The Spiritual Journey
From Addiction to Recovery
Gathering Courage

Every moment of my life, I’m either living more fully or withdrawing into less. I can challenge my fears or believe them. I can expand my point of view or try to protect it. I can work with life circumstances or struggle against them. I can believe in myself or find myself lacking.

It’s a process! I’m more courageous now than I used to be. Every time I set a boundary, say what I need, or stand up for what’s important to me, my courage grows. Even if my stomach is doing flip-flops as I take that next step, I feel brave!

I’m my own hero! I don’t even have to do it well; I just need to do it.

For years I used sleep as an escape. My life just didn’t feel right, and I was afraid to look at the reasons, so I hid from them. Of course, things only got worse. Finally, I started to trust myself enough to make changes. It was scary and led to some sleepless nights, but it was worth it. One tiny step at a time, I created a life that feels right to me. I deserve a life I don’t have to hide from.

Walking through my fears helps me awaken to the unexpected strength I’ve had all along. Gathering courage as I go, I gain momentum with every gutsy step, no matter how small. Today I move forward, becoming more of who I want to be.

Finding God in Recovery

I did not kill myself that night, despite my intention. Like most nights, I sat in the basement with my last friend, a dwindling case of red wine. I still remember the pain and regret, the shame and self-loathing, the complete isolation from people, anger from my husband and children, jobs lost, and friendships ruined. I could not look at myself in the mirror. I cried imagining there would be nothing nice said at my funeral. Even God was disgusted with me.

Just as I wondered whether anyone would care, a beam of light through the small, basement window fell on the wine glass in my hand. I looked at the glowing liquid with a sudden awareness about myself: This is what you do all night, every night, and some days too. No. I did not want to be dead. I wanted everything to be different.

Somewhere inside, a still, small voice said, “Tomorrow, you will not drink.” I did not drink the next day but kept a lunch date with a recent acquaintance and networking connection. I barely knew her, yet I
sobbed through lunch, unable to hold back the misery. She went to get something from her car and returned with a used paperback she had picked up the day before at a garage sale.

I had read half of that book, *A Return to Love* by Marianne Williamson, when I found the courage to call Alcoholics Anonymous. Maybe God was not done with me after all.

I had given no thought to God in the years I drank. My husband had been my Higher Power, the source of my physical and emotional well-being for 30 years. I did not know I was codependent or emotionally abused, nor did I have the courage to leave. No one knew the chaos and violence inside our home.

I had not considered that there was a spiritual aspect to me or that I was more than a physical being. I had been religious at times, but I never had an awareness of Spirit or that I was being guided.

Still, I fought the idea of a Higher Power. I was not giving over my will so fast. When someone suggested I think of God as “Good Orderly Direction,” I went with that, learning to do “the next right thing”: eating when I was hungry, sleeping when I was tired, even remembering to do laundry, feed my kids, or pay a bill. I was relearning the simplest things so my life could be manageable in the smallest of ways.

I had trouble focusing and couldn't read right away. Yet healing was taking place as I did what I could. The promises I read in the *Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book*, assured me that if I didn't drink, one day at a time, I would “not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.” I wanted that more than anything else. There were caring, encouraging people around me. I leaned on their faith while not really having any of my own.

Then one day it happened: My awareness of God showed up in a lightbulb moment as I understood the third step! It says: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

This came with the knowing that God forgave me. The judgment had come from me, not God. Now I had a decision to make. Was I going to rely on me alone, the self-involved, ego-driven personality that had “Edged God Out (EGO),” or would I choose to live while listening for God's will for me? That is when I heard the small voice say, “If God is your copilot, let him fly the plane!”

Instantly, I felt a weight lift from my soul. I did not have to do this alone. I began to understand God as unconditional love and an always gentle wisdom that I was worthy to receive.

I had not considered that there was a spiritual aspect to me or that I was more than a physical being. I had been religious at times, but I never had an awareness of Spirit or that I was being guided.

It has been better than all right. The person holding the wine glass in the basement did die. Someone new emerged. With God, I have gotten through life’s hardest challenges—deaths, divorce, starting a business and losing one, unemployment, and cancer—by not drinking and becoming someone useful.

All the promises have come true, one day at a time. It has been an evolving thing, but God only gets bigger and more essential to my life. 💙
Are you trying to stay clean and sober and wondering why everyone keeps saying that spirituality is necessary for recovery? You may be asking, Why can’t I just stop using and drinking? Isn’t that the whole point?

The answer to that question lies in the very nature of addiction itself, and you might find it surprising! The bottom line is that abstinence is not the same as recovery. Having abused body, mind, and spirit with alcohol and/or drugs, simply removing the substances does not repair the damage. The body is sick, the mind is confused, and the spirit is beaten. Recovery is movement in the direction of reunifying all the damaged parts. This reunification can be understood as a return to wholeness.

My own recovery journey has encompassed all three aspects of being: body, mind, and spirit. At its core, my experience has been that this journey toward wholeness is a spiritual journey. Follow me through it for a few moments here and see what you think.

Abstinence withdraws the poison. This will eventually return the physical body to a more normal state, though abstinence alone ignores the mental and spiritual issues that are also present. Abstinence alone is what we call “white knuckle” sobriety. It’s holding on tight in order to avoid a relapse yet being tormented by the untreated symptoms of mental and spiritual decay.

Mentally we may be stuck in old patterns of thought that are keeping us sick. For example, we may not know how to function effectively in relationships with others. We may be dishonest, take things too personally, find ourselves without patience and tolerance, and it seems that the only right ideas are our ideas.

We can work on our behavior—just “stop doing that”—and see our lives improve. Yet we may still be subject to depression and a feeling of worthlessness. Just as abstinence is only part of the solution, so it is with changing our behaviors. There is still something missing, and we can sense it.

Spiritually we might feel lost in the world, not having a sense of who we are and what is important in life. We might begin to realize that we have ideas about God, the Universe, the world around us, good and evil, how we fit into the picture, and so on that are now coming into question.

We might wonder if there isn’t a better way to see these things. This is where the real power of sobriety comes into play. It is only by exploring these deep questions of life and finding a new understanding that we gain the peace and serenity we so desperately desire.

Perhaps you can assess your program of recovery. Perhaps it feels as if there is something missing. Maybe some new ideas, tools, and/or techniques are called for to address all three areas of your life.

If you are focused on abstinence, that’s good. It’s the essential first step. But when you are able, think about what you can add to that to address your other needs. Talk to your trusted friends and stretch your comfort zone. You will soon be walking in the sunlight of the Spirit as the uniquely created individual you are!
In this moment, there is perfect recognition of Divine Power as all limitations fall away.

You are lifted up into this realization through your own ability to hold on to your presence of being beyond any limiting thoughts or feelings.

True peace enters your heart and mind and reintroduces itself to you as perfect harmony. You remember the grace with which you have always wandered this world. You are such grace within the beauty of your existence. God grace is fulfilled within and through you. God love is your breath of life.

Your doubts, fears, and sickness are real and impacting at your human level. You do not ignore them nor deny them but slowly open yourself up to what is more of who you are. Nothing can truly sway you from your path even though sometimes that is exactly how your inner and outer world appears to you.

You no longer give power to anything less than what you already feel, intuit, and truly understand at the very depth of your being. Instead, you affirm the very Christ presence within you that recognizes itself through the tender heart, gentle touch, and compassion you extend to others. Now is the time to turn your power around and apply it to yourself.

Allow yourself to receive from all directions and from all who extend their helping hand to you, whether you recognize them or not. Right now, allow yourself to give back to you with all the passion you usually extend to others. Therein lies the power of true surrender.

Even if you may not see the gratitude in all, simply thank yourself for the strength within you to ask for help. The gift of vulnerability serves you well. And for that, we say thank you. And so it is.

PRAYER FOR Healing

AMEN.