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This personal account of a true life story is offered as support and inspiration for your own healing journey. It is not presented as a definitive method of healing, or seen as encouragement to pursue a particular path

About Healing

The only experience I had with [healing] was about suffering. And I didn't really believe in any of that healing and recovery stuff. I was totally hopeless. Healing, to me, was lying in a bed and trying to kick, going through all that agony -- which was really withdrawal. At the time I thought that was what it was all about.

I would suffer for a few days and then throw up, vomit. It was ridiculous. Then I would get up and wouldn't even take a bath. Just get washed off, and go out and buy some more drugs. I just couldn't endure, couldn't make it through that withdrawal. I didn't believe that people like me would ever be able to regain their lives.

When I first came around, that's how I felt, really hopeless and helpless. I thought I was different, unique. They read that thing [in AA], that some people are constitutionally incapable of being honest, and I used to really believe that that's who I was. And that made my skin crawl because I thought, "These other people are going to make it, but I'm not." And the fear of not having anywhere else to go, but not being able to go on -- was just terrifying.

Despair

I know that not everyone looking for healing is coming from the same place as I am, the physical stuff, and being sick, and going through a lot of that, but the feelings are the same-- the despair. I used to unplug my phone and put on Christmas music and then cry, because I didn't think I'd be making it to the next Christmas with my children. I went through a lot of those kinds of moments of despair. Once I got clean, of course, things got better.

I got clean through a series of bad events. My life had gotten so unmanageable. I had two children. One of them was born addicted to methadone--my oldest. My wife and I had split up and I had my son and I was dragging him around to unsavory places and unsavory people. My family would tell me, "What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

Fear

I used to be a thief. And I lost even the ability to do that. I was so full of fear, that it was almost impossible to face that every day. I stole every day and bought drugs. That was it. There were times when I sold drugs. Even a couple short stints when I tried to straighten out. I went to work doing a couple different things, but over those years, from the time I left the Marine Corps, until I got clean, were mostly spent stealing.

We used to work in teams, like shoplifting teams. One person would steal something and bring it out. The other person would put it in a bag, and return it for the money. Then, we would do burglaries. We would drive around in the daytime until we found somebody was gone, and we'd rob their house. Then, in the evening we would go back out again and do the same thing. It wasn't like we were highly skilled burglars, we were just junkie burglars – break your doorknob, go in, steal your TV, whatever was in sight, and take off. Just to get a fix. It wasn't like I was some professional. The sophisticated cat burglar--that's not the real thing. It's just pathetic people doing pathetic things to get drugs.

I had gotten arrested for a burglary. I was with my new girlfriend and this other guy, and we were driving up to see his girlfriend in prison. On the way up the guy said, "Well, you know, there's a burglary over here." The guy was high on barbiturates. He was goofy. He said it was a mob house where they're doing big money. So we break in, and it turns out it's just some people--it wasn't a "mob house." And it ended up that the people came home and the guy took off and left me. They saw me and I was arrested and my girlfriend was outside in the car so they ended up charging her. As a result, we got on a methadone program to avoid going to jail. That's when my children were born, during that time while we were on the methadone program. I was on that for six years.

Denial

Denial of the addiction was so great. You know how you grow up in the fifties, I had this image of myself as Ward Cleaver, sitting there rocking my son, singing to him. In the meantime, they were giving him paregoric to keep him from going into convulsions. And I was totally oblivious to all that. I was like this great dad because I was there visiting him and holding him and singing to him.

I took a real interest in my kids and always helped take care of them -- changed them and bathed them and did all that stuff. I really did need them in my life. I felt more fulfilled when they were born. But I couldn't see the damage that I was doing to them, or even imagine what their life was like.

Damaged Children

I was at the prison this past Friday. There were two guys talking about going to jail. One guy is 55. The first time he went to jail he was 12. He said, "You know, it was the first time that I got three meals a day. It was the first time I had a clean mattress to lie on, and there were sheets on it, and I felt there were friends around. And here I am 55 years old, and I've spent almost my whole life in prison. But, this is like my home."

Another guy who shared was about the same age, maybe 50. He said he used to steal meat from work and take it and put it in the freezer for his mother, who was a drug addict. She used to sell the meats that he brought home instead of feeding him the food he was stealing. She'd sell it and buy drugs with it and they would go without.

And I thought, you know, that's where I was headed. Back then, I couldn't see that I was that person. I was so self-centered it was unbelievable and I just had no idea what I was doing to my children. Addiction is the most self-centered disease in the world.

Instinctive Knowing

But something inside of me kept telling me that it was wrong. It's like if you send a space probe out in space, without any kind of guidance system, it just spins aimless off into space. I think we

have a guidance system. My problem was I kept interfering with that guidance system. When I was out doing a burglary, I would pray if I heard sirens in the distance, that they weren't coming to arrest me. If I was making a drug deal at two in the morning and I was in the projects and I saw headlights coming in my direction, I would pray that it wasn't a police car coming my way. So, I prayed, but I knew inside, instinctively, that there was something really wrong with me.

I remember, this one time, the FBI was looking for me and I was dealing drugs in the projects. I decided I was going to take over this neighborhood. I was walking across the street and I thought, "Man, if my mother got run over right in front of me, I wouldn't feel anything right now." You know, you have those reality checks. And I thought, "Man, you are really messed up." I thought God must have messed up when He made me, that there was some chemical missing in my brain that other people had so they could feel things like that. And I was so influenced by the drugs, I was so stupid that I didn't realize it was the chemicals I was adding to my brain that were keeping me from feeling what I thought normal people felt.

Out of Control

It's the insanity of addiction. I remember a time when I was so obsessive-compulsive. I used to believe in all that boogey-man stuff and I believed that I was possessed by a demon. But again, it was just another way of me not accepting responsibility for what I was doing.

You have to find justifications or rationalizations, even if it's not a good thing. You know, something is making me do this but it's not within my control. I'm out of control, or I'm possessed, or I'm this, or I'm that.

I had dated a couple women who practiced white witchcraft. I figured they put a spell on me. I was just so deluded in my thinking. I was trying to figure out what was wrong with me. Things like that, that were just so abstract, would pop into my brain as possible understandings about what was wrong with me. But never looking at the key thing, that my self-will had run riot and I was doing what I wanted to do from the time my mother and dad split up.

Powerless and Fearful

I was about ten or eleven. There was a lot of physical violence and a lot of fear. I used to shake inside. Very powerless. I remember when they split up, my mom left us for a year with my father. He moved another woman into the house. I punched her in the stomach. It was just this craziness in my life. Then my mom came back and got us and we moved in with some family in the project in those high rises. I went from playing little league sports to the gang. It was just such a traumatic experience on a kid, you can't even imagine it.

I was so fearful—hanging with people, being a "man" at eleven. Being tough, or trying to be something that I wasn't. Couldn't ever show any weakness. Even if you looked weak to people when you walked past a corner, you set yourself up to be attacked. So you had to pretend you weren't. I used to practice strolling – walking in a manner that looked intimidating so that people wouldn't challenge it. It was such a bizarre way to live, it's hard to explain.

I was introduced to alcohol about that time. That was my first drug. Man, that made it okay. I found I would drink and I could talk to the girls and I could hang out with the guys. I could pretend like I was tough, or whatever, that I wasn't afraid. But it was that cycle. It would relieve that fear for a short time, and it would come back, and it would be worse as time went on.

I got started in that pattern until I became incorrigible. My mother had to give me up to my father. They were going to put her in jail for me not going to school. My mother was poor. She made about 40 bucks a week as a single mother. But she always made sure we got something to eat. So I went with my father again, who I hadn't spoken to in three years, who I hated at that point in my life. My father was a functioning alcoholic, a businessman. I hated the way he was, what he was, and how he was. And man, I became worse than he ever was.

Defiant

Not me. I told you what I was – the way my children's lives started out. I went down there, same thing. I was impressed by all the baloney in those kind of people. So, of course, I ended up with those kind of people. Ended up getting arrested for burglary.

At eleven I planned this little burglary in a bar and my friends pulled it off. I set it all up. By the time I was about fifteen, I was in Florida and I ended up getting arrested for burglary. We robbed this Union Mall. We were breaking into the safe. We were hammering and chiseling at it, but we didn't get the safe open.

The first time I went to jail for a crime other than drunkenness was the summer I was fourteen. In the fall I tried to go back to school, but another person told on me for having a gun and some stolen credit cards. They came into school and arrested me. I ended up so defiant. It was just so important to me to have everybody know... because I felt so vulnerable when I was little. I developed to be big. I didn't want to be vulnerable anymore. So, I played that role.

My father had falsified my baptism certificate when I was a kid and put me in school when I was five. I was always lying about who I was, what age I was. I was fifteen when they threw me out of school, but they thought I was sixteen. My Guidance Counselor said, "Do us all a favor, don't come back." As soon as I turned, what they thought was legal age, they threw me out. They said, "Don't come back anymore."

Passage into Manhood

So, I went to work with my father in the meat business. That was a place where you drank to stay warm. Even growing up I drank with my father. It was really a kind of acceptance. On my mother's side, I would come back and forth to Philly, and my uncles were big drinkers. When I started drinking with them they started to treat me like a man. They stopped teasing. You know, they would disrespect you when you're a kid.

I remember this one uncle beat me up with his fist. I was about eleven. He wasn't a nice person and he was drunk. I lived with that resentment, just to kill him when I got big enough. It was all I wanted to do. I hated my father for not being there to protect me. I plotted his death until, when I was about fourteen or fifteen, he died of cancer.

The other uncles were good guys. I really cared about what they thought. I started drinking with them and then they started treating me like a man. It was like a joke, but in my culture it was kind of like your passage into manhood. You drink with the men in the family and they start to relate to you in a different way. It was the same thing with my father, who was one of four boys. They drank with their dad in a bar when they were kids.

A Real Man

Going to work kind of straightened me out for a little while. I stayed out of legal trouble. But I worked all the time -- a lot of hours, sixty or seventy hours a week, cutting meat with my father and getting drunk and going to work, and not sleeping all night. I continued that until I was eighteen.

It was 1969 when I thought, "Hey, I'll go to Vietnam and I'll become a hero, and I'll get all these metals on my chest and it'll solve all those fearful questions inside of me. No one will challenge me. I'll know and they'll know that I'm a real man. I'm going to go over there and be a hero.

So, I was out drunk one night with a friend who was home on leave from the Marine Corps. I took him to the airport about seven in the morning. We'd gone to a beer and wine joint and drank all night after the bars closed. I took him to the airport, then I went over to the recruiters office. I was eighteen. I sat down in the office and I just remember passing out. I remember waking up, soaking wet and smelling like booze and this Sargeant was shaking my hand saying, "Congratulations, Marine!" Apparently I had gone through all the testing and everything and didn't even know it.

Trying to Set Things Right

Anyway, that's how I started my "heroic Marine Corps adventure." As it turned out, it wasn't like that at all. I joined for two years, and it took me five years to complete a two-year enlistment. I went to prison while I was in there. I got out and went back to duty to finish my enlistment and on the day my enlistment was up, they pushed me out the door. I'd gone back to duty with no pay, trying to set things right again in my life, but it didn't work out.

That was May of '74. In June of '69 I'd gone in. I was so defiant. I did good for the first year. I was down to about nine or ten months left in my enlistment and I had top proficiency and conduct marks. I was a really outstanding Marine up to that point.

I didn't go to Vietnam, I ended up going to California. They put me in the Air Wing. I was third in my class and I got to pick where I went. When I got out there I got into the drug scene in California in '69.

Then I got so whacked out on the drugs. I started into drugs while I was in the Marine Corps and I got crazy with it and I was so defiant. I was into LSD -- I was selling LSD on the base, and marijuana. Before I went into the Marine Corps I was a blatant alcoholic. I had used just strictly alcohol, but I got drunk three or four times a week, at least. I could drink a fifth of vodka in a day. In fact in Paris Island, I was bloated from the alcohol.

Quitting

I was home on leave at the same time that those kids got killed at Kent State. I got into all that anti-war thing. I had a crush on this friend of mine's sister, and I didn't really want to go back. So I hear on the radio, "Anybody who's in the armed services, just call up and tell them you quit." So I did. I just quit. I said, Okay, fine. I'll just stay here. I won't go back.

I'd had some trouble with my eye. I was going blind in my right eye and I decided that they weren't doing things the way I thought they should. That hadn't taken care of me. I'd worked for them, and now when I was having a problem they weren't accommodating me. I had tried to get a

transfer here to get my eye treated but they wouldn't do it. And when they made that decision, I made my decision that I was through with the Marines.

But, eventually, I ended up going back, and ended up getting into trouble. They put me on restriction in the barracks. I was doing so many drugs I decided I was going to leave anyway. I was so defiant. I wrote over my bunk in big red permanent magic marker. F... you, Mother F...ers. And I just left the base. When I went back I got sentenced to eighteen months of hard labor. A General intervened and I ended up doing maybe eight and a half, nine months and getting sent back to duty. They were trying to get me straightened out.

Shot in the Back

I did try. I did actually try. I even started studying with these born-again Christians and I tried to really get things back together. But, when my time was up and they put me out -- I got out in May -- by Halloween of that year I was in Episcopal Hospital with a bullet in my spine because I had stolen some guns in a burglary and was selling them, and I ended up getting shot.

I had my cousin drop me off at the hospital. I said, "Go sell the guns, get some drugs, bring it back and pick me up." I'm walking around with a bullet in my spine, and I still didn't realize how crazy I was. Of course they didn't come back. The cops came in and I told some lie about how I'd gotten shot and I got admitted to the hospital.

There was a guy I knew when I used to sell drugs up in the Projects and he was in there for bleeding ulcers from Percodan. I had gone in right off the street, so he gave me his pajamas that were too short, and his platform shoes. And he had a jacket that I put on that was probably five inches short on my arms. I couldn't go to the bathroom after the gunshot, so I had a big catheter pushing out these brown, linen pajamas. And I would sneak out of the hospital every day with that bullet in my spine, and buy drugs. Then I'd come back to the hospital.

After about a week, they decided they were going to go into my spine and take out the bullet. They got the bullet and the bone fragments out of my spine without paralyzing me. But again, I didn't take that seriously, even while I was in there. I'd sent my girlfriend to get me drugs, and when I was getting ready to use the nurse came in so I stuck it under the phone. When she left I went to pick up the phone and they fell on the ground. I got out of the bed, with the sutures in my back and all. The guardrail was up on that side, so I had to go around, holding onto the bed with my hands, to get to those drugs, and bring them back around so I could use it.

They were giving me all kinds of medicine, but it didn't work because I was a drug addict. They were giving me all kinds of Demerol, but it didn't stop the pain. I didn't sleep for four days. In any case, it didn't slow me down too much. Before my time was up, I was already sneaking out of the hospital and getting high. The night before they discharged me I was out all night. I just came back in to get discharged.

On the Streets

It became the pattern of my life. My kids were born, I split up with their mother. She gave me my son when he was about a year and a half and I was staying with my mother and my step-dad most of that time. Then I stole a gun out of the house so I couldn't go in there anymore.

I was out on the street with my son and I remember having to take him to my mother's, knocking on my mother's door, running down to the corner, and standing at the corner. He was crying on

the front step because he didn't understand what was going on, and I had to go to a burglary and I couldn't take him with me. And I couldn't go in the house because I had stolen a gun. I stood at the corner until somebody came and took him off the steps and then I ran down Kensington Avenue and went back to steal.

I was on the street, and then I was literally sleeping on park benches, people's porches, and things like that. In fact, the guy that I was stealing with at the time, he had a girlfriend who had a house. She wouldn't let me in at night, so I used to sneak up on their porch. It was a raised porch, so the police couldn't see me if they drove by.

I'd walk the streets until people went in at night. It was summer and they'd be sitting out and I'd have to walk around in this pair of five-dollar sneakers and a pair of jeans, and a shirt from this restaurant the woman worked at. That was all I had. I would sleep out there and when the sun came up the concrete would get so hot. I'd start banging and wake him up. I'd say, "Come on, Bill, let's go to work." We'd go out and start stealing.

The Breaking Point

But thank God it got so bad right then. As it turned out, I finally broke, and I couldn't live like that anymore. I had started to try to get away from it. Bill stayed in it. The same year that I got clean, he got his case. He's doing life without parole.

I saw him when he had fourteen years in, and I was clean for fourteen years. I was up on my anniversary, speaking, and I saw him across the room. He'd been in the drug program, in prison, for two years at that point. We recognized each other and he came up and said, "I can't believe this. You left, and your life went this way, and my life went this way. I'm here for the rest of my life now. So, he asked the guy who ran the place if he could come up to the regular meetings. He said, "This was the only guy I knew who was a real dope fiend like me." He used to come up every week and see me at the meetings.

I don't see him all the time now, but he works as a peer counselor there. He's been clean ever since. He's doing good, but no matter how good he ever does, he'll never get out of there for the rest of his life.

I don't even know what happened. He said some guy got killed in a drug deal they were involved in. I don't even know if he was the one who killed anybody. I just know that he got life without parole. And I know, if things hadn't gotten so bad for me at that time, and if I hadn't been so broken.... I would have probably been with him when that happened.

Sensitivity

I think what broke me was a combination of the things that I hated most about myself. The fear. All the things at the time that were so negative. I didn't want to be vulnerable, didn't want to feel things, didn't want to be sensitive. I thought it was a woman's trait.

It was sad. During my addiction, and especially near the end, I remember my mother would sit down on the couch next to me and try to put her arm around me. It made my blood curl. It made my skin crawl. And I couldn't stand to have her even touch me, or to hug me. It made me feel weak. It was a terrible thing. I would just pull away from her.

Desperation

I think I got to the point where I was just so afraid, so desperate. I tried some meetings. I tried going on short term methadone detox as an outpatient. I was going to some counseling down at the Lower Kensington Crisis Center, but it was a joke because I would use, then go in there. Nobody was really straight. It just was bizarre.

I was getting pressure from my family to do something. They were saying, “What’s the matter with you? Look what you’re doing to your daughter. Look what you’re doing to your son. What are their lives going to be like?”

Asking for Help

When I was in detox and I would buy the Valiums off the other patients — I’d have them spit them back out and buy them for fifty cents — I still didn’t want to feel that way. Finally I had my second detox in Lower Kensington. I asked to go to [Eagleville](#) offered me a bed, but I had to wait ten days. I went home, and for ten days I did not want to use. I really didn’t want to use. I would cry outside. But I used every day during those ten days that I was out and didn’t want to. I drank or took drugs every day.

Overwhelming Fear

There were other times when I maybe had good intentions, but bad results. Those other attempts at getting clean were because it wasn’t fun anymore. I was shooting drugs into the jugular veins in my neck. I didn’t have any veins left in my body. I was in a pressure situation. In the end I was afraid. I was afraid to steal, and it was getting hard to get money. It was an overwhelming load on me every day, and I didn’t believe that I could get clean. They used to say, “Once a junkie, always a junkie. You’ll die a junkie.” And I believed that.

But I went up to Eagleville [drug and alcohol rehab]. I had the syringe in my back pocket. I also had a syringe stashed at the abandoned house next to my house in Kensington, in case things didn’t work out. I went through the intake. And when they accepted me, I took that syringe out and I threw it in the trash can.

It’s funny. When they were doing the intake, my voice was cracking and I was shaking. The guy got up and he said, “Excuse me for a second.” He just left, and he came back with a psychiatrist. And the psychiatrist sat down with me.

I just ran into him last year in a restaurant. He said, “You know what I was doing? I was deciding whether to send you to the state hospital or not. That was my job.” I said, “I scared the intake person, who was a man!”

At the time I would have thirty or fifty nightmares a night — be startled out of my sleep. My son catching me getting off. Or, spilling my drugs. Or getting beat. Or getting arrested. Things would just shock me awake, all night long.

Out of Touch

At Eagleville I figured I was manipulating them to get more drugs. I would do all kinds of things. I would shake my leg, in order to appear like I was tense or nervous so they would give me drugs. I remember going to my counselor, in orientation, when I was first in there. I was crying, and I said, “Look, man, I’m trying to be honest here. I think I’m trying to manipulate these doctors into

giving me some medicine, to get some medication, to get some drugs. All this stuff, it ain't me." I'm crying and stuff.

The guy says, "Well, sit down for a minute. Tell me what's going on. Tell me what your life is like. Where are your kids?" Then he goes, "You know what, you're sad. And you miss your kids. You want to call them?" I said, "Yeah, let me call them." And I stopped crying. I was so out of touch with my feelings that I didn't even know that I was really sad. I thought it was another manipulation.

Hopelessness

So that's where my healing began. There I heard people talk about their own healing – how they had gotten straight. That was a big thing for me, because on the street I had only met people who were failures. They'd say, "I got out of that place – they put a clock around your neck and they shave your head..." and I thought, "Man, I went through Paris Island. I'm not going to sign myself into some place where they abuse me." And, I thought, "I'm going to buy him some drugs, so it obviously doesn't work. We're both in the same car going to buy drugs. So what's the use in it?"

Raging Inside

By that time I had been shot and stabbed in the jaw with a screwdriver. I didn't have any veins left in my body. I didn't know what to do. I started begging God to help me. I would walk through the chow line in the morning and I'd have my plate, and I'd go by the window and I'd want to punch out every window that I passed. Then, when I'd get to the table I'd want to take all the plates on the tray and just smash them against the table before I sat down. That's what I would feel like. I'd want to bite the person in front of me in the face. I felt like Dracula, or something, when that stuff was out of my system. I was so full of fear. I was so full of hopelessness, and self-doubt, and I didn't believe I could get fixed. There was so much fear going on and it was coming out in all these violent thoughts in my head. I was raging inside because I didn't know how to stop it. I just didn't know how to stop the pain.

I just prayed. I would pray, "God, look, let me get through 'til lunch time." And at lunchtime I'd have that experience and I would say, "Let me just make it through to dinner." At dinner, I'd go back and say, "Look, let me get to that meeting." And at the meeting I'd say...

In the meetings, in the beginning, I would judge everybody. I wouldn't hold hands at the end and pray. I'd fold my hands, I wouldn't pray. I was being real defiant. I'd find all the fault in that organized crap. I couldn't see the beauty in the words. If I didn't make up the words myself, then they weren't sincere, they weren't real. I was such an egomaniac with an inferiority complex. It was incredible.

A Quiet Inner Voice

You know, it sounds corny, but, I really think it was just the grace of God that kept me trying -- and that little guidance system that God put inside of us to keep us on track. It's a quiet voice inside of us, a real gentle voice. It's easy to talk over, to talk louder than it, and ignore it, if that's what you choose to do. But there is always that inner voice telling you, "This is what you need to do." Everybody's got that.

Beginning with Self-Forgiveness

I would hear the voice, literally, hear it. I remember thinking, "God already forgave you for everything you ever did. What are you, better than God? That you don't forgive yourself?" I read

later on about recovery beginning with self-forgiveness. But at those times, I didn't know what was happening to me. I just knew I was getting those kind of thoughts.

Father's Love

I think about God as my loving parent. I was walking up a path one day, and I thought, "If I told my son not to climb a tree, and he climbed the tree and fell and broke his arm, even though I told him not to do it, I wouldn't run over and beat him and give him to some evil guy who took him somewhere. And this is all an analogy of the conventional 'go to hell' thing. I wouldn't take him somewhere and give him to some evil guy who took him out of my presence and into a wood shed and burned him with cigarette butts and stuck him with a pitchfork all day long. I would run over to him, and pick him up and kiss him where he was hurt, and hold him and love him, and do whatever I could to make him better and to help him.

I remember that voice putting that analogy in my mind and then telling me. You are a junkie. Think of how much greater God's love is for you – your Father's love is for you. If you could love that way as a father, how much greater does your Father love you?"

Connecting

You know those prayers that I was sending out –I was starting to *connect* with this loving parent. It is the same beliefs that I have today. The initial belief system that hit me there is the belief system that I still have today, so I know that it was real. It hasn't changed in twenty years. I know that it was a real, genuine description of God for me. I say "the grace of God" because it wasn't my normal way of thinking. These new thoughts were piercing my consciousness and getting through to me.

Stop Playing Games

I started to believe that there was some good force that would help me. I remember a girl talking about it. She came in to one meeting, and shared her story about how she used to play all these depression games. She would get herself all worked up, then she would use. When she was in recovery she found she was doing the same thing, but she couldn't use. She finally stopped playing the "depression game." I thought, "That's me!" I identified with this girl somewhat. She said, "I pray everyday. I thank God at night, and I go to a meeting everyday. And I found that I never have to use again, a day at a time."

Making Friends

They used to tell us that maybe ten percent of the people there were going to make it. But, I had been through Paris Island. And I thought if another guy could do it, I could do it. So, I believed that I was part of that ten percent. I thought, "Not only that, but I'm going to make a hundred friends while I'm here so that when I'm done, I'm still going to have ten people around me as a support system, as a safety net." And I went out of my way to start talking to people and introducing myself and doing one-on-ones. Fortunately, I was there for seven and a half months so I had time to go for those kind of relationships.

I started to be overwhelmed. I was in awe of the first snowfall. There was a volunteer who was coming in and doing a creative writing thing. She published my little *First Snow* story in the Eagleville paper.

Full of Spirit

Christmas was coming up and I didn't have any money, but they gave me money for a haircut so I could be in the Christmas fashion show. I cut my own hair and I bought my daughter a teddy bear and my son an Eagles shirt for Christmas. Of course they could have thrown me out for being a dope fiend and cutting my own hair, and lying, being sneaky –I almost got thrown out of there for that, but I really was full of the Christmas spirit for the first time.

I had spent so many years not even being able to go home for Christmas because the police were looking for me, or the FBI was looking for me. My family used to have to sneak around to try to get to where I was just so they could see me. I might be at a relative's house, and I would be so sick because I couldn't steal because of the holiday, everything was closed, and the people were home. I hated the holidays. I can't even explain it to you – I hated it. They'd go through all that, and I'd just be lying there like an animal. They'd come over and I wouldn't even have the courtesy to get up and go out in the kitchen and have coffee. I would just lie there, looking pathetic, hoping that they would offer me some money so I could go buy some drugs, just totally self-centered.

In Touch with Great Feelings

So, this was my first Christmas clean. My recovery date was July 7, 1981 so by Christmas I'd had about five months in. Around October I started to memorize all the words in the Christmas songs. I started to sing them inside. I started to sing to God. I started to have these great feelings popping out all over inside of me. I was just so in touch with all the good stuff. Everything was like brand new, you know? It was unbelievable. It's hard to explain it to somebody unless they could understand what it felt like to be that other guy on the couch, you know. Or, to be in jail under an alias, and waiting for the cops to find out.

Remembering the Terror

Recently, I met a young guy on retreat who invited me to a meeting he was chairing downtown on Thanksgiving day. I had my granddaughter in the car with me and I was going by the Roundhouse, the holding center downtown, and remembering the most horrible, terrifying days in my life were locked up in there, because I knew the FBI was looking for me. I was using an alias. I would hallucinate, hear them saying my real name through the glass, but they really weren't. It was all going on in my mind. I really would think I had gotten found out. They went to my mother's and told her they were going to shoot me if they saw me. She didn't tell them where I was. They were going to kill me. I was selling drugs, and they were going to kill me if they found me, if she didn't tell them where I was.

So, I'm going by the same place, on Thanksgiving Day, and I'm thinking, "How could I not..." I was crying. I was so grateful. I'm singing Christmas songs in the car with my granddaughter. Again, it's hard to express that to somebody.

We go a little bit past the place and there's a homeless guy on the street, walking. And I remember being that guy. I remember being that guy inside that Detention Center. And I remember the feelings.

Different Directions

See, all that stuff was happening to me all at once then. It happens to me still, but then it was just so overwhelming to feel all that good stuff. It used to scare me. I used to think God was setting me up because my kid was going to die or something. I thought, "I shouldn't be feeling good like this, man, something's going to happen bad. He's setting me up for this bad event so I can handle

it. I had that looming sense of doom for the first year I was in the program [AA]. It's amazing what kind of forces are at work inside, raging in different directions.

Just Kept Going

Anyway, I got through the Eagleville experience, came out, and started going to meetings. It was terrifying for me, I used to shake inside, violently, man, my insides would jump, the same feeling I had when my father used to hit my mother. That's the feelings I would have when I would first sit in those meetings outside. I felt I was sick, everybody else was well. My stomach used to jump six inches, I swear. And my heart would pound. I'd hear this screaming, at the top of my lungs, I'd hear this aaawwwwww... and it was just screaming so loud that I would sneak looks out of the corner of my eye at the people sitting next to me to see if they could somehow hear the voice that was screaming in me. It was so terrifying. But I just kept going. I kept going to the meetings and going to the meetings.

Helpers

I was fortunate I had met some people in Eagleville who had gotten out ahead of me who introduced me to some other people. They would take me to meetings and introduce me, kind of break the ice for me. And again, that inner voice. I instinctively knew that that was the answer for me and I just had to stick it out and stay with it. That's how it began. I brought my son up to live with me, got an apartment with him for a couple of years, got married, started another whole family. Kept clean. I couldn't get a job cutting meat at the time. I had no real work history. Then another guy in the program got me a job where he was working, driving a cab.

I sponsored a guy, and got him a job driving a cab. He came out of Eagleville and got in the car business and asked me to come in. I went out there, and within a year, I was the sales manager of the place. I was so used to selling stuff that I had stolen, I had all these great skills that I hadn't known about. I became really successful at that.

Illness and Loss

Then I got really ill. Really sick. Couldn't walk for awhile, bladder, bowels, and all, shut down, marriage was falling apart. Everything was getting crazy. Before that, when I got clean, I started running everyday. I was playing ball. I was real athletic. Plus I was in control at work. I ran everything. I took so much pride in what I did, and I didn't realize it at the time. It was so important about who I was. But I got so sick that I got fired from my job. I couldn't walk for a little while. They told me I had this spinal disease and it started to really impact my life. They told me I was going to end up in a wheelchair, which didn't happen.

Help from God

In the very beginning of my experience of healing, when I started to believe in that "loving parent" theory, I started to believe that there was some hope for me. Getting the help from God, I was going to be able to do it. That's really where my healing began.

Through the years my faith has grown, just because of the experiences. You have experiences, you survive them, and then your faith grows. But my faith didn't start as a result of me having great experiences. My faith started on grace in the beginning. I started to believe that I could be okay. I think that was grace. That was the change. I stopped believing the lie and I started to see the truth – that I didn't have to feel that way anymore. I don't know how it happened, or exactly when it happened, I just know that in my life it was more of a process than it was one single event. It was more of an ongoing process which is still in effect today.

Today, I don't beg God, "Oh please," like I did in the beginning. My prayer has changed to one of mutual respect. I respect God, and I love him and I make choices based on that. I don't want to do anything to interfere with my relationship with God. One of the books, talking about resentment, says, "it blocks us off from the light of the spirit." (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Alcoholics Anonymous, 1996). We're people who have admitted that. We need the light of the spirit in order to live.

I've made a lot of mistakes through my journey, even in the despair, and all the humbling I went through when I first got sick. But, it's been a little series of progressions. Even at that time, I had achieved a lot, success was really going on, and man, I found myself flat on my back in the hospital for a couple weeks, not able to walk. They'd lay me across the bed and pull the feces out of my body. People were bringing me books, like *Sermon on the Mount* (Emmet Fox, 1989), *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (Harold S. Kushner, 1981)

The Four Seeds

I remember reading this passage in the Bible that talked about how to open up to different things. I popped it open and there was this thing about the four seeds. There was this guy sowing seeds and some went on the rocks, and some went in the shallow soil, some fell into the weeds, and some fell on the fertile soil. At the time I had about seven years in the program. I was in that physical position in the hospital, and I read that story and I compared it to people who hear the truth.

For the first ones the seeds fall on the rocks, they hear the truth, but it doesn't really take root, it's just snatched right away. This is the way I was most of the time in the early phases, when I'd have the moments I wanted to do something good, but it never lasted. For the second ones the seed didn't take root, the soil didn't have any depth. So, when the sun came up it would burn it up and it would die. I thought, that wasn't me because I knew it was in me, deeply. I knew it was rooted inside of me. The third ones it took root, got really rooted, but they get so caught up in the cares of the world in the pursuit of money, that they did less and less for God. Then there was the fourth ones who got it, and multiplied six times sixty, or whatever. When I read that I thought, "Oh my God, I'm a Three!" The third one was me. I heard the truth. And I said, "God, I don't know how you're going to do this, but make me a Four. I don't want to be a Three!"

Something Missing

I realized that even during my recovery time I had drifted back into a lot of self-centered stuff and it slowed me down. Being in the hospital, being totally incapacitated, was another breakthrough in my development, spiritually. I don't know that it would have come about in any other way. The arrogance of self importance, you know, when you're really successful, man, it's hard to say, "Hey, if it's not broke then don't fix it. What am I doing wrong?" But then, I knew there was something missing inside of me.

I've had other moments like that, where I've had those realizations, I'd have all these things I wanted and I'd think, "Man, is this all there is?" I did that with women. I did it in recovery. Then I find myself thinking, "Man, phew, I got all this. I got this great job. This great car. Expense account. Beautiful woman..."

Satisfaction and Fulfillment

Harold Kushner wrote a book about it, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He also wrote *When Everything You Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*, which describes that kind of experience.

Sometimes the best thing that can happen is that we get everything we want because then we realize it ain't enough.

I used to go on retreat with a friend of mine, Father Mike. He would talk about the [Enneagram](#) which describes the nine personality types. I was a “seven” which is an enthusiastic doer — always busy, always doing. I read a couple books on the subject and they said that a person of that personality type can try to get it in other kinds of forms, but the only deep, lasting thing, is the spiritual. If you can find that, in the eternal, then it will last, you'll finally find satisfaction and fulfillment. Its not going to come from accomplishments or the things that you think its going to come from.

Compassionate Feelings

I really believe with all my heart and soul, that God is love. And all that bogeyman stuff just doesn't work for me. God is love and that is it. He's unconditional love. I believe that's the way he reveals himself, that love shows its face. Have you ever read, “How long will you hide your face from me?” It's a quote from the Psalms. It's in compassion, that he reveals his face. That's how love shows its face, through compassion. That's why one person helping another is so effective.

I remember sitting in a meeting at the penitentiary and this guy was talking about stabbing himself over and over again in his chest with a butcher knife, in a psychotic episode. Sitting in the schoolyard, stabbing himself, just trying to make the pain stop. And I felt like I loved that guy. It wasn't that I had stabbed myself over and over again, but I knew how that felt. I knew how it felt to be so full of despair and to be so angry. Like when I felt like punching the windows out. You just want it to end. I knew the pain that he felt.

When somebody shares that with me, people that I'm talking with at work, or the people in the prison, I know. I feel that little kid, that hurt child, inside. A guy was sharing his story about not having anything to eat. I felt he was like a fifty-five-year-old twelve-year-old sitting next to me. This big, strong guy, who is like a frightened child. And I know what it feels like to be a frightened child. That I know. And I know the extremes that we go to to prove that we are not that frightened child and that we are not going to be that person they can hurt or take advantage of any more.

It's All Part of the Journey

All those cumulative experiences in the eighteen years that I've been going up to meetings at the penitentiary — working with other people in the program, people I sponsored, seeing guys come out of jail with no life and then being best man at their wedding, watching them have their first children,—all those things are part of my healing journey.

Prepared to Die

When I was in Florida the doctors were saying I was going to be dead in a couple years. They told my sponsor and my wife I was going to die. I'd had a couple heart failures, my heart functions were damaged fifty percent. I had Hepatitis C, they diagnosed me with that. My spleen was enlarged. My liver was enlarged. My heart was enlarged, because of this damage. It had stretched out one side of my heart. The valves were all leaking. You know, I was like, phew. The spinal disease I had created a lot of conditions. I was not able to go to the bathroom. I got myself off catheters — well, God got me off catheters, but I even had to cath myself four times a day. I still today, have to take enemas every couple days in order to cleanse my system out.

Saved by Love

It was very painful to do these catheters every day, and I remember my sister got me a Saint Francis prayer poster (see page 24). I put that up over my toilet and I would pray. I'd say the St. Francis prayer, which is really all about healing--all about understanding healing: Give, rather than receive. Love, rather than to be loved, because we only really feel love when we are loving, not so much when we are being loved. I mean, I was loved my whole life, but it didn't work for me until I started loving. Then I was able to feel the emotion of love. So, that's what saved me. I would read the prayer and after awhile I would relax that part of my body so I didn't feel the pain.

One thing I learned was that if you resist pain, if you tense up and try to resist the pain, it hurts a lot worse. That's where the pain comes from, resisting the process. When I read the prayer I would relax and I would be able to do things without the pain. Then, after awhile, when I read the prayer, I would start to urinate.

Crossing a Circuit

I went for tests at Jefferson Hospital. They fill you up with water and measure your electrical conduction and all. I had no waves on the chart, nothing that was making it happen. The guy said, "You have no signs, how do you urinate?" I said, "Believe it or not, I say the St. Francis prayer, and when I get to the beginning of it I start going to the bathroom." It's like I've crossed some circuit. He said, "Well, you might be firing maybe one neuron. Whatever you're doing, keep doing it, because it's working, and I can't explain how its working." Biologically, it shouldn't have been possible for me to urinate, but I would say the prayer and I'd start going.

They told me I was going to become impotent. I didn't become impotent. They told me I was going to develop spastic paralysis in my legs. I didn't develop spastic paralysis in my legs. They told my sponsor and my wife, that I would be dead in a couple years. That was seven years ago. I knew then that they were wrong.

The Voice of Love

I had been through so much up to that point. I had a catheter running through my shoulder and into my right atrium. I'd been in the hospital with the heart failures. I remember being in CCU and believing that I was going to die over in Sacred Heart Hospital and I remember praying, "God, if you got a mansion, I'll be the janitor. I just want to be with you." I really thought that was my time to go. And I heard the voice say, "It's not."

I heard that in my own mind's voice. Sometimes I would hear the voice say, "Peter, don't you know that I love you? I just love you." I had a moment like that one when I was in the hospital – I remember saying that I wanted to be with him no matter what, and the voice said, "You are my son. Don't be foolish."

One time I was at a convention and a guy was talking about loneliness and started to cry. I wondered what people were thinking. If I cried, would I look.... then I thought, "Oh, it's all right to cry. You can be sensitive." I'd been praying to have a spiritual experience there, and I was looking forward to something like that happening. It was happening, and I was perverting it in my mind. The voice just said, "Peter, I love you. I just love you." I was like apologizing for perverting this whole thing that was happening, and he was going "Stop! I love you. That's it." Tears were gushing down, because I know the loneliness that the person had experienced. I knew that kind of loneliness. I just cried and cried and cried.

Free Will

I feel that the spiritual journey is just that, it's a journey. Every once in awhile you come up on forks in the road, and you have to choose, again. Love is a choice. That's why I think we are created in God's image. It's that we have the ability to love. But, as a result of that we have a free will, which is the root of all the evil, all the bad stuff that happens in our lives. So, it's either our will, or somebody else's will that interferes with our life. I never think anything bad has to do with God's will.

Weariness

I did feel like giving up a few times. At the time that I was getting all that bad news and I was feeling really bad. My kids used to always say, "Daddy, don't give up. Don't give up."

I was talking with my wife one night about everything that had been going on, and she told me what the doctors were saying. I said, "You know what, to tell you the truth, I feel so weary." And that's not a word that I used commonly, if ever, up to that point. It is funny isn't it? That would be a "weak" word, you know. I don't use that word, but I said, "I just feel so weary. I feel like giving up. To tell you the truth, I don't know if I can keep going on. I have this overwhelming sense of weariness. I just feel so weak." So we went to bed.

An Offer of Prayer

The next day a woman called me. She says, "You don't know me, but I heard your wife sharing." I guess after the doctors talked to my wife she had gone to a women's meeting and shared. The woman on the phone said, "I'd really like to come and pray with you, if that would be okay with you." I said, "Oh geez, well..." I figured she was a friend of my wife, from the women's meeting and the program, so I didn't want to offend her, you know. So, I said, "Alright. Okay." What harm could it do. So she says, "Well, I'll come over a little later."

So I hang up. Meantime, my wife calls. At the time I was really sick. I wasn't even working. She says, "You told this woman to come here? What are you doing? That's going to scare the kids. Don't let her come over there!" I said, "Well, I don't have her number. I can't call her. I already told her. I thought she was your friend."

Anyway, the woman comes over. In the meantime, my wife had come home and was heading out to somewhere else. The kids in the meantime, without us setting it up, had said, "We want to go over to our friends and play." And they went across the street to their friends' house.

So it was just me there. The woman shows up and my wife runs out the front door. She grabs the woman and says, "Listen, I really don't think this is a good time. I have to go out." The lady says, "I didn't come to see you, anyway. I came to see him." And she walks right past my wife, kind of blatantly, and into the house.

A Message from God

This was after years of set-backs, and set-backs and set-backs, and I just was so tired. The woman came in and sat down and she said, "Listen, I know this is going to sound crazy, but, I'm an agoraphobic, I'm afraid of going out of the house. And not only that, I'm dyslexic, so my husband won't let me go out of the house because I always get lost."

She said, "But, you know what, since I heard your wife share at that meeting – I've had this voice in my head telling me to come and talk to you. I have a message for you from God. I kept ignoring

the voice, and ignoring it, and it's gotten so loud now that I can't think of anything else. I finally said to my husband, 'I don't care. I have to go find this man and tell him what God wants me to tell him.'

"This is the message. God knows that you are weary. But he doesn't want you to give up. He wants you to keep bringing people to him." She said, "There. I've said it. That's it. Now it's on you. Can I pray with you for a minute?" I said, "Okay." She said a prayer and boom, she left. I never saw that woman again in my life. Hadn't seen her up to that day.

A Message in the Mail

She left, and it still didn't sink in. I had said the night before that I was weary, a word that I don't use. And she uses "weary — God knows you are weary." That's exactly what her words were. "And he doesn't want you to give up."

So, she left, the house was quiet, the kids were at their friends. I picked up the mail, and there was a card from my youngest sister, who was one of my rescuers in my addiction. She was the one who took me to Eagleville that first day, and the one who gave me the poster of St. Francis. She knew what had been going on physically with me and she wanted to encourage me—a kind of get-well card. Inside she said, "I love you and I'm praying for you. And listen, I came across this parable. It's about a mother, but it really reminded me of you and the way you are with the children, so I wanted to send it to you."

The Other Side of the Gate

I opened it up and I started to read it and it said, "There was this mother, and on the day that her child was born, she looked to God and she said, 'this is the greatest day of my life.' The guide that was with her said, 'and it will even be better.' She thought, 'No, this is it, this is the best.' The guide started off with her on a journey and each day she would experience different things and at the end of the day she would say, 'Today I taught my children, patience.' And today I taught them. . .

In the middle of the story, she's climbing this mountain and she gets to a certain point on the mountain and she says, "I'm weary. I can't go on anymore." And she prayed that she was weary and she couldn't go on any more. Somewhere inside of her she finds the strength to go on and when she goes to bed that evening she said, "Today was the greatest day of my life because I taught my children fortitude."

Then she goes over the mountain, comes down the other side and there's these golden gates. She walks through the gates and she turns and looks at the kids and she said, "This is really the greatest day of my life, because now they can go on without me." They're on the other side of the gate, and she knows that they're going to be okay.

Teach the Children

I would always pray, back then, that I would just make it until my kids were eighteen or so, when they could take care of themselves, because I didn't want them to be without a father, like I was.

So, I started crying, like I am now. The whole rest of the story, after the "weary" part, of course, I just cried and cried and cried. And then it all hit me, you know, that God really had sent this person to tell me that he knew what I was feeling and he knew three weeks before I started feeling

it that I was going to give up – that I felt like giving up. But I had to stay with it, to teach them not to give up, to go on. And that's what he wanted me to do.

And since that day, I've had days when I've felt like maybe I'd be better off if I didn't wake up tomorrow. I'd just feel so beat. But, I never felt that kind of despair again, or that weariness, as strong as I did that time.

Again, it was just another part along the journey, like I was saying, it's an accumulative thing. These things happen and it's at a point in my own conscious that I'd be ready to give up on the path that I'm on. Just like that story. Then somewhere inside God will intercede and give me the strength that I need to keep going on.

A Need to Be Loved

One of my favorite meditations from the *Twenty-four Hours a Day* book (Hazeldon Publishers, 1975) is "Amid the crowd, God chooses those people who fulfill his need to be loved." Maybe our great need to be loved, as human beings, is something that we inherited from the great spirit and there are people amid the crowd who do that for God. He's given me extra time with my children, and the other things. I feel I want to be one of those people that give him, that can satisfy that need in God, in his spirit, to be loved.

I'm not a religious guy, and all, and I'm not a fanatic, I just love God. I sing to God. I sing love songs to God. When I hear a love song on the radio... Sometimes I wonder if that's unusual.

Tuned In

I studied different religions. I talked to Jehovah Witnesses, born again Christians, I talked to Buddhists, Hare Krishnas, Muslims, and I was brought up Catholic and had a lot of that information.

Just within the last few months, I was with my family, and I was talking about hearing the voice. They said to me, "The what?" I said, "The voice. Don't you guys ever hear a voice?" They're like, "No." And everybody's looking at me going, "No." It's like, you know, sometimes I think that I'm a little bit goofy. But, if this is goofy, then I'll be goofy.

With some people you feel like you're right out there with it and it's not something that's misunderstood. Some people don't get it, they might think you're goofy, or it's phony, or you're trying to present yourself in some certain way. I frankly don't care what people think of me in that sense. I really don't. I'm not some Holy Roller, like, "Hey, look at this." I don't like people to view me in that way, thinking I'm different from them. I really feel like every one of us has that voice, we just don't tune into that station, you know what I mean? Every one of us has that same love.

Invisible Signals

I'm not bright enough to figure out how television signals work. The invisible part of the TV is the most important part of it. It's just glass and plastic. There is nothing there that could tell you that I could be watching the game in my home, and the guys up in prison are watching the same game. How does that signal come into my house, and go to their house, and go to your house, and all over the place? I can't figure that out. I don't understand it. But I don't need to understand it to be able to use it. All I have to do is learn how to work the remote control.

For a lot of years, I thought had to figure God's signal out before I could use it. And if I didn't get it quite right, oh boy, was I going to pay. There was going to be this big hand at the end of the maze, "oops, (slap) wrong exit!" You know? And it had all just been a futile journey, I had gone in the wrong direction and somehow offended him, even unintentionally. It's bizarre, the way we think.

But now I feel that the most powerful things in the world you can't see, just like you can't see God. Nuclear energy, electricity, radio signals, microwave signals, things like that. But it doesn't deny their existence.

A Deeper Joy

I got my GED in the Marine Corps in jail, so I'm not a great mind, or anything – but it seems awful stupid to me when I meet somebody who's really intelligent who doesn't believe in God. It just seems to me that it's a lot simpler than that. Just because you can't figure it out or you can't see it, you can't deny its existence, because there is evidence of it. Just like that picture on the screen of the TV.

[Kahlil Gibran](#), the prophet, says if you're looking for God, hey, don't look at the mysteries of life, that's not where you're going to find him. Look at your children at play, then look up to the tree and then watch as he waves to you through the leaves of the tree. That's really what I believe.

At the end of it all, if I was wrong, then it really doesn't matter, because at the end of it all, I'll have had a happy life. People of some kind of faith are always the really happy people, they find a deeper joy and happiness. About two weeks ago, I heard on TV, "Happiness is dependent upon outside things. But joy is dependent on your relationship with your higher power." I really think that is the true.

You were telling me about those guys being on Larry King and talking about the test of spiritual healing being that you have the desire to help other people. I guess that's a pretty good way of describing it. I feel better being that person, than I was being the person who was the taker. And I don't ever want to give that up.

Recovered

I read one time that the goal of recovery would be that you could be on a desert island and have all the drugs and alcohol you could ever want to use. No one would ever know about it, it would never hurt anybody else, but you still wouldn't touch one drop of it. Something would change inside of you, something would happen, and that's how I feel. I haven't thought about using for eighteen years.

I've had some dreams now and then that I did use, that I was a phony, and I really had been using all along, and that this was just another time. But, when I regained conscious contact, the fear goes away. It doesn't scare me like it did when I first got clean.

Finding Peace

I don't think it's a new principle, but somebody asked Christ, "What are the greatest commandments." He said, "Love God, love your neighbor as yourself," which is why I focus on the [twelve steps](#). The steps kind of give you a way of healing three areas of your life: your relationship with God, your relationship with yourself, and your relationship with other people.

In all of the discord in my life, the reason I could never have peace of mind or achieve any peace, was because I wasn't at peace with my relationship with God. I wasn't at peace with my relationship with myself, and I wasn't at peace in my relationships with others. I think the twelve steps are so successful because they lead us back to correct those three areas of our lives, and that creates a spiritual healing in us. We are living the way that we are intended to live.

I believe that we were created to lie down in green pastures and walk beside the still water and all that stuff, and we can bring ourselves back to that, not withdrawn in a bedroom vomiting blood, and getting shot, and getting stabbed, and all this painful stuff ...

Another Phase

It's not a perfect world. My goal, and my hope, is that I don't harm other people. If I enter into a relationship with someone I pray to God that I won't harm that other person. I don't want to be hurt either.

I've had some big setbacks in my life. My wife finally got tired of me being sick. She said, "You're sick, I'm not. I'm going on with my life." She met someone else and had a baby. And I prayed for their baby, that their baby would be healthy. I prayed for them. Not because I'm a great person, but because I didn't want them to have a sick baby. But, that wasn't where I was in the beginning of this whole thing. I was just like anyone else, I was reacting out of my hurt and anger and stuff like that. Again, it's just part of the journey, just another phase.

Seeking Forgiveness

When I first left I was living in my van because I couldn't afford to live anywhere else. I didn't know what I was going to do. One day I woke up, drove over to Valley Forge Park, parked my van and I was talking to God. Somebody had given me a book on forgiveness. I read the first chapter, and I said, "God, I can't do this. I can't do it." Closed the book. Again, it sounds crazy, but I hear the voice say, "Find this guy, he'll help you."

A couple years before that, a friend of ours who had cancer came to stay with us, and died at our house. Somebody got a minister to do the service, but I didn't know the guy. All I knew was that he was from some church on 363, I remembered hearing that. But at the time in the park, I saw this guy's face in my mind, and I heard, "Find this guy, he'll help you."

I had liked what he said at the service, "We're all about love. We're all about God being love." He seemed like a decent, God loving man.

Seeking Help

So, I get in my van and I drive up to every church on 363 and knock on the door and I say, "Listen, do you know this guy? He's kind of bald and he's a minister." "Nope." I go to the next church, "Do you know this guy, he's bald..." "Nope." I go to the next church. "His father was a minister, I think he mentioned when he was talking..." "Nope."

I finally ended up all the way up in Lansdale. I go into this place and I say, "Listen, I know this sounds crazy, but do you know this guy, I'd like to talk to him. He's bald, and I think his father used to be a minister." The lady goes, "Oh, you want Pastor Tim, Dr. Tim. He's our family therapist." So I go, "Yeah! I think that's him!"

Moving On

So, every Wednesday, after my prison meeting, I would go up there, and he'd take his lunch break off and he would meet with me. It was exactly the very thing that I needed. I saw him for two years. He used to say to me, "You are in the trenches. I'm up in the crystal cathedral. We're both workers, and we are both working at the same goal. You help me, to remind me of that. And I can help you to remind that part of yourself, that you don't deny that part of yourself, in order to please anyone else."

Overwhelmed with Gratitude

The first Christmas I was out of the house I was really struggling financially. I only had about \$200 for everybody. I was still keeping the bills up, the kids were living with their mother. She was working, they had the boyfriend's money, the mother, her family, her. I'm thinking, they're going to have all this stuff. They're going to be the heroes, I'm going to be the bum who didn't give his kids any presents. I'm up at the prison, and I'm talking about that.

There was a guy talking, he's kind of like an old boxer. He's not criticizing me in any way, he's just sharing his story, but it's right on target. He goes, "You know, I just wanted to share that I got a chance. I ain't been able to work outside the block. They let me work on the one side and made 48 cents an hour. I messed up over there. Then they let me work on the other side. I got in trouble over there too. So, now I can only work on the block. I make like 26 cents an hour working on the block."

He said, "You know, I ain't had to buy no drugs, or nothing, this year, right? You know what, it's the first year I was able to save up six dollars to send my daughter a Christmas present. I sent her six dollars for Christmas. Do you know what that means to me?" He was looking up, and his face is lit up. He's sending this energy to God, that he's so grateful. And he said, "A lot of you guys, you know my story. You know my daughter has got AIDS, right? And I ain't been able to be there for seven years."

And man, I left that prison crying hysterically. I got outside and I thought, "Man, how can I lose focus, Lord? How can I get so distracted that that is what's important?" You know what I mean? And look at this guy. He's still grateful. He was overwhelmed with gratitude. And I'm there complaining! This is why I keep doing the daily reprieve. I have to keep doing that to renew my spirit, to renew my spirit, to renew my spirit. Because those are the times when, if I just sat home and thought about my problems, they'd overtake me, and I'd lie down.

Keep Moving

The doctors used to tell my dad when he had cancer, "Don't lie down. If you lie down you'll never get up." And, that's my motto. You got guys with the shovels, with the dirt. If you lie down, man, they are going to start throwing that dirt on top of you. You gotta keep moving.

Anyway, those are the experiences that happened to me and when I find that I'm a little bit in despair, by staying active with other people, God always finds a way to get the message through to me. As long as I put myself in the channel. Like that St. Frances prayer says.

Moved with Compassion

If you've ever seen a tree that was hit by lightening, you know if you cut it open you can see how it's changed inside. That force going through it can't pass through it without changing it inside. And that's exactly how I feel.

I come out of the prisons some nights and look at Kurt, and we both have tears running down our eyes because we're just so moved – not sad – but moved with compassion. And that's where the love comes from. That's how God shows his face to me. He allows me to feel that love through the compassion I feel for those suffering people. Sometimes I've even sat in there and I've heard a voice, the God inside of them, saying "Get me out of here." Looking out over the prison and hearing the God in them crying out to me to help them out of there.

Life's Fertilizer

I guess if there's a signal for spiritual healing its that if you're trying to help somebody else God can take all the crap in your life, and use it for fertilizer. And then it doesn't stink up your life anymore. But if you try to handle it on your own, its like picking up that crap and trying to handle it, you're just going to stink up your whole life. But if you give it to God, and you use it in ways like that, God always finds a way to get that message through to you. I come out of the meetings and I'm transformed inside, I'm telling you.

Positive Energy

I tested positive for active Hepatitis back in '95. I had a biopsy done. The last couple years I've gone to the doctor to get my clearance done, and my Hepatitis C is undetectable. And I could never take the treatments, the interferon, because of my heart, because of my spine, because of my nerve damage. I went to Temple, and Einstein, and Penn, and all these places, thinking, well maybe they could help me with the liver. They said, "You can't take the medicine because of the nerve damage. You have to be in relatively good health." I didn't even think I could qualify for a transplant. They're not going to give me a transplant, I've got too many other medical problems.

I don't understand why that happened How come I'm fixed and there are others... you know, I see this little girl on TV crawling through a cardboard box, with no legs, on her hands, on her knuckles, shuffling through the thing. I don't want to get fixed before her, you know what I mean? That was my prayer, "God, fix her first, then fix me." But, somehow. . .

I had this inclination to stop eating meat about ten years ago. I followed my instinct. Don't eat meat, fish, anything like that. Keep letting that positive energy pass through me. Put myself in the channel. You know, trying to walk a little bit, do things, get back some of my life. Now, the hepatitis isn't showing up. I don't know what that's about. I really don't know. But, I know that as long as I have that good stuff passing through me, its going to change me.

Feeling Healed

Sometimes, not being able to just go to the bathroom, it really makes me sick. I get migraine headaches, get nauseous, I get terrible sick. I have bleeding problems with my kidneys and my bowels, you know, at different times. My ears bleed and my nose bleeds. I'd go through this stuff, man, and I'm feeling really lousy, just beat, and I come out of meeting and I feel healed. I feel okay. Not only do I feel okay, we go out to a diner afterwards and we laugh and we joke and we have fun, and I enjoy myself, or we go watch the Sixers game. It's like, I just feel terrific. And before that, when Kurt shows up to get me, man, he's going, "Are you alright?" and I'm like, "You know, I'm just feeling a little wiped out or something." And bam, I come out of the meeting and I'm transformed, even physically.

Influencing the Heart

So maybe there's something in that that can help physically. I've had a couple mini strokes. I don't think that God is going to send out a lightening bolt. I don't think he's going to fix everything in my life just because I have a relationship with God. That sets up expectations, which set up resentments. Rather than that, I know what he will do and I know what he can do, because I know what he's done for me -- he can influence the way the doctors think. He can give them the ability to discern what's wrong and how to help. He can influence their heart and give them some compassion so they don't just treat me like another piece of meat because of my history of drug addiction, or they don't treat me like I'm dirty and disgusting.

I've had those experiences in the hospital, where people treat me like, "Oh, you're one of those." Like, they don't understand I've been clean for twenty years. They still see me as this drug addict because that's part of my past history, my medical history. But, I pray for them to overcome those kind of prejudices, or stereotypes, and allow them to do what they've been lead to do by Him through their life.

Prayers Answered

I think, sometimes when we're praying for a cure, I don't think that our prayers go unanswered. There might be some kid who is sixteen years old who is being led by God to go into medicine. Then he gets into medicine and he's led into research. Then, in research he finds a cure for some disease. That's the answer to a prayer, maybe way down the line, but that's how God works.

Things come about, the answers to prayers, but it may not always be visible to us anymore than God is visible to us. And even though I can get distressed by things that happen in the world, and the fact that they are newsworthy means that they are the exception to the rule, rather than the rule. It's not newsworthy, but most people are good. So, I know God is operating somewhere inside of them. He's helping them. I always believe that somehow everything is going to be okay.

A Clearer View

When my healing began I was just getting a glimpse of hope through the despair, but I was blocked by the fear and the doubt and insecurities. And then, over time, and through experience, and trying to find and develop my relationship with my higher power, those things have been removed, a little bit at a time, and they don't obscure the view as much as they used to. Most of the time I can see the truth as it is. I don't see the illusion of the truth. It's kind of like the illusion of our bodies. Its like God gives you a banana, and you throw away the fruit, you want to keep the skin. You keep the illusion of that part of it.

Eluding Illusions

A lot of life, I think, is like that. You want to hold onto something that isn't really real. It's an illusion. Like happiness -- it's an illusion of happiness. "This is going to make me happy. That is going to make me happy." I've read before that happiness is a byproduct of doing the right thing. It's like a butterfly, if you keep chasing it, it keeps eluding you. But when you stop and sit still, maybe sometimes it will just land on your shoulder. I believe that.

A lot of lessons are like that, particularly for me. Maybe I'm just stupid and it takes me a long time to learn things. Even today, or this week, I'm learning things, or having things that I've learned reinforced in me. Belief systems are changing, or I'm developing a more loving relationship with God.

Dichotomy

I know that even me loving God is dependent on his grace giving me the ability to love. I'm doing this for him, but he's got to do it for me for me to do it for him. With spiritual stuff there are so many dichotomies. Something appears this way, but it's really the opposite.

Addiction is like that. It tells you what's good is bad, and what's bad is good for you. A lot of things that we think are going to make us fulfilled or happy are the things that we avoid, and the things that we are afraid to embrace. And the things that end up making us unhappy are the things we chase after. We believe the illusion of the truth, rather than the truth itself.

Family

When I was laying in that intensive care unit and I thought I was going to die, I was in a panic to get Kurt in there, and Father Mike, and my friend Rev. Underwood. I was saying, "I want to see these guys." Everybody was coming to the hospital and telling them they were my brother, black guys, white guys. They'd say, "This is your brother?" I'd say, "Yes, it is." This other guy, an Italian guy, "Is this your brother?" "Yes, he is, let him in!"

But my big hurry was to get these guys in there and to everyone of them I'd say, "Listen, if I don't make this, please, just stay in contact with my kids, and let them know about our God, the God that we talked about on the way to the prison, the God that we share in those times, in retreat. Let them know what I believe, so that they can have that if I'm not around. I made them promise me that they would do that, that they would stay involved in my kids' lives, you know.

But thank God, that didn't happen. I didn't die. I thought that was it, but it wasn't it. Not then. I don't know why, but you know, it just didn't happen.

Loving and Understanding

I would say healing is being able to love, rather than seeking to be loved. Just like it says in the Saint Francis prayer (see page 25). Try to understand, rather than be understood. To me that's what healing is doing.

Light Shining Through

I was on retreat, where they have fifteen minutes of prayer time set aside in one adoration room. Usually, when I'd go in there it was daytime, and I'd see the light coming through the beautiful stained glass. One night I went in there, when I was going through the sickness and all. It was dark outside, and all I could see were gray shadows where the stained glass normally is. And I thought about how much like that our lives are. We're just in this gray, kind of shadow world. We need that light to shine through us to make us beautiful, like the beauty of that stained glass. It's only possible when the light is going through it. So, knowing that, is the healing for me. Knowing that I need that light passing through me, is the surest sign I know, for me to define healing.

You know, the spiritual awakening that they talk about in the steps is exactly that. It's like waking up to the fact. Like I said before, the things that were good were bad, and the things that were bad were good. But when you get to that spiritual awakening you can see the good, and the right, and you can learn to listen to the voice inside and tune into the guidance system that you have, and allow it.

Pray for Guidance

Every morning I pray for God to direct my thinking throughout the day, not let it be full of self-centered thinking. I just pray for God to direct my day. If I'm having particular trouble with something, if I find that I'm short tempered, or something is going on in my life and its effecting my serenity, I pray for God to help me with that particular thing for that day. I figure God is not going to crash any party. He ain't coming unless he's invited. He only comes in if you ask him into the process. And when I do that, then throughout the day, I'll be reminded of the request I made earlier in the day to have him help me.

My sponsor used to say "Ask yourself in every situation, what would God want you to do?" If you're a Christian you can say, "What would Christ do?" If you're Muslim you could say, "What would Mohammed do?" If you were Jewish you could say, "What would Moses do in this situation?" Whatever your faith base is, you can still come back to that thing.

Like a Baby

Almost all the time, I know the right way to respond. I don't always do it, believe me, I'm just as flawed. When I first came into the program, some old woman who was working at Eagleville said, "Some day you'll thank God for your shortcomings, or your weaknesses." I used to hate being sensitive. I used to hate it, it made me feel weak, like when my mom used to hug me. Like a baby or something.

A Greater Capacity

But today, I'll tell you the truth, I'm riding in my car and singing songs to God, pretending he's singing to me, that James Taylor song, "You Got a Friend." I think God is singing to me sometimes, or I'm singing to him. You know, it makes me cry tears of joy.

And here's the other thing. I know a lot of people that feel this way, because I deal with a lot of them in prison and all. The fact that you feel worthless and no good can be exactly the reason why you have a greater capacity for gratitude. I'm not saying that God loves you more, but our capacity for love may even be greater. Our capacity for gratitude may even be greater than the guy who doesn't have the sense of worthlessness and the stuff that we've had to struggle with. Even physical health, or if you lost your job, or maybe you're a woman and you had breast cancer and your husband couldn't handle it and he left you. Whatever you are going through, instead of believing the lie that you're worthless, believe that because of your situation, maybe you have a greater capacity in you to be one of those amid the crowd that can satisfy the great spirit's need to be loved. You can give something back.

I would say to someone going through an especially challenging part of their healing process, "God knows you're weary. But he doesn't want you to give up. He wants you to keep turning people to him. And he loves you. He knows you're weary but he loves you. He doesn't want you to give up."

Knowing Love

Sometimes I feel like everything is broken apart in my life and I'm kind of in pieces, but not so much now. I just go, "Okay." But before, I let it really affect me. And my family breaking up. But now, when something like that happens, and I get caught up in all the fear and all the crap, and all the stuff that goes along with that experience, the hurt, the despair, I always go back to this prayer, "God, I know I'm not where you may want me to be. And I know I'm not where I want to be right now, I'm not the person I want to be right now, but I know you love me. And I know you will put me back together again. I'm going to give you the time, and I'm going to give myself the time for

you to do that.” That’s my prayer. I pray that over and over again, knowing that he loves me, and knowing that he holds all the stars in place, and everything in heaven. And I don’t give him credit for holding together my little existence, my little emotions, or my little whatever is going on in my life? So, when I give that back to him I take away the potential for resentment because it ain’t getting done at my pace. I take away the inclination that I have for perfectionism.

Be Good to Yourself

The last thing my sponsor used to say to me before he died was, “Be good to yourself, kid.” He knew I would be so hard on myself. He didn’t have to tell me to be good to other people because that was a part of what we shared with each other and what we loved about each other. But he knew he had to remind me of that. Everytime he talked to me he used to end that way, “Be good to yourself, kid.” You really gotta be good to yourself. You really gotta, somewhere inside there, know that it’s okay that you don’t get it right away.

You Don’t Have to Be Perfect

I’m not like a Bible thumper, but there’s another example in the Bible about that. Peter is the guy who says, “I don’t know who that guy is.” He denies Christ three times. Then he comes back to Peter and says, “I want to make you the head of the church.” He doesn’t hold him in contempt. He doesn’t minimize his position after that. In fact, these guys were walking around the earth with Christ. Whatever you believe Christ to be – prophet, guy, whatever, you’d have to believe that at least he worked a good program, right? Prayed for people that were hurt, you know, offended him, he did things like that. He would turn to them and say, “Didn’t you guys hear anything I said? Didn’t you learn nothing? Weren’t you paying attention?” I mean, when he’s dying himself he says, “Hey, why do you forsake me?”

How many times in our lives, especially with this kind of stuff, we just feel forsaken. Maybe he said that for our benefit, maybe he was really feeling that, which I believe, because he was human, he felt human. He felt forsaken by God. But what was his choice? He was at one of those crossroads I told you about in your spiritual life. He could have ended his life saying “kill them dirty, rotten, so-and-so’s” and then his whole message would have changed, right at that point. The next thing he said was “Alright into your hands I commend my spirit.” He even questioned God’s will when he went to pray before they came and got him. He said, “Look if there’s any other way this can come about, hey, I don’t want to drink from this cup!”

So, there’s all kinds of examples in there that say you don’t have to be perfect in order to have a relationship with God. Not only that, I read one time, our imperfections put holes in our armor that are the very holes that God can enter through. That’s the thing that allows an opening for him to get through to us. So, I sure got plenty of gaping holes in there, in my armor. You know what I mean? And that’s a good thing. It doesn’t seem like it, but it is. Sometimes I really am grateful.

Not Separate

I just wish that, as hopeless as people think their situation is, that they could realize that nothing will happen in life, nothing, that together you and God can’t handle.

My friend had thirteen years and he relapsed. He’s dead now, he died back in jail. I went to the hospital to visit him and we had a little meeting, and I read this to him: “Nothing can separate us from the love of God. No power, no principality, no disease, no death. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” And I believe that with all my heart.

The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
...where there is injury, pardon;
...where there is doubt, faith;
...where there is despair, hope;
...where there is darkness, light;
...where there is sadness, joy;*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
...to be consoled as to console;
...to be understood as to understand;
...to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;
...it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
...and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

The following websites are provided as sources of information about resources mentioned.

Eagleville	http://www.eaglevillehospital.com/about.asp
Enneagram	http://www.enneagraminstitute.com
Kahlil Gibran	http://www.leb.net/gibran
twelve steps	http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

To order books referred to, click on them in the story or go to www.Amazon.com

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Alcoholics Anonymous, 1996
 Emmet Fox, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1989
 Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 1981
 Harold S. Kushner, *When Everything You Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*
Twenty-four Hours a Day, Hazeldon Publishers, 1975

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