, we must decrease."²³

23 John 3:30

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you suffer from an exaggerated sense of your own importance?
2. What part is acceptance playing in your recovery? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, live to give the talents you have.

CHAPTER 18

DOING AS THEY DID

The pioneers of our programs set the bar with their zeal for action. When we reflect, we see how little or how close to nothing we do. They had very little and were met with deprivations, doubts, unemployment, homelessness and detractors on every side. They knew it was “do or die.”

Single-mindedness was their code. Temptations of money, power and prestige were strewn in their path by the enemy. They began their day with a morning devotional for an hour before they engaged the line of battle. They learned the real meaning of being of maximum service to God and to their fellows.

They turned down honorary degrees along with wealth, power and prestige. They replaced themselves using the spirit of rotation. They remained anonymous at the public level only, never to their fellows. They were poor by worldly standards, but rich in God's graces and abundant mercy. They were the proverbial “thieves and prostitutes storming the gates of Heaven.”²⁴ What they did was what they got. What an inspiration they are to progress from the fever of life!

Discipline began to unfold in our founders' lives as they saw how meetings, Steps and service-work produced results for their sobriety, but also led to being reasonably happy and useful. They bonded with sponsors who served as guides to God's will. Their lives, though not perfect, gave us hope as they were willing to grow along spiritual lines.

We who are now far from our first days of desperation in recovery can easily espouse the status-quo. That mentality is no spirituality at all. And if we ignore parts of God's Commandments we can become spiritually dead. Let your gratitude for God's many blessings be evident by your actions with service to God and your fellows. As St. Augustine said, “love God and do as you will.”

²⁴ Matthew 21:31

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you putting romance or finance ahead of your recovery?
2. Have you a time and place set aside for morning devotional?
3. Are you keeping all of the Commandments?

RESOLVED: Ask God today to “use me” with the gifts He gave you.

CHAPTER 19

TRUDGE, TRUDGE, TRUDGE

As recovering persons, we should mirror so clearly the principles of our fellowship that words are hardly necessary. Being real and who we are in the sight of God is our new found joy.

Each day should bring us a renewed intent to focus our resolve in such a way that keeps us on the venture of belief, we're able with Steps to say:

- “I'm sorry,” (Step 10)
- “I surrender,” (Step 11)
- “Use me,” (Step 12)

Grace brought us thus far and it's only with grace that we persevere on the path to recovery. Prayer of a heartfelt nature gives us grace and changes us. If we slack off or don't pray, we won't stay.

We learn to commend our thinking and our actions to the care of God. Keeping our focus on “preferring nothing whatsoever, than the love of Christ”²⁵ gives us the power and perspective to change. Money, jobs and relationship issues will be replaced by a healthy spiritual indifference. God's ways are not our ways.

At a set time in a set place, each morning we renew our chat with the Higher Power along with sustained listening. Each evening we reflect on the deeds done that day for good or evil.

Harnessing our instincts can prepare us for the devil's assaults. Being hard on ourselves entails curbing our appetites. Intensive work with others when fueled by prayer and meditation will help curb our selfishness, our self-centeredness.

²⁵*The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

Being individuals, we'll want to choose devotionals that work for us. Some we'll use on weekdays, some on Sundays, other devotionals may be better suited to the season. Some may be needed for grieving losses, others for celebrating joys.

During holy seasons, such as Lent, we can avail ourselves of abundant graces with renewed prayer, fasting and service work. We learn that we're able to overcome the self easier during these holy seasons than perhaps any other time of the year.

Trudge, trudge, “trudge the Road to Happy Destiny.”²⁶ God's generous blessings and gifts await you beyond anything you could have imagined!

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. What does “spiritual indifference” mean? Explain.
2. Has intensive work with others produced emotional sobriety? Or has it helped curb instinct-gratification?

RESOLVED: Make use of what organized religion has to offer by pursuing more resources of grace – a participation in the very life of God.

CHAPTER 20

SOULCALM

We must find an “inner room” for solitude to focus on God's blessings to us. We'll slow down and put away our distractions, gossips, rumors and erroneous speculations. Soon, we'll find the time to foster a loving relationship with the Lord.

Any work done without adequate quiet-time is often not done as well as work preceded by a morning devotional. Bill, Dr. Bob and Anne Smith began each day with a one hour devotional. If we wish to grow in our venture of belief we should go apart from the crowd just as the Lord did. How else can we develop that vital love-bond with the Lord unless we make time, set a place and get some inspirational books to assist us? It may require some financial investment.

²⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

Loving and protecting our solitude prepares us for interactions with our fellows. “Restraint of tongue and pen”²⁷ can be fostered by periods of silence. Following directions and being teachable prepares us to lead. Having a clean conscience enables us to relish heartfelt belly-laughs.

A healthy fear of the Lord and contempt for self should produce the direction necessary for our growth. If we are self-centered we will find only disillusionment in our pursuits born of pride and presumption.

Ours is a journey of progress, a real process of ups and downs. No pedestal-dwellers permitted. Some have tried. Excessive confidence and pride can precede our downfalls as our sensitive egos take credit at times for work done by the Lord. Thankfully, temptations and our frailty serve to remind us of the truth of our spiritual condition.

When one detaches from empty cares, great peace can ensue as the focus on the Lord becomes more clear. If we put our trust in the Lord, we develop a wonderful sense of spiritual indifference. No more big deals replace majoring in minors. Restlessness, irritability and discontentedness are detoxed.

“What's our part in it?” becomes our focus rather than the slings and arrows of “them people.” Here it is with healthy effort that we learn the truth of our life.

Reading scriptures with the ear of our heart produces serenity. Here we listen to the Lord talking directly to us. Here we learn how to cleanse ourselves for greater intimacy with the Higher Power. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us.

We enhance our sobriety by finding the path of maximum service to God and to our fellows. Hopefully we do it best by using the gifts we bring to the table.

Romance and finance have caused many of us to lose our lives or to be incarcerated when recovering, we allowed instinct gratification to upstage our sobriety. What began with passion too often ended in remorse and death.

Our experience of “first things first” leads us to conclude that issues of money, jobs and relationships are resolved best by our focus on abandonment to God. Anything put ahead of that, not only impairs our sobriety, but also causes the loss of the substitute as well.

We must focus on the Lord with the same abandon we summoned for self-gratification. We'll leave vanity to the vain. Do God's will as we understand it. Close the door to ourselves with heartfelt zeal. We'll call out to the Lord and remain for a while with Him in the morning for nowhere else will we find such peace.

²⁷ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 91

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Your time apart with the Lord prepares you for life on life's terms. How's that working for you?
2. What is meant by fear of the Lord? By a healthy contempt of self?
3. Have you become a “pedestal-dweller” by not opening up to your fellows about your shortcomings and defects of character?

RESOLVED: Spend 20 minutes each day reading scriptures.

CHAPTER 21

BLUE FUNKS

It's not always “happy, joyous and free”²⁸ on the venture of belief. Our progress requires a healthy fear of the Lord, self-discipline along with a tempered realization of being reasonably happy and useful when we use our problems as vehicles to God.

Putting expectations on our sobriety in and around feelings can imperil our recovery as our human condition remains. Despite one's many efforts spiritually or otherwise, we, at times, are blue and devoid of answers. Our true freedom rests in fear of the Lord along with a good conscience revealing that we're leaving behind our former selves.

Happy are we who let go and let God, simply allowing things to be as they are and not as we would have them. We leave behind the “director's chair,” assume our small but vital role in life and pursue with abandon His will for us.

We're to avoid being busybodies about the affairs of others while we focus on what needs to change in us.

The favor of our fellows is fickle at best. What matters more is that we show by our actions and thinking, our new found life of love and service to God and our fellows.

Thank God we didn't get what we deserved when men were angry with us! How unworthy we were and undeserving of freedom from the “snare of the fowler.”²⁹ We should cast ourselves at the Lord's feet, thanking Him for His mercy to us.

²⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

²⁹ Psalm 123:7

Our humanity draws us to self-seeking and being irked at the wrongs suffered by the misdeeds of the irksome. Upon reflection, isn't it amazing how little it takes at times for others to “set us off?”

And yet, if we but lived our lives with an eye to an early death rather than the false security of a long life, we'd be perhaps more zealous about our spiritual condition; “there are ways which men call right that in the end plunge into the depths of hell.”³⁰ We'd endure without complaint any hardship in the path to the Lord. But instead, we remain cold, indifferent and content with the status-quo. We enjoy at times having surrendered to whine rather than to win.

We pray with heartfelt zeal that the Lord give us the grace to see the truth of our lives. If we're not the problem, there is no solution.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Feelings aren't facts. I don't always have to like it or understand it. Reflect.
2. Are you a busybody? Have you resigned your position as “manager of outcomes?”
3. Aren't you glad you didn't get what you deserved when “men's anger rose against you?”³¹ Reflect.

RESOLVED: Pray the Lord lets you see the truth of life today.

CHAPTER 22

THE HUMAN CONDITION

The true easier, softer way that we seek can be found by letting go of self and letting God run our thinking and our actions. No one gets their way in everything. All suffer trial and anguish.

Who is it then, that has it made? We may say that others have riches, fame and romance, but when we reflect on the gifts of sobriety and detachment from persons, places or things, we realize that an abundance of things bring anxiety and fear. Acceptance has a better chance of bringing us peace than does gratifying our selves.

Living life on life's terms isn't easy. The more we aspire to progress, the quicker it becomes clear that

30 Proverbs 16:25

31 Psalm 123:2

others' toxicity stand out by contrast. We're faced with the choice of instinct gratification or growing along spiritual lines. Money, jobs and relationships can become the primary focus to our peril. We've attended funerals of our fellows who put romance and finance ahead of their recovery.

What a surprise to us to learn that all our instincts are provided for in abundance to the extent that we abandon ourselves to God! His blessings to us are rich and satisfying beyond any expectation on our part.

We don't hold back from all that awaits us. Now is the time to act, to turn away from chasing phantoms and pipe dreams. We must give Him our heartfelt willingness and He will take away the things that block us from the sunlight of the Spirit.

We are but frail creatures prone to sin. Today, we tell the Lord our defects with much sorrow and purpose of amendment and tomorrow we do the same sins again. It's easy to see how much we need to “decrease while He must increase,”³² lest we lose our way. The status-quo can become no spirituality at all. We're in trouble if we glide in our journey without rowing the boat. When we glide with taking the oars out of the water, we can hear the roar of the falls in the distance. If we abandon ourselves to God, great things will come to pass for us.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you moving forward or backward? Reflect.
2. Are you awash with instinct-gratifying distractions? Reflect.
3. Are you holding back in your venture of belief? Why?

RESOLVED: Today, enjoy the joy of the journey by giving God the complete care of your thoughts.

CHAPTER 23

REMEMBERING OUR LAST END

“Look beyond the bread you eat,”³³ says the hymn. Here today, gone tomorrow and so quickly forgotten. How foolish we become when looking only at the present. Living one day at a time doesn't rule out preparing for that which is to come.

³² John 3:30

³³ John 6

Living each day as if it were our last keeps us focused on a good life of loving service to our fellows. Having a clean slate makes death no more than it is. If we figure we can “get ready” later, we have no idea when later will be.

There's still no virtue in old age. Once the Lord began writing on the ground in front of the mob, ready to stone the woman caught in adultery, it was the old guys who dropped their stones and left first. Many a fellow has spent years in our fellowship, but have found very little difference in their spiritual condition. It's the dying to self that will best prepare us for the hereafter.

Death comes to us all. It behooves us to live our lives with a realistic eye to our last end. Our lives will surely look different at the end as we perhaps regret our “boldness-in-tongue and slackness in good deeds”³⁴ for our fellows.

How much better now to live life in a state of readiness for our final end. A healthy contempt of self and the world, a zeal for progress in virtue, a love for discipline, genuine restitution that puts things back as they were. In addition, a readiness to obey sponsors, mentors or bosses, a willingness to go to any length for sobriety without counting the cost; these things will give us a realistic expectation of a happy death.

Unreliable are our fellows and they will not long remember us when we're gone. Don't delay, work on your spiritual condition as it can prove more fruitful long-term than relying on others.

Now is all we have. How tragic it would be to run out of time to purchase everlasting life in a better way. The time may come when we're overwhelmed with “couldas, shouldas and wouldas” as we rue the lost chances we've missed at “happy, joyous and free.”³⁵

We live now, our life, in such a way as to be glad, rather than sad and fearful at our death. We must learn to die to self so that we may abandon ourselves to God. Constraint merits crown.

How foolish to plan to live long when we're not sure of living one day! Scores of our fellows were lost in their prime “doing it their way.”

Build your treasure in Heaven: live to “love and do as you will.”³⁶

34 Sirach 4:29

35 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

36 *Confessions of St. Augustine*

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. When your time comes – will you be ready?
2. What's meant by “love and do as you will.”³⁷

RESOLVED: Today, live your life as if it were your last day.

CHAPTER 24

THE FINAL EXAM

We will be called to give an account before our Higher Power, just know that He is the author of truth; He will clearly see the reality of how we lived our lives. And if an angry fellow upsets us now, how will we handle the Lord who knows all our sins? Why do we delay providing for ourselves on the inevitable day of judgment? Clean house, serve others and express with heartfelt sorrow to God our intentions as well as firm purpose of amendments. These will profit us for the final exam.

Far better for us to grieve over malice to our fellows than the harm done to us. Praying for their sins while exercising compassionate forgiveness cleanses our souls from petty resentments. Asking pardon for others while being moved with pity does violence to our “king-baby,” self-will, which is often so prone to be put upon and victimized.

Why keep for ourselves now what will later become fodder for the fires of purgation? We're being dishonest with ourselves by our love of the flesh. What will that fire feed upon if not our sins? Our willingness to have Him remove our blockage from the sunlight of the Spirit should be engaged on a regular basis with an eye to our final exam and providing less fuel for the burning. Better to be pruned now rather than later.

On that day great joy will occur for those who've lived the life of love and service for their fellows. Constraints endured in this life for God's honor will merit a crown in the life hereafter. The last and seemingly lost and lowly will be first. Simple obedience on earth will be more praiseworthy than worldly cleverness. The wisdom of the worldly will be overshadowed by gladness of heart of those with clean slates. How glad we'll be that we set aside a regular time in a set place each day to do a little talking and a little listening to the Lord! We'll also be glad that we preferred silence to prolonged gossip.

Then it is that our good works done will be the core of our final exam. The violence done to our self-

³⁷ *Confessions of St. Augustine*

will and the real restitution done for others will tell the true story of whether we lived for self or the Lord in our fellows.

Put up with the small stuff now that we may not have to endure greater stuff in eternity. If we get upset about nothing at present, how will we be able to endure eternal torment? The small setbacks and suffering of the present are no match for the fires of hell. Trying to have it all now and expecting the crown of glory later leads nowhere but to pain. Spiritual schizophrenia ensues.

If we love the Lord with our whole hearts, death holds no fear for us. Hell is also not an issue, as perfect love will cast out all fear of the final exam and create an expectation of eternal union with the God of love. Those who delight in sin should fear the place where “the worms never die and the fire never goes out.”³⁸ If this healthy fear of hell propels us to restrain from doing it our way, rather than from love, we need to be advised that “doing it” matters more than “not doing it” is what will count for our final exam. The person who persists in doing it their way while casting aside the will of God cannot continue long in goodness, but will quickly fall into the snares of the devil.

No one wants to talk about hell or the devil, but those had it right who said: “There are ways which men call right that in the end plunge into the depths of hell.”³⁹

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you serving self or others? Are you doing it your way? Reflect.
2. What will you have to show to the Lord when He asks what you did with the gifts He gave you?
3. What is meant by “constraint merits a crown?”⁴⁰ Reflect.

RESOLVED: Do God's will by keeping all the Commandments... especially His message to love others.

CHAPTER 25

MACH-TWO WITH OUR HAIR ON FIRE

Putting the same effort into recovery as was invested in self-gratification has led to what was being

38 Mark 9:48

39 Proverbs 16:25

40 *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 34

sought all along... a loving God who's meaning and purpose for our lives has given us the assurance of rewards for our labor, both here and in the hereafter.

Doing God's will has proven to be rewarding beyond any effort at self-will. God's gifts have been better than any foreseeable substitute. While one develops a sure and certain hope of final victory, the need to continue our effort is born of the realization that "it's easy to let up on our spiritual condition."⁴¹ Our gift of sobriety is an unqualified gift that becomes more qualified with time.

Dr. Bob, one of the founding members of AA, was heard to say that if he continued to act and pray as he then did, that he expected to die sober. Perfect love still casts out all fear of the future.

Our fears of the cost of discipleship block our efforts to engage the venture of belief with the same abandon that we used to get loaded and chase women or men. "How am I going to get any stuff? I need a relationship! What's this going to cost me?"

Victory over self and having a willingness to let go and let God guides us with heartfelt sincerity and takes us away from our "False Evidence Appearing Real," FEAR. "Here I am, Lord, I come to do Your will"⁴² becomes our ticket to being reasonably "happy, joyous and free."⁴³

Avoiding beginnings along with real efforts toward the practice of principles in all our affairs (especially with loved ones) can help us make the progress we need for a genuine spiritual awakening.

What we so quickly spot in others are but reflections of the same things we have in ourselves. You spot it, you got it. Sticking with winners affords us the chance to improve as we imitate the good we see in our fellows. If I'm not the problem, there's still no solution.

How edifying it is to see a sermon rather than to hear words. The disciplined and fervent souls among us show us the way, the truth and the life.

Those who "did it their way" also show us the final end of "self-will run riot."⁴⁴ Oftentimes they were locked up or covered up, those who chose romance or finance over the scary prospect of letting God have time to finish with them what He started.

Abandoning ourselves to God still causes great things to happen for us and countless others. We sell ourselves short and settle for so much less by our foot-dragging, fearfulness.

Having a yielded will to the Lord enables us to experience trials and tribulations with an attitude of joy for the chance to develop endurance and spiritual maturity. Propulsion by self-will places one in the mire of

41 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 85

42 Psalm 40:7-8

43 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

44 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 62

restless, irritable and discontent; when left unchecked this can and has proved fatal to folks who put issues before God.

What great joy it is to experience first hand the rebirth of our fellows! How much better it takes away the fever of life and satisfies, than did our self-destructive pursuits to fill the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it! Intensive work with others in recovery has proven a great anecdote for the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Once you sober up, there are no more big deals. “To them that love God, all things work together for the best.”⁴⁵

We must always remember our end with an eye to making it a point to do well the path God chose for us. We avoid “cruise control” in our venture of belief. Consider it evidence of onset spiritual toxicity. If we give ourselves to fervor we will find peace and will experience less hardship because of God's grace and the love of virtue.

A day well lived leads to a life of satisfying love and service to our fellows; it enables us to do violence to self-will and keeps us on the firing line of life in fit spiritual condition.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Aren't you perhaps afraid that in having Him – you'll have nothing else besides?
2. Are you holding back in hopes that something better comes along? Are you still asking, “what's this going to cost me?”
3. You either have issues or you have God. How's that working for you?

RESOLVED: Today, begin your walk with the Lord by asking Him to “use me with the gifts You gave me.”

45 Romans 8:28

PART TWO
AN INSIDE JOB

CHAPTER 1
MEDITATION

“The kingdom of God is within you,” says the Lord.⁴⁶

We make a time and place each day to grow and nurture our venture of belief. If we leave behind needless distractions, we will sharpen our focus and grow rich in the gifts of being reasonably “happy, joyous and free;”⁴⁷ gifts not given to those chasing their tails with perpetual, mindless motion.

Slowing down, cleaning house and making way for the sunlight of the Spirit allows Him room to become one with us on a regular and frequent basis with the peace and consolation that we once sought in the bottle. Letting Him into our lives with these daily efforts will make it possible intuitively to know what to do about both the small as well as the big stuff in life.

It takes work, effort and perhaps an investment in the beginnings of a spiritual library. Dr. Bob was known to have such a library. If you prepare your “inner room” in such a fashion the Lord promises: “if anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word and My Father will love him and We will come to him and will make our abode with him.”⁴⁸

We put the Lord first in our lives, serve Him in our fellows and He will never let us down. Unlike our fickle and changeable fellows, the Lord will not leave us orphaned. He will supply our every need and overwhelm us with gifts of a loving father to the extent that we truly make room for Him.

Folks can change with the wind, be for us today and at odds with us tomorrow. All our fellows are in various states of spiritual condition. Helpful and friendly folks won't always deliver, as we hoped for, in our hour of dire need. Too many are “bold in tongue and slack in deed.”⁴⁹ We let the Lord have our whole hearts and trust Him beyond any created thing. He will finish with us what He started. He will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We must give Him our willingness with the self-same zeal we once placed in the bottle and fallen women or men.

46 Luke 17:21

47 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

48 John 14:23

49 Sirach 4:29

Life is but a journey to a better place which is our real home. The “Hound of Heaven⁵⁰” longs to make His home with us here and be one with us in Heaven. The prophet put it this way: “Why spend your money for what fails to satisfy?”⁵¹

Ours is a journey rather than a destination. Our destiny remains to be the ultimate union with the Lord in Heaven. We, of course, apply ourselves to service work by carrying the message of our experience, strength and hope. We don't carry the alcoholic. The Lord handles outcomes. Our job is to move our feet as He helps us navigate this journey called life. We must keep our mind fixed on Him and offer the total of our thinking and actions up to Him as a perpetual prayer. Fasting can serve as an example of constant prayer.

If meditation is a challenge for us, we'll think at length about the Christ's suffering and sacred wounds; we may come to find with time and practice that we “count it a great blessing to be tested as it builds endurance and spiritual maturity.”⁵² We'll be better able perhaps to navigate and ignore the hurts inflicted by our hurting fellows.

When Jesus walked the earth He was met with utter disdain by men; when arrested He was deserted by His friends and left to die an ignominious and torture-laden death. How dare we complain of our pitiful, small issues?! He was rejected. Do we expect everyone to be our friend? How can we grow in endurance without any adversity to test us? How can we be a friend of the Lord if we're not willing to pay anything for our discipleship? The resurrection always follows the cross.

Love of the Lord makes us aware of just how much house cleaning needs yet to be done. The closer we are to Him and the more intimate we become with Him, the better we'll become spiritually indifferent to our treatment in the arena of life. There will be no more big deals. We'll no longer be referred to as “tornadoes roaring through people's lives.”⁵³

Loving the Lord allows us to experience true freedom from the bondage of self. We get glimpses of gut-level heartrest and soulcalm. This fellow sees the truth of their life and knows the wisdom of God, he “knows the difference”⁵⁴ between the real life and the fake.

Developing an interior life can mean more than making a time and a place for it. Doing the dishes can be a prayer, as well as mopping a floor. More importantly, calling another recovering person each day with a listening heart can be a prayer and a chance to meet Christ in our fellows. We don't waste time with superfluous externals. Others' strange behaviors are no concern of ours. We're upset and distracted only to the extent that

50 From a poem by Francis Thompson.

51 Isaiah 55:2

52 James 1:3

53 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 82

54 From the *Serenity Prayer*

we're meddling in business not of our concern.

Once we really sober up, there are no more big deals. But since we're a work in progress, we find ourselves at times still “prey to misery and depression”⁵⁵ due to our self-centeredness. If we give it up, we'll get what we sought all along.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you made time and a place to spend with the Higher Power? Have you made use of books and pamphlets toward this end?
2. Are you taking a good daily inventory? How about a thorough 4th and 5th Step done annually?
3. What can you do in your daily life to ramp up God consciousness?

RESOLVED: Sit quietly for 15 minutes daily starting today.

CHAPTER 2

TRUTH

Others' opinions of us are no concern of ours. We'll make certain, however, that the Lord be with us in everything we do. Having a clear vision of the truth of our motives can leave us impervious to man's malice. What difference does it make if we're misunderstood? We place all our trust in the Lord. We learn how to suffer in silence without recrimination. We put our hardships to good use by offering them up to the Lord for the still-suffering alcoholic.

Having the contempt of our fellows affords a chance at humility. When we humble ourselves before others, we're perhaps more likely to placate and appease those who are angry with us.

It's the open-minded and teachable whom the Lord provides solace and comfort. With their humiliation, He bestows great grace that they may glory more in His mercy than their self-reliance. To the humble of heart, He reveals His secrets. Peace can be possible in the midst of conflicts from all sides as we place our trust in Him and not in the world. We must look upon ourselves as inferior to all men in order to make real progress.

⁵⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 52

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you “ceased fighting anyone or anything?”⁵⁶
2. Are you becoming more spiritually indifferent to the slings and arrows of your fellows?

RESOLVED: Today, cast your lot with the Lord and practice being average.

CHAPTER 3

LOOKING FOR THE GOOD

If we let heartrest and soulcalm be our companions, then we'll bring it to others as well.

All things work together for the best when we're at peace whereas being restless, irritable and discontented, colors our perceptions and makes us believe the worst.

The peacemaker sees only the good whereas the malcontent persists in crying foul. A tornado roaring through people's lives, he stirs controversy and takes the inventory of his fellows with a critical eye. Meanwhile, very little thought is paid to his part in anything.

We should look to ourselves first, asking, “what's really going on here? What's my part in it?” How quick we are to excuse our behavior while castigating our fellow's apparent misdeeds. Our faults should move us to compassion for others' failings. Live and let live, simply allow things to be as they are and not as we would have them be. These outbursts of intolerance serve to remind us of the real truth of our spiritual condition.

What merit is there to associate only with those naturally pleasing to us? The challenge is to live and let live with our fellows who maybe harsh and perverse, undisciplined, who irritate us. This is a great grace and fellowship that accepts people as we find them without conditions. Love conquers all at that moment when they see that we don't overpower them with what's wrong with them and what they need to change.

Few there are who live at peace with themselves, who've abandoned themselves to God in truth. Others continue to try to do it their way and are never at peace with themselves nor with their fellows. They are a burden to their fellows, but mostly to themselves. Peacemakers are at peace with themselves and try to restore it to others by means of trusting God, cleaning house, and bringing joy through maximum service to others.

⁵⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

Accepting our lot with humility brings peace. They who know best to “trudge the Road of Happy Destiny”⁵⁷ can best conquer self, be a friend of the Lord and an heir of Heaven. There are in truth no more big deals for them.

So we look for the good, we're quick to see where others are right and of good heart.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. How's your attitude? Are you still quick to see the bad in people, places or things? Reflect.
2. Are you practicing acceptance for real? Placing unreal expectations on self or others?

RESOLVED: Today, practice unconditional love with your fellows by accepting yourself and them just as they are.

CHAPTER 4

ONE TRACK MIND

Keep it simple and sharing. These intentions keep our desires free of selfishness and cause us to be reminded that He's done for us what we couldn't do for ourselves.

If we're in fit spiritual condition, we'll more likely make house calls than those still asking, “what's in it for me?” Being of maximum service to God in our fellows will cause us to be “free from the bondage of self”⁵⁸ and the fever of life.

When we align our compass toward God's will for us, all things around us begin to be a reflection of God's glory and His goodness to us. As a person is within, so they are prone to judge on their outside environment. The good in us sees the good elsewhere, while the evil in us sees the bad.

When we turn it over completely to God, we're shorn of our sluggishness and experience the beginnings of a spiritual awakening leading to a personality change. But those who allow distractions of money, jobs and relationships to take first place in their venture of belief often come to a bad end. For those that love the Lord in their fellows, what may have seemed impossible in the past now causes them to conclude, “no situation is too impossible.” Freedom from the bondage of self awaits those who let go and let God. Could it be perhaps that

⁵⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

⁵⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 63

we're selling ourselves short with poor substitutes when we could have so much more?

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you awash in self with money, jobs and relationship issues? Reflect.
2. Toxic folks don't make house calls. How's that working for you?

RESOLVED: With heartfelt willingness, let God have care of your thoughts and actions today.

CHAPTER 5

SELVES

Self-reliance by now should have proven itself as unreliable. How often we err in insights born of self and our need to be seen as right. And so we do wrong things with little thought for others. Good works can often mask a need to be a compulsive busy-body. We're quick to be put upon by others' misdeeds causing us to brood and sulk. How blind we are to what others suffer from us. We become prey to whining about “them people.”

We learn soon enough how frail we are and that if we're not the problem, there is no solution. They got the right guy. This should give us pause to exercise “restraint of pen and tongue.”⁵⁹ We must be silent in our judgment of our fellows while we continue to look to ourselves with a healthy scrutiny. If we keep our focus on the Lord and our part in things, we'll develop a healthy spiritual indifference, making it possible for us to “take the world as it is and not as our expectations would have it.”⁶⁰

What happens to us is not so important anymore. How important is it? Why be caught unaware by neglect of our spiritual condition? We must ignore the wrongs of our fellows and focus with God's grace on our part in things. If we keep our garden clear of the weeds of neglect, He will be better able to talk to us through our thoughts.

What we do, we do well. Let our zeal be tempered by staying focused on “preferring nothing whatsoever than the love of Christ.”⁶¹ This is the answer to our concerns about money, jobs, relationships and

59 *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 91

60 From the *Serenity Prayer*

61 *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

“what's to become of me?” He is who'll bring true and lasting peace to our souls, but only if we let Him. Since we're not getting our way, we should consider giving up our way.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you a compulsive busybody? Reflect
2. Do you judge others while having a blind eye to your shortcomings?

RESOLVED: Pray today that the Lord will not let you be confounded in your expectations.

CHAPTER 6

THE JOY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Having a clean slate makes life worth living while harboring questionable motives and bad behavior fosters only restlessness, irritability and chronic discontent.

True heartrest and soulcalm can best be fostered by a healthy self-esteem born of a good conscience and good deeds done for others in secret. A simple act of kindness done for another without getting caught can produce a feeling of well-being.

Those with hidden agendas and various disguises of self-seeking have no peace. They may play the role of invincibility, but beneath the veneer we can see by their actions the futility of their self-seeking. In the end they who seek self, destroy themselves.

For us that love the Lord, no hardship is too much as we identify with the sufferings of Christ. All glory born of men is fleeting, transient and short-lived followed quickly by “what have you done for me lately?” A hollow emptiness and sorrow can follow in the wake of worldly applause. Those who do good to their fellows discover an unending mother load of relief from the fever of life. After all, wasn't that our first intent when we gave our all for the bottle and self-gratification? Having a clean slate with only the love of the Lord in our fellows gives one no need to apologize, rationalize or be more than who we are, children of God trying to help our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

We build our treasure in Heaven and live our lives as if we're on a bridge to a better place. What others think of us is not our concern. Contentment and peace come only by indifference to the praise or slights of our

fellows.

Neither praise nor blame can take away from our good actions done with pure motives and a clean conscience. We are what we are, nothing more, nothing less. Men look to “rending their garments rather than to rending their hearts.”⁶² They see only our outsides and our actions. God sees our hearts and knows that we are but dust.

A humble soul will always try to think little of self and more of others. Purity of heart propels us to do our good works in secret with no thought to public adulation. Our justification can only come from the Lord and turning over our outcomes to His care. And so, to walk with the Lord free from any external pats on the back is the state of those espousing the venture of belief.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you plugged-in with service work? Does it reflect your gifts?
2. Are you too sensitive to have concern for human respect? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Do a good deed today without getting caught.

CHAPTER 7

PREFERING NOTHING WHATSOEVER THAN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Happy are those who love the Lord with a healthy contempt of self. Putting the Lord first allows Him to be loved alone above all things.

Clinging to creatures while taking hostages in the process is a “sometimes” thing, while the love of the Lord lasts. The inconstancy of our fellows lets us down. Those who cast themselves on the Lord are made secure for the journey.

We love Him and keep Him as our friend. We'll find Him to be much more attentive and reliable. He will not leave us orphaned. In point of fact, we will find Him more present than ever when wounded by suffering. We must cling to Him, trust Him above all others as they sometimes fail us in our hour of long term,

⁶² Joel 2:13

real need.

He desires our love with the same abandon we once mindlessly invested in the bottle and women or men. In having Him, we truly have all else as well!

Apart from Him, we'll find that our fellows will fall far short of our expectations. Sponsors speak with the voice of God about recovery. Beyond that we must remember that "all flesh is grass"⁶³ and to depend on others can be a risky business.

What we see in others very often isn't what we get. Leaning too much on them for comfort or gain can be delusional. If we seek the Lord in all things, we'll find Him. We'll also find ourselves in this process. But if we seek only self, we'll destroy ourselves. The person who does not seek the Lord first does themselves more harm than the whole world or their enemies could ever do.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you seeking yourself first or the Lord? Reflect.
2. Have you found God more in trials than successes? Reflect.
3. Are you afraid in having Him that you'll have nothing else? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Seek the good of others today by being a good listener.

CHAPTER 8

INTIMACY WITH THE "BIG RANGER"

The retired army fellow would refer to the Lord at meetings as the "Big Ranger."

When the Lord is present, all's well, there are not big deals. When He's absent, all's too hard. When He talks to us through our thoughts we're able to "intuitively know what to do about what has baffled us."⁶⁴

Marching orders are comfort when we're intimate with their originator - "the Big Ranger."

How dull and uninspiring we can be without the Lord! What a futile and foolish use of our selves, indeed a greater loss than the whole world, to seek only self. For without the Lord, what can the world give us?

63 Isaiah 40:6

64 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

We who have chased phantoms for so long know how it leads us to the hell of terror, bewilderment, despair, loneliness and suicide; leaving us prey to misery and depression. If the Lord be with us, by contrast, no enemy can harm us.

Those who find and foster their love of the Lord find all they sought for the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it. Gut-level, spiritual poverty attends those still claiming, “I’ve got it now, I can handle it;” no one is so rich as they who live “happy, joyous and free”⁶⁵ with the grace of God.

Like any friendship, it takes effort to foster our relationship with the Lord. How can He find room if we’re still so full of self? We need to calm down and take time out for Him. We must put away all of our distractions. We don’t expect Him to be present if we’re a candidate for a digital detox. If we drive the Lord away with our phantom chasing, who will we seek as a friend in our hour of need? If the Lord be not our intimate friend, we will be dry as a bone and lack soul for our journey. Relying on our fellows can be a prescription for being confounded in our expectations of all who are dear to us. If we let Him have the place of honor, we’ll be more able to love Him in our fellows, but we love Him for His own sake and not just for the gifts He gives to us. Loving Him in the unlovable can make for smooth sailing that allows things to be as they are.

What happens on our behalf is not so important anymore. We’ll love the Lord in our fellows, do as we wish and we’ll not be false to self or over-demanding of others’ applause and affection. We must pray for purity in our affections.

We bring the Lord our clean and open heart if we truly wish to see how sweet the Lord is. With His grace we can turn our backs on self for the “Road of Happy Destiny”⁶⁶ is beyond anything we could have imagined.

We can do all things in the personality change department with the help of His grace. Doing it our way cuts us off from the sunlight of the Spirit and can lead, at the extreme, to death and despair. Be stout-hearted and persevere for “beginning again” is allowed.

65 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

66 *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 164

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you in need of a digital detox? Reflect.
2. Is what happens to you still so important anymore?
3. Are you loving your fellows without conditions? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, pray for purity of intentions.

CHAPTER 9

BEING HARD ON SELF

It's one thing to forgo human consolation when we're on a pink cloud. But trudging the other path without pink clouds, human consolation without complaint or self-seeking is a very great thing indeed.

Feelings aren't facts and whether we're elated or saddened matters little in the long run. Of course, we revel in our new found freedom from alcohol as we're born anew from our old life of bondage.

Wilson and Smith endured hardships on every side, accusations of jealous detractors. Bill and Lois were homeless, living off the charity of others and moved fifty-one times between 1939 and 1941. They learned to endure the hardships by loving the God who saved them. We learn what it is to suffer the loss of a friend for the love of God. We don't take it to heart when we are deserted or unfairly maligned by a friend.

Turning one's back on self with some sense of mastery requires real effort and sacrifice. We're afraid to let go and let God, lest we become "poor, miserable and celibate." Relying on human consolation can't replace the lessons learned by enduring severe trials and spending yourself on intensive work with your fellow alcoholics and alanons. The relief from the fever of life by working with others far exceeds any pleasure of the senses.

We must thank God for spiritual pink clouds when they come. They are perhaps a foretaste of Heaven. We'll be thankful and humble as one of God's kids would be with a generous daddy (Abba). By staying right-sized we find virtue "in the middle" for this too shall pass and temptation will come in its wake.

God still enters through our problems and can be found at the very hour of our greatest need.

We, like few others know what it is to cry out for help from the hell of terror, bewilderment and despair. The Lord hears the heartfelt cries of His kids impaled on the bondage of self. We learn that problems are

vehicles to God. We can either bend our knees or bend our elbows. The choice we make determines whether we live a reasonably happy life or die a horrible alcoholic death.

Trudging is required as we're hot or cold at times in our pursuit of the Lord. We're afraid of His will for us and what might be the true cost of discipleship.

How can we not place all our hope and trust in Him whose done for us what we couldn't do for ourselves? We can have fellowship galore, service work, conventions, banquets, retreats and the praise of our fellows, but all this matters little without God's grace or when we are abandoned to our spiritual poverty. Going with the flow no matter the flavor, is required. We don't have to like it. We don't have to understand it.

Bill Wilson experienced depression. Dr. Bob often had financial concerns and not much to show for his intensive work with others by worldly standards. Dr. Bob's spiritual awakening wasn't easy or dramatic. Temptations flew in the path of their sensitive egos. They were able to overcome their temptations by reliance on a loving God as He expressed Himself in the group conscience. Father Ed Dowling from the Society of Jesus, served as a spiritual adviser for Bill. They had ample opportunity to be reminded of their need for God when faced with temptations. They learned that feelings weren't facts and that what happened or didn't happen to them didn't really matter much anymore.

The devil still prowls about seeking whom he may devour. When left to ourselves, we predictably self-destruct. Vigilance is required then for our final perseverance.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you found emotional sobriety by working with others? Reflect.
2. Are you going with the flow? Are you not understanding or liking it? Reflect.
3. Reflect on how far the Lord has brought you.

RESOLVED: Today, with all your heart, ask God to “use me.”

CHAPTER 10

APPRECIATING GOD'S GRACE

Doing the service work that best reflects the gifts we bring will prove much more satisfying than chasing

elusive phantoms of temporary pleasure.

Grace helps us focus on simply allowing things to be as they are. Intensive work with our fellows relieves us of the bondage of self and moves us closer to “happy, joyous and free.”⁶⁷

Our sensitive egos work against us despite our best efforts to the contrary. We too soon develop an exaggerated sense of our own importance in the fellowship as well as elsewhere.

Gut-level grace that consoles us to the core is a Heavenly gift from the Lord. But if we forget to return thanks with our words and deeds, these moments of peace tend to dry up. Why keep gifting one who forgets to say, “thanks,” while at the same time taking credit for the gift? God still resists the proud and heals the broken-hearted.

“A humbled and contrite spirit, you will not spurn.”⁶⁸ So the grace that helps us see the truth of our life is preferable to consolation and contemplation that fails to keep us right-sized. “He must increase, we must decrease.”⁶⁹

It's all gift. Without His grace to fuel our spiritual awakening, we revert to our self-destructing ways and return to the chaos of whining, victimization awash in issues. We come to Him with our emptiness and ask with heartfelt gratitude that He finish with us what He started.

“They got the right guy,” can be heard at meetings. “If we're not the problem , there is no solution,” was also admitted. The less full of ourselves we are, the more God's grace can enter in. We are the “thieves and prostitutes who are storming the gates of Heaven.”⁷⁰ How could we who lived with terror, bewilderment and despair possibly credit ourselves or play the “them people” blame game? We are indeed clear evidence of the power of God's grace at work in His broken kids.

Living to give, affords gratitude at every turn. Appreciation of the gift giver without undo adulation for the gift follows in its wake. Once we sober up, there are no more big deals as we embrace acceptance even for things we may not like or understand. Like a loving daddy (Abba), He acts only for our welfare no matter how much we may conclude that it's an odd way to “run a railroad.” We sometimes ask, “how come God does things the way he does them?”

So we let gratitude be our guide, to be open to God's grace and patient in the face of its absence. We'll pray the Lord return His grace to us with the heartfelt humility of a child.

67 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

68 Psalm 51:17

69 John 3:30

70 Matthew 21:31

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still a victim...talking about issues or “them people?” Reflect.
2. Have you begun to focus more on the gift-giver rather than the gift? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, have compassion for that part of yourself and others that are never going to get it.

CHAPTER 11

JOY IN HARDSHIPS

“How much is this going to cost me?” Many there are who flock to feast at the banquet while balking when asked to set up chairs or do the mundane work required to plan the event! Many there are who wax eloquently about gratitude at the noon meeting while later that day saying, “no” when asked to do the hard work. We want the respect of our fellows and so we turn a blind eye to a given incident of a group's trampling over the spirit of the traditions. We love Him for what He gives us, like the self-centered kids we sometimes are. Only with grace do we move toward love of the giver and away from “what have you done for me lately?” and a jaded sense of entitlement. To “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ”⁷¹ was the goal of St. Benedict. This is the love fostered by a healthy spiritual indifference and is free from self-interest and self-love.

If we seek only the joy of consolations we may become unfocused in our venture of belief. Loving God for His own sake with no thought or expectation about His gifts is truly a pure and worthwhile love. He attracts us to the path with His gifts, but our hearts remain “restless until we rest in Him.”⁷² He and only He is what can fill the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it.

If a person gave all their wealth, did great amends making and became an expert on spiritual principles, they would still lack the one thing necessary: gradual turning of one's back on self with complete abandonment to God. To make little of what may be considered by some as great and to think of oneself with a healthy sense of wary self-contempt. For we read: “When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: 'we are unprofitable servants'.”⁷³

No one in recovery is more truly poor in spirit and humble than those who admit: “I just showed up where I was supposed to be and did what I was supposed to do.”

71 *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

72 *Confessions of St. Augustine*, 1:1

73 Luke 17:10

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Aren't you being asked to do what regular folks do all the time? Reflect.
2. Are you bold in tongue with gratitude and slack in deed when asked to deliver?

RESOLVED: Just for today, “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ.”⁷⁴

CHAPTER 12

GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY

Recovery entails denial of self, taking up one's cross and doing God's will. While we may not like the thought of the sacrifice required by these suggestions, we will like even less ending up in the wrong place because we don't know where we're going. Those who follow the way of the cross now, need not fear the day of judgment later. This sign of the cross will be in the Heavens when the Lord comes to judge.

Why fear abandonment of self when we can win a crown? The victory to be won is in the cross as well as protection from enemies, a blessed sweetness, strength of mind, a joy of the Spirit, freedom from the bondage of self. There is no salvation of soul nor hope of everlasting life but in the cross.

“Take up your cross, therefore, and follow Jesus, and you shall enter eternal life. He Himself opened the way before you in carrying His cross, and upon it He died for you, that you, too, might take up your cross and long to die upon it. If you die with Him, you shall also live with Him, and if you share His suffering, you shall also share His glory.”⁷⁵

Living life on life's terms requires us to do what we're supposed to do regardless of understanding or liking it. Saying, “no” to our instincts, especially the need to control, keeps us at peace.

“Trudging the Road of Happy Destiny”⁷⁶ can best be found by simply allowing things to be as they are, whether we're on a pink cloud or in the throes of a blue funk. Dryness of spirit can be our cot at times. Even Bill Wilson was a prey to depression for many years in recovery. Learn to accept and bear trials without consolation. You can become more humble through suffering and unite yourself more intimately with the sufferings of Christ.

⁷⁴ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

⁷⁵ *Imitation of Christ*, 41

⁷⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

No matter the person, place or thing we seek as a cure, we cannot escape the cross since we take ourselves with us and shall always find ourselves. If we want peace, patience will be required. By this, we will merit an eternal crown. Willingness, honesty and open-mindedness is still a requirement more than ever.

The entire life of Christ was a cross and martyrdom. Can we follow Him without experiencing trials, hardships, tests and temptations? Our venture of belief is a constant invitation to get out of the way. The greater the love, the more we experience the pain of exile.

As always, accepting life on life's terms, builds endurance and causes us to grow up spiritually. The spirit is strengthened by grace as problems become vehicles to God. His grace not only does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, but He finishes with us what He started. Bear patiently with the trials as they're not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.

When we sober up, there are no more big deals as we've resigned our position of scriptwriter for persons, places and things. Taking things as they come, leads to gut-level blessed peace. We pray only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out (Step 11). If we're to live, we must die to self and the more we decrease, the more He can increase.

The true measure of our spiritual growth consists in compliance with God's will for us in whatever form it may come: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."⁷⁷

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still fearful of becoming a nobody? Reflect.
2. What steps are you taking to deny self and follow the Lord?

RESOLVED: Today, simply allow things to be as they are.

⁷⁷ Luke 9:23

PART THREE
MORE HEARTREST & SOULCALM

CHAPTER 1
LIVING ON DIVINE INSTINCT

“I will hear what the Lord God will speak to me.”⁷⁸

Happy shall we be when the Lord speaks through our thoughts. Living on divine instinct is now more possible than ever as we're under new management. Single-mindedness is required to foster this God-consciousness. A sure and certain recollection with eyes and ears closed to exterior distractions is the recipe.

We can be really present for His divine promptings. The complete abandon that once went for self-destruction can now be focused on God-consciousness.

We must turn off and curtail the exterior noise in order to better hear what He's saying to us.

“I am your peace and your life. Remain with Me and you will find peace. Dismiss all passing things and seek the eternal. What are all temporal things but snares? And what help will all creatures be able to give you if you are deserted by the creator?”⁷⁹

We live on divine instinct by loving our fellows and being present with a heartfelt sense of abandonment to Him whose love for us knows no bounds.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you have a set time and a set place for quiet time with the Lord each day?
2. Reflect on those times when God spoke to you through your thoughts.

RESOLVED: Repeat this: “Today, I'll live on instinct by loving our fellows and being present with a heartfelt sense of abandonment to Him whose love for us knows no bounds.”

⁷⁸ Psalm 84:9

⁷⁹ *Imitation of Christ*, 44-45

CHAPTER 2

GOD SPEAKING THROUGH OUR THOUGHTS

When a sponsor speaks to us about recovery, it's the voice of God talking directly to our specific issue.

God speaks to us through our sponsors, our circumstances, our thoughts, our bodies, our mentors or those placed in authority over us. Without God's inspiration to guide them or us, we can easily miss the message or misinterpret its intent. Bill and Dr. Bob were moved by what they imagined to be God's will to establish hospitals across the country raising capital, selling shares, etc.... God spoke to Bill through the group conscience by reminding him not to turn this program into a professional endeavor and so while desperately in need of a job, Bill turned down the offer to be a counselor from Charlie Towns at Towns Hospital.

But without grace, no amount of flowery words can prompt one to act on them. Without grace along with honest, open-mindedness and willingness we may not hear or get the point of what's being said for our benefit. The Lord's wisdom can unlock meaning and enable us to “intuitively know what to do about things that have baffled us”⁸⁰ Sponsors take us through the Steps.

OUR WORDS TO THE LORD: Your promptings on our hearts cause us to hear them over and over. These guides point the way. You give strength for the journey. The Lord is the “master gardener” of the “inside job” aspect of our fellowship.

Speak to our hearts O' Lord and give us the power to carry out your marching orders for us. Without your grace to sustain us for the journey we can grow cold, disinterested and get off the trail. Too often have we seen what happens to our fellows who take over the steering wheel only to be locked up or covered up.

“Speak, Lord, for your servant listens.”⁸¹

You and You alone have the power to fill this hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it. Come Holy Spirit, come...

⁸⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

⁸¹ Kings 3:9

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you so wrapped up in issues, projects and distractions that you're barely able to pray or meditate?
2. Do you have a sponsor? Are you using him or her?

RESOLVED: Today, call your sponsor and bounce things off him or her.

CHAPTER 3

MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN

THE LORD: Hear My Words, for they surpass all the knowledge of philosophers and wise men of earth. My words are Spirit and life and will give passion to the brittle dryness of your hearts of stone. Stay as teachable as you once were in order to follow the promptings I'll place on your heart.

OUR RESPONSE: We will be able to live a “happy, joyous and free”⁸² life if we but follow Your spiritual principles?

THE LORD: I taught your founders about trusting Me, cleaning house and helping others. So many insisted on doing it their way. Others sobered up to better gratify their instincts. The allure of romance and finance which promised the moon too often resulted in their destruction. I, the Lord, promise more lasting and truly satisfying things and the hearts of men grow dull for fear that in having Me, they'll have nothing but a state of being poor, miserable and celibate. So who is there who'll serve Me with the same abandon once given to chasing phantoms?

“Be thou ashamed, o Sidon, for the sea speaketh.”⁸³ I, the Lord, inquire; should you wonder why be ashamed? Folks will travel across town for a meeting attended by pretty girls or attractive guys while refusing to go down the street for a nearby workshop. They will put hormone therapy and people ahead of their sobriety only to lose, not only the sobriety, but also whatever it was they put in first place. But when offered a reward beyond estimate and an opportunity to be fully human and fully alive with the divine grace and peace afforded by preferring the love of the Lord above all else, it must be said to their shame that recovering folks begrudge rather than choosing to “trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.”⁸⁴

82 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

83 Isaiah 23:4

84 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

“I would that you have life and that you would have it more abundantly.”⁸⁵

I, the Lord ask you to reflect; have you surrendered to win or to whine? Do your actions show you're more eager for self-seeking and vanity than in the way, the truth and the for real life?

I, the Lord, offer My gift of life to you as a free gift and while it becomes more qualified with time, you'll soon find you will not be confounded in your expectation by trusting Me, your God. What I, the Lord, have promised I will give. Remain faithful to My love until the end and you'll enjoy blessings in sobriety beyond anything you could have predicted.

I, the Lord, offer My principles to guide you past the temptations you'll encounter and while I allow these, I will be there with My consolation. Those I love, I admonish like a loving Father, while urging them on to being of maximum service to Me in their fellows. Those who have My words, only later to despise them, do so to their own peril, both here and for all eternity in the hereafter.

OUR PRAYERFUL RESPONSE: Here we are, Lord. All we did to get here was seek relief from self-pity and the fever of life in the bottle and fallen women or men. Terror, bewilderment and despair were our new companions along with gut-level alcoholic loneliness. Without You, we can only revert to our self-destructive ways. Only You can fill the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it. How can we persevere unless you finish with us what you started? It was grace that saved us from ourselves and it's only Your grace that can sustain us for the journey. We're scared of both the price of discipleship as well as our erratic attempts at self-reliance that return us to restlessness, irritability and disconnectedness. Show us Your will. Speak plainly, Lord, as we're not very good at following directions. We long to do Your will and “to prefer nothing whatsoever to the Love of Christ.”⁸⁶

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still “holding back” in hopes that something better comes along in the venture of belief? Reflect.
2. Have you in fact put anything ahead of your sobriety? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, begin writing a gratitude list of a dozen or so things you have to be grateful for and put new things on the list each day.

⁸⁵ John 10:10

⁸⁶ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

CHAPTER 4

HUMILITY IS TRUTH

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Honesty and abandonment of self to Me will shore up your sobriety like nothing you can cook up on your own. Slings and arrows from your fellows, along with the seductions of the world, the flesh and the devil will do you no harm while you're under the shadow of My wing. Others' opinions of you quickly fade into nothingness as they become no concern of yours. You are what you are.

OUR RESPONSE: What You say is so true, Lord, since we're comforted and feel protected. We seem much less inclined to stray off the path with varying disguises of masked self-seeking.

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: I the Lord will show you the way you should go. Despise your faults and always give credit to My grace for your good works. You're still a work in progress as you're so often reminded with flair ups of restlessness, irritability and disconnectedness. You really have little to brag about for you are much weaker than you can comprehend. When you keep your eye on Me above all else, there will be no more big deals as you abandon your old self and become My new creation. Fearlessly flee your old self-destructive ways with heartfelt willingness and I will remove them from you.

I, the Lord, tell you that some hold back with duplicity and want to know the way, but are driven by their pride and curiosity. They often are revisited by even worse troubles than they first had.

Know that I, your God, will require an accounting at your life's end. I am still a God of justice as well as perfect love. Take stock then of what's blocking you off from our relationship. Do this now rather than later for the accountability call will most likely catch you by surprise.

I, the Lord, tell you that nowhere is it more true that “half-measures avail you nothing,⁸⁷ than in a reluctant, half-hearted attempt at intimacy with Me. Many there are at meetings, who, while bold in tongue about the topic of gratitude, are found later that day back-pedaling when asked to speak at an institution. Others realize the wisdom of preferring nothing whatsoever to My love and are found loving their fellows with sincere adulation. And, so I, the Lord, urge you to leave behind your distractions and give Me your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole mind. Build your treasure in Heaven and you will find in Me all, and more than you once sought in the bottle and fallen women or men.

⁸⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 59

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still holding back? Reflect.
2. Don't you see that you are who you are whether praised or maligned?
3. How would you fare if your accounting to the Lord was scheduled sooner rather than later?

RESOLVED: Today, begin focusing on and be alert to God's will for you.

CHAPTER 5

DELICIOUS, DIVINE LOVE

OUR RESPONSE: How can we possibly return thanks adequately in our brief lifetimes for Your countless blessings to us? You've pulled us out of the mire of terror, bewilderment and despair. So many have died of our disease and yet You've chosen us, Your erratic and flawed servants to receive the gift of sobriety. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank You, Lord.

All's reasonably well when You are present with Your gifts of heartrest and soulcalm. We use problems as vehicles to You, rather than to our former self-destructive ways. Our love is weak and imperfect, and so our need for You, Lord, is greater than ever. Our erratic and lethargic discipline lets us down as self-reliance continues to fail us.

“Take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy power, Thy love and Thy way of life.”⁸⁸

Love is still most resilient to others' toxicity and turns all things into good. Love is acceptance even when we don't like or understand what's going on around us. Love turns that which may have seemed bitter into sweet. Love of the Lord makes us want to love and serve our fellows without being busybodies. Love rises above the pettiness and nothingness and isn't overcome by adversity.

Love that rests in You, God and our fellows is sweet, guileless, unaffected, strong, pleasant and powerful enough to move men's souls.

One who is in love is on a pink cloud, giving all for all with no thought of reward for self. The avid lover rests in God and is not prone to rest in the gift, the focus instead, is on the gift-giver.

⁸⁸ *Third Step Prayer, Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book), 63*

Love knows no limits. Above and beyond is no impairment for the lover with no whining or complaint; it serves others without conditions or hidden agenda. Those by contrast who don't love, don't make house calls.

Love is vigilant and looks to itself first for its part in things rather than the real or perceived wrongs of others. Love is a living flame that seeks the higher good. No obstacle is too great to impede its warmth.

A lover will recognize the meaning, the messenger, and for whom love is intended.

“My God, my love, You are all mine and I am all Yours. Give me an increase of love, that I may learn to taste with the inward lips of my heart how sweet it is to love, how sweet to be dissolved in love and bathe in it. Let me be rapt in love. Let me rise above self in great fervor and wonder. Let me sing the hymn of love, and let me follow You, my love, to the heights. Let my soul exhaust itself in praising You, rejoicing out of love. Let me love You more than myself and let me not love myself except for Your sake. In You let me love all those who truly love You, as the law of love, which shines forth from You, commands.”⁸⁹

And so, love steps up to the plate in word and deed, still makes house calls and takes newcomers through the steps rather than a cursory, “keep coming back.” Love exercises “restraint of pen, tongue”⁹⁰...and Internet. Love is long-suffering and compassionate with that part of all of us who are never going to get it. Love isn't self-seeking. It allows people, places and things to be as they are. Love is humble and not intent on vain things. Love is sober, chaste in its motives, firm and guarded in all its senses. Love is teachable and listens to sponsors as well as to superiors. Love still conquers all and endures sorrow and suffering with resignation. Love takes the good along with the not too good, without complaint. The lover offers up their lot to the Lord and puts their suffering to good use for the benefit of their fellows. The lamb sleeps with the lion.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you see the risk with self-love? Reflect.
2. Examine your love of others. How do you measure up to the standards shared here?

RESOLVED: Today, love your fellows unconditionally.

⁸⁹ *Imitation of Christ*, 50

⁹⁰ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 91

CHAPTER 6

THE PROVING OF A TRUE LOVER

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Don't get too comfortable and smug in your sobriety.

OUR RESPONSE: What do you mean, Lord?

THE LORD SAYS: It doesn't take much for you to get sidetracked by a slight difficulty as you react to the fever of life in recovery. Courage is required to resist the magnetic pull of romance and finance when you're new in recovery. Wisdom will guide you to spiritual indifference regarding prosperity or adversity being in your path. You will, with time, learn to regard not so much the gift of Him who gives, as much as the love of Him who gives. Rest in Me as you may not, at first, recognize the gift I've given you.

I know that you run hot and cold in our relationship. At times you will experience Heavenly consolation which is a foretaste of your Heavenly home. It comes and goes. Feelings aren't facts. Resist the weird, distracting thoughts that may come at the oddest times, but to fight against them is a sign that you're getting well. Resistance from the evil one is a sure sign you're doing something right.

You may find temptation can attack in the middle of prayer and meditation. These are evils you suffer rather than commit; your struggles to resist them serve as evidence of progress in our relationship.

The devil will use all his deceptive powers to get you to stray from the path of sobriety. He will especially try to turn you away from prime time with Me when we might do a little talking and a little listening. He'll encourage you to whine, be a victim and focus on the wrongs of "them people." An honest, Fifth Step displeases him and he would have you omit whatever your religion would have to offer.

Don't believe him or heed him. He will suggest phantoms as mirages that will serve as gateways to taking that first drink. Here's a suggestion of what you can say to him:

"Away, unclean spirit! Shame miserable creature! You are but filth to bring such things to my ears. Be gone, most wretched seducer! You shall have no part of me, for Christ will be my strength and you shall be confounded. I would rather die and suffer all torments than consent to you. Be still! Be silent! Though you bring many troubles upon me, I will have none of you. The Lord is my light, my salvation, whom shall I fear? Though armies unite against me, my heart will not fear, for the Lord is my helper, my redeemer."⁹¹

Should you fall, begin again. It doesn't mean you have to drink. Trust that I will finish with you what I

⁹¹ *Imitation of Christ*, 52

started with my loving grace. Don't confuse complacency with spirituality, for it can be no spirituality at all. Many there are who are led astray into perpetual blindness and find themselves suddenly taken drunk. Too many become “locked up” or “covered up.” Let their example of self-reliance serve as a reminder to you that “there but for the grace of God, go you,” as John Bradford said.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Doesn't it seem that the more you try to do good, that opposition appears from everywhere? Reflect.
2. Should you prepare yourself for an ordeal when espousing the path of love and service?

RESOLVED: Today, remain focused on love and service despite resistance from self, others or the devil.

CHAPTER 7

STAYING RIGHT-SIZED

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: You who were once addicted to chaos may, in recovery, find yourselves at times in the middle of dry drunk. Prayer may seem distasteful and despite your best efforts, some days you'll conclude that all you did right was to stay sober. Feelings aren't facts. When I see you trudging the road with no regard to liking it or understanding it; I, the Lord, will know that you're making progress. Dryness and anxiety are what they are. This isn't a feel-good program I've given you, it's a do or die program.

Self-reliance falls short and can generate impatience followed by laziness when you don't get your way. I, the Lord, give my consolation to whom I want, when I want and as much as I wish as it shall please Me and no more.

Some there are in recovery whose reach exceeds their grasp. They can become busybodies trying to do more than they are capable of by following the desire of their heart rather than seeking input from a sponsor. My grace can't penetrate one who is so full of themselves. The loss of grace can occur, reminding them once again that self-seeking can lurk even in the disguise of selfless and heroic efforts for their fellows. I, the Lord, will be here when they come down off their high-horse.

Newcomers can want to take over their own venture of belief and, without the direction of a sponsor, be deceived and awash with needless trial and error. Many who ignore the coaching and insight of those who've

preceded them experience relapses. Romance and finance become more important than recovery causing those who ignore input from sponsors, to get locked up or covered up. Pride precedes their fall from grace. They stopped listening and being teachable way before the train wreck occurred. I, the Lord, ask for humility and responsibility as the price required for your recovery as well as your final perseverance.

I, the Lord, want you to be fully human and fully alive; however, it's unwise for you to give yourselves up entirely to enjoyment as a distraction losing your awe of Me. Be patient and don't get discouraged with your progress. Try to stay in the middle ground of faith so that I can finish with you what I started. Gifts for you in recovery will far exceed anything you could have predicted for yourselves.

Stay right-sized. Restraint will merit the crown of reasonably “happy, joyous and free”⁹² recovery. Your humility can protect you from the throes of restlessness, irritability and disconnectedness.

Pink clouds are great. Just imagine how you'll act or feel when the mood changes to a blue funk instead. What then? Such trials are oftentimes more beneficial to you as they serve to remind you of your need for Me and My grace. Your merits aren't measured so much by spiritual highs as they are trudging the road to sometimes dull and uninspiring destiny. Can you still seek My honor, says the Lord, with humility and a positive contempt of self?

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Humility is truth. Are you being yourself? Reflect.
2. Are you putting anything ahead of your sobriety? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, focus on really putting your recovery ahead of money, jobs or relationships using balance and moderation as a guide.

CHAPTER 8

HEALTHY SELF-CONTEMPT BEFORE GOD

OUR RESPONSE: If we start to believe our own press releases, we're suffering from an exaggerated sense of our own importance. Soon our sins serve to remind us of our true frailty. We are but dust and revert to

⁹² *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

our self-destructive ways without Your grace to sustain us, O Lord. Boldness in tongue is quickly followed by slackness in deed.

When we stand in the shadow of our true self-centeredness, it gives us pause to know how weak we truly are and how much in need we are of Your grace. On our own, we sink to the depths; but with Your grace, we find that which satisfies beyond all we sought in the bottle and fallen women or men. We are lifted up and experience the warmth of Your loving embrace in their fellowship.

Your love has filled up that hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it. Our self-love led us to terror, bewilderment and despair. By seeking You, we have found ourselves and are thinking less of ourselves and more of the needs of our fellows. Thank You, God we didn't get what we deserved. We have found instead a new freedom, a new happiness in living to give.

How can we possibly thank You enough in our lifetimes for Your many gifts to us? Finish with us, Lord, what You started so that we may return thanks by being of maximum service to You and our fellows.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you do gratitude or just talk it? Reflect.
2. What's meant by having a healthy self-contempt?

RESOLVED: Do a grateful act for your fellows, perhaps with those closest to you.

CHAPTER 9

OFFERING IT UP

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: If you desire happiness, make Me your aim in all things. By doing so you'll be less inclined to put your frail fellows on a pedestal and less self-centered. Seeking self can turn to ashes in your mouth along with disillusionment.

Place all your tasks in My care and things will go better for you than with self-reliance alone. Bring Me your concerns, questions and issues; I will help you to “intuitively know what to do about things that baffled you.”⁹³

⁹³ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

I am still the Way, the Truth and the Life. If you serve Me with all your heartfelt desire, you will receive grace upon grace. Those who follow their own drumbeat will be burdened by self-inflicted and often toxic restlessness, irritability and discontentedness. They will be a burden to their fellows, but mostly to themselves. Don't let success become a failure experience. Others aren't to be put on pedestals for they are as frail and inconsistent as you are. Give it up to Me. I'll handle it better for you than you could have ever imagined.

I, the Lord, have given My all for all and I expect you to do likewise. When you return thanks for My gifts with your actions, you'll put vainglory to flight.

Where charity and love prevail, there's less room for envy, stubbornness or self-love to enter in. My love conquers all and will strengthen you for the job I have in mind for you, being of maximum service to Me and your fellows, giving your all for all.

And so, if you're truly wise, you'll rejoice only in Me, for I, the Lord, am your greatest good. Put me first. Give Me your all and you will have all. Issues of money, jobs and relationships can best be resolved by seeking Me first, and so I, the Lord say to you: not getting your way? How's that working for you? Give up your way.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you giving all for all? Reflect.
2. Has a little success in sobriety made you an expert in all things?

RESOLVED: Today, turn the care of your thinking and actions over to your Higher Power.

CHAPTER 10

THE REAL DEAL

OUR RESPONSE: How could we miss all You've given us? When we're honest, we reflect that it's all gift. To those who love You, everything works together unto good. What can we possibly say about You and Your gifts to us who love You with our whole heart?

The incredible peace we experience at times in Your presence is beyond words. We are fearfully and wonderfully made and though we sought escape in the bottle and pursued death with abandon, You saved us

from our self-destructive ways and asked us to love You by carrying the message of recovery to our fellows.

You are indeed a tremendous lover. How can we possibly forget Your many blessings to us even after we'd squandered our youth with alcohol and roadhouses. You heard the cry of our desperation and drew us out of the grip of terror, bewilderment and despair. Thank God we didn't get what we deserved.

What shall we possibly be able to give back for Your bountiful grace to us? Few with our disease, are given the unearned gift of a sober life. Why should we get a big head about our new way of living, we're just finally doing what regular folks are supposed to be doing all along? We are humbled instead and mindful that You've done for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. As we become well, we can see that You give us the help of our fellowship, the principles of the Steps and a chance to plug into service work with the gifts You blessed us with. We've begun to hear Your voice speaking through our thoughts.

How on earth can we possibly, in a lifetime, repay You for all these gifts? We just wish that for one day we could serve You worthily! Lord, without You we can do nothing that is good. You deserve only our best in Your service. We want only to give our all with the time we have left to Your greater honor and glory. Use us though we're often bold in tongue and slack in deed. Please keep doing for us what we can't do for ourselves.

Serving our fellow alcoholics and alanons brings meaning and purpose to our lives. It's a trip from life's fever to a land of life-giving "happy, joyous and free,"⁹⁴ the internal recovery. We possess great grace as You use us to show our fellows what happened, what it used to be like, and what it's like now. The consolations and rewards of seeing the light gradually dawning in our fellows, is a comfort beyond words. We're freed from our carnal path by this intensive work with our fellow alcoholics. Great freedom of mind follows in the wake of service to others as well as untold relief from the minor irritations of everyday life in recovery.

We're so glad that You not only use us, but give us joy in Your service. O happy sobriety! How blessed are we to be in Your service with such freedom! By loving You in our fellows, we get ourselves back along with a more healthy self-esteem. With love and service, we find all we pursued with complete abandon in the bottle and fallen women or men. You complete that hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it better than all we ever sought before. You, Lord, are the real deal.

94 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you chasing phantoms, looking for substitutes for God? Reflect.
2. Look honestly at what your Higher Power has done for you so far? Make a gratitude list.
3. Have you engaged and plugged into the program with service work? Does it reflect the gifts you bring to the table?

RESOLVED: Today, seek out a new-comer and not only listen, but share experience, strength and hope.

CHAPTER 11

I WANT WHAT I WANT

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: You've got a lot yet to learn which you haven't quite picked up on.

OUR RESPONSE: How do you mean, Lord?

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: How about having as genuine a yielded will as when you cried out to Me for help at the start or using the same abandonment toward My will that you did with the bottle and fallen women or men. You may find yourselves going off in all directions while on a pink cloud, but consider if you're acting in My honor, or for your own advantage. If it be My will, doors will open up and solutions will cross your path. If, however, you seek self in your actions, they will be laden with peril, hidden agendas and become way too hard. Your over-zealousness at the start can cause you to be busybodies as your reach may exceed your grasp. You may find yourself confounded in your expectations. Sometimes a little prudence and discretion can be had by bouncing your zeal off a sponsor. "Ezduzitbutdoit" is your mantra.

Too much eagerness at the start can lead to distraction of mind. Your lack of restraint and erratic discipline could send the wrong message to your fellows. If you, by your zeal, run into a stone wall, when you're raw and green in your new-found sobriety, your sensual appetites can seem, at times overwhelming. They may in fact be serving at the start to be the only glue that keeps you coming back to meetings. A quick detour to romance or finance looks very enticing. But you should be hard on yourselves and keep your focus on recovery. Ignore the rage of your hormones and slow the pace of the restoration of your net worth (which you probably never had to begin with). Go to any length to be in the zone of having a yielded will, to simply allow things to be as they are and you will find gut-level peace and all the answers to money, jobs and relationship

issues beyond your ability to foretell. Love your fellows, use your resources, be grateful for the little gifts I send you and most of all surrender to win, not to whine.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you surrendered to win or to whine? Reflect.
2. Has romance or finance been at the fore-front of your focus? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, simply allow things to be as they are.

CHAPTER 12

EZDUZITBUTDOIT

OUR RESPONSE: We must have compassion with that part of us that's never going to get it. Whatever our expectations may be for peace in the valley, we're still required to “trudge the Road.”⁹⁵

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: I require an attitude of gratitude especially when trials and tribulations cross your path. These are tools I use to foster your endurance as well as to help you grow up spiritually. Bear with present evils patiently for My sake.

All my children suffer trials of all sorts, even the ones you may most envy. While they seem to have it all, they seem not to feel the fever of life very much. How long will it last? They shall vanish like smoke and be quickly forgotten. Even while they lived, their distractions and pleasure were laced with bitterness, weariness and fear. All satisfactions have limits and often turn to ashes in their mouth.

How quickly did you learn that the mindless pursuit of self-gratification in the bottle and friends in low places resulted in terror, bewilderment, despair and utter loss of self? You would have died in the pit of self destruction had I not snatched you from the jaws of death.

And so, I say to you, don't pursue your instinct-gratification: “Seek your pleasure in the Lord and He will give you your heart's desires.”⁹⁶

The more you throw yourself into intensive work with fellow alcoholics and alanons, the happier you'll

⁹⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

⁹⁶ Psalm 36:4

be and more free of the lusts that block you from the sunlight of My Holy Spirit. Your self-esteem that was squandered in the self gratifying pursuits will come roaring back.

But don't be surprised if you rebel at the thought of surrendering to Me in the service of your fellows. Old habits die hard, but prayer will change you along with moving your feet. Be steady and courageous, for I will be with you as we “trudge the Road of Happy Destiny”⁹⁷ that I have in mind for you.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you better self-esteem as a by product of service to your fellows? Reflect.
2. Do you count it all as joy when trials come your way? Reflect on the good that has come to you from hardships

RESOLVED: Starting today, call someone in the fellowship and ask how they're doing. Do it each day thereafter.

CHAPTER 13

THE GREATEST IMITATION OF THE LORD

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Doing things your way brought you to a bad end. My grace brought you back, but will only work if you follow My lead. I provide you with sponsors, but if you keep “yeah butting,” then it's pretty clear who's running the show. How's that working for you?

To overcome self, give up your way, do what your sponsor has done. Let your spiritual mentor who speaks My words provide you coaching and insight instead of your trial and error. If you're not the problem, there is no solution. Having a healthy contempt of self will help you in the battle over the world, the flesh and the devil.

Your inordinate self-love makes you leave claw-marks all over the shortcomings you came with. You have the mistaken notion that in having Me, your Lord, you'll have nothing else beside. What's the big deal about following the directions of a sponsor when I, the Lord, subjected Myself to man for your sake? I, the Lord of life, became the more abject and despised of men so you'd have a model by which to overcome your

⁹⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

pride with my humility.

Listen as if your life hangs in the balance, because it does! Be real – no more fantasy-land phoniness. Submit yourself to a good sponsor or spiritual mentor. Be hard on self and easy on your fellows. Let your only boast be about the power of My grace in a garden variety drunk's life. Let go, let others have their way and you will find peace.

Things are fine, you just don't always think so. Thank Me from your heart that you didn't get what you deserved when man's anger arose against you. I, the Lord, spared you to do My work with your fellows in recovery out of profound gratitude and with all the love and service your spiritual condition can reflect. So, I, the Lord, say to you: get out of the drivers seat and enjoy the ride. You won't believe what I have in store for you.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you afraid that in having God you will have nothing else beside? Reflect at length.
2. Aren't you glad that you didn't get what you deserved when men's anger rose against you?
3. Reflect on your experiences with helping others that brought you to “happy, joyous and free.”⁹⁸

RESOLVED: Today, do what your sponsor does and says.

CHAPTER 14

AS HE SEES IT

OUR RESPONSE: We're, at times, literally powerless in the face of a drink. Some who went ahead of us and did so many greater deeds fell tragically from Your grace and met their death. If You did not spare them, Lord, what will become of us? I prayed with some of them while they were full of zeal for recovery only to be soon looking helplessly into the face of their mother at the funeral home: “I'm so sorry, I don't know what happened to your son – I wish, I wish...”

Unless You finish with us what You started, Lord, how can we possibly attain the personality change needed for recovery? No amount of vigilance on our parts, without Your grace to free us from our character

⁹⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

defects and shortcomings will work. Left to ourselves, we revert to our self-destructive ways, but filled with Your Spirit we are empowered to do things we're not able to do by ourselves. We are bold in tongue and slack in deed, but you, O Lord, reignite our zeal for our fellows. You give soul to the sometimes dryness of being stark-raving sober.

How could we foster such an exaggerated sense of our own importance? We're indeed the clay; You, Lord, are the potter. Without the help of Your sustaining grace we can do nothing that is good.

Our lives are yet unmanageable without Your guidance speaking through our thoughts. We must decrease – You, Lord, must increase. You see us for what we are, too much, yet egomaniacs with inferiority complexes: childish, sensitive and grandiose.

We are but too soon ashes. “Shall the clay Glory against Him that formed it?”⁹⁹ If we've truly let go and let You, Lord, how can we be such a big shot? Success needn't become a failure experience if we're mindful of who brought and keeps us here. Men will be for us today and against us tomorrow, but those who place all their trust in the Lord will be unmoved by flatterers. Those who praise us will pass away along with their words, but the truth of who we are in the eyes of the Lord will count most in the long run.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. You are what you are with flattery or criticism strewn in your path. Reflect.
2. Are you staying right-sized?
3. You're on probation and have been given a reprieve to do God's work.

RESOLVED: Today, forgo human respect and focus on God's will for you.

CHAPTER 15

TALKING POINTS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: As you've asked Me to “take away my difficulties,”¹⁰⁰ you should acquire enough spiritual indifference toward results that you can say to Me: “Thy will be done.” With the zeal of a foxhole prayer, you actually begin to mean it.

⁹⁹ *Imitation of Christ*, 60

¹⁰⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 63

Not every instinct you feel is divine in nature nor does it always come from Me. You'll need to have input from your sponsor to determine if you're on the right path or not. You know first hand what happens when you march to the beat of your own drum.

Whatever you see in your mind's eye as good, ask Me for it with awe, humility and with utter heartfeltness. Commend all your activities to my care, yes, all of them. You might say: "Lord, I don't always know what's good for me. You sure do however, so, I ask You to run the show. Do with me as You see fit for your greater honor and glory. I am Your servant. What happens to me doesn't matter much anymore. Speak plainly, Lord, as I get easily confused. I'll need a lot of help when I try to live for You in my fellows!"

A prayer that the will of God be done: "Grant me Your grace, O most merciful Lord, that it may be with me, and work with me to the very end. Amen."¹⁰¹

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you self-directed? Do you bounce your thinking off your sponsor?
2. Reflect on how God has answered prayer in your life.

RESOLVED: Be a good listener instead of an expert advice-giver.

CHAPTER 16

DEUS SOLUS

OUR RESPONSE: Our sobriety and the venture of belief causes us to look long term. Not all present satisfactions are unlimited, nor will they long endure. Our hearts remain in varying stages of restlessness, irritability and discontentedness until we rest in God alone. If we are a little patient and trust God, clean house and help others, not only will we glimpse at "happy, joyous and free"¹⁰² on the earth, but we will also build our treasure in Heaven where things last forever. We can never fully enjoy temporary things as we were not created to enjoy them. Where we once used people and loved things, we're now called to use things and love other God's kids.

Think about it, if we had perfect romance and endless finance, we could not fill the hole in the belly with

¹⁰¹*Imitation of Christ*, 61

¹⁰²*Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

the wind blowing through it. We are made for God. He has work for us to do with our fellows; when done well with meetings, Steps and service, it can produce, not only relief from the fever of life, but a foretaste of Heaven. A new sense of direction is fostered by repeated acts, moving us to a more constant God consciousness. God is heard speaking plainly through our thoughts giving our lives meaning and purpose.

The pats on the back are nice, but we realize that we're just passing on what was given to us. We're soon forgotten, but the message endures. Love and service is our guide. We're under new management and there are no more big deals as we shed our mantle of “children of chaos.”¹⁰³ We become one with the Lord. We carry Him with us in all our affairs and say to Him:

Be with me, Lord, as I place the tasks You've given me in Your care. I don't need to be famous or to be caught doing good. Your consolation is enough for me. I'm here to do Your will. I pledge to simply allow things to be as they are and not as I would have them. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you ready to “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ?”¹⁰⁴
2. Reflect on the joy of the journey.
3. What steps can you take to foster God-consciousness?

RESOLVED: Today, be alert to God speaking through your thoughts.

CHAPTER 17

TURNING IT OVER

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Let me do your thinking for you. You think with the wind of human respect at times.

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, we can't deny it. We don't always know what is good for us by a long shot. Our past experiences tell us that if all we rely on are our people skills and forget to cast our task to Your care, we're liable to think with our mouths and cause harm to ourselves and our fellows. So please, guide our actions for the best and for our real good.

¹⁰³ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 146

¹⁰⁴ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

We will simply allow things to be as they are, knowing that problems are vehicles to You, God; that pain serves to motivate us to grow closer to You. We will bless and accept the good along with what we may first perceive as not so good. What happens to us isn't so important anymore. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."¹⁰⁵

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: That's exactly how you should think and act if you're serious about doing My will. Develop a healthy spiritual indifference as to outcomes, whether glad or sad – healthy, wealthy or needy. You move your feet and I'll guide you where you should go and help you to know what to say.

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, we accept whatever You deem fit for our growth in love and service. We are ready to try to see the truth of our lives as we discover what seems to be a cross. It soon becomes a vehicle to share with our fellows. It instead becomes a resurrection. But, Lord, keep us right-sized and free from the bondage of self and we will fear neither death nor hell. Finish with us what You started and as we learn to "prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ;"¹⁰⁶ then whatever tribulation befalls will not harm us.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Can you go with the flow?
2. Are you practicing acceptance?

RESOLVED: Today fast from self-will by simply allowing things to be as they are.

CHAPTER 18

THIS TOO SHALL PASS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My Love, I came down from Heaven for your salvation and took on your miseries so that you might learn patience and also bear the fever of life without becoming an issues-monger. From the moment of My birth to My death on the cross, suffering did not leave Me. Homelessness, revilement and scorn was My lot as I preached and healed. Final betrayal and abandonment of My disciples was My reward.

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, You set the bar pretty high by showing us how to do another's will. It makes

¹⁰⁵ Job 1:21

¹⁰⁶ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

sense that we, Your unworthy children, should learn to have patience with life, self and others. These things we should do for the merit of our souls. This corruptible life becomes a vehicle of God-consciousness if we but follow Your example. You've not only opened the gates of Heaven for us by Your passion and death, but also given us rebirth with the gift of sobriety with glimpses of Heaven while still in this life.

Lord, how can I possibly be indifferent and unmindful of Your untold blessings to me? How can I, in a lifetime, repay Your clearly given graces on my behalf? You are the easier, softer way for this alcoholic. Your example of doing the Father's will tells me how to best imitate You. I was lost without You when I strayed from the path and I won't be able to finish what You started with me without the grace of final perseverance. I'm just not sure I can hold up my end. I fear in having You, I'll end up poor, miserable and celibate. I get scared that I won't have a relationship or get any possessions. But, the old-times tell me if I but follow You with the same zeal that I worshiped the bottle and fallen women or men, that problems of money, jobs and relationships would be resolved beyond anything I could have predicted for myself. Help my weak faith, Lord, to see the truth of my life. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Doesn't it seem at times that when you follow God's will, you're faced with an ordeal? Reflect.
2. Are you afraid that in having Him, you won't get a relationship or have any possessions? Reflect
3. Do your actions reflect that abandonment to God is the answer to issues of money, jobs and relationships? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, remind yourself: this too shall pass.

CHAPTER 19

HANGING IN THERE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Have you surrendered to win or to whine? Reflect on My plight on your behalf and stop complaining. Your burdens are light compared to those who were so sorely tempted and tormented. Keep fresh in your memory “how wonderful it still is out there” by carrying the message to newcomers. You'll soon forget the minors you were majoring in as you sit next to a newcomer who's back from

a visit with terror, bewilderment and despair. If your issues persist, examine if perhaps your impatience isn't the culprit causing the discomfort; though others meet our expectations, try to bear with outcomes patiently. The more you practice acceptance by simply allowing things to be as they are, the better will be your gut-level peace.

Don't say, "I won't take any guff from so-and-so as I don't deserve it and besides, they have it all wrong. They just don't understand. But from my friends I'll take it on the chin as much as I think I should."

That, My children, is "stinking thinking." It does not consider the virtue of patience of the Lord who will reward it, but rather focuses on the person and the offense committed. If you insist on taking what you like and leaving the rest, by selective suffering, how will you shore up your faith muscles with patience? When you sober up, there are no more big deals and what befalls you from whomever doesn't really matter anymore. How important is it? But with acceptance you build up your faith muscles and foster endurance which helps you to grow up spiritually. You who take things as they are, rather than as you would have them, can be grateful. With Me, nothing that is suffered for My sake, no matter how small, can pass without reward.

"Be prepared for the fight, then, if you wish to gain the victory. Without struggle you cannot obtain the crown of patience, and if you refuse to suffer you are refusing the crown. But if you desire to be crowned, fight manfully and bear up patiently. Without labor there is no rest, and without fighting no victory."¹⁰⁷

O Lord, I know by now that your grace will do for me what I cannot do for myself. I'm too often a wimp with pain and setbacks seem insurmountable to me and bring me pretty low. Help me with reminders to put my suffering to good use by offering them up to You for another's benefit, and I will be blessed as well in the process, both here and in the hereafter. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you learned to pray for those who've harmed you or ignored you? Reflect.
2. Is your path strewn with evidence of gratitude or resentment? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, live and let live with my fellows.

107 *Imitation of Christ*, 65

CHAPTER 20
GETTING REAL

OUR RESPONSE: I can truly say, O Lord, that they've got the right guy.

We can get tripped up on things that are minor. While “bold in tongue and slack in deed,”¹⁰⁸ it's often a slight distraction that can blur our focus. Oftentimes, when we think we're really secure, a slight trifle can serve to remind us of our spiritual frailty. It doesn't take much to bring us down off our high-horses. We are weak, Lord. You are strong. Please finish with us what you started by snatching us out of the bondage of self.

Our weaknesses serve to keep us right-sized. While we do not fully consent to them and they often come in the middle of prayer, we're wearied by their assault and the effort vigilance requires us to avoid beginnings. They serve to remind us of our spiritual frailty. Resistance to them does in fact please You and serve as evidence of our zeal for You with love and service to our fellows.

Please know that we're moving our feet and making an effort in the battle to leave self behind. But unless You, Lord, give us Your help for the long-term and save us from our self-centered ways, how can we possibly finish with any success? We didn't get sober so we could better pursue other forms of distraction and gratification.

Good grief! The “Road of Happy Destiny”¹⁰⁹ is fraught with peril, challenges and roadblocks. “Restlessness, irritability and discontentedness”¹¹⁰ can seem to dog our trails even when we appear to be doing everything correctly. At the end of many a day, our conclusion often was that being sober that day was the only good that occurred.

How inevitable has it been in the face of raging hormones early in recovery to see folks never get past the initial attractions only to pursue romance and finance to their death? Those who focus on their relationship with the Lord first, find that problems of money, jobs and relationships are resolved beyond any expectation on their part. Life or death: do we want to be fully human and fully alive, or continue to be “prey to misery and depression”?¹¹¹

The phantoms of worldly pleasures continue to blind their followers and end up as ashes in their mouth. The sweetness of the Lord and the life of self-discipline are considered to be that which you fall back on as nothing else has come along that's any better. They, on the other hand, who abandon themselves to God and

108 Sirach 4:29

109 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 164

110 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, xxvii

111 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 52

give their all for all, discover a satisfaction and joy beyond any short term pleasure and not only are relieved of life's fever, but also find themselves. Those especially who are blessed with lining up service work that matches their gifts and talents are in for a fantastic pink cloud experience. And so, Lord, help me to love and serve with the gifts You gave me. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still holding onto the character defects that you came with when first sober? Reflect.
2. Have you found that doing the right thing isn't always neat, tidy and secure? Reflect.
3. Are you continuing to peel the layers off the onion by offering heartfelt willingness to the Higher Power? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Continue to try by moving your feet whether you understand or like it.

CHAPTER 21

ABANDONING OURSELVES TO GOD

OUR RESPONSE: When we rest in God, we're in good hands.

“Lord, help me to 'prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of You'¹¹² above all my fellows; above all health and beauty; above every honor and glory; every power and dignity; above all riches and art; all joy and gladness; above all fame and praise; all sweetness and consolation; above every hope and promise; every merit and desire; above all the gifts and favors that You can give or pour down upon me; above all the joy and exultation that the mind can receive and feel; and, finally above the angels and archangels and all the Heavenly host; above all things visible and invisible; and may I seek my repose in You above everything that is not You, my God.”¹¹³

Nothing can come close to Your power, Your peace nor can anything satisfy our inadequacy as much as You, O Lord. Your direction has given meaning and purpose to our lives. We get glimpses of just how much You love us. You are perfect in every way and can do all things. You've shown us time and again that no situation is too impossible. We fall so short of the mark by bedazzlement over Your many gifts rather than

¹¹² *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

¹¹³ *Imitation of Christ*, 67

wonder and awe over You, the gift-giver. Nothing satisfies as fully and completely as You, O Lord.

And yet, we can't seem to fully grasp adequately what it means to be near You and to feel the warmth of Your loving embrace. We so long for the freedom from the bondage of self in order to see how sweet You are, O Lord. How we long for intimacy with You beyond our self-absorption. Many evils and distractions enter in to deter us from the path to You. We feel impaled on our spider webs and unable to rise above to Your sweet embrace. Let us cry for help, causing You to hear and answer our heartfelt pleas.

O Lord God, may our humble silence speak to You. How long, O Lord, will you delay Your coming? Trudging this dark path without Your light is too often dull and uninspiring. It's with anguish and dryness of spirit at times out here on the venture of belief that we find ourselves. How can we be truly happy unless we get better connected with You? We are weighted down by self-centeredness and expectations we place on others. Without You, our tables are empty and our cups only run over with "restlessness, irritability and discontentedness."¹¹⁴ Nothing on the planet can fill the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it. We'll keep trying, Lord, to get Your attention and to pursue You with abandon until we hear You saying:

"Behold, I am right here. Lo, I have come to you because you have called Me. Your tears and the desire of your soul, your humility and contrition of heart have inclined Me and brought Me to you."¹¹⁵

Lord, we are more ready to do things Your way than ever before. We thank You with all our beings for having brought us safe thus far according to the many mercies given us even as we tried to hang on to old ideas and toys in the playpen.

What more can I possibly say as I see the truth of my life. You must increase, I must decrease. Your loving hand has brought me the precious gift of sobriety. God grant that my words and deeds always give You the credit and the glory for having done for me what I couldn't do for myself. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you been more focused on His gifts than the gift-giver? Reflect.
2. Are you ready to "surrender to win?"
3. If you've been holding back, how's that working for you? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, meditate on all the ways God has shown His love for you.

114 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, xxvii

115 *Imitation of Christ*, 68

CHAPTER 22

BEYOND OUR EXPECTATIONS

OUR RESPONSE: We're here to do Your will, O Lord, open our hearts to Your Commandments, each and every one. Help us to see and remember Your many blessings and graces so that we can return thanks with an attitude of gratitude along with love and service to our fellows. When we see how You snatched us away from the pit of destruction saving us from getting what we deserved and then overran us with pink clouds; and resolutions to dilemmas of money, jobs and relationships, a fellowship beyond family ties, a new meaning and a new purpose in life and the focus of love and service overwhelms us. It gives us pause.

Some can bake cakes, some start new groups, others sponsor or take service positions, some give good leads, others can write articles or be a pen pal for folks inside the walls. Whatever gifts we've received we can share with our fellows. God gave us gifts, not to lord it over others with long-winded expertise. We are what we are by the grace of God. When we reflect on the path to locked up or covered up we were on, how can we not be right-sized and eternally grateful to You, O Lord? Our vigilance calls for a healthy self-contempt and examination of our motives.

Those who have received fewer gifts should not compare their lot to those who've been given more. Those most open, empty and childlike are able to make more room for the Lord in their lives. They can find ways to express their heartfelt gratitude and can avoid letting success become a failure experience. All things come from You, O Lord, "You must increase, we must decrease."¹¹⁶ We each have a job to do. Why some have more gifts and others less is not our department. You know what You're doing. We only think we know what's good for us, but we really don't.

How truly blessed we were to receive the gift of desperation! What great lengths we'd have gone in our early days of recovery from terror, bewilderment and despair! You've taken our zeal for oblivion and turned it into zeal for You, O Lord, in service to our fellows. Thieves and prostitutes are storming the gates of Heaven. The truth of this is witnessed by a band of brothers and sisters who pioneered our fellowship in the midst of hardships, setbacks and reproach.

And so, like You, O Lord, we come to do Your will in all things as best we can. We offer You service to our fellows without getting caught. Last place or first place is all the same to us. Ours is the action while Yours is the result. We should be impervious to being despised, unknown and forgotten as we'd be to being honored by others and to have more fame than they. We merely pass on what was given to us. Your will, Your honor

¹¹⁶ John 3:30

and Your glory are all that will really matter and all that will truly comfort and satisfy in the end.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. What does “practice being average” mean to you? Reflect.
2. Are you being of service or lip-service? Does your service reflect the gifts you bring?
3. Are you giving credit to the Lord for His gifts? Staying right-sized? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, in your heartfelt prayers, ask the Higher Power to “use me” with the gifts and talents He gave you.

CHAPTER 23

FOUR THINGS WHICH BRING GREAT PEACE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, I will show you the truest path to “happy, joyous and free.”¹¹⁷

1. Do the will of others rather than your own.
2. Have less rather than more.
3. Look for the last place and seek to be beneath others.
4. Do My will in all things

OUR RESPONSE: O Lord, we know by now that it's progress and not perfection. You've said in a few words what it would take for us to be reasonably happy, useful and non-toxic to self and others. If only we could do these things, we'd be far less inclined to restlessness, irritability and discontentedness. It's too often that we find ourselves confounded in our expectations as we persist in writing scripts for our fellow's behavior. But You, O Lord, can do all things and write better outcomes, please grant us the grace to let go and let God for good and for all.

A PRAYER AGAINST BAD THOUGHTS: *O Lord, stay close by. O my God, hurry to my aid for crazy thinking can invade at the oddest moments giving me the shivers. What shall I do about these phantoms that*

¹¹⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

can show up even in the middle of my prayers? How shall I kick them to the curb?

“I will go before you,” says the Lord, “and will humble the great ones of earth. I will open the doors of the prison, and will reveal to you hidden secrets.”¹¹⁸

Let it be as you say, O Lord, and I will gently crush my evil thoughts against the Lord. Without You to help me, I am still prey to misery and depression. Now I can use my problems as vehicles to You and bend my knee rather than bend my elbow, calling on You with heartfelt devotion, awaiting Your consolation.

A PRAYER FOR ENLIGHTENING THE MIND: *Ramp me up, O Lord with Your bright light and shed away the darkness of my soul. Help me, O Lord, to keep my focus and ward off the wanderlust thoughts assailing my way to You. Give me Your strength and shower me with willingness for relief from these character defects that I so clutch for relief from the fever of life. How else will I ever be reasonably “happy, joyous and free”¹¹⁹ unless You remove from me those things that block me from the “sunlight of the Spirit?”¹²⁰ Only say the word and my warring flesh will be healed.*

Fill me up with Your light, truth and passion for being fully human and fully alive with a desire to “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of You,”¹²¹ O Lord. I'm but a hollow, dry shell, lacking in all things meaningful. Help me to pursue You with the singleness of purpose I once employed for the bottle and fallen women or men. Lift up my heavy spirit, inflame me with devotion for You in my fellows in order to produce the good fruit You intended for me and my fellows. Take me from the bondage of self to God-consciousness at all times and in all persons, places and things.

Free me from spinning my wheels in fruitless pursuit of that which only leaves ashes in my mouth, wanting more and expecting different results. Bind me to Your heart and wrap me in the warmth of Your loving embrace. With You I'm finally able to fill the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it and without you all satisfactions have limits. Show me, Lord, how I too can be a tremendous lover as you've been to me. Amen.

118 *Imitation of Christ*, 71

119 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

120 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 66

121 *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. What's your take on the “four things that bring great peace?”
2. Do you believe you can be fully human and fully alive by turning your back on self? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, be ablaze with love for your fellows.

CHAPTER 24

MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Mind your own business. Why trouble yourself and add much ado about nothing to your busy calendar? Other's opinions of you are none of your concern. What another does or fails to do is immaterial to your sobriety and venture of belief with Me. You won't be expected to answer for others, but you will have to give an account of yourself. Why then do you stick your nose in where it doesn't belong?

Listen to Me, My children, for I see the truth of people's lives. I know what they do, where they stand and the motives behind their actions. Cast all your concerns and tasks on to My care and you will have peace. Let the dervishes whirl as they may and simply allow things to be as they are and not as you would have them. What men do will be done onto them, for they cannot fool Me.

Don't chase after the affection of fickle men or for favor of the well-connected. These phantoms cause distraction and great darkness about the heart. I can speak better to you through your thoughts and reveal My wisdom to you if you are free from the fear of human respect. Live and let live, watch and listen to what I have to say when you spend time with Me. In all things, humble yourself; stay teachable and right-sized. You've got all you can handle with vigilance of self.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Don't you see that you are who you are whether maligned or praised by fickle fellows?
2. Are you too focused on human respect? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, sit quietly for 15 minutes and listen for the Lord.

CHAPTER 25

RECIPE FOR HEARTREST & SOULCALM

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My dearest sons and daughters, you've heard about My promise to you :
“peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you, not as the world gives, do I give unto you.”¹²²

Everyone (especially former tornadoes roaring through people's lives) desire peace, but not all want to pay for it. If you keep it simple and share with your fellows, your peace will be found in compassion and patience not only with others, but especially with self. If you hear Me when I speak through your thoughts and act accordingly, you will be able to enjoy much peace.

OUR RESPONSE: What do we do and how should we do it, Lord?

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Restraint of “pen and tongue”¹²³ is still a good idea. Offer your will and your life to Me in everything you do. Don't judge your fellows and try to avoid being a busybody. Focus on your part in things and refrain from entanglement in affairs that are not your own. Doing this will cause there to be no more big deals in your recovery.

But don't expect an eternal pink cloud; nor is it advisable to put conditions on your sobriety based on feelings. True peace doesn't preclude blue funks, dry drunks or opposition from others. Things aren't necessarily as they appear with you getting your way in all things. Feelings aren't facts, so try to stay in the middle regardless of how devout or spiritually high you may feel. Your progress in the venture of belief is not measured by how fired-up you are.

OUR RESPONSE: Well, Lord, how will we know if we're making progress?

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Progress consists in turning your will and life over to Me without seeking self in small things or great; and to be solely focused on efforts while accepting outcomes with spiritual indifference both in prosperity and adversity.

¹²² John 14:27

¹²³ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12)*, 91

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Reflect on those times when God spoke to you through your thoughts.
2. Have you put conditions on your sobriety? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, focus on efforts rather than outcomes.

CHAPTER 26

KEEPING IT SIMPLE AS A PATH TO PEACE

OUR RESPONSE: Once we sober up, there are no more big deals. We learn the wisdom of being responsible by means of “ezduzitbutdoit.” We're freed of obsessiveness about people, places and things.

Keep us, O Lord, from getting ourselves entangled in much ado about nothing. You've sobered us up for love and service rather than the pursuit of pleasure. Help us keep our thinking straight so we don't get too far from the path of recovery. Free us from the bondage of self and show us the path to liberty of Spirit.

My Lord, God, allow us the foresight to see through to the “morning after” for any alluring detour that may cross our paths. Don't let it overwhelm us, Lord. We are weak and prone to sin, easily discouraged and distracted. Our flesh rebels. The worldly pursuits look good and the devil dresses up his traps in attractive packages. We need courage for this fight, patience to endure and the grace of final perseverance. Give us promises that last, as opposed to the fleeting consolations of the present age. Help us most of all to “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ.”¹²⁴

Help us, Lord, to avoid filling the void of alcohol with pursuit of instinct gratification. Grant us the grace to use Your gifts temperately and not to become entangled in too great a desire for them. Prevent us from being compulsive about money, jobs or relationships lest we lose our lives and become locked up or covered up. In these matters, O Lord, let Your hand and good Spirit guide us, so that we may continue on the path of reasonably happy and useful sobriety.

¹²⁴ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. What do you yet need to be willing to let go of what's blocking you from the “sunlight of the Spirit?”¹²⁵
Reflect.
2. Have you sobered up for service or self-gratification? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, throw yourself more into helping others.

CHAPTER 27

DENY THY SELF

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, live to give and not to get. It's self-centeredness that is at the root of your problems. If you love things and use people, then how are things any different from the drinking days? Love God in your fellows and you'll do right by them as well as yourself. I've not freed you from the bondage of self only to enable you to be in bondage to persons, places or things. I would have you be free for unconditional love and service to all.

It amazes Me that you're so quick to hold onto old habits and ideas. Why do you hold back when I have so many gifts to give you in recovery? Why do you persist in majoring in minors that don't really matter? Haven't you learned by now what happens when you don't get your way? Give it up – acceptance is still the pathway to peace, do it My way, listen for My directions through your sponsor.

Geographic cures are but phantoms as you end up taking yourself with you. You'll find folks that don't know their lines wherever you may go. Chasing a buck and piling up “stuff” won't fill the void but to live simply and detach from things will give you freedom. All the wealth in the world along with all the worldly praise will pass away in the end.

Where you are, what you have or what you lack matters little if you have no real focus on Me in your life. If all you change are outside things, you will not better yourself. Once you focus on Me and your recovery for good and for all, then problems of money, jobs and relationships will, with time, be resolved beyond anything you could have predicted for yourself.

A PRAYER FOR FOCUS: *Help me, Lord, for the mess I made while drinking dogs my trail with constant and persistent reminders. I'm tempted to run at them alone, but I know what self-reliance did for me in*

¹²⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book), 66*

the past. Help me to see through to the “morning after” with all persons, places and things and to realize that everything is passing as well as myself. Nothing lasting under the sun should deflect my focus from love of You, O Lord, in my fellows.

Help me to “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of You”¹²⁶ in my fellows and to see the truth of all things as they are. You'll have your work cut out for You when helping me stay right-sized. While getting a few pats on the back, it's not so easy to avoid reading Your own press-clippings. The business of “ceasing fighting anything or anybody”¹²⁷ doesn't come overnight to a scriptwriter of the Western hemisphere. “I must decrease – You must increase.”¹²⁸ You, it is, who've done for me what I couldn't do for myself. Don't let success become a failure experience for me, Lord. I am a garden-variety drunk who is a product of Your grace, Your power and Your abundant love. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. What would be so bad about you “giving up your way?” Scary as it may seem, would it not provide a pathway to peace? Reflect.
2. Are you stuck on issues of money, jobs and relationships? Reflect.
3. What does unconditional love mean to you?

RESOLVED: Today, try to see the Lord in your fellows.

CHAPTER 28

OTHER'S OPINIONS OF US

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Other's opinions of you are no concern of yours. What difference does it make if folks are for you today and against you tomorrow? Walk with an eye to what I think and you'll be resilient to the slings and arrows of fickle folks. How important is it? You'll likely forget tomorrow what so aggrieved you today. Turn to Me; I know what it is to be maligned, misunderstood and to suffer hardship at the hands of others. Don't invest your energy into what others think, but rather cast all your care on Me. Chasing the applause of your fellows will result in restlessness, irritability and discontentedness. Give it up, give it all to

¹²⁶ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

¹²⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

¹²⁸ John 3:30

Me and you will find rest.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you trust God to see the truth of your life? Reflect.
2. Do you live your life each day as if God is observing your actions? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, give your thoughts and actions over to the Lord's loving care.

CHAPTER 29

PROBLEMS ARE VEHICLES TO GOD

OUR RESPONSE: O Lord, we're beginning to see the wisdom of allowing us to traverse swamps of what seems to be unsolvable problems and to be tested by allurements that so entice us in recovery. We've learned, Lord, that problems are vehicles to God. Our hearts are not at rest and we so easily seem awash in our present dilemmas.

What can we say about this tangled web we find ourselves in? We know what You're doing, Lord. We don't at times see past the end of our noses. Lord, deliver us from our admiral's chairs in order that we might better do Your will in all things. Without You to steer our course, we spin our wheels and accomplish only fatigue and frustration. Help us to have compassion for that part of us that's never going to get it. Help us, Lord, and we will be fearless in our distress.

What can I say, O Lord, but help me, do with me as You see fit and not as I would have it. I have deserved much worse than these petty problems. The quality of my trials have dramatically improved. Endurance and patience are sadly lacking at times for me. I find You in the wounds and by now I know to instinctively cast myself and my pitifully small issues on Your care, O Lord God. Grant me the heartfelt willingness to simply allow things to be as they are and I will be at peace. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Haven't you seen the quality of your problems dramatically improve? Reflect.
2. Do you now begin to see how God's meaning and purpose for your life has begun to unfold? Reflect on how far you've come in your venture of belief.
3. Aren't your issues, problems of privilege?

RESOLVED: Today, cast your thinking and actions into God's loving care again.

CHAPTER 30

BEGIN AGAIN

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, using Me as a last resort only delays the resolution to your dilemmas. Using your character defects to deal with the fever of life prove of little profit until you realize that I am still the way, the truth and the life in all things. Why delay answers and do it the hard way? What are you afraid of?

Begin again, always begin again no matter how far you may have strayed from the path. I'm right here to restore and renew your resolve in full measure. Is there anything I can't handle? Have faith in Me that I'll not only deliver on My promises, but overrun your life with unforeseen blessings that satisfy and last. Trudge the road I've laid out for you. Be patient with courage and endurance; I will come to you in your hour of greatest need.

“All worry is useless, what's needed is faith.”¹²⁹ It's so easy to overreact to issues that in the long run won't amount to a hill of beans. One day at a time should enable you to focus on the full plate you have in front of you. I know you're only humans and in varying stages of spiritual repair. The devil trips you up by fear of your past or the future.

Don't ever despair of My mercy. Begin again without fear and know that I am closest to you in the midst of your remorse or angst about issues. No situation is too impossible. All I need from you is your willingness to begin again.

All you lose when things don't go your way is a little self-will. Your feelings at present aren't facts and

129 Mark 5:36

may well miss the meaning of your present circumstances altogether. Don't panic if I send you a temporary hardship or withdraw a pink cloud. You'll be better able to grow through adversity and trials than by having all things go your way constantly. While I may seem to be distant and unconcerned, it can serve to remind you of your need for Me and the utter frailty of your makeup. Perhaps these trials can help you stay right-sized and miss the pitfalls of a little success going to your head.

What you have received is all gift and I can take it away should you decide to become a whiner rather than winner. I'm drawn still to the glad, thankful and humble hearts. I love a cheerful giver. It's all gift. Every perfect gift is Mine.

There are no more big deals now that you're in recovery. Be spiritually indifferent to what I send you. What you perceive as bad for you may, in truth, be for your long term merit. Thank Me for whatever I send your way. I know what I'm doing and am driven by a love for you that is awesome and well documented... with blood, sweat and tears.

Rejoice in your trials and tribulations. See them as the vehicles to God they can be. Know I'm close to you and anxious to see you lose the training wheels of old ideas. Rejoice in your adversities for I'm never so close to you as in your woundedness; "As the father hath loved me, so also I love you."¹³⁰

I say this to you too. Your co-founders found great struggles in their efforts to carry the message; often misunderstood, maligned and weary in their labors and in need of the patience of Job when working with drunks. They brought forth much fruit by their patience and willingness to do or die. They learned to begin again in the face of setbacks and trials. Begin again, My children.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you ready to "begin again?" If not, reflect on how self-reliance has been working for you.
2. Haven't you progressed further with trials and tribulations than by always having things your way?
Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, see challenges as vehicles to change.

130 John 15:9

CHAPTER 31

THE JEALOUS HOUND OF HEAVEN

OUR RESPONSE: O Lord, we've a long trek ahead to arrive at there are no more big deals in our lives. As long as we pursue phantoms that block us off from the sunlight of the Spirit, we are impeded from abandonment to You. How often have we mused with the Psalmist who said: "Oh that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest."¹³¹ Who better to get things their way than those who give up their way?

It's a good thing for us to abandon ourselves to You for we've witnessed first-hand that great and wonderful things have come to us and countless others when we did. Too often we find ourselves fearful of having You and nothing else besides. How, O Lord, can we free ourselves from people, places and things enough to focus on just a few moments each day of quality time with You to just listen and learn?

Your best graces will be required to disconnect us from the fear of human respect. If we had all knowledge and lots of material possessions what good would it do us in truth if any of it became a God-substitute? We'd be dry as a bone, lacking passion and soul, hardly fully human or fully alive. No person, place or thing can come close to You and Your love for us and our fellows.

There's a big difference between being an expert on recovery right down to the page number versus delivering our vibrant spirituality with actions that reflect genuine gratitude and love of our fellows in recovery. Many talk the talk without evidence of walking the walk. Instinct gratification can disconnect us from the path and when pursued can lead to our death from alcoholism. Saying "no" to the demands of the world, the flesh and the devil require a strength that we don't have. We get back what we spend the bulk of our time and money on, despite our best efforts to develop a heartfelt and meaningful relationship with You, O Lord. We're often distracted in prayer by some of these old phantoms pursued in the past. How can we ever expect what You started with us to flourish unless we find time, energy and resources to foster this "inside job" by letting You have Your way with us?

O Lord, our focus is wobbly and we're blind to the truth of our lives as well as the questionable purity of our motives. We want to look and sound good and impress our fellows with our wisdom and extensive life experience.

We managed to nearly drown in a sea of alcohol. Many of our fellows did drown and died horrible alcoholic deaths. We can say that while You snatched us from the pit of our destruction, we have yet a long way to go to want right things for the right reasons. We can very soon revert to our self-destructive ways without the

¹³¹ Psalm 54:7

power and peace afforded by Your direction in our lives.

People are bowled over by externals and what others have accomplished, achieved or conquered. Having things and getting a relationship seems to be the model of successful sobriety. Not much is noticed about how loving, patient or meek, how devout or spiritual one is in recovery. Nature still applauds externals, while grace focuses on the inside stuff.

Lord, grant me the grace to “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of You”¹³² in my fellows. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you in full pursuit of money, jobs and relationships in lieu of abandoning yourself to God? Honestly reflect.
2. What are you spending the bulk of your time and money on? Are you sobered up for helping others or for self-centeredness? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, be ablaze with love for your fellows by reaching out to them in a concrete way. Consider a digital detox.

CHAPTER 32

LET GO, LET GOD

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Unless you turn your back on self, you will be entangled in issues. Those awash in issues are prey to “more,” always seeking the perceived easier, softer way; chasing rainbows and dealing with the fever of life without seeking Me. Any phantom pursued will fail in the end. I am the answer that will never fail.

Let Me make it as clear and simple as possible as I can: **GIVE UP YOUR DESIRES AND YOU WILL FIND REST.** Take that to heart, meditate on it and when you start doing it, You'll have a new experience of peace in your walk with life and with Me in your fellows.

OUR RESPONSE: O Lord, what an awesome concept! Our hands still have the scars from efforts to control the rotation of the planet. What You suggest seems like an impossible mission.

¹³² *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Don't be discouraged if you find the bar set high by those who've gone before. I want you to be inspired to seek wholeness by making progress as opposed to needing to be perfect. I long for you to ignore the promptings of self and instinct-gratification and wish instead that you cast each and every task to My care. Wait for My will as expressed through your thoughts and your sponsor. If you really lived your life this way, then you would please Me very much and be reasonably “happy, joyous and free.”¹³³ But by clutching the remaining toys in the playpen and taking on other distractions without any willingness to have Me remove them, you will be impaired in your efforts to seek and find a more intimate relationship with Me and the pathway to peace... how's that working for you?

Build your treasure in Heaven. Put aside human flattery, seek Heavenly wisdom which keeps all things in their proper perspective. Avoid the cruise-control of self-complacency. Know that the status-quo can in truth be no spirituality at all.

I have made it clear. You need to change if you expect to stay sober in the long run. Don't believe all those press clippings about yourself. You are a product of My life-giving grace and evidence of the presence of healing miracles still occurring on earth. Don't take any undo credit for getting well or for performing the tasks expected of those normal folks. Let Me drive the bus now, I've saved a great passenger seat for you. Enjoy the ride.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you ready to enjoy the journey?
2. Are you willing to have God remove all your character defects? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Spend 30 minutes in prayer and meditation before the Lord today.

CHAPTER 33

RESTLESSNESS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Feelings aren't facts. Today sad, tomorrow glad; blue funks and dry drunks are all part of your human condition. At times you'll feel like you're on a pink cloud of spirituality and at

¹³³ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

other times find it hard to pray. Sometimes you'll be diligent and focused while later being lazy and distracted.

But those who are wise stay focused on Me and My mission for them. Unlike the high highs and the low lows of their drinking days, they strive to attain virtue in the saner middle ground. With a single minded heart bent on “preferring nothing whatsoever to the love of the Christ,”¹³⁴ they are quite taken aback by the resolution of issues in and around money, jobs and relationships. They are made steady in their gait with a sure and certain sense of My power and presence at work in their lives.

But many lose their way on the venture of belief due to detours from the path of sobriety into romance and finance. Indeed, few shed all elements of self-seeking with complete abandon. They hold back in hopes that something better comes along and in the end sell themselves short.

My children, your hearts must be free of old ideas and any remaining toys in the playpen. No matter what may come along to distract you, your intention should be to abandon yourself to Me and great things will happen for you and countless others. You will learn what is meant by your recovery is an “inside job.”

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Have you avoided putting qualification on your sobriety?
2. Haven't you seen by now the resolution of issues (monetary, romantic or job-wise) by your focus on sobriety? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, renew your focus on sobriety first.

CHAPTER 34

THE TREMENDOUS LOVER

OUR RESPONSE: Our God and our all! How could we “prefer anything whatsoever to the love of Christ?”¹³⁵ Nothing so completes us as well, neither people, places or things.

Our God and our all! No amount of explanation is needed to those who seek to abandon themselves to You. When You are here, all things work out as they ought. When You are not here, all things become dull and uninspiring, bone dry and soulless. It is You who gives us peace and tranquility beyond description. We are

¹³⁴ *Holy Rule of St. Benedict, 95*

¹³⁵ *Holy Rule of St. Benedict, 95*

“happy, joyous and free”¹³⁶ while at Your side. You give us rose-colored glasses to see things in the best light and to look for the good. Without You, nothing pleases for very long and we're too soon on to the next distraction. Only with the seasoning of Your wisdom do we find true joy in the journey. We are bullet-proof to the slings and arrows of our fellows when we seek our happiness in You alone. You change our disease of the attitudes into “happy, joyous and free.”¹³⁷

We who chase phantoms are short of the mark by pursuing instinct gratification and vanity to our deaths. We who follow You by being hard on ourselves and easy on our fellows soon learn to ignore the promptings of self. Whatever good we find in ourselves or our fellows is a cause for praising God. We learn to focus our delight on the Creator rather than in the creature and we develop a view for eternity.

O Lord, fill us with the light of Your wisdom and the complete array of blessings promised those who trust God, clean house and help others. We want nothing more than to “prefer the love of Christ”¹³⁸ above all created things. Ramp us up in this venture of belief so that we might better reflect Your amazing grace and light-hearted love for our fellows. Without You all else falls woefully short and we are left bone-dry and soulless.

Lord, we're not what we ought to be; and with the help of Your grace, we have come from death to new life. Stay near Lord, for when left to our own devices, we predictably self-destruct. Our flesh rebels against our spirits and can lead in no time to restlessness, irritability and discontentedness.

But You, who told the stormy seas of our passions to subside, can help us get untangled from the web of our self-will-run-amok. Give us willingness to allow You to continue the miracle of doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Please finish with us what you have started, for we find no hope of refuge in this life to compare to You. Come Holy Spirit, come...

136 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

137 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

138 *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. How have you abandoned yourself to God? Reflect on any areas where you may be holding back. How does that holding back manifest itself?
2. Do you find more resiliency in God-consciousness... in being spiritually fit?
3. Are you ready, for real, to get out of the way?

RESOLVED: Today, do a good deed for your fellows and do it cheerfully, without grumbling.

CHAPTER 35

GETTING TESTED

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: The price of sobriety calls for vigilance. Your disease waits to mislead and attack you from every side. Patience will be required for the venture of belief, patience with others but most of all with yourself.

You either have issues or you have God. Either I am still everything or I am nothing. There are no more big deals once you sober up. Your strength will come from letting go and letting God. When I am for you, who can be against you? Prepare yourself for an ordeal as you trudge the road ahead.

This fellowship I've blessed you with is not a "feel-good" program. It is a "do" program. "Easy does it" is still followed by "but do it." True peace is not to be found on this earth. True peace is found in Heaven. Don't expect to find true peace with your fellows or in other things, but rather in God alone. Sobriety can give you a new attitude and enable you to cheerfully undergo all labors and sorrows, temptations and trials, anxieties, weaknesses, necessities, injuries, slanders, rebukes, humiliations, confusions, corrections and contempt. Trials are helps to virtue and reflect the price of discipleship. Your reward will come in Heaven. For a little brief labor I will give an everlasting crown, and for passing confusion, glory that is eternal.

Do you think you will always have a pink cloud in sobriety? The co-founders didn't always have them. They had many afflictions, temptations of various kinds along with economic insecurity. Their way was unsure and fraught with trial and error. They bore their uncertainty patiently. They learned early on to turn it over and to leave outcomes to Me. They realized that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come. Your walk in recovery is a process. Don't expect a quick turnaround to what has taken

others years to accomplish.

Don't get impatient, wait for Me, seek Me in your hour of need and be courageous and unafraid. Don't lose trust. Know that I'll finish with you what I started if you but offer Me heartfelt willingness. Give Me and your fellows your all, holding nothing back. I will reward you most plentifully. I will be with you in your woundedness.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. The gift of sobriety is an unqualified gift that becomes more qualified with time. Reflect – how does that apply in your life?
2. Are you lacking faith?
3. Are you plugged into emotional sobriety with service work that reflects the gifts you bring to the table? If not, why not?

RESOLVED: Today, involve yourself in a service commitment reflecting your talents and abilities.

CHAPTER 36

THE FOLKS DON'T ALWAYS GET IT RIGHT

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Other people's opinions of you should hold no weight when you know that your side of the street is clean. These slings and arrows can serve instead as building blocks to virtue. It will require you to have your heart focused on Me with humility rather than on self. Folks blab much about which they know very little.

You can't please everybody. The co-founders floundered in the beginning with trial and error. Their motives were questioned by some in the fellowship. Despite giving their all for as much as they could with limited resources and very little experience to go by, they did not escape being judged unfairly by their fellows. Out of this early welter of chaos they were able to trust God, clean house and continue to help others; all things worked together unto good. They answered their enemies when necessary out of concern for newcomers.

Why fear the blusterings of mortal men? Their ranting and raving today, lead to their funeral tomorrow. Fear the Lord with awe and wonder and you will not be afraid of other's toxic barks. What can anyone do to

you with word or injury? These toxic folks who attack, condemn themselves and are in the end more of a burden to self than others. We have “ceased fighting anyone or anything.”¹³⁹ Keep God before your eyes.

If you find yourself overwhelmed, know that I am there with you to deliver you from all disgrace and injury and I will repay folks according to their deeds.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. How important is it when you meet resistance from others?
2. With your focus on God alone rather than self, don't you find it of little account if you're demeaned or ignored by others?
3. Have you learned to use the compassion prayer from the Big Book?: “Lord help me to remember that this is a sick person. God Keep me from being angry.”¹⁴⁰

RESOLVED: Remind yourself today that other's opinions of you are not your concern.

CHAPTER 37

GIVING UP OUR WAY

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Turn your will and your life over to Me for real and you shall find Me. Give up any vestiges of “self-will run riot”¹⁴¹ and you will always gain. Once you turn your back on self, greater grace will be given to you.

OUR RESPONSE: Do you mean all the time? And in all things?

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Always and in all things, no exceptions. I want you to be open to my lead in all things. How in the world will you be Mine and I yours unless you deny self and abandon yourself to Me? The sooner you do this, the better things will go for you. I know it's scary for you to move from the driver's seat to the passenger seat. But you'll enjoy the ride I have planned for you and I will take you to new vistas beyond your imagining.

Some are zealots for sobriety at the start, but their fear impedes them and they revert to romance and

139 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

140 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 67

141 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 62

finance and come to their deaths. Others, fired-up in the beginning are only willing to go so far and often revert to their wayward phantoms, thus making no progress in virtue. These who hold back will not reach a happy friendship with Me unless they, in truth, turn their wills and their lives over to Me. Without this, no fruitful union lasts, nor will last.

I've said many times before and it bears repeating: give it up and you shall enjoy great inward peace. Give all for all with no thought of personal gain. Let Me drive the bus and you shall possess Me. You will be free of heart and the power of darkness will not overwhelm you.

Go after our relationship with the same single-mindedness employed while worshiping the bottle and fallen women or men. Die to self-will and live forever for Me. This is, in fact, the easier, softer way to “happy, joyous and true freedom.”¹⁴² You'll then be free of fear and inordinate love will die.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still “driving the bus?” How's that working for you? Reflect.
2. Have you strayed from your venture of belief into mindless distractions? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, practice gut-level acceptance.

CHAPTER 38

INTUITIVENESS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, you were given the gift of sobriety to be free to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic. I prefer that you not be relieved of one addiction only to become enmeshed in romance and finance. Discipline your instinct-gratification and see through to the aftermath of any errant distractions that will surely come your way. Balance and moderation, living one day at a time with an eye to eternity with Me, will be called for. If your way becomes burdensome, always wait for Me. I'll speak through your thoughts, your circumstances, your sponsor and the folks at meetings. Go to your inner room and wait for the promptings of divine impulse. Your co-founders were good about coming to Me and they found refuge in one another as well as in the secret chambers of their heart. You're under new management and you

¹⁴² *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

will “intuitively know what to do about things that have baffled you in the past.”¹⁴³

Too many fall prey to instinct-gratification after their initial pink cloud of sobriety. As they begin to feel better, they retake the steering wheel often coming to an end that I never intended for them.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you doing God's will? Reflect.
2. Has God spoken to you through your thoughts? Are you a good listener? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, exercise some self-discipline by simply allowing things to be as they are.

CHAPTER 39

MORE “EZIDUZITNESS”

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, always commend your task to My care. I took care of the loaves and the fishes, I can handle your issues. Be patient and it will work out to your advantage.

OUR RESPONSE: Going mach-two with our hair on fire profits us little. We sometimes allow angst to overwhelm in matters that turn out to be beyond our control. Too often we reach for a hoe before praying for potatoes.

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, very often you chase phantoms that prove later to be ashes in your mouth. You find that what you deemed as essential to you, ends up having limits to its satisfaction for you. And so you flit from one distraction to another seeking escape rather than making the real effort required to forsake yourself in small, and in great things alike.

The visible sign of your real progress in sobriety consists in denying self. That fellow is truly free and secure, but the old enemy will ramp up deceitful distractions at your most vulnerable moments to deter you from the path of “happy, joyous and free.”¹⁴⁴ “Watch and pray that you don't enter into temptation.”¹⁴⁵

143 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 84

144 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

145 Matthew 16:41

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do your actions reflect a faith that God can handle it or do they reflect your need to control? Reflect.
2. Are you in over your head with things you ought to let go of? Reflect.
3. What would balance and moderation look like in your life? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, deny yourself by practicing acceptance.

CHAPTER 40

I AM WHAT I AM

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, how could we so easily come by an exaggerated sense of our importance? What we deserved was death but You gave us a reprieve with the grace of sobriety. What have we to complain about? When will we learn that prayer is designed not to change You but to change us? Left to our own devices, we predictably revert to our self-destructive ways. Unless You finish with us what You started, we too often veer off the trail.

You, O Lord, by contrast are utterly reliable. While we don't always get it, You run things better than we do. Things in the end work out for the good. We, however, can change with the seasons, now glad, then sad, ambitious and awash with irresponsible enthusiasm. Yet when we sit at Your feet, our lives light up; we often cry tears of joy when hymns are sung to Your honor and glory. You alone are our rock. Men are not reliable as they struggle just as we do. When we are at our lowest point in recovery, we most realize our fragile natures, the fickleness of friends and our complete and total need to seek You alone above all people, places and things.

How can we in our lifetimes, adequately return thanks, O Lord, for all we have from You is a gift? You know how quickly we can begin to believe how special we are when getting glowing praise from our fellows and being quoted at meetings. We are still awash at times with more subtle forms of egomania with an inferiority complex. “Ego” still eases God out. It robs us of Heavenly grace and sets us up for a fall. Panting after human praise is an exercise in utter futility. Of course, it's edifying to get positive feedback from folks You helped in the past. But it's far better to serve without getting notoriety and to realize we're simply passing on what was passed on to us. We can glorify the Lord in our fellows and avoid self-glory in the process.

You deserve all the praise, Lord, as we are what we are only by the grace of God. Let the work of Your

hands get all the credit, “You must increase, we must decrease.”¹⁴⁶ You fire us up; we weep tears of joy at Your altar as we sing Your praises. You are the joy of our hearts. We will glory only in our infirmities so that Your power and Your peace may overwhelm us. We mean in truth to “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ.”¹⁴⁷

Let the experts among us seek the glory that comes from others. I will seek that which comes from God alone. No earthly honors or glory can compare to the glory that is to come for those who've in truth abandoned themselves to God in service to their fellows. To You, Lord, be given all the credit and all the glory. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you have an exaggerated sense of your importance to the fellowship? Reflect.
2. Are you grateful in deeds or just with glowing words? Reflect.
3. What could you do to give back that which you've received?

RESOLVED: Today, give back with the talents you bring to the table.

CHAPTER 41

GIVING DUE CREDIT

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Don't worry if you see the wicked prosper. While you are passed over and ignored. Keep your focus on Me and contempt of the toxic won't matter.

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, we're quick to believe the flatterers. But when we're honest, we reflect how blessed we are that we didn't get what we deserved. We have nothing to complain about and everything to be thankful for. We're really not significantly important in the grand scheme of things. You deserve all the praise and glory. We must prepare ourselves to be willingly despised and forsaken by every creature; anonymously we'll have interior peace and strength and more room for the sunlight of the Spirit.

¹⁴⁶ John 3:30

¹⁴⁷ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you see that you are who you are whether reviled or praised?
2. Have you finally arrived at the conclusion that it's really not so important what happens to you anymore?
Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, look for the good and avoid grumbling.

CHAPTER 42

WE'RE BUT FLAWED FOLKS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: If you put your fellows in recovery on a pedestal because of your own feeling or for the sake of their company, you're setting yourself up for disappointment and disillusionment. But if you have recourse to Me as your focus, you will not grieve if a friend should suddenly get taken drunk or forsake you. Your love for the winners in the fellowship should be grounded in Me and for My sake you should see Me in your fellows above all things. Without Me, friendship has no glue and cannot endure. Love which I do not bind is neither true nor pure.

What others think of you is no concern of yours. Seek out the fellowship of those who are awash with love and service. Don't set your clock by the glances of your fellows for they, like you, carry their own baggage and their odd reaction to you may have nothing to do with you at all. As you strive for more God-consciousness and intimacy with Me, you will be made keenly aware that you're not what you ought to be and that you're not what you used to be. Know that your efforts to begin again please Me and I applaud your labors. "Ego" still "eases God out" and makes little room for My grace to enter. "Lack of power is still your dilemma."¹⁴⁸

If you would, for real, get out of the way and empty yourself of all created love, then I should overflow in you with great grace. When you look to your fellows, the sight of the creator is taken from you. Learn to be hard on yourself, to conquer your instinct gratification, to forgo all the character defects for the sake of your maker. Then, it is, that you'll have ready access to the sunlight of the Spirit. But anything, no matter how small, that you cling to unreasonably keeps you back from the highest "happy, joyous and free"¹⁴⁹ possible; it corrupts and deadens the soul.

¹⁴⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 45

¹⁴⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still a people-pleaser? Reflect.
2. Are you sticking with the winners? How's that working for you?

RESOLVED: Today, with heartfelt willingness, be open to have God remove from you any defects of character.

CHAPTER 43

KEEPING IT SIMPLE & SHARING

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Don't be swayed by fine-sounding words spoken with subtlety. Sobriety consists not in psycho-babble, but in love and service. Listen to the winners whose lives and actions bear out the truth of a relationship with Me reflected in their spirit of “happy, joyous and free.”¹⁵⁰ Never search your literature for the purpose of sounding good at meetings. Apply yourself to foregoing the toys in the playpen as this will benefit you far more than sounding like a wise man at meetings.

You've experienced and learned many things, but always remember: I am your teacher and will give clarity to the things shared by others at meetings, by your sponsor and especially through your thoughts. If you clear away all that blocks off My grace, you will soon be wise and your soul will profit. Why spin your wheels needlessly with inquiries about many curious things with no regard to serving Me or doing My will?

The time will come when I, the teacher, will appear to hear the lessons of all, to examine the conscience of everyone. Then I will bring out into the light the hidden things of darkness and the arguments of men's tongues will be silenced.

God, in one stunning mountain top experience, taught Bill Wilson more about spirituality than he could have learned in a lifetime, without the noise of words or clash of opinions, without ambition for honor or confusions of argument.

God, causes recovering folks to abandon themselves to Himself leaving behind things and issues that seemed so essential. They learn to love people and use things once they truly sober up, there are no more big deals. They learn that this program of recovery is a “do program” rather than a “feel good” or “sound good” at meetings program. Love and service transforms them.

¹⁵⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

To some I speak plainly, to others more intricately. Some see Me in circumstances of their lives, others hear Me speaking through their thoughts or in books like the Holy Bible. I am within all men and I am the teacher, the truth, the examiner of hearts, the understander of thoughts, the promoter of acts, giving to each as I see fit.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you more interested in sounding good at meetings than listening for the message? Reflect.
2. Do you love things and use people or love people and use things? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Spend 20 minutes each day reading the Bible as if it were mail addressed directly to you. Listen with the ears of your heart.

CHAPTER 44

SPIRITUAL INDIFFERENCE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Mind your own business and leave to others their opinions. Your focus should be on Me and allow you to rise above being bested by others. Be deaf and pass by squabbles over nothing and you will have peace. It is more profitable for you to turn away from things that displease you in your opinionated fellows and avoid taking part in quarrelsome talk. If you stand well with God and look to His judgment, you will more likely be indifferent to outcomes.

OUR RESPONSE: How easily, Lord, we get hung up on majoring in minors that don't really matter in the long run! We labor and fret for small gain, while loss of the soul is forgotten, scarcely ever returning to mind. We major in minors while elephant herds roar past. The highest necessity is neglected all because we give ourselves to outward things; unless we withdraw ourselves quickly, we willingly lie immersed in the quagmire of externals.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Can you detach with love from your sometimes toxic fellows?
2. Are you attempting to stay sober by keeping busy? How's that working for you? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Make a special effort to put “principles before personalities.”

CHAPTER 45

IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO

OUR RESPONSE: If you're not running with us, Lord, and helping us in our needs, we're in a world of hurt for the aid of our fellows is a “sometimes thing.” Those we thought we could count on through thick and thin are with us today and against us tomorrow. But we're surprised at times to find support from strangers or folks we barely know. Setting our sails with expectations placed on the behavior of our fellows is a vain pursuit. Our hope lies in You, O Lord, in whom we place our trust.

We are frail indeed, easily deceived and changeable. Rare is the person so well wrapped as to avoid being misled or confused by the foibles of his fellows. If we but turn to You and confide in You with heartfelt earnestness, perhaps we would not fall so easily. If overcome with trouble, we will intuitively use the trouble as a vehicle to ramp up God-consciousness. We know that You will finish with us what You started and that You will not leave us orphaned.

It's almost unheard of for one's friend to remain faithful through all his friend's distress. But You, Lord, and You alone are entirely faithful in all things; other than You, there is none so faithful.

If we were but more firmly grounded in You, O Lord, we would not so easily be angst-ridden and would be Teflon-coated to the real or imagined rebuffs of our fellows. But how are we to know ahead of time what to expect or how can we provide for ourselves against all evils? We're still sensitive, grandiose and childish in our reactions to others, especially those of our own house. It's at these times that we can berate ourselves for not being spiritually fit enough to swim among the toxic waters of our fellows. It's proven futile to unfairly put others on pedestals for they exhibit the same frailty as we do. We are but weak folks.

With whom should we cast our lot but you, O Lord? You've never misled us. Every person on balance is prone to exaggerate the truth, exhibit weakness and instability, and is often wrong; their words should not be

so quickly believed. A man's enemies are those of his own household and their words aren't to be taken as Gospel at first glance.

Protect us, O Lord, from the gossip-mongers and keep far from us the crafty tongue. We choose to be silent about others, not to believe without discrimination all that may be said by others, not to be blown away by every wind of words, but to seek that all things be done according to the pleasure of Thy will.

We are far better to carry the message of hope and recovery without getting caught doing it. Many have taken credit for their good deeds and were praised too hastily to their detriment. How much more beneficial it is that we remain anonymous in our good deeds in this frail life, which is all temptation and warfare.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you relying on God in truth? Reflect.
2. Are you sticking with the winners or the whiners?
3. Do you gossip? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, pray that I not be confounded in my expectations.

CHAPTER 46

WE KNOW WHO WE ARE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, practice being average and trust in Me. Other's opinions of you are none of your concern. If you're wrong, you know I would have you promptly admit it. If not in the wrong, what difference does it really make, and how important is it? When you consider all that you really deserved when men's anger rose against you, it is little enough for you to have a few slings and arrows cast in your direction?

Why do sticks and stones seem to pierce your delicate sensitivity? Are you entrapped still in the bondage of self paying more heed to men than you ought? Correction and reproach seem lethal to you and your repertoire of excuses still alludes to “them people” being the real culprits. The truth is, the world is still alive in you as well as a vain desire to please men. When you're in denial about issues brought to your attention, your reaction reveals little humility or detachment from things of the world.

Listen to My Word speaking through your sponsor and your thoughts, and you will not value ten thousand words of men. Think about it, if every malicious thing that could possibly be invented were uttered against you, what harm could it do if you ignored it all and gave it no more thought than a four-year-old kicking you in the shins? Could it so much as pluck one hair from your head?

Keep true to yourself and your focus on Me and you'll not be so easily dislodged by words of disparagement. If you trust in Me and have no desire to stand by your own judgment, you will be free of the fear of men. For I see the truth of men's lives. I know who causes injury and who suffers from it. I allow things to happen in order to test and admonish those I love. I shall judge the guilty and the innocent; I have wished beforehand to try them both by secret judgment.

The words of your fellows are often deceiving, but my judgment is true; it will stand and not be overthrown. It is hidden from many and made known to but a few. It is never mistaken; and cannot be mistaken even though it is questioned by the unwise.

Commend all your tasks to My care, consult with Me in every decision, not depending on your own judgment. For the just man will not be disturbed, no matter what may befall him from God. Even if he's wrongly accused he will not much be troubled. He considers the middle ground avoiding highs and lows. He knows that it is I who search the hearts and inmost thoughts of men and that I do not judge according to externals. For what the judgment of men considers praiseworthy is often worthy of blame in my sight.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still afraid of human respect? Reflect.
2. Do you see that “you are who you are” whether praised or reviled? Reflect.
3. Are you turning over to God the care of your thoughts and actions each day?

RESOLVED: Today, pray that God allows you to see the truth of your life.

CHAPTER 47

OFFERING IT UP FOR LATER

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Don't let your efforts to carry the message overwhelm you when met with

resistance. Don't be overcome by blue funks. In all things let my promises strengthen and console you. You'll find that my blessings for you will exceed anything you could have imagined for yourself.

In a short time your labors here will be over and “this too shall pass.”¹⁵¹ Wait for a little while and you will soon see the fruit of your labors. The seeds planted now will surprise you with results later from the least expected folks.

What you do, do well. Stay on course with recovery, unity and service. I will be your reward. Write in your journal, read My Word, mourn with those who lose loved ones to the disease. Be recollected and slow to speak, pray unceasingly and bear hardships like an adult. Eternal life is worth all these and greater battles. Peace will come on a day which is known to the Lord, and then there shall be no day or night as at present, but perpetual light, infinite brightness, lasting peace and safe repose. Then you will not say, “why doesn't this sponsee get it?” Nor will you cry, “None of these pigeons are staying sober!” For death will be banished and there will be joyous sobriety unfailing. There will be no anxiety then, but blessed joy and sweet, noble fellowship.

If you could but see the everlasting crowns of those who've gone before you in recovery and the great glory wherein they now rejoice, you would focus more on building your treasure in Heaven and you would see the sufferings of this present life for the problems of privilege they are when compared to the glories to come.

Your surrender should beget winning rather than whining. Shouldn't all trials be born for the sake of everlasting life? In truth, the loss or gain of God's Kingdom is no small matter.

Look to Me. Behold Me and all your fellows who went ahead. They had great trials in this life, but now they rejoice. They are consoled. Now they are truly “happy, joyous and free.”¹⁵² And they shall abide with Me for all eternity in the Kingdom of the Father.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you building your treasure in Heaven? Reflect.
2. Do you “look beyond the bread you eat?”¹⁵³ Reflect.
3. How will you answer the Lord when He asks for an accounting of your life?

RESOLVED: Today, think and act long-term with an eye to living to give.

151 Corinthians 10:12

152 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

153 From a song by Darryl Ducote

CHAPTER 48
THE FINAL EXAM

OUR RESPONSE: O happy day! O what joy, happiness and ultimate freedom will be ours in the blessed and beautiful hereafter! No more blue funks. No more dry drunks. All these mighty big deals will fade in the brightness of God's glorious presence. We have but a dim perception of all that awaits as we come to the end of our journey of trudging the road of sometimes dull and uninspiring destiny. The citizens of Heaven know how joyful this day is, but the exiled children of Eve mourn that this day is often bitter and tedious.

Our life in sobriety on this earth is short and we're at times off the path. Awash in confusion and distress over unsolvable problems in relations with our fellows, oftentimes with those closest to us. We find ourselves awash with many cares and too often prey to many fears. Worn out by going mach-two with our hair of fire; helter-skelter, we find fatigue dogging our trail as self-reliance continues to fail us. We're oppressed by stinking thinking about real or imagined wrongs suffered from the hands of our loved ones. We sulk, awaiting them to see the error of their ways and offer a groveling apology.

O, when will we ever cease using our character defects to deal with life's problems? How long must we cling to the toys in the playpen? When shall we finally “prefer nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ.”¹⁵⁴ When shall there be peace and freedom from the bondage of self? O Lord, when shall we stand to gaze upon You? When will You be all in all to us? O, when shall we be with You in the Kingdom of yours which You have prepared for us thieves and prostitutes who are storming the gates of Heaven?

We are left poor and exiled as we seek to swim upstream amidst rebuffs from life and our fellows. Lift us from the loneliness of discipleship and comfort our disillusioned sorrow. This world is at times a burden and not always “happy, joyous and free.”¹⁵⁵ We try to enjoy You, O Lord, intimately but we fall short as temporal affairs and raging instincts weigh us down. We're at war with ourselves, we see the good path and want to rise above the bondage of self as our flesh rebels and we sink to our self-destructive ways. How frail we feel when we consider Heavenly things! Even when we pray, a multitude of carnal thoughts rush upon us!

Like those ordinary fellows who've preceded us in their attempts to do extra-ordinary things, we too cry out, “O, Lord Jesus Christ, Have mercy on us sinners!” Dart forth Your graces and put to flight the phantoms that dog our paths. Draw our senses toward You and make us forget the toys in the playpen. Free us from vanity, take us into the warmth of Your loving embrace and let all impurity fly from before Your face.

Have compassion with that part of us that's never going to get it. Give us balance and moderation to

¹⁵⁴ *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

¹⁵⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

enjoy Your gifts, but most of all the Giver of the gifts. Keep us focused on the mission of love and service to You in our fellows.

Happy indeed is the fellow who for Your sake, O Lord, detaches with love from people, places and things that could block him or her from the sunlight of the Spirit. Emptying self and seeking the Lord with heartfelt, unconditional love for their fellows makes them worthy to pass the final exam.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you still slow to let go of your character defects? How's that working for you? Reflect.
2. Have you sought balance by practicing being average? Are you seeking balance and moderation in all your affairs? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, practice being average.

CHAPTER 49

THE BIG MEETING IN THE SKY

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Spiritual highs are a gift of My grace and an incentive for you to look beyond the bread you eat, to advance in virtue and greater humility. It will prepare you for future trials, keep you close to Me and make it possible to serve Me with a fervent will as you experience the true joy of the journey.

You may be aflame with devotion and yet not free from temptations of carnal affection. It may not be for the pure honor of God that you petition so earnestly. That which is alloyed with self-interest is not pure and perfect.

Ask nothing for self but for what is acceptable to Me and is for My honor, because if you judge rightly, you ought to prefer and follow My will, not your own desires or whatever things you wish.

I still hear the cries of the poor and know the longings of your heart. You'd like to be free and enjoy the delights of your eternal home in paradise. But that hour is not yet come. You are to be My message-carrier and your way won't always be "happy, joyous and free"¹⁵⁶ but rather a time of war, of labor and of trial. Be patient

¹⁵⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 133

and know that I am your sovereign good and that your efforts will go rewarded both here and in the hereafter.

Your spiritual awakening must continue lest you fall back to your old ways or become prey to faults and failings, worse than before. Others will seem to succeed in everything while folks shake their heads with contempt at you and count you as nothing. You will be tried and tested as you abandon yourself to Me to see how far you can deny yourself and break yourself in all things.

“I must increase, You must decrease.”¹⁵⁷ When you start accepting things as they are and not as you would have them, you will be making a start at death of self-will. When you follow your sponsor's lead, comply with authority and be a man among men, you'll be on the right path... that leads to peace.

In Heaven you shall always have your will. You shall possess all good without fear of losing it. There you shall forever be one with Me. No one will oppose you, complain about you, hinder you, nor will anything stand in your way. Full satisfaction shall be yours.

Live therefore with a yielded will and don't fret about who said this or that. Be obedient to all as was I to My Father in Heaven. Have a healthy contempt for self and seek only My pleasure and honor. Let this be your goal: TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you live with a yielded will or insist on being your own person? Reflect.
2. Have you settled for the status-quo in your venture of belief? Reflect that such cruise-control may be no spirituality at all.

RESOLVED: Today, begin to build your treasure in Heaven.

CHAPTER 50

TURNING IT OVER INTO THE HANDS OF GOD

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, God, it is You with whom we cast our lots, for You, in the end are calling all the shots. All You do is for our good though we may protest that it's an odd way to run a railroad. It's really not all about me anymore nor is it about putting our fellows on a pedestal. You fill the hole in the belly with the

¹⁵⁷ John 3:30

wind blowing through it better than all others.

Sometimes we get discouraged in our venture of belief when faced with resistance from our fellows. We want peace in the valley and instead find controversy. It's hard to resist sulking and the desire to lash out or retaliate. But if You, O Lord, infuse joy and shelter us in the shadow of Your wings, we're invincible and react to others assaults no more than we would to a blade of grass. But if You withdraw Yourself, we find the going dark, confusing and we become "restless, irritable and discontented."¹⁵⁸ Whining replaces winning, and gratitude is upstaged by sniveling resentment.

As tried as we may be, the problems instinctively point us to You as we await Your arrival through our woundedness. Pain still propels us to spiritual heights unattainable via long bouts of success and no opposition from others.

What's the big deal if we are a little slighted, humbled, or found to be in error by our fellows? We'll at times be afflicted with sufferings and pains so that we may experience the resurrection that follows the cross and be happy with You in Heaven.

Lord, You didn't promise us that a rose garden would accompany the gift of sobriety. Those whom You love, You chastise and admonish to greater heights of intimacy with You.

All things happen for a reason in Your providential care and though we may not like it or understand it, it's always to our benefit, in hindsight, to learn enough of humility and to cast away unrealistic opinions of our importance in the greater scheme of things. You at times bring us low so we experience our need for Your grace and Your love rather than looking to distractions or our fellows for consolation. Under Heaven there is none to console us except You, Lord God, the Heavenly physician of souls. Your discipline is upon us.

Finish with us what you started. Make of us pious and humble followers. We want to do Your will. Correct our every fault, for it is better to be punished here than hereafter.

Prune away the rust of our vices and rid us of all that could block us from the sunlight of the Spirit. You see the truth of our lives. Help us to be so sensitized as to abhor what is unclean in Your sight.

Help me seek things that are above, help me to always seek Your good pleasure. The deceiver deceives the deceitful; the vain man deceives the vain, the blind man deceives the blind. I am but what I am and nothing more, a work in progress. Help me, Lord, to see the truth of my life. Lest I become a legend in my own mind. Amen.

¹⁵⁸ *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, xxvii

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you staying right-sized? Do you share openly with others the truth of your life? Reflect.
2. Haven't you seen in your past the benefits of facing hardships and challenges in recovery? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Do an updated inventory and share it with a sponsor this month.

CHAPTER 51

PRACTICING BEING AVERAGE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Pink clouds come and go. You will not always be able to go mach-two with your hair on fire with this venture of belief. Blue funks and fatigue will come and you'll need at times to simply trudge the road of sometimes dull and uninspiring destiny. You may not like it nor understand it but you're still a human being and your flesh at times will rebel as you aspire to giving yourself to Me and your fellows.

Practice being average; be a man among men, a worker among workers; pay your bills, left foot, right foot, etc...; serve others with the gifts I gave you and refresh yourself in good deeds. This blue funk shall soon pass and you'll be visited by Me and freed of all anxieties. I will cause you to forget your labors and to enjoy inward quiet. I will spread before you the open field of scriptures, so that with an open heart you may begin to advance in the way of My Commandments. As you come out on the other side and look back, you will see the good that has come to you.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you need to practice being average? What would it entail?
2. Do you feel that “this too shall pass?” Reflect on prior experiences.

RESOLVED: Today, spend 20 minutes reading the Bible.

CHAPTER 52

DUCKING A BULLET

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, when we reflect on the waywardness of the past, it's clear to us how blessed we are that we didn't get what we deserved. We have nothing to complain about when the pink cloud leaves and we're left to trudge the road of sometimes dull and uninspiring destiny. We're really unworthy of all Your bountiful blessings. We know only too well that we're not what we used to be, but have miles to go before we're what we ought to be.

But You, O Lord, at times speak through our thoughts and our sponsors. Having meaning and purpose in our lives along with a sense of direction gives us comfort. Your promises are more to us than the words of our fickle fellows.

What have we done to deserve Your blessings except only to destroy ourselves and our families? Even in recovery we find it easy to revert at times to our self-destructive ways. Sulking and waiting for others to see the error of their ways and for them to offer a groveling apology can blind us at times to our part in things. Thank God we didn't get what we deserved as we prowled the houses of ill repute.

And so, if a bit of scorn and contempt comes our way, it pales in comparison to what we truly deserve. “They got the right guy” and if we're not the problem there is no solution. It's not “them people” that need to change and accept blame. We are the problem and without the continued help of Your grace, we will be unable to finish what You started without the enlargement of our spiritual condition, not only will we return to our old ways but our condition will be worse than when we began.

We are made contrite and brought low by the frailty of our spiritual condition. Our troubled conscience is consoled by Your encouragement to begin again. We know You give us forbearance as You see us making an effort.

“A contrite and humble heart you will not spurn.”¹⁵⁹ Help me, Lord, to amend my ways, to promptly admit when I'm wrong as well as to see the good that You've accomplished through me. Amen.

¹⁵⁹ Psalm 51:17

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Haven't the quality of your problems dramatically improved? Reflect.
2. Do you see the truth of your life or are you focused on the wrongs of your fellows? Examine and reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, do a grateful deed for your fellows.

CHAPTER 53

GOD'S GRACE IS NOT GIVEN TO THE EARTHLY MINDED

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My grace gave you sobriety and keeping it will require you to enlarge your spiritual condition. You can do this by being open to the sunlight of the Spirit and casting away all obstacles to grace.

Spend some quiet time alone above the fray. Pour out your heart to Me. Keep your focus on your part in things and seek Me with a pure heart.

This world is passing away. You cannot serve Me and self-gratification of raging instincts at the same time. Keep your mind free of all temporal consolation. Keep yourself as strangers and people passing through the world. Just think how confident you'll be at the hour of your death when you realize that you approach your passing with a heart that "preferred nothing whatsoever to the love of Christ."¹⁶⁰ But those with divided loyalties know not the liberty of the spiritual man. Detachment with love for your fellows and being wary of one's self will allow room for the sunlight of My continued grace and enable Me to finish with you what I started.

If you overcome self, you will more easily subdue all other things. The perfect victory is to triumph over self. For those who hold themselves in such subjection that sexuality obeys reason and reason obeys Me in all matters, they are truly their own conquerors and masters of the world.

Now if this high position is what you really want, you must begin like an adult, by laying the ax to the root, in order to tear out and destroy any hidden unruly love of self or of earthly goods. Too much self-love fosters almost every other vice. And when you've emptied yourself and reigned in your raging instinct gratification, great peace and quiet follows at once.

¹⁶⁰ *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

Few there are who will entirely abandon themselves to Me; they remain entangled in self, and cannot be lifted in Spirit above themselves. If you desire to walk freely with Me, mortify all your low and inordinate affections and stop clinging with selfish love or desire to other creatures.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you higher-powered for real? Reflect.
2. Are you giving back as you get?
3. Have you really emptied self to make room for God's peace? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, ask God for self-discipline and follow it up with some real effort.

CHAPTER 54

GRACE VS. NATURE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Be alert to the movements of nature and of grace for they are at odds with one another and unless you're spiritually fit they are hard to tell apart. Everyone wants to be good and so the appearance of good deceives many.

Nature seeks self. Grace walks in simplicity, is real and offers all tasks to My care.

Nature doesn't want to be told what to do, it's unteachable, it wants more and will not go near constraint or be made subject. Grace strives for mortification of self and resists sensuality. It seeks the Lord in it's fellows, follows the lead of sponsors and mentors; lives and lets live while simply allowing things to be as they are. Love and service is Grace's code.

Nature asks, "what's in it for me?" Grace seeks the good of it's fellow traveler. Nature takes all the credit, Grace gives God the glory. Nature is concerned with what others think. While Grace is spiritually indifferent to what others may say or think of it. Nature makes provision for comfort and ease. Grace embraces labor willingly. Nature is fussy about needing first class. Grace lives simply so that others may simply live.

Nature wants "stuff" and glories in trivial earthly gains; it's easily injured, quick to argue and punitive in its manner is nature. Grace builds treasure in Heaven, is indifferent to harsh words and rebuffs from the toxic.

Nature wants more and doesn't make house calls; it likes to pile up things. Grace makes house calls and isn't the least bit distracted by plenty or want. Grace believes less is more and that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Nature likes to run about and is inclined toward its own flesh and toward vanities. Grace draws near to God and to virtue, detaches with love, hates the desires of the flesh and restrains its wanderings.

Nature does everything for its own gain; it does nothing without pay and wants to get ample notice for any good deeds done. Grace seeks nothing temporal nor does it want to get caught doing its many good deeds. Grace “prefers nothing whatsoever than the love of Christ.”¹⁶¹

Nature glories in many friends, considers self more equal than most, flatters the rich and applauds those who are like itself. Grace loves even its enemies and is not puffed up by having many friends; it doesn't care about position or noble heritage. Grace favors the poor in preference to the rich and favors the innocent and truthful. It exemplifies by life the joy of the journey.

Nature is a victim and a whiner. Grace is staunch in practicing acceptance. Nature is self-seeking; it fights and argues for self. Grace brings all things back to God; it attributes no credit to self and has ceased fighting anything or anyone. Grace submits herself to God's will as expressed through circumstances.

Nature is nosy and relishes knowing secrets and insider information, high profiling and being seen in the right places with the right people is paramount. Grace minds its own business. Grace restrains its senses and cares not to be found out doing good deeds. Grace gives all glory to God and is grateful for all God's many gifts.

This grace that pulled you from the pit of destruction will raise you up from your old self. It will aid you to seek things above and move you from a carnal person to a spiritual person.

The more nature is conquered, the more grace is given. Constraint merits a crown. The sooner you seek Me in your fellows with heartfelt love, the happier you will be and the more you will reflect the image of God.

¹⁶¹ *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you identify more with grace or with nature? Reflect.
2. Are you making progress or are you satisfied with status-quo spirituality?
3. What does “constraint merits a crown”¹⁶² mean to you? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, try to see the Lord in your neighbor.

CHAPTER 55

HE'S THE POTTER - WE'RE THE CLAY

OUR RESPONSE: O Lord, finish with us what you started, grant us Your grace to complete the course, that we may overcome our evil nature that draws us back to our self-destructive ways. Our flesh rebels at accepting what will help us to find You and we're powerless over our passions without an infusion of Your holy grace to assist us.

When left to self, we tend toward evil and baser things. Adam weakened us all by sin, and the punishment of that stain has fallen upon all mankind. We know the right course and yet so often go our own way. We are powerless over many short comings and defects of character, quick to find fault in our fellows while excusing our baser handicaps with an eye to compassion and “excuse-it-is.”

On the inside, we know Your laws, how generous and fair You've been with us and what happens to recovering folks who ignore Your laws. But in the flesh, we keep the law of sin and retribution for wrongs suffered (real or imagined), obeying sensuality rather than reason. We mean to do good but don't always know how. Being bold in tongue and slack in deed when grace to help us is lacking, we recoil and give up at the slightest resistance. We see how we should act, but our lingering toxicity impairs efforts to rise to more perfect things.

We need Your grace to finish well and bring to completion any good deed. Without grace we can do nothing that is good; with its strength we can do all things in You. You ask only our emptiness and not our fullness.

Where charity and love exist, God's presence is found; the wisdom and strength of man is secondary

¹⁶² *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 34

without Him.

Your grace reminds us what You've done for us and serves to let us know how much we are a product of Your miracle-making grace. We are but dry, soulless and hollow shells prone to weariness and blue funks without the life-giving power of Your grace.

Please lead us always to Your grace for it is sufficient enough for us beyond any persons, places or things. We're not so afraid while Your grace is with us. This is our strength. It will intuitively guide us on the paths we should go. This grace makes us more powerful than all our enemies and wiser than all the worldly-wise. "This grace is the mistress of truth, the teacher of discipline, the light of the heart, the consoler in anguish, the banisher of sorrow, the expeller of fear, the nourisher of devotion, the producer of tears."¹⁶³

I am but deadwood, a useless branch without Your grace. Guide me on by Your grace, O Lord, to the work You have in mind for me. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. What does the grace of God mean to you?
2. How do you get more grace with lack of power being your dilemma? Reflect.

RESOLVED: Today, make use of what organized religion has to offer.

CHAPTER 56

ACCEPTANCE

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, the more you turn your backs on yourselves, the more you will enter into Me. The forsaking of self unites you to God. Give it up without complaining or whining.

Follow Me. I am "the way, the truth and the life."¹⁶⁴ Without the way you'll get lost, without the truth you'll be deluded, without the life you'll be dry and stark-raving sober. Do it My way for a change, believe that I don't make any mistakes and that your life in recovery will be beyond anything you could have predicted for yourself. If you abide in the habit of doing things My way, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free; and you shall be with Me both here and in the hereafter. If you wish to be fully human and fully alive,

¹⁶³ *Imitation of Christ*, 108

¹⁶⁴ John 14:6

keep My Commandments – all of them. If you will know the truth, believe in Me. Don't be owned by your possessions. If you will be My disciple, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. I will finish with you what I started when I pulled you out of the pit. Money, jobs and relationship monsters will be vaporized and your final state will be beyond anything you could have imagined for yourself.

OUR RESPONSE: O Lord, Your yoke is sweet and Your burden is light. Grant that we may fly in the face of human respect and imitate You. The servant is certainly not greater than the master. Our way is too hard. We want to do things Your way, O Lord, for there we've found our salvation and “whole-liness.” The rest all turn to ashes in our mouths and leave us empty.

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: And so, if you would have life and have it to the fullest, do it My way. If you love Me, keep My Commandments – all of them. I will love you and show Myself to you and bring it about that you will sit down with Me in My Father's Kingdom.

OUR RESPONSE: Lord, as You have said and promised, let it be our lot to win. We have accepted our lot in life and we will live our lives on Your terms even though we may not understand it or like it. Our problems are vehicles to You, Lord God, and if we but simply allow things to be as they are, it will lead us to paradise. We don't want to go back, nor do we wish to foster the status-quo, for in it there is no spirituality at all.

Be brave, my fellows and know that the Lord will be with us as we go forward. For the Lord's sake we accept life on God's terms. Let us not grow weary but persevere in our quest for “whole-liness.” He will speak to us through our thoughts, our circumstances and our sponsor. He goes before us and fights for us. Let us follow Him fearlessly. Let us face up manfully to the challenges that come our way. Amen.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you getting out of the way and allowing your Higher Power to run things? How? Honestly reflect.
2. Are you holding off on complete surrender in hopes something better comes along? Reflect.
3. Are you doing God's will by keeping all of His Commandments?

RESOLVED: Today, offer to drive a newcomer to a meeting.

CHAPTER 57

BEING PATIENT WITH SELF

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: Patience and humility in hard times pleases Me and serves you better than persistent pink clouds.

Why be saddened by a comment made against you? You should react no more than to a blade of grass. This too shall pass. It will happen again. You've probably deserved worse.

When things go your way, all's well and you're a winner. You tell others how it should be done, give good advice, but when setbacks appear, you revert from winner to whiner and fail in both counsel and strength. Consider your frailty and see the good that comes your way from tribulations on every side. They happen for your benefit.

Let it pass and don't fight back. Bear with your trials patiently even if you cannot bear it cheerfully. How important is it? The storm that is now so big will soon become the phantom that it really is. I will return to you with sweet consolation, if you but trust in Me and call devoutly upon Me.

Easy does it through your trials and be prepared to bear still greater ones. You're human beings and life will continue on life's terms. I am He who rescues the afflicted and brings My divinity to those who know their own weaknesses.

OUR RESPONSE: O happy day, knowing that You will finish with us what You started and console us amidst the slings and arrows of the narrow path You have us on! If we land in paradise with You at the end of our lives, what difference does it make how much we suffer? Grant us a good end, grant us a happy passage out of this world. Keep us and ours as the apple of Your eye and count us as those who have been chosen both here but most especially in the hereafter.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you being compassionate with that part of you that's never going to “get it”? Reflect.
2. Don't you seem to grow more from your trials and issues than from your successes?
3. Don't you begin to see the pattern of life that's been set out for you by the Lord? Reflect on how far you've come by God's grace.

RESOLVED: Today, try to be compassionate and understanding with your fellows.

CHAPTER 58

MINDING ONE'S OWN BUSINESS

THE VOICE OF THE LORD: My children, keep it simple and tend to your own garden. You are in way over your head when trying to analyze My actions or apparent inaction. Why one seems so afflicted and another so highly exalted is beyond your pay grade. Trying to fathom the judgments of God is without merit and pointless.

The enemy puts these bits of “stinking thinking” in your path to stir the pot and upset our relationship. Such things breed strife and useless contentions. My judgments are incomprehensible to the understanding of men.

I offer you true peace born of humility. Which co-founder did what better than the other is of no real importance as it often nourishes pride and vainglory, breeding envy and quarrels. When one proudly tries to exalt one over the other; a desire to pry into such matters brings forth no fruit. The real or imagined faults of your founders teach you either what to do or what not to do. I am the God, not of dissension, but of peace, of that peace which consists in true humility rather than in self-exaltation.

Be careful then, My children, to mind your own business. Look for union with Me both here and in the hereafter. Look to your part in things and give no thought to who is greater or who is lesser. For what good would this knowledge be unless it makes you stay right-sized and causes you to rise up in greater praise of Me.

The greatest among you will be the servants of the rest. Let love and service be your guide: “Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 18:3

Humility brought you sobriety and responsibility will help you foster it and finish the course successfully. Walk in the truth, stay right-sized and give no thought to greatness except only as one who serves his fellows lovingly.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Are you paralyzed with self centered analysis? Reflect.
2. Do you still judge your fellows? Isn't this nothing more than an attempt to build yourself up at the expense of your fellows?

RESOLVED: Today, curtail your need to judge others.

CHAPTER 59

ABANDON YOURSELF TO GOD

OUR RESPONSE: Nothing have we found that so fills the hole in the belly with the wind blowing through it as You, O Lord, our God. You've given us rope when we needed time to forgo the toys we came with. You've brought us a peace that lasts, a joy that satisfies. How could things go badly when You are present? Where You are, there is Heaven, and where You are not, is death and hell. In none can we fully trust in our necessities, but in You alone, God. You are our hope. You are our confidence. You are our consoler, most faithful in every need. You are our CEO sponsor.

Even though we may not like or understand the things You send our way, You turn all things to our good. You expose us to various temptations and hardships as You prove Your loved ones in a thousand ways, yet we realize eventually that You order all this for our good. You ought not to be loved or praised less in these trials than if You had filled us with Heavenly consolations.

We cast our lot entirely with You and have pursued as best we can “preferring nothing whatsoever to the Love of Christ.”¹⁶⁶ All the rest of it is outside of You, we find ourselves to be weak and unstable. Tons of friends, powerful helpers, prudent advisers and books of learned men bear out the truth that all satisfactions have their limits. If we don't have You, we have nothing. For all things which seem to be for our peace and happiness are nothing when you are absent, and truly confer no happiness.

¹⁶⁶ *Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

You, indeed, are the fountain of all good, the high we seek, the depth of all that can be spoken. To trust in You above all things is the strongest comfort of Your servants.

Our Lord and our God, to You we look, in You we trust. Take away anything that would block us from the “sunlight of the Spirit.”¹⁶⁷ We want to make a home for You and give You full reign over our wills and our lives for good and for all. We are but exiles here in the region of the shadow of death. Protect and preserve the soul of Your poor servants among the many dangers we face in sobriety and direct us by Your accompanying grace, through the ways of peace, to the land of everlasting light.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE?

1. Do you believe that if you “give up your desires – you'll find rest?”¹⁶⁸ Do your actions reflect this belief? Reflect.
2. Are you ready to “prefer nothing whatsoever than the love of Christ?”¹⁶⁹

RESOLVED: Today, be unafraid and let your Higher Power handle the direction of your thoughts and your actions.

167 *Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)*, 66

168 *Imitation of Christ*, 80

169 *The Holy Rule of St. Benedict*, 95

“Maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”¹⁷⁰

170 1 Peter 4:8-10

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This book is offered as a free PDF download at:

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I encourage you to copy it, distribute it
and share it with others.

Sincerely,

dave m.

Dave's sobriety date is May 15, 1969.

He is a retired businessman, a retreat facilitator
as well as a trusted servant to high-risk, homeless,
male alcoholics, young people in AA and folks in Alanon.