

Lessons In Forgiveness

A Ministry For Healing

By

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PREFACE

This is your personal journal, which will guide you along in your journey toward each lesson that is in store for you. No two people are exactly the same and so your experience with your journal should reflect your unique way of understanding and processing the stories and practice experiences that are a part of the Lessons in Forgiveness workbook. You will quickly see that journal has a structure for each day. We ask you to develop a routine of daily journaling, as it will build upon itself only as much as you devote yourself to this experience. The structure is easy to follow and intended to be fun as well as growthful. To be candid, this process will require you to take action and therefore you can expect that your comfort level will be challenged by Lessons. The good news is that this is neither a test nor a course in self-discipline. You cannot fail or make a mistake in the Lessons process. You immediately have the opportunity to either follow our suggested course as it is outlined, or to make up your own

directions as you move along. In either case the Lessons In Forgiveness are strictly your own.

The format of Lessons is quite simple which makes the profound impact it has all the more curious to people who try to 'figure it out' to no avail. Why this works is entirely unimportant right now. Suffice to say that understanding is wonderful but not required. We urge you who need to KNOW and UNDERSTAND to try, in spite of your intellectual craving, and take the Lessons as they come to you. For many that desire and seek to find forgiveness, the Lessons will flow but not without effort, and to some degree-pain. Do not fear as you have already experienced the bulk of hurtful feelings that you had to endure. In fact, these are the pains, which probably motivated you to reach out for help to begin with. Our intent is not to scare you away from using this material, but to be honest from the very beginning to give you the most opportunity to trust in the unfamiliar. We ask you to make this effort not because you know you can, but because you feel you must learn LESSONS IN FORGIVENESS.

INTRODUCTION

Our capacity to forgive begins with our pain and moves backward in time. The injury we sustained is often the place we go to in attempting to find a forgiving spirit. This is fruitless because the place in time where we were caused to hurt is also the place we decided not to forgive. This simple truth is why so many have made unsuccessful journeys in their lives towards an ever-allusive forgiveness. It is our desire to show you a method of working towards forgiveness, because the wounds you feel can create an enormous barrier to healing and growth. The essence of healing is at the heart of our mission. Forgiveness is the process that can bring us to complete this mission.

We have created nothing magical, yet there is mystery to be found in this personal and interpersonal experience. The process of forgiving someone or, something for harming us is possible for anyone willing to make the effort. This workbook contains all the necessary information to help you along in your healing. We have identified a systematic approach that includes five pivotal areas that will become your guides as you

develop the keys to unlock forgiveness in your heart. These pivot points cannot be effectively utilized as a pick and choose offering. The Lessons in Forgiveness are truly what the title implies. One lesson builds on another, and so there are required elements which act as prerequisites. We have also found that there is remarkable flexibility in approaches towards some of the elements in this highly personal experience. The journal will reflect your personal effort throughout the Lessons process.

The pivotal areas for the Lessons in Forgiveness are metaphor, reflections, practice exercises, skill development, and journal maintenance. These are the primary headings you will notice in the workbook itself. They should be viewed as categories of development in your personal growth. The metaphors are comprised of a series of storytelling events, which are featured at the beginning of each lesson. The stories are intended to expand your thinking and facilitate concept formation for a more complete understanding of forgiveness. Following each metaphor is a practice exercise designed to generate experiences that are essential for healing. You can be

confident that the exercises you will be given will not exceed your abilities. It is imperative to know that your willingness may be tested with at least one exercise. If so, be sure not to skip that particular one, as it may be what has held you back in the past. The reflections are personal experiences that we share with you. We give these to you freely as a part of our own Lessons in Forgiveness. Skill development is the foundation of Lessons in Forgiveness. The end of each segment will contain a brief discussion about the skills you need to have obtained from that section of the workbook. Your skill building must be in place before advancing to the next level. If you have not acquired the skills necessary, then forgiveness will be incomplete. Please review these discussion areas carefully and be available to the possibility that some skill areas may be more difficult and take longer to develop than others. Journal maintenance is the fifth pivotal area in the Lessons program. You may have kept a journal or diary in the past, however this is highly specialized to suit the healing forgiveness will bring to your life. The journal has a structure that provides you with some inspirational encouragement, and specific questions for each day. At the end of each week of journal entries, you are

provided with an opportunity for rest. You may use this as simply a break or you may decide to highlight your skill building experiences. The journal is perhaps the most flexible aspect in the Lessons workbook because you can write what you choose and move at your own pace. This is not an optional aspect of the process by any means. We have clearly said that there are five pivotal areas in this workbook and all are equally important. If you are undecided about your commitment to work on all of these areas; then we suggest you stop now and reconsider when you are entirely prepared to find a spirit of forgiveness in your life.

Chapter One

THE BIG FISH

Some people have never known the excitement of catching a really large fish. You may, in fact, have no desire to go fishing at all. In any case there is a great opportunity to understand and learn from the experience of going after the *big one!* Your journey might take you in search of many big desires of the heart. Our fishing tale can be related to any great search, as you will soon discover. Fish with your heart, your mind and with all your strength as you read THE LESSON OF THE BIG FISH.

Fishing can be for sport or food, but in either event you are always looking forward to landing the biggest one in the pond. If you decide to go fishing and are in search of that creature from the deep, then you need to prepare yourself for a long day. When you catch small fish you need to quickly reel them in so they don't get away. This is not the case when you go after *the big one*. You will need a strong line, and plenty of patience to catch this fish. As a fisherman knows, when a truly

big fish takes the bait, you have just started a long days work. You certainly can't just reel him in like a guppy because he will break your line and maybe take your rod out to sea. You are going to have to play with this fish for awhile. You have spent much time in preparing for this moment. Selecting the right lure as bait-probably a very shiny and well adorned one to get easily noticed. Perhaps you made this lure yourself to personally conquer the beast using your skill and wits in the hunt. As the great one lunges for your baited hook you realize the splendor of the chase has begun. Feet dug firmly into the earth, you maneuver the rod to place tension on the line, producing a grappling effect as the hook gouges deeply into the mouth of your sea giant. Then, after a brief struggle, you release the tension from your line to permit the fish full access to swim its territory. Of course you know that in a few moments you will tighten the line again to exert your power and control over this creature.

Your excitement at the catch is not complete without bringing in that big fish you have angled toward your banks. As you stand proudly at the waterside, you are completely aware that this creature is strutting along the bottom looking

for more to eat. This fish believes it's free again each time you let up for awhile. Slowly, you wear him down. Reel in and hold, then release. You have found a synchronicity to the motions of your arms, hands, and the waves that slap the shore. That fish, *your fish*, has lost its robust character. Now it is only your desire that leaves it out there. The conquest is over. It is time to bring him in. You gently roll the line over the spindle inside the reel. Your monstrous catch does not fight or struggle in the least. It comes to you relieved of its torment. Tired of the burden it has endured for so long. This giant has been sought after by so many, for so long that you feel pity for its difficult life. This is a moment of decision. Do you throw it back to fight again, or take it as a proud trophy? If it is hunger that brings you to this point then your answer is swift and the fish becomes food. If you are out for sport, then you must decide to either keep it or set it free.

A true fisherman who captures a great fish will undoubtedly bring it in for the show as a final testimony to his skill. Pity or not, the great fish can only be caught by the greater fisherman. This *big fish* becomes a showpiece for the sportsman who patiently and skillfully practiced the art of hunting the waters.

In this Lesson it is imperative to see that the *big fish* is not what it appears to be. You are the fish! Your pains, worries, and dependencies are always looking to catch you. They have skills that have developed in your life over time. They have had practice at capturing your attention with the lure of shiny well- adorned things. You may realize at this point that you already have a hook in you somewhere. Can it be true that you were hooked long ago by a cunning fisherman that has let you believe you are free when in fact you are about to be reeled in and mounted? Look again at this tale and substitute yourself for the fish, and replace the fisherman with the source of your emotional struggles.

In the week ahead, be sure your journal entries reflect the true measure of power and control you have over your life's circumstances. You may do this simply by focusing more on the problem that is trying to 'catch' you. This is risky and generally futile as it only makes you struggle to free yourself through another battle with the fisherman again. We suggest you carefully review each day for extraordinary happenings. List these events as either accidents or coincidences in your daily journal.

PRACTICE EXERCISE ONE

HOPEFULLNESS

The exercises are strongly suggested as they have all been created to specifically provide an atmosphere within you, as well as around your life that enhances and draws out the healing experience. For this week and as long as you desire afterwards, remind yourself as often as possible, that the most incredible thing in your life is about to happen to you. Imagine that as you turn the corner, open the door to your home or work, you are about to discover something so amazing that you will shout out loud with joy. Do this at least twice a day and make a mental note or write down what happens as a result.

Notes for Practice Exercise One: Hopefulness

INSPIRATION

What was Albert Einstein's self-image? Did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. feel inadequate because he was a junior? Perhaps Aristotle had an inferiority complex. It is impossible to ascertain the answers to such questions and in fact, we would hardly consider such ideas about people who represent such great achievements in our world. Do any of the truly outstanding men and women of an age know of the remarkable place they create in time?

Most of us have no idea what is about to take place in our lives enough to envision such miraculous work that an entire generation might be affected. We are too preoccupied with the urgency of the moment to establish a firm grasp on our lives extending much beyond next week. The tragic result is that we ignore our higher calling to be creative beings of power. The power of love in action is creation.

We can develop this endless supply of energy by remaining free of the distractions of our world. These distractions are nothing other than noise/pollution of the mind, body, and

spirit. The temptations of pleasure we indulge in bind us to our own ego in such a way that seeing ourselves as great people, timeless individuals, is beyond comprehension. Only creative persons who act out of love for what they do can foresee their efforts as meaningful beyond their own lives.

Who are these creative and legendary people? They are the persons you meet every day who do a kindness for someone else. They are people who intentionally offer assistance when there is nothing to be had in doing so beyond the act itself. Great people become great without concern for their self-concept. The timelessness of love is a legacy that each of us can participate in through our own simple acts of kindness. Keep the legacy alive!

SKILL BUILDING EXERCISE

For the week ahead the task is simple and yet very difficult. You will need to randomly select a letter from the alphabet. Simply think of that letter and jot it down. Now, you have an assignment for this week and that is to find a person you don't know at all! This is ensured further because the person will be someone whose name begins with the letter you have selected. You will probably have to meet this individual to get their name but that is the limit of which you can be aquatinted with this person. Your job is to find a way to give them something important to you. Offer it freely in such a way that they do not know who the giver of the gift is. We suggest you give money or a valuable possession. How much of a gift you give is entirely up to you. The most significant aspect of this exercise is that you give to a stranger without the possibility of their knowing who gave it to them. After you have done this, watch to see what you receive afterwards. Be sure to note in your journal what you received and how much you value the gift. In looking forward to your gift, be reminded that not all gifts come in packages. You may be on your way to establishing a

foundation for spiritual gifts to enter your life. One final note about this exercise: as you receive a gift you are asked to say thank you. Say it aloud even if no one is around at the time. And be certain not to say more than that.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day One

Focus on Power for this day and where it comes from.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: In my madness I find rest. Many times I have enjoyed the chaos in a hectic day. I even enjoy acting bothered by the adrenaline rush that comes with a crisis. I feel a false sense of power that I absorb through this lifestyle. Today I seek refuge from the confusion and know that where there is true power, there is also great responsibility.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Two

Focus on engaging in the activities of the day to your full potential.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I do not wish to be a spectator of my own
life any longer. Make me a full-fledged participant in life.
Engage me with your will.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not, then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well

today: _____

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Three

Search for inspiration in the day to day routines of life.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: I search for creativity in this day that will inspire me. I look for inspiration born out of my longing to find my higher calling. Inspire me to your greatness and not my own self-serving desires.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today

What I will do better at in the future

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Four

What is a true friend? Make one of yourself and then look for others.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Who is my friend? I wish to know who
can befriend me. Is there someone else like me in this world?
Please let me find a true friend for all the seasons of my life.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Five

Vision is glorious when you can see your dreams come alive.

Be hopeful.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Prayer may help but I am unsure. I only
ask now for the possibility to find hope and not despair. Grant
my wish and my dream will survive another day.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

Today I rest myself to allow the Lessons of this past week to become a part of the person I want to be. The following lines are only to be used as notes and reminders of great significance. Do not write simply to fill up space. It is very important that you leave this page to write itself by only permitting the amazing or unbelievable to be placed on these lines. There is no harm in leaving the page blank. Remember: Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for yourself or for another is to do absolutely nothing at all!

REST

The space below is provided if you need unlined paper for drawing or other creative expressions.

Chapter Two

ENTRUSTING

One day a young child took a walk through the woods behind his home. It was a bright sunny day and he was a curious child who loved adventure. Naturally a walk in the forest was just the perfect opportunity to express his character. He jumped over logs and ran along streambeds, hunting grizzly bears with a pinecone as a compass and a rifle that he also used as a walking stick. His imagination conjured up notions of super heroes and villains he dispatched easily. After fighting a terrific battle he turned homeward and without need of his pinecone, he began his return. Walking down the trail a shadow caught the corner of his eye and the rustling of brush brought him to a stop. The young boy stood motionless as the sun bathed his skin while a gentle summer breeze dried him off. He again returned to the trail growing steadily closer to

home. He picked up his pace but tripped into the brush falling face down then rolling alongside a stream. Slowly he lifted himself to see the reflection of a young, dirty and slightly embarrassed boy in the water below. He chuckled and heard someone else chuckle as well. Now more humbled and blushing he turned, but no one was there. He rose quickly and spun his head around. Still he saw no one. A shadow caught his eye once again and he trembled. Now peering into the brush, the boy spotted a furry creature that resembled a silver haired woodchuck. The animal did not move at first and the boy remained still. Again the boy laughed at himself at blushing over a woodchuck, and the animal echoed his laughter. The boy stood transfixed with fear. Suddenly, the beast darted out from behind the tall grasses and the boy ran screaming down the trail.

Arriving home the young child stood in the safety of his yard with his heart pounding in his chest. Afraid but excited he was unsure what to do. “Should I tell my parents,” he thought to himself. Convinced that no one would believe him he

decided not to share this experience. The following day, he awoke with excitement about what he was sure to do. This day he would explore the forest again in search of his mysterious friend. He set out at once down the trail to the stream and to his amazement he found what he was looking for so easily it frightened him. There next to the stream, taking a drink was the animal he had never seen before yesterday. This time in plain unobstructed view, the boy gazed at this beautiful animal. It had bright silver fur on one side that appeared smooth, almost reflective. When it turned to its side the fur shined so brightly that it made the boy cover his eyes. When he removed his hand, the animal had left. There was no sign of it anywhere. For hours he walked the forest with no success at finding his friend. He returned home only to sleep and strengthen his resolve to locate this incredible animal.

As he lay in bed, the boy pondered what kind of trap he could set to capture the animal. He could put food out and dig a hole trying to lead the creature into a snare or pit, but he was unsure what kind of bait would entice this strange beast. He contemplated his options as he faded off to sleep. The morning sunlight gleamed through his window and he awoke. The

strange but familiar smell of hot dogs filled his room. The boy looked down to find a trail of hot dogs leading to his window which continued out beyond the house. The boy threw on his clothes and ran out to the trail of hot dogs that led him back through the forest to the stream. He stumbled as he spotted the animal behind a tree. This time the boy was not embarrassed or laughing about his fall, as a net quickly encircled him, knotting around his ankles then drawing him up straight in the air. Shocked at what had happened, the boy lay in a net several feet off the ground staring down at the strange beast. The animal stood with its reflective silky side showing. Terrified, the boy wailed and then pleaded but the creature did not respond. He quieted himself and heard a familiar voice. At first it sounded like laughter but turned into a rustling noise. In silence the young child looked down to see his reflection mirrored in the fur of the beast. Then a voice spoke to him quietly: "Fear does this," it said. The animal's fur gleaned as the boy looked intensely into it, seeing himself enmeshed in the net. The reflection disappeared and the animal turned and shined radiantly at the boy. The light was blazing and the boy closed his eyes but felt a warm glow from the radiance. He

slowly opened his eyes wide to find the sunlight shining brightly through his bedroom window with his blankets tucked around his feet. The boy awoke and went to his window. He sighed with relief as he looked out from the safety of his room. In the distance he saw a small silver haired woodchuck in the forest which stood on its hind legs and, peering at the boy, gave a laugh and ran deep into the woods.

PRACTICE EXERCISE TWO

THE MIRROR

Contained in the story you just read are the elements that create obstacles to forgiveness in our relationships. We frequently see the problem, as something done to us that can never be undone. We are trapped, as the boy was is our metaphor. Today you must begin the process of looking at the snare in your heart that keeps you captive inside the walls of bitterness, fear, and resentment. Go now, and find a mirror. Take your journal with you and write down what you feel as you complete this exercise. Look carefully at the mirror staring directly into your own eyes. What do you feel? How

do you feel about the person you see? What do you think about them? Do you trust him/her? Do you have confidence in that person you see? Do you respect that image? We urge you to be thorough about your journaling these questions. When you complete the Lessons in Forgiveness, we invite you to return to this exercise and do it again to check on you progress.

Notes for Practice Exercise Two: The Mirror

RISK

Perhaps one of the best-known and most beloved scriptural passages is the 23rd Psalm. A beautiful poem, the words paint wonderful images of God as a shepherd watching over, guiding, and protecting the sheep. It is a comforting sense of knowing ourselves to be secure in God's gracious

care, walking through green meadows, resting beside pools of cool, refreshing water.

But suddenly, without warning, everything changes; “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death....” “Whoa! What happened? We were just sitting in the peaceful green meadow, now all of a sudden, ‘...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...’ How did we get here?”

Most often I hear people speak of how we, as the sheep of this poem, sometimes make poor choices or turn and try to go our own way and find ourselves wandering into frightening, dangerous situations, i.e., “the valley of the shadow of death.” But the good news is of a Good Shepherd who can reach us and bring us back into the safety of the fold. This certainly is an appropriate and helpful interpretation. There is, however, another interpretation, which I believe is also important to explore.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to spend time in Israel. While there, I observed quite a few shepherds tending their flocks. One incident in particular made a lasting impression on me. I was seated on a hillside looking out over a

field in which a number of sheep were spread out grazing. A man walked out into the field. Being a considerable distance away, I could not tell if the man called, or whistled, or just stood there, but all of the sheep stopped eating and began to gather closely around the shepherd. He turned and walked out of the field, and all of the sheep followed behind their shepherd, walking as close to him as they could. The sheep would have followed the shepherd anywhere he led them.

Suddenly, I thought of this psalm. The sheep did not accidentally wander into the valley. The shepherd took them there.

Why, I wondered, would God, our shepherd, ever lead his sheep into a place that is dark, frightening, and perhaps even dangerous? On a journey of healing, there will be times when we will need to see and confront issues which we have worked desperately at avoiding; shame, guilt, anger, resentment, other memories or situations which we have held in denial. There are portions of the journey that feel much more like the dark valley of the shadow of death than like any safe, green meadow. Perhaps it is at those points that God stands out before us asking, "Will you trust me? There are

things in this valley that you do not want to look at, and I know that you are frightened. But I need you to trust me. What lies beyond the valley is so much better. But the only way to get there is to go through the valley. I can set you free of that which has held you bound, but only if you will see it and confront it. Now, will you trust me, or will you choose to run away again?"

SKILL BUILDING

This week your skill building is around the area of sensitivity. How sensitive are you to the needs and feelings that you have? Another way to say this is to ask three questions. 1) Do I truly care about this person/place/thing or circumstance? 2) Is it all right not to care? 3) Am I making an effort to stay numb to feelings about the person/place/ thing/ or circumstance? These three questions are for you to deliberately begin to explore what you believe is acceptable for your life. What kinds of things are O.K., and what is simply

out of bounds? Additionally, you need to consider what actions and feelings you have made acceptable, by changes in your beliefs that use to be unacceptable to you. Please review the three questions each day for the next five days and record any insights in you journal.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Six

Today let us look cleanly at defenses so as to use them properly.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: I have been victimized and played the victim role thoroughly with all the defensiveness I could muster. I have battled to say that which I knew was a lie. Free me from the past hurts, which I have endured for so long. Let me be genuine with others rather than shielded from them.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Seven

A resolution is possible in my life. Become eager for the moment it will happen.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: The beginning and ending --alpha and
omega. Here is resolution to my life's hardships. I seek to
problem-solve, rather than to problem resolve. Help me to
become a resolver.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Eight

Today you can be free to commit yourself to someone. Believe and commit to you.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Please allow me to continue my journey
to completion. I believe it is of importance, but my ego may
deceive me. I am dedicated to my calling. Strengthen my
commitment.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Nine

Character is the structure that personality dwells in.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I ask you to build a foundation within me.
Please give to me the stone and mortar needed to structure
character and mold my personality into it. Make me a
completed work.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Ten

The natural state of being is a safe one. Learn to trust your life process.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: I wonder and question my nature. Do I really believe in myself, my higher calling? I doubt, and then have faith. Is this mystery or foolishness? Teach me truth. Open me.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

Today I rest myself to allow the Lessons of this past week to become a part of the person I want to be. The following lines are only to be used as notes and reminders of great significance. Do not write simply to fill up space. It is very important that you leave this page to write itself by only permitting the amazing or unbelievable to be placed on these lines. There is no harm in leaving the page blank. Remember: Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for yourself or for another is to do absolutely nothing at all!

REST

The space below is provided if you need unlined paper for drawings or other creative expressions.

Chapter Three

THE STOVE

“Don’t touch that, it’s hot!” As children we heard many adultisms that became a part of our culture and personality. Don’t touch! Put that down or you’ll put your eye out! Not so high! Often times a parent or guardian was only trying to keep us safe. We may understand this now in our more mature age, but not as children. In fact the message we probably gleaned sounded more like the squawking of birds than anything else. We are very capable of clearly communicating information when there is no emotional attachment to the message, or an expectation of any importance associated with it. This is not always so when we talk to our kids. It was also not always the case with your parental figures. The message you eventually learned to understand was to *be careful*. This simple and precise statement of safety is easily lost in the fearful parent who knows they cannot keep their child from harm forever, and yet tries desperately to avoid danger at all costs. Even if

that cost is a payment the child will have to pay in later adult years. What message did you receive from your parent or guardian? Didn't you understand that to be careful in the world was simply a smart way to behave? You may have gotten the message from fearful adults that you needed to hurry up and do *something*! This *something* was what the parent was unable to do. It was your job to figure it out before *something* really bad happened. The undercurrent of fear and uncertainty was ultimately the message and the trap you found yourself caught in. You may even hear your own words to your children, or to the children you have cared for, echoed in the memory of your parents' fearful "don't do that or...!" As you read the following tale of THE STOVE you may find your thoughts drifting back to earlier years. Read and allow yourself to become immersed in the experience.

It is cold. A bitter and painful cold dwells in you. This is a chill that has entered you suddenly and completely as you find yourself lost and alone in a desolate space with the exception of an abandoned house. You enter to find it is more a simple

shelter than a home. The saving grace of this shack is a stove that sits in a kitchen area glowing with warmth. You draw close, but for some reason you can't seem to find this warmth despite what your senses avail to you. Standing alone in this empty room, you approach the burner with hands outstretched. The chill you feel is rushing through your bones as you place both hands and body just above the surface of this apparent furnace. Still, there is no relief from the cold that ices you from inside. Baffled by the perception of a heat that offers no warmth, you lower your hands touching the surface. In direct contact with the stove, at last you find relief from the biting cold. Soothing warmth overcomes you as you rest from your previously frigid condition. As the moment passes by, the sensation abruptly changes to a scalding, boiling heat that sends you leaping across the room.

Now licking your wounds you realize that your skin is in tact with no sign of injury. Again the freezing chill returns along with the agonizing need to warm yourself. The stove seems to give off a steamy haze that draws you back. You wrestle with the problem of warming the bitter chill while the

pain of burning is still fresh in mind. The frost thickens in you as you decide to try a different approach. You reach down with just one hand this time and quickly brush the burner with a fingertip. Once again relief comes to you. At last the agony is gone and you begin to feel the thrill of conquest. As you bask in the warmth you notice your finger begins to burn, then seethe as the pain radiates up your arm. You scream and the heat dissipates rapidly only to be replaced yet again by the freeze that is now engulfing you. You search for options to this dilemma but nothing comes to you. This shanty affords no other means of heat you can find beyond the stove. The cold grows disabling as you approach the only remedy in sight. This time you will try the other hand. Again sweet relief: “Oh let it remain.” It does not. Your efforts seem futile as you find no lasting solution to you plight. Desperately, you try every conceivable method of touching the stove but only to find the painful alternative to freezing is burning in every instance. Each moment of relief seems to get shorter and you begin to question your intelligence, your sanity. The cold is so unbearable you must do *something!* The relief you experience is so pleasurable that you can only endure the pain of burning

through knowing the intensity of that joyous relief. The more you do to combat this problem the more frantic you become. You are caught in a cycle of pain-relief-pain. Each pain you *do something* about only to find it returns. You *figure out quickly* what to do and the cycle continues.

The only resolution to the cycle is to break free from the doing and figuring around THE STOVE. This is only possible when we see the chains that tie us to it and learn where to look for the key to unshackle us. No matter how complete our search may seem; there is none that frees us, no lasting warmth without consequence until we see the true nature of our condition. The painful blasts of heat and cold arise from within us, and not from without. Exterior solutions are always temporary at best. Look inside of yourself to kindle lasting and truly soothing warmth. Knock at the door of your heart to ask for what you need. If you possess a chill in your bones then seek your internal thermostat. Rest quietly as you offer your specific pain the opportunity to guide you to a new understanding that *you can't do and figure it out anymore*.

PRACTICE EXERCISE THREE

MISTAKES

The week ahead will undoubtedly bring some conflicts and confusion. You may have a current life situation that you don't know how to resolve. As you encounter the troubles of everyday life this week, imagine what would happen if you did absolutely nothing about them. Make an effort to not figure out a problem. These might be difficult to avoid but you must permit yourself the opportunity to learn the Lesson of THE STOVE.

Notes for Practice Exercise Three: Mistakes

REMEMBER WHEN

I was fifteen years old and full of thoughts about how the world should be and what people ought to do. No one had any real idea what was suppose to happen and so I made it my job to graciously let them in on what my thoughts were. Of course, like most of the kids my age, the only people who really had no clue were my parents. They just seemed unteachable. I had pretty much given up on trying to make them understand me, but there always seemed to be something I had to explain to them. There was the; ‘everyone else has one’ speech, and the; ‘I wasn’t the one who started it’ explanation. At fifteen I had a new lecture for my parents at least once a month.

I recall living in Florida where the driving age, at the time, was fifteen. I had driving privileges, which made access to trouble all that much simpler. The loss of those priveleges, after three accidents in as many days, was devastating. This was a difficult time in my life for many reasons; but mostly because of one event that changed my father’s and my relationship for many years to come.

I had a difficult time feeling accepted by peers. After living in Florida for about a year, I still felt like an outsider (the famous 'I'm different' lecture). I attempted sports and didn't perform as well as I thought I should. I eventually turned towards experimentation with alcohol and other drugs to see if I could fit into some group for friendship. My associations were very superficial, but that didn't matter, as I had quickly become addicted. This was a fact I would not come to realize until some twenty years later. Despite my pretense of acceptance within a drug group who called themselves "heads," I was truly overjoyed when an old friend from my former neighborhood came for a visit. It had been a year since I had seen a real friend and I was glad to show him the sites and new entertainment I had discovered. One night we had gone out to a club. We both looked older than we actually were, and so it was easy to get in and drink in our best effort to look cool. After about six shots, the bartender cut us off, and so we proceeded to another bar. We drank so quickly that we could not feel the effects until we were so drunk that neither of us could walk alone. Holding onto each other we hitchhiked home. I don't recall what happened beyond that point. I

am told that I came in the house and cursed my father, telling him that I hated him and never wanted to talk to him again. The next day I was told what had happened and I quickly apologized to him. My apology was not given as sincerely as it could have been, but he accepted it. I was an alcoholic at the beginning of my drinking career. I was sorry, but I did not feel responsible for my cruelty. I simply chalked it up to a blackout, blaming alcohol for the harm I caused, instead of my choice to drink. Many more years of painful battles within and outside my family developed. My relationship with my father became nonexistent. I made a habit of blaming my dad for my problems long into my adult years. I blamed his drinking, his lack of involvement in my life, and his emotional coldness for my drinking, my lack of involvement in his life, and my emotional coldness.

Twenty- two years later, on a brisk but sunny autumn day, I stood out in the driveway of my father's home. I said that I was angry with him for what he had done in my life, and for what he had not done as well. Mostly, I had come to understand that my feelings were not his responsibility. We.

talked, for maybe the first time, about his dad and the struggles they had had together. We completed a circle. Releasing him from his mistakes, opened the way for me to embrace my faults as well. I hugged my father, and as he began to let go, I pulled him to my chest in a warm embrace and said, “I love you dad.”

SKILL BUILDING THREE

This week you have the glorious assignment of screwing up. That’s right, go ahead and make that mistake. In fact, make several and do not delay in this matter. Get right on it and make one in the next few minutes if you can. This may sound peculiar but in fact you are only granting yourself this opportunity for the week and can easily return to doing things correctly in awhile. Of course we are only human and bound to fault ourselves. The point is to begin to give ourselves permission to be human. Cut yourself some slack this week and generously allow yourself to make as many boo boos as you need to. The key to this assignment is in recognizing that making mistakes is not some form of failure, but an actual human need. Where would you be today without the things

that went wrong? Realize this week as you stumble, that each mistake you make is potentially the most important thing you accomplished for that day, that week or even more.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Eleven

Holding onto something you love can destroy it if you are unable to let go.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: Provide for me so that I am not misled into thinking that I have so much control over my life that my spiritual needs do not exist. I acknowledge that I control very little, yet I do control my choices. Thank you for the opportunity to choose.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twelve

Be on the lookout for guidance in all forms, shapes, and sizes.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Lead on in your ways to give me
guidance and direction. Teach the lesson. I am ready to learn,
and to follow. I seek guidance, as I know that I don't know the
way alone.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirteen

Security has only one effective meaning in our lives:
permission to move on.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of
day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I offer a thank you for meeting the needs
and even some desires of my spirit. I feel protected and secure
with my higher calling. Secure for me a place of your design
and choosing.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Fourteen

Conflict creates tension that can be used for our benefit as well as our demise.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I am at odds with my own desires today.
I lift up my conflict toward the source of my higher call, so that
resolution finds its way to me.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Fifteen

Anxiety is the wellspring that feeds darkness in our soul.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: In my spirit I feel the tension mounting as
fear tries to overtake me. Let me be free of this anxiety, so I
can become who I dream to be.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

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REST

The space below is provided if you need unlined paper for drawings or other creative expressions

Chapter Four

The Gorilla

(Author Unknown)

There was a man who lost his job. He had been out of work for several months and was getting pretty desperate; his car payment was past due, his bills were mounting up, and he was about to be evicted from his apartment. One day he was lamenting to his friend about the situation. His friend said that he thought he had heard about a job at the zoo. He didn't know the details, but he heard the pay was pretty good. The man said he would be willing to do just about anything at this point. He thanked his friend for the tip and ran to the zoo to apply for the job.

The zookeeper said, "Well, as a matter of fact we do have a job, and it does pay quite well, but I don't know that you'd be interested in it."

"I really need a job," said the man. "I'm willing to do just about anything."

"Well," said the zookeeper, "the problem I have is that our gorilla died, and it's going to be a while before we can get

another one to take his place. The gorilla is one of our biggest attractions. What I really need is for someone to take his place.”

The man looked stunned for a moment, but then said, “I don’t know anything about gorillas. What would I have to do?”

“Just put on the gorilla suit, climb in the cage, and act like a gorilla,” said the zookeeper.

The job did pay well and the man did need the money, so he agreed to give it a try. He put on the suit, climbed into the cage, and just sat. People would stop for a moment, but seeing the gorilla just sitting there wasn’t very exciting, so they would walk away disappointed. The man was getting pretty bored too just sitting , so he decided to explore the cage and entertain himself a little bit. He started swinging on the tire swing and bouncing a ball. The man began to notice that the more he played, the more people seemed to pay attention to him. He attracted a small crowd and began playing to his audience. He climbed up and down the tree, swinging from branch to branch. The people loved it and cheered him on. With his courage peaked by the cheers of the crowd, the man

started swinging from a rope he found way up at the top of the tree. He swung so far that he was out over the crowd and the people screamed with excitement. Finally, the man swung so hard that the rope broke and he came crashing down.

Dazed, the man looked up and saw that he had landed in the lion's cage. From across the cage, the lion awoke and looked at the intruder. The man jumped up and ran to the far side of the cage yelling, "Please, somebody get me out of here!" The lion leapt up and started coming toward the man. The man ran around the cage yelling, "Somebody please help me!" The lion, coming closer, began to roar. Hysterically the man cried, "Please! Help! Get me out of here!" Suddenly he heard from the lion, "Shut up stupid! You're gonna' blow this thing for both of us!"

PRACTICE EXERCISE FOUR

MASKS

Like the man in the gorilla suit, we too put on masks and costumes, and we put on a show. We want people to believe that the masks and the show are real, that is, who we really are. But inside we know it is a lie. We know that the

show is just that, a show, and our fear is that others will see through the facade and discover that we are not all that we have portrayed ourselves to be.

Reflect for a moment, what masks have you worn, what show have you put on? You wanted people to believe that it was really you, perhaps you even wanted to believe it yourself. But deep down you knew that it was not who you really were.

Notes for Practice Exercise Four: Masks

TWO REFLECTIONS ON THE POWER OF SHAME

Several years ago, a woman was referred to me for counseling. The letter said that she was now on her third count of physical assault, and that if something did not change, she was going to

go to prison. Given three counts of assault, I was prepared for a pretty tough lady to show up at my office. When she arrived, I looked up to see no more than about 85 pounds standing shyly in the doorway, staring directly at the floor. For the first several sessions, she knew exactly what my shoes looked like, but could not look at my face. For her to say anything even slightly positive about herself was almost an impossibility.

This woman had grown up in a home where no one was aloud to express anger except Dad. Dad would go into rages, which involved screaming, slapping, and kicking anyone and everyone in the family who dared to come within range. She learned at a very early age not to get angry, because anger was too dangerous; if you got angry, you got hurt. Anger, however, in a healthy emotional balance, is a normal, healthy, human emotion, which needs appropriate expression. Anger, which cannot be expressed outwardly, will be turned inward upon the self. While such suppressed anger can express itself in several distorted ways, one of the most common is depression. But, as was the case with this woman, it does not simply stop with depression. Every time she did not stand up for herself, or she let others push her around, she would think to herself, “You’re

nothing but a door mat! Why don't you just stand up one time and say what you really think? You're a spineless wimp, a nobody...." She now saw herself through a thick wall of shame which distorted her self-image to the point that she felt not only that she could not, but that she did not deserve to stand up for herself.

This woman never outwardly expressed anger toward anyone. However, every few months she would go out and get drunk. And once she was good and drunk, she didn't care who it was or how big they were, she would begin attacking people. So this woman was one step away from prison because the only way she had discovered to release any of the anger that was destroying her was to go into a drunken rage, feeding her sense of shame.

A part of my own story was that I had a teacher in first grade that took it upon herself to teach me just how stupid I was. I was a very slow reader and consequently was usually lagging behind in my work. At some point, on most days, would come the opportunity to be publicly reminded, not only that I was stupid, but at the rate I was going, I would clearly never amount to anything. Now if you tell a six-year-old

enough times that they are stupid, they will begin to believe it must be true.

Being stupid was not something I was proud of; indeed, I was very ashamed of this “fact”. It was bad enough that I had to know I was stupid, I certainly did not want the rest of the world to know. The way I dealt with it was to become a class clown. I became an expert, no, an artist at classroom disruption. The trick was to not wait until it was your turn to read, that was the sure sign of an amateur. As a true master, I would look down the row of students, estimate the amount of time left in class, and if it appeared likely I would have to read, I would start the disruption about six students away. If well executed, the teacher would never know what happened. But, the truth was, I would rather get kicked out of class and act as if I did not care than publicly reveal my stupidity.

The problem, however, was that years later I had two masters degrees, and was still trying to prove to myself and anyone else who might have cared that I was not stupid. I quit jobs because of this. I remember the last job I quit; I had been there two years and really enjoyed what I was doing. I

received my second annual evaluation, and it was wonderful, which, of course, meant I had to quit. What that evaluation told me, through my distorted wall of shame, was that whoever did my evaluation had clearly not looked closely at my work. Obviously, as soon as they did, they would discover how stupid I was and would have to fire me. I saved us all the embarrassment by quitting. Of course, I said that I had accomplished my goals in that position and that it was time for me to move on to new horizons or something equally noble. It was a lie. I quit because of fear! Fear that others would discover my shameful secret.

If I had a god in my life, it was Fear. I did not make decisions based on what I thought was best or what I really wanted; what I wanted was to not be exposed as being stupid. I held virtually no opinions. If someone asked a simple question like where I wanted to go for dinner, I would say I didn't care, wherever they wanted to go was fine. What if I had taken a risk and said I wanted Mexican food, and the other person hated Mexican food. It would just prove that I was too stupid to even pick good food. Better for someone like me to not have opinions, or at least to not express them.

For me, where shame really manifested its power was in “people pleasing”. People really liked the class clown; the joyful *who cares* attitude and behavior drew a lot of attention and a fair degree of popularity. The problem was, the class clown did not feel joyful; what I felt most of the time was sadness and fear. But, if what people liked was the clown, I would be the clown. Of course I could not trust their friendship, because I knew that they did not know me. If they ever discovered the real me they would leave and I would be alone. And so we played the game, I would pretend to be a joyful clown and they would pretend to like me.

It took a long time, including significant work with a spiritual director to come to the realization that I needed to forgive my first grade teacher for what she had done to me. I remember the day it happened. I was driving out in the country, one of my favorite ways to relax and think. The thought came that I had to forgive her. I began the conversation there and then with my long dead teacher. I said, “What you did was wrong....” Notice that forgiving her had nothing to do with saying that it was all right and let’s just forget about it. “What you did was wrong. It was hurtful, and someone should

have stopped you. But, I forgive you, because I cannot let you continue to run my life....” The conversation, granted it was pretty one sided, went on, and I truly forgave her for the pain she had caused so long ago.

Immediately after I finished, however, another thought came; I had to ask her to forgive me. At first I could not understand why I should ask for her forgiveness. After all, she hurt me. Then I realized, I was not yet free. I had carried hatred and resentment against this woman for all those years, and that was a major part of what was binding me. I pictured a young teacher stepping into the classroom for the first time, and I realized that she had not always been the bitter, sick old woman I had known. I said, “I bet you were not always the way I knew you. I don’t know what happened in your life to make you turn the way you did, but you were sick. I’m sorry I hated you for being sick. But you and I are through. We have no relationship.”

The anger began to slip away, and cracks began to appear in my wall of shame. The sense of shame did not suddenly disappear, but piece by piece a new, healthier self-image began to emerge. Every little mistake was not blatantly clear

evidence of being a worthless screw-up. That old voice of my first grade teacher does come back from time to time, but today it has no power. I can tell her to sit down and be quiet; she doesn't know what she is talking about.

SKILL BUILDING FOUR

Who talks to you throughout the day more than anyone? Of course it's you. This week, pay particular attention to how you talk to yourself. Far too often the messages we are giving ourselves about ourselves are negative and self-destructive. As a part of your journaling this week note the kinds of messages you give yourself.

My first grade teacher had been out of my life for many years, so who was calling me stupid now? That's right, I was. Are there words that you need to remove from your vocabulary of self-talk? Are there names or images of yourself that can only tear you down? Note these. What purpose do they serve in your life? Are you ready to let them go and begin to see yourself for who you truly are, that is, a uniquely and wonderfully made human being?

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Sixteen

At the end of the day can you snuggle up with your standing in the community?

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: I feel most uncomfortable around people who have little in common with me. I find myself leaning on my status in life to hold a simple conversation with those I perceive as 'different.' Please let me see beyond status and position. Let me see people.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Seventeen

I have every reason to affirm a positive self-image, especially if I've had a poor one.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: In a thousand years my self- image will be noticeably altered. I can barely hold onto the image I see of friends and relatives passed. I ask you to remove the ties I have to my body so I can pursue my calling with reckless abandon.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Eighteen

When your word is accepted as a guarantee, then you know you possess integrity.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I can withstand the elements even until
death. I can go beyond the gateway into the presence of my
higher calling, with integrity as my passage.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Nineteen

Shame kills relationships by convincing people they deserve less than what they have.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I feel wicked and disgraceful. I think I
have to do better just to be equal. I am ashamed of myself.
Fill this emptiness with the spirit of a higher calling. Reside in
me.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty

Anger serves its master well. Passionately it prepares a way for serenity.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: AAAAgh! What can I do? What will you
do? Leave me alone and let me be! I am filled with rage at
everything. Contempt and disgust are my friends. Hold me.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

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REST

The space below is provided if you need unlined paper for picture, drawings or other creative expressions

Chapter Five

LOST IN SPACES

There was a woman of small stature who stood in the window of her New England home waiting for the return of her love. She was striking to look at, even at a distance. She possessed long dark brown hair and mysterious emerald green eyes, which captured the glow of moonlight as it glistened in the evening sky above her. She looked out upon the Atlantic in anticipation of his return with hope that at any moment she might spy the light of his ship's bow in the waters below. Weary of the many nights spent in this posture; she decided to retire into her half-emptied bed. Sadness overwhelmed her and she began to sob as she lay her face gently into her pillow. Then abruptly she pounded at her mattress in a frantic display, and cursing the night, threw a pillow to one side, shattering the crystal lamp which stood atop a nesting table in the corner of her bedroom. The noise frightened her and she froze for a moment unaware of what caused the crashing sound of glass

against the hardwood floor. Suddenly, the echoing throng of cathedral bells cut through her panic. It was midnight.

She gingerly grasped at selected pieces of the shattered lamp from off the floor while the bell tolled ominously in the distant night. Picking up the pieces she pricked herself against the razor sharp glass and blood began to pool around the creases of her index finger. The young lady wrapped a small hand towel around her finger as the bell sounds ended. Stooping down once again her eyes caught the moonlight reflected from the crystal shards at her feet. The sadness returned to her as she felt the painful irony of her lost love displayed by a shattered lamp. The bloodstained glass reminded her of the tragic death her husband suffered at the hands of nature, as his ship sank in the depths of that great sea he loved to sail. She clenched her fist in agonizing rage at the thought of his loss. Pounding the floor she writhed then moaned as the physical pain in her hand returned her to the present of this night, and her bedroom. “Why not take me?” she thought and then asked aloud. “Please take me!” she begged to God. Then mournfully the young woman brushed

the hair from her face and looked at the sharp crystal slivers that surrounded her. “Death has separated us in a cruel twist of fate and death can restore our bond,” thought the woman. She reached for a long crooked shard and placed it to her wrist. She touched the glass ends to her forearm and then to her chest. Feeling the beat of her heart in her breast, she closed her eyes. Slowly she moved the crystal razor to her neck and, thinking only of her love for him, the throng of bells returned. The sounds cut into her despair as surely and precisely as a surgeon. She opened her eyes to see the futility of her actions and removed the threat from herself. With the bell sounds of the cathedral still fresh in mind she recalled the church that housed them. This was the place of her wedding. Tears streamed down her face as she felt the sadness and the joy converge together in her heart. Peacefulness rose within her. Barely noticeable at first, the feeling grew and surprised this grieving widow. The memories brought her comfort, and she allowed them to pour over her like waves cresting to breakpoint in the ocean beyond her window. She stood to look again at the sea but this time with no intent on finding her lost love. She knew

now that the love she had felt for him was not lost at all, but remained as a part of her, forever.

PRACTICE EXERCISE FIVE

GRIEF

Grief has several elements that we can readily identify in either our personal experience, or within the metaphor entitled Lost in Spaces. This exercise is tied to the story and you will need to review the brief narrative again to complete this segment. Look carefully at the woman's emotional responses. Find the grief process identified in her experience of loss. Notice her anger and sadness, but also look beyond the obvious to see where she is trying to negotiate with her pain. The woman in this story could be anyone. Can you relate with her experience? You may not have lost a husband or wife. You may be a person who has never experienced grief over the death of any person. However, you may have lost someone to divorce or abandonment. Perhaps you lost something else you loved such as self-respect, parental love, or the trust you once

felt confident to offer in relationships. These are frequently some of the greatest emotional struggles people seek to heal from. Forgiveness can provide the healing you desire but not in some pain free strategy. The woman in the story finds acceptance with her loss. Does this mean she has received healing? Write down your definition of acceptance in your journal. As you heal from any loss or trauma in your life you will experience feelings similar to, and perhaps as intensely as the woman in our story. Are you afraid to feel these emotions? Please journal the answer to this question also.

Notes for Practice Exercise Five: Grief

GOD TENDS TO SHOW UP

I was serving a hospital chaplaincy appointment as part of my seminary studies a number of years ago. It was at a point (and there were a few) in my journey toward ordination, when I truly wondered about my sense of call to this ministry. Having just completed my shift, I was rather hurriedly heading for the door when a nurse called me. She asked if I would be willing to talk with one of the patients. What I wanted to do was go home and loose myself in some mindless pursuit. But, not wanting her to know that I was not even sure I was really capable of offering pastoral care to anyone, let alone whether I even wanted to do so at that moment, I dutifully followed her down the hall while she explained the situation.

The man's name was Bob. According to the nurse, Bob was convinced that he was going to die, even though his doctor had assured him that there was no reason for him to feel that way. As we entered the room, Bob appeared to be sleeping. I was home free and half way out the door when the nurse started calling, "Bob! Bob! Wake up, the chaplain is here to see

you.” Bob’s eyes blinked open. “Bob. The chaplain is here. I thought you might want to talk with him. Chaplain, this is Bob. I’ll leave you two alone. Bob, I’ll be back to check on you later.” And she was gone.

I did not want to be there. What was I supposed to say to convince this man that he wasn’t going to die? After a few perfunctory comments I ran out of things to say, so we sat quietly for a few minutes of eternity. While I wondered how long we would sit in silence before I could offer a prayer and leave, Bob started talking.

For the next two-and-a-half hours, I listened while Bob poured out his life story. I learned that the issue was not that Bob believed he was going to die. The question that Bob needed to wrestle with was if it was OK for a Christian to decide that he’d had enough. That he did not want to fight anymore. Bob had already been through two difficult surgeries and a very painful rehabilitation process. He was looking at a future of more surgery and some significant permanent disability. Bob needed to wrestle with, what for him was an issue of faith: “Can I, as a faithful Christian, say, ‘It’s enough, I don’t want any more.’?”

In their desire to be supportive and to bolster Bob for the fight ahead, those closest to him would not let him ask this question. His family, his doctor, and his pastor all kept assuring him that he would make it, but he needed to keep fighting. And so he talked to me about his life growing up on a farm. He talked about sailing around much of the world on a Navy destroyer. He talked about falling in love and about raising two daughters whom he adored. We laughed. We cried. We sat together in silence.

I could not answer Bob's question, but I could stay near and enter with him into his struggle. It was there in the midst of struggle and uncertainty that we both encountered the living Christ bringing a sense of serenity in the midst of struggle. We sat quietly for a long time, my hand on his, neither of us wanting to disturb the moment.

Eventually, Bob looked over at me and smiled, "It's a pretty good life, isn't it?"

"It sure is Bob," I said.

I never saw Bob again. He left the next day to continue his rehabilitation in a convalescent center nearer his hometown. I'm not sure how he and God resolved his struggle. I think of

Bob from time to time and wonder. I hope that our brief time together was helpful to him; I believe it was. I know that it was a great blessing to me. By inviting me into his struggle, Bob taught me the importance of presence, the willingness to be with others in pain and struggle, when all we can offer is our compassionate presence, a listening ear, and an invitation into the gracious presence of Christ.

So often we want to fix the problem or offer profound words of wisdom or comfort. This usually has more to do with our need than it does with the person to whom we seek to minister. In our efforts to comfort and fix we deny the other the opportunity to discover the mystery of Christ's presence in the midst of struggle. The answers, or the decisions, I have found, lie within the person. While we can not offer fixes, we can offer fellowship, insight, and, perhaps most importantly, gracious space for the other to rest, struggle, and encounter the holy. The miracle which I have found in this is that I too am profoundly blessed and spiritually enriched in these encounters. For it is in such holy spaces that I find the gracious presence of God most fully revealed.

Thank you, Bob, and so many others, for inviting me into your holy space to meet the living Christ.

SKILL BUILDING EXERCISE

The skill we are attempting to enhance this week is significant in your effort to find forgiveness even more so than in previous sections. You are at a critical point where you need to grant yourself permission to have feelings that are difficult to experience and to express. The degree you can to permit yourself to have these feelings is frankly the amount you can have them. This is so simple that people often mistake this element of forgiveness. The key is permission. You will not feel what you won't allow yourself to feel. After all, these are your feelings, not someone else's'. If you are unable to feel or express your emotions related to a loss or trauma then you are stuck. Moving forward requires identifying where you are stuck and allowing yourself to advance at your own pace. Don't force yourself at this it will only set you back.

Journal daily on the following emotional responses to trauma and loss paying close attention to any feeling upon which you believe you have gotten stuck. Stuck can be defined as having no emotional experience or, as having an exclusive emotional experience. The responses to loss include anger, bargaining, fear, sadness, and acceptance. Take anger for the first day in your journaling experience and review if it has been a part of your response to trauma or loss in your life. Be sure to write down how it has expressed itself and whether or not it was the only (exclusive) response you have had. For day two take bargaining as a response. Day three will entail a review of fear, and days four and five should include evaluations of sadness and acceptance respectively. The next five days provides an opportunity for you to look at the grieving process you have gone through in your personal experience. If you have any difficulty being clear on how a particular feeling is expressed, then return to the metaphor for additional review.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Twenty-one

For today we focus on the mending of broken promises made to us and by us.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I have suffered the pain of promises
broken, and worse, the torture of breaking my own. Grant me
the lesson and prepare my heart to heal.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-two

This day teaches me to thirst for a truth that can heal.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Quench my soul with a spring that has no
end. I long for the waters to pour over me like tears of joy.
Free my soul to drink from the river of life.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-three

With each day we find a new port on our journey. Learn the lesson of the quest.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: My voyage is not a mild and carefree
drifting upon the sea. I am on a quest to find my holy and
sacred calling. Lead me in my journey and protect me from
distraction.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

OINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-four

To love is also to grieve. Learn the lesson of loving someone completely.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I have never known such isolation as I
feel in my grief. Loss is so very normal and routine, but this
pain is exquisite. Release me from my burden. Help me go
forward.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-five

Today give permission to yourself to be who you are becoming.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: grant me the serenity to accept what
changes; give me courage to grow and heal, as you instill
wisdom in me to obey by letting go so my hands may be free to
give and receive the blessing of forgiveness.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

Today I rest myself to allow the Lessons of this past week to become a part of the person I want to be. The following lines are only to be used as notes and reminders of great significance. Do not write simply to fill up space. It is very important that you leave this page to write itself by only permitting the amazing or unbelievable to be placed on these lines. There is no harm in leaving the page blank. Remember: Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for yourself or for another is to do absolutely nothing at all!

REST

The space below is provided if you need unlined paper for picture, drawings or other creative expressions

Chapter Six

THE TROPHY

It was a time long ago, though perhaps not so long ago, that a young man set out to find his way in the world. He was a handsome and strong youth whose swiftness and athletic ability had brought him a degree of notoriety throughout the region. Indeed, the young man had many trophies and medals proclaiming his successes. But, alas, the bold youth cared only for himself. He had many admirers and those who would fawn to do his bidding, but he had come to expect such behavior and would use others for his amusement, simply casting them aside when he tired of them.

Feeling that he had far outgrown his little village and its people, whom he felt were too simple to fully appreciate his greatness, the young man determined to set out for fame and fortune. He loaded all of his trophies and medals in a large pack on his back so that all might know the manner of champion he was. The pack was heavy and weighed him down greatly, but the pride he felt when he realized how much

admiration such trophies would bring him helped him bear the load.

The young man had not journeyed far into the hills beyond the woods when he heard a strange voice, “Ho there!” The young man turned and, at first, saw no one. But then, from the shade of a small tree emerged an odd little man. The figure could not have stood more than a single meter tall and walked with a limp and a cane. “I said, ‘Ho there!’ young fella,” said the little man. “Where do you journey from?”

“That hole-in-the-wall town beyond the woods that I journey from is nothing to me. To where do I journey, now that is the more interesting matter. For I journey to find my rightful fame and fortune in the world. But I have no time to delay in idle chatter with the likes of you,” said the youth.

With a twinkle in his eye, the little old man said, “Oh, and clearly so, for I see from your load of trophies that I am addressing quite a champion. I can only assume that you journey to the castle for the great contest.”

Now, intrigued by news of a contest, the youth asked, “A contest at the castle? Come quickly and tell me all about it.”

“Of course I will,” said the odd little man. “But sit here and rest a moment. Drink some of your cool water and I shall tell you all.”

The young man looked perplexed, “I have no water. There was just room for my trophies and medals.”

“Come, young champion, and rest here in the shade, for I have plenty of water for both of us,” said the old man.

As they sat and relaxed in the cool shade and both drank their fill of cool water, the man told the youth of the contest. The best young men in the kingdom would gather at the castle to compete for the hand of the beautiful princess.

Jumping to his feet, the youth proclaimed, “Am I not as handsome as any? Do I not have the speed and strength to rise above all challengers? Tell me, old man, the way to the castle so that the princess might indeed meet the best.”

“I know well the way to the castle,” said the little old man. “But it is a long and difficult journey. Perhaps I had best travel with you and show you the way.”

“I need no guide, old man,” said the youth. “Besides, you could only slow me down, for you are old and small, and you

walk with a limp. What good could you do for someone swift and strong as I on such a journey?”

“Certainly, young sir, you are probably right,” said the little old man. “But I would not be a bother, and I do know the best way to the castle.”

The young man grudgingly consented and they began to gather their things to continue the journey. The old man said, “It will be a long and hot journey. Perhaps if you would remove just one or two of the smallest trophies from your pack, you would have room to carry a small jar of water.”

Reluctantly, the young man pulled out two small trophies, gazed at them fondly, and with a sigh, threw them down the hill.

The two walked together for a long time. To pass the time, the young man entertained the old man with stories of his marvelous victories in all manner of games of strength and speed. The old man listened with great interest. He guided the youth through pathless woods and over hills. There were times when the young man would lag behind because of his heavy pack, but the old man would patiently wait for him to catch up. Finally the young man looked so worn out that the older man

suggested that they could both perhaps do with a good rest and some food.

Again a perplexed look crossed the young man's face. "Food?" he said. "There was only room in my pack for my trophies and medals. I had no room for food."

"Come, sit here and rest," said the old man. "I have more than enough for the two of us to share."

Gratefully, the young man set down his pack and rested while the old man prepared the meal for them. After a good rest and eating their fill, they loaded up their packs and set out again.

The road began to climb and become much steeper. Soon the young man was struggling greatly with the weight of his pack. "My young friend," said the old man. "You will not make it up this mountain with all that you are carrying. Perhaps if you were to choose several of your most important trophies, you could then leave the rest behind now."

"But you don't understand," said the young man. "How will I, that is, how will others know the great things I have done if I have no trophies to show them?"

“Dear friend,” said the old man. “As important as they have been as reminders of what has been, they can now only drag you back down the side of the mountain. Please, select those that are the most important to you and leave the rest to memory.”

Reluctantly the young man sorted through the pile of trophies and medals. The old man sat and listened with great interest as the young man told the story of each victory. Finally, he chose his seven favorite trophies and one beautiful solid gold medal which he now hung around his neck on its ribbon.

With his load greatly lightened, the young man climbed easily up the steep mountainside. “Come, old friend,” he said, reaching back to help the old man up the last sheer climb.

Descending the other side to the valley beyond, they soon came to a river. The water was moving quite swiftly and the old man said that while this was the best place to cross, it was still very dangerous.

“The water is too swift and deep for me to cross by myself,” said the old man.

“Then I shall carry you,” said the young man with great confidence.

“I do not think that you will be able to carry both me and your pack of trophies,” said the old man.

“Nonsense,” said the youth. My load is so much lighter now. These last trophies can not weigh me down. Come, climb up on my back.”

The old man climbed up on the young man’s strong shoulders and he stepped out into the swift current. As the young man walked out toward the middle of the river, the water became deeper, up to his chest, and the current was very swift and pulled against him. He fought to keep his footing. Suddenly he stepped off a ledge and was into water up to his chin and rising.

“Let me help you remove your pack,” cried out the old man, or we shall both be dragged under and drown.

The younger man continued to struggle with the rushing water, barely able to reach the bottom. Finally, he consented to letting the old man help him remove the pack with the last of his trophies. But as he pulled the pack off, the old man’s leg became entangled in the strap and he was carried down stream

by the current as it grabbed the pack. The young man lunged after the old man, but he had disappeared under the surface and he could not find him. In a panic, the young man dove into the rushing current in search of the strange little man. Suddenly, he saw the old man several feet ahead of him tangled in some brush. The young man reached him, branches tearing at his clothes and skin. He pulled the old man from the river; he was unconscious and barely breathing.

Looking up, the young man saw that he was but a short run from the castle. He lifted the old man into his arms and ran with the last of his strength crying out for help. The castle gate was open and he ran into the inner court, tears streaming down his mud-streaked face. The people there looked in amazement at the limp little old man in the young man's arms.

"Please," cried the youth. "Please help him. I have nothing to offer for your help except this medal, but it is solid gold and should cover his care. Please take it, it is nothing to me if it can not help my dear old friend." He handed the medal and the little old man to the puzzled officials just before he collapsed from exhaustion.

When he awoke, the young man opened his eyes to see the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen standing before him. He was lying on a bed in a huge, richly decorated room. “Where am I and who are you?” asked the young man.

“You are resting in the castle, and I am the very grateful princess who has come to offer her deepest thanks to a true hero.” said the young woman.

“Hero? No your majesty, the little old man I brought in, he is a hero,” the young man said humbly.

“Yes,” said the princess. “But what daughter would not see a father like mine as a hero?”

“Father like yours?” puzzled the young man?

“Why yes,” said the princess. “My father, the king. You saved his life. So many brash and self-inflated braggarts have come proclaiming themselves the best in all the land and offering themselves in marriage. My dear father said that he would journey throughout the kingdom in search of the truly best young man he could find that I might consider for marriage. Such kind, humble compassion and courage is a rare and wonderful gift to find.”

And yes, as all truly good stories should end, they lived happily ever!

PRACTICE EXERCISE SIX

GRACE

Reflect over some of the positive aspects of yourself. Please be honestly generous with yourself, because you do have positive aspects to your personality, character, etc. Who is the person or persons in your life journey who have helped to instill or nurture these aspects? What gifts did they offer of themselves to help you become the person you are, and perhaps to strengthen you as you seek to become the person you could be?

Notes for Practice Exercise Six: Grace

WHAT DOES GOD WANT?

How does God speak to you? It is a question I often ask my clients in recovery. Many of them struggle tremendously trying to understand spirituality, or as some have put it, "This whole 'Higher Power' thing." The issue raises itself in many forms. But one of the most common seems to be the question, "How am I supposed to know what God wants me to do?"

I suppose all of us wrestle with this question at some point in our lives, and we probably should if we take our faith seriously. But I believe that this question is the wrong place to begin our search. Rather than starting with the question, "What does God want me to do?", I would suggest the more daunting question, "What does God need of me?" When I posed the question to myself in this way, I arrived rather quickly at the seemingly stark reality that God did not *need* anything from me. God was God before I was born, and I suspect God will still be God long after I am gone. There is not much I can do to make God more God.

The amazing thing, though, was that once I really accepted this rather obvious truth, i.e., that God did not need me, I was struck by an even greater truth, that God chose me. God did not breathe life into you or I because he *needs* us. God *wants* us. He wants a relationship with us. Not because we have done great things, but simply because God truly loves each one of us.

God did not tell Moses to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt to build great temples or to accomplish marvelous deeds. God simply said, “They will be my people and I will be their God.” God was calling the people out of bondage into a new land, a new life of freedom; he was calling the people into a relationship.

It has always been that way since the very beginning. The Bible says that God created, and that God looked upon all that he created and declared that it was very good. But the story goes on, because countless centuries later, God again looked at his creation and said, “My creation is very good, but there is something that could make it even better.” And God looked at you and I and said, “If you were in it, my creation could be even better.” And God breathed life into each one of us, not

because of some need for us to fulfill, but because he wanted us to be a part of the creation which he loves. Perhaps our real task is to discover what it was that God saw within us when he said, “If you were in it, my creation could be even better.”

What does God want you to do? It is an important question. But to place our primary focus on this question may be to risk missing what is the most important, that is, simply a relationship with God. Focus more on the relationship. What would it mean to allow God to truly be God in your life, and for you to be his beloved child? If there is some work to which God wants to call you, I think you will come to know of it. It will reveal itself out of the relationship. After all, it is for relationship that we are born. True and loving relationship with God, with ourselves, and with one another, that seems to be the essence of it. The rest is just stuff.

SKILL BUILDING EXERCISE

Over the last few weeks you have been asked to look for coincidences and accidents as part of your daily journaling. Look back over these. What do you notice about them? Are

there any particular patterns? Are there any incidents that stand out as significant? As you have paid attention to these coincidences and accidents, have you noticed any interesting or unexpected outcomes or opportunities?

Beginning this week we ask you to change the focus of this part of your journaling slightly. Rather than simply noticing coincidences and accidents, you are invited to take some time and ask yourself the following question, “What happened today that let me know in some way that God was truly present and acting in my life?” In the midst of conversation did someone say just the thing you needed to hear which gave you encouragement, insight, or assurance about an issue you have been wrestling with? Could it be that God sometimes speaks to you through the words of other people? Perhaps it was something you were reading that almost leapt off the page giving clarity to something you had been puzzling over. It might be a thought or strong feeling that seems to come from nowhere. How does God seem to be speaking to and guiding you?

If some great miracle were to flash across the sky, you probably would not miss it. But it is in the seemingly very

ordinary, everyday interactions and occurrences that so much is being offered and revealed. Try not to worry about what you must do or what you have to give to others. Pay close attention, each day is a gift with much to offer; let this be a time of receiving.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Twenty-six

I will learn to receive without expecting myself to owe someone in return.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I have many wants and only a few needs.
Sometimes I cannot meet even the needs without assistance.
Please help me to receive the help I am given and the gifts you
freely provide.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-seven

My spirit is equal to the love I feel as I grow into a new person.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Fly! Soar beyond the savage garden to
infinite possibilities. This is my spirit in motion. Healing and
touching beyond the world we see. Blessings to my spirit!*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-eight

Today I look into my relationships so that I may begin to see how I relate to others.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: Relationships are at the heart and soul of both my difficulty, and my release. I ask that I may find relationships that mend the fences of my yard and those of my neighbors.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Twenty-nine

Seek a family that includes you in everything and you will be lonely.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I play so many parts, so many roles. I
need comfort and rest within my family. Bestow your mercy
and provide a way for my family to unite harmoniously.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty

Today we will learn the lesson of a grateful heart.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I ask to be part of the magnificence of
life. Please fill me with gratitude at knowing the splendor of a
higher calling.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

Today I rest myself to allow the Lessons of this past week to become a part of the person I want to be. The following lines are only to be used as notes and reminders of great significance. Do not write simply to fill up space. It is very important that you leave this page to write itself by only permitting the amazing or unbelievable to be placed on these lines. There is no harm in leaving the page blank. Remember: Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for yourself or for another is to do absolutely nothing at all!

REST

The space below is provided if you need unlined paper for picture, drawings or other creative expressions

Chapter Seven

IN LOVING MEMORY

The dark figure approached her while she lay motionless on her living room floor. It crept silently towards her, remaining hidden behind the shadow of a black sheet. The terrible intent of this force was nearly upon the woman who rested comfortably upon a large couch pillow. The glare of television noise made the steps of this ominous, yet small creature, almost unnoticeable. With remarkable speed and precision, the shadowy figure leaped at the woman. Her eyes sprung open at just that moment, and she screamed. They wrestled on the floor and she reached out with both arms and held the small but powerful beast as tightly as she could. In desperation, they struggled and the woman gained a foothold under the couch. She pressed one arm down to the floor and lifted herself and the dark sheeted animal in one heroic movement. She grasped the sheet tightly and tore it free of the small figure.

“Gotcha little man!” cried the woman.

“Oh mom,” the boy pouted.

It is long past your bedtime she thought to herself. She remembered a time in her life when precious moments like these were incomprehensible. Not to long ago she had been diagnosed with a tumor on her breast, and she feared the worst. For weeks she had literally planned her demise. She recalled the day she received news that the tumor was benign. How wonderful everything seemed at that moment. She was elated. Her thoughts returned to her son and his bedtime.

“Mommy, I’m scared of the dark. Can I sleep here on the floor with you?” urged the three- year- old.

“Of course you can” she said.

The woman retired on the floor with her son nestled in his bedding along side her. How warm and loving she felt toward him. She turned the television off and lay silently cradling the boy as tears streamed softly down her cheeks.

PRACTICE EXERCISE SEVEN

MERCY

In our busy, hustle-bustle lives, it is easy to lose track of the simple moments. We search for the big promotion, or the wonderful vacation. We work hard to satisfy our basic necessities and plan for a time when they won't concern us any longer. So many of us seek out wealth as a means to eliminate worry over finances, while missing out on the joyful opportunities within our day-to-day lives.

In our story, there is a woman who has learned that life is truly precious. This of course is connected to her vision of her own life as nearly ending. This story is about how she came to appreciate her own life. She can enjoy a moment of closeness with her son, where before she may have abruptly sent him off to bed. However, the woman in our story may also see what the circumstances of life are for all of us. We are all living on borrowed time. For some of us, this realization means we can relax and not get so caught up in the struggles in our day. For others, the awareness of the brevity of life necessitates a hurry

up and get moving attitude. Forgiveness is never obtained in a hurry. No matter how intensely you may feel about making up for mistakes or lost time, it is not possible to develop a forgiving spirit without the proper attitude. That attitude is a merciful one. It claims that the situations in our lives are entirely unimportant. A merciful attitude allows us to see ourselves in the eyes of our brothers, sisters, friends, and even in the eyes of our enemies. For the week ahead, attempt to look carefully at your attitude. In your journal, list the feelings you have towards the person(s) whom you are still having difficulty forgiving. Have you a desire to be merciful in your attitude? If so, then briefly write down how you think mercy will look in your behavior towards them. Afterwards, review the story again and see how the woman in our metaphor displayed mercy.

Notes for Practice Exercise Seven: Mercy

FREEDOM

Her name was Donna. The first time I met her was in the fellowship hall in the basement of the church where I was serving. A few of us were standing around the coffeepot talking before an AA meeting. A friend who regularly attended the meeting came in with another woman whom I'd never met. The woman's hair was matted and her clothes looked as if she might have slept in them. She stared at the floor as my friend gently guided her over to where we were talking.

"Pastor Kevin," she said, "I'd like you to meet my friend Donna. Donna, this is Pastor Kevin."

I welcomed Donna, and told her it was nice to meet her. Donna's eyes never looked up from the floor. She mumbled something softly, which I took to be a greeting. As it was time for the meeting to begin, we all found seats.

Over the next few weeks I saw Donna at AA meetings at the church almost every day. I, as well as others, always made a point of welcoming her. She was usually quiet, but little by

little, as she found herself warmly accepted, and as she heard others share their stories, Donna began to open up to the group.

At her request, Donna and I began meeting regularly. Eventually she began to share her story of a life filled with abuse, shame, alcohol, and drugs. It was not easy for her, but as Donna risked reaching out and inviting others to journey with her, and to support her, she began to find within herself new sources of strength, self-acceptance, and a profoundly deep faith.

It was about two years after I had first met Donna, and I was once again sharing coffee and conversation with friends before the AA meeting in the same church basement. Donna was laughing and sharing in her now usual animated way. Most of us were so deeply engrossed in our discussion that we did not notice the woman who had entered the room. Looking frightened and very uncertain, she stood just inside the door. It was Donna who stepped away from the group, walked across the room, and welcomed the woman, inviting her to share a cup of coffee and some conversation.

It was then that I realized that Donna was free. The shame, the pain, and the guilt which had held her bound was now being passed on as a gift of hope to this new woman. That which seemed destined to bring only destruction, had been transformed into a gift through which Donna could now reach out to others in compassion, understanding, and love.

SKILL BUILDING SEVEN

Are you free like Donna has been freed from the pain she suffered? The question we need to consider, is how find it? Perhaps you have tried in the past to free yourself from some type of bondage like drug or alcohol dependency. Maybe you have been in recovery from some addiction or injury in your life. Freedom to move beyond these life forces is an incredible opportunity. What makes this possible is the same miraculous process that allows healing to take shape in the hearts of troubled people.

Freedom is the logical result of healing. In forgiveness, freedom is a requirement. We cannot choose to forgive unless

we feel the true freedom to make that decision. If you are not free to make that choice, then you are still enslaved by something. We suggest you look at what you may feel tied to now. Write it down in the form of a single word. Whatever comes to mind, go ahead and write it in your journal. Once you have done this, we ask you to take a very uncomfortable look at yourself. The question we invite you to ask is this: Am I dependent upon the pain? Has this become an addiction for me? If you answer yes, then we invite you to participate in a twelve- step recovery program.

Please be encouraged, as you now know that forgiveness is not an event, it takes its time in each person's life. Looking back at the reflection, you will see that it took Donna two years before she could reach out to give what she had received. Your path may be longer or shorter. It does not really matter unless you are trying to rush what cannot be hastened. Forgiveness is something to relax into. The challenge is in finding it possible to relax in the face of pain and/or fear.

This week look to find freedom from your fear. Advance with confidence in your effort at freeing yourself from emotional struggles of all kinds. You will be successful

because the ability to forgive is readily at your disposal. You have been given this gift already. Now it is time to consider if you want to give that same gift to those who have hurt you.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Thirty-one

Giving is the focus of this day. I will look to what I have, so that I may offer it to others.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I have so much to offer! I want to give
this feeling to others right now. Help to provide me with
plentiful opportunities to give freely of myself today.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-two

Fellowship is the only preparation we have for a truly spiritual endeavor.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: Gathering together is the beginning of an opportunity for the spirit to connect us in our humanity. Unity in fellowship is a manifestation of spirit. I seek spiritual connections today.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-three

Today I focus on the precious gift I find when love is given,
and returned.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of
day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: My heart is bursting. Give me room to shout and dance. I need love in my life. Precious and rare is the love I long to embrace. Today I find romance in my soul.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-four

“Thank you,” is a simple phrase that contains all the elements of a humble life.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: May this be a day of celebration and
thankfulness. I ask to be immersed in the full measure of this
day, joining with others who share in the joyful expression of
thanks.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-five

Respect your power to bring forth either misery or gladness to the world today.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: Respect is given freely but earned harshly. I have often lost respect for myself because I failed a task. I can be overly critical of myself and judgmental of others. My calling is now toward a more gentle life. Keep me aware of your gentle nature. Help me to respect failure as a lesson and not a punishment.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

Today I rest myself to allow the Lessons of this past week to become a part of the person I want to be. The following lines are only to be used as notes and reminders of great significance. Do not write simply to fill up space. It is very important that you leave this page to write itself by only permitting the amazing or unbelievable to be placed on these lines. There is no harm in leaving the page blank. Remember: Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for yourself or for another is to do absolutely nothing at all!

REST

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Chapter Eight

COME INTO THE LIGHT

“I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness.” John 12:46

We look to light as that which illuminates our path, guiding us and keeping us from tripping and falling over obstacles in our way. We have all had the experience of stepping hesitantly into a dark room and moving about, cautiously seeking a light-switch, flashlight, or candle to light our way. Light usually brings a sense of comfort and greater assurance. However, we do not generally get to choose all that the light will illuminate. Light casts its glow over the whole room, including the dusty, cobweb-filled corners that we may prefer not to see.

PRACTICE EXERCISE EIGHT

CHOSEN PATH

At this stage in the forgiveness process, many wish to run and hide. The light has been turned on, and there is dirt in the corner, which is hard to reach, even with a good broom. We believe the old adage, forgive and forget, developed out of someone's misplaced ideas about the nature of healing, before the light went on in their life. You may have tried to forget, and been successful at doing so for awhile. Now that the light is on, forgetting is not a real option. The choice we are presented with in this metaphor is more a question of how much cleaning we are prepared to do. For some people, the injury suffered was so extreme and so long ago, that turning on the light of awareness is shocking. Please be confident that you would not have access to the switch unless you were ready to look at the mess in your room.

Review the metaphor and respond to these questions in your journal: Do you want to close this workbook and walk away?

Are you afraid of what the light is revealing to you? Can you stand to remain in darkness any more than you have already? Take a moment and remind yourself of exactly what you were thinking and feeling on the day you began the Lessons in Forgiveness.

Notes for Practice Exercise Eight: Chosen Path

RECOVERY EXPERIENCE

As a recovering alcoholic I was involved in Alcoholics Anonymous groups and worked at the steps of the program with a sponsor. This was a person that supported and encouraged my sobriety by instructing me on how to work a recovery program. I also had a counselor who helped me to work on my anger at the world for not behaving the way I thought it should. I had to work on the fourth and fifth steps in my recovery. This means I had to take a careful review of my resentments and tell them to another person. I had much to hide, or so I thought. So I was not expecting an easy time in doing the work. I only knew that if I didn't follow the steps I was in for more misery. I finally decided that telling my sponsor was not private enough for my comfort level. I chose to tell my resentments, my wrong doings, to my counselor.

I completed my fourth step inventory which was scribbled down shamefully on a legal pad. I remember walking into the office building where my counselor worked. I took a seat in the waiting room and watched as people came in and out. I

wondered if they had done their fifth step yet. After all, this was a counseling agency treating alcohol and drug addictions. Some of them looked as nervous as I felt, while others appeared strangely content. That seemed truly out of place to me. “How odd that an alcoholic or drug addict could look peaceful,” I thought. I anxiously guarded my legal pad filled with all the sordid details of my past. Then I heard my name called by the receptionist. I moved as quietly as I could into the counselor’s office. We shook hands as was customary for us at this point in my therapy. I proceeded to tell him I had completed my fourth step and was ready to give him my fifth step. We sat down and I began to read to him from my notes. I read to him for an hour without so much as looking up to see if he was still in the room. I had been so ashamed of this awful list. It detailed everything I could remember doing that caused harm to another.

An alarm went off and he told me time was up. “NO IT ISN’T!” I commanded. It was then I realized; I was actually looking at him. “I am not leaving without getting through this,” I said.

He must have seen how desperate I was to finish. He agreed to let me continue. Another thirty minutes went by as I read quickly from my list. Finally, I was on my last few words. I read them and looked up once again not at all sure what response I would get. I had just told this man every dirty little detail of my life. I imagined he would be shocked, horrified at the secrets I had kept. My eyes reached his. There in front of me sat a man, smiling at me. With an absurd grin he spoke to me.

“Are you done with it now?” he said.

At that moment I understood the truth about my past. I realized that I had been the judge who declared myself to be so wicked; I had to keep everything locked up in secret. I didn't have to do that anymore. In a moment I was free to be just the person I was intended to be.

“Yes I am done with it now,” I said. I returned the smile and thanked him. Then I turned and walked boldly from that office. I felt so at ease within myself. On the way out, I passed through the waiting area. Off to one side was a young man nervously shuffling some papers. I smiled at him for a moment and then I walked on.

SKILL BUILDING EXERCISE

Decision- making is the cornerstone of a forgiving spirit. We can spend many years of life looking for direction, finding solutions, or remedies to fix what ails us. In the final analysis, the search only ends when we say we have reached our destination. We must choose to begin the journey and so it only seems proper that we reach a conclusion on the same note.

It is decision time for you. The week ahead provides ample time to reach a decision about how to conclude the Lessons in Forgiveness you have worked so hard to learn. You are completing a structured process in just a few short days. What is your desire for your life? Would you like to hold onto injury? Do you need to say, “this is my pain and my problem and no one can take it away?”

If this is your desire then you can choose it. Would you prefer to believe you could release the person who harmed you right now? This is also possible. You will have the responsibility to follow through with your decision today. Even remaining uncertain is a decision of some kind and bares

with it the same measure of responsibility.

The week ahead is an opportunity to consider your decision about forgiveness. More importantly, we invite you to choose to “be not afraid.” In the days ahead your assignment is to consider the people that have hurt you. Once again, consider the reasons you first picked out the Lessons in Forgiveness. Each day write the answer to the following questions in your journal. By week’s end you will be sure to have reached a decision about the life you want for yourself.

Question 1) Am I willing to ask forgiveness of the people who have injured me, for the bitterness I have held towards them?

Question 2) Am I willing to ask forgiveness for the harm I have caused others?

Question 3) Am I willing to ask God to forgive me for putting my misery ahead of my relationship with him?

Question 4) Am I willing to forgive myself for the wrongs I have done?

Daily journal your response to these for the week, and conclude the Lessons in Forgiveness with our final metaphor.

Notes for Skill Building:

Day One

Day Two

Day Three

Day Four

Day Five

LESSONS JOURNAL

Journal Day Thirty-six

Our focus today is on choice making, with the awareness of responsibility.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: I can make decisions by ignoring or forgetting as easily as I can decide by conscious effort. Please help me to execute my abilities actively. Give to me the options with a reminder to seek my higher calling each moment of this day.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-seven

Faith is belief manifested in spiritual conviction. Today I find my beliefs in my faith.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: I see what cannot be believed, and seek a
belief that is invisible to the eye. I ask that I may find trust
within myself, enough to bridge the expanse of my fears.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-eight

Peace is not the absence of an exciting life. It is only found in vital beings.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: Peace to my soul and all who encounter
me today. I look outward because I can offer my peace to
others, secure in knowing there is a plentiful wellspring living
in me.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Thirty-nine

My journey leads me to find solitary moments to draw energy to my spirit.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

Offering for this day: The stress that comes with everyday life is simply the noise that prevents us from our higher call. Whispering, silence, or long pauses are all ways of the spirit. Solitude is necessary for spiritual communication and direction. Today I will stop the noise and listen.

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

Journal Day Forty

Serenity is a blessing that comes to us after we have decided to let go of ourselves.

Upon Awakening: What have I told myself about the kind of day that this is going to be?

Do I wish for this day to be different than I am imagining?

If I want the day to become somehow better than I anticipate,
what steps can I take to improve my day?

*Offering for this day: grant me the serenity to accept what
changes; give me courage to grow and heal, as you instill
wisdom in me to obey by letting go so my hands may be free to
give and receive the blessing of forgiveness.*

Retiring the day: Did the day go as I ultimately expected?

_____ If not then why do you think the day proceeded as it did? Please be detailed.

What I did well today:

What I will do better at in the future:

COINCIDENCES I FOUND TODAY

ACCIDENTS I HAD OR NOTICED TODAY

REVIEW, REFLECT, REVEAL

Today I rest myself to allow the Lessons of this past week to become a part of the person I want to be. The following lines are only to be used as notes and reminders of great significance. Do not write simply to fill up space. It is very important that you leave this page to write itself by only permitting the amazing or unbelievable to be placed on these lines. There is no harm in leaving the page blank. Remember: Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for yourself or for another is to do absolutely nothing at all!

REST

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Chapter Nine

DAVID AND GOLIATH: A RECOVERY STORY

David and Goliath is perhaps one of the best known stories in all of literature, and certainly of the Old Testament. It has been handed down from generation to generation for a few thousand years, teaching lessons of faith and courage. But the story has not survived simply because it is an interesting story of faith from a time long ago, but because it is our story, i.e., it has truths to teach us about who we are and what we struggle with today.

The story of David and Goliath is a story of war. It takes place at the time when Israel, struggling to become a nation, is at war with their more powerful neighbor, the Philistines. Ancient battles were usually fought by two armies who would line up across a field or valley from one another and charge into each other. Whichever army had the most soldiers standing in the end won the battle. Another way battles were sometimes fought, potentially saving many lives, was for each

army to choose a champion to fight on their behalf. Whichever army's champion survived the fight would win the battle.

Thus begins the story of David and Goliath. The army of Israel is lined up on one mountainside and across the valley, the army of the Philistines are arrayed and ready for battle. Out of the Philistine camp, however, emerged a huge warrior, a giant of a man named Goliath. Goliath was the most powerful, most frightening warrior Israel had ever seen. Goliath called across the valley to the army of Israel saying, "Choose your greatest warrior to do battle against me. If your warrior defeats me, we will surrender and serve you. But if I defeat your warrior, you will surrender to us and you will become our slaves."

The whole army of Israel heard the challenge of Goliath and not one of them had the strength and courage to stand against him. In fact, they began to run and hide, frightened to death of the giant Goliath.

This is the first point that the story has to make to us, that Goliath is real, that he is alive, and that he is in our lives today. In other words, what is it that holds that much power of fear

over your life? The question for suffering people: what is it that has the power to keep us in torment?

-drugs/alcohol

-shame

-guilt

-fear of change

-relationships

-money (fear of financial problems)

-depression

-stress

-legal problems

Goliath is real and he is powerful. Our first task is to see Goliath for who and what he is and to recognize the power that he holds over us. The power of Goliath is power, which, if not confronted, will send us, like the army of Israel, hiding in fear.

It is into this situation that our hero David entered. David would eventually grow to become Israel's greatest king and would lead the nation for many years. At the time of our story, however, David was a young shepherd boy of about 14. A shepherd was an important job because much of the family's livelihood came from the sheep, but it was the job of the youngest boy. David's older brothers were all in the army. David's father called him from the field telling David to take food and supplies to his brothers at the front line and bring back word of how the battle was going.

David did as his father had asked. He took the food and other supplies and found his brothers and the whole army of Israel hiding in fear. He then learned of the giant Goliath. After hearing the story, David said, "Let me fight the giant." A 14-year-old shepherd boy was asking to stand where Israel's bravest warriors feared to go. David realized, however, that the giant had to be confronted, that is, to not fight the giant was to already be a slave. David would not be a slave.

Finally, David convinced the king, King Saul, to allow him to fight for Israel. But Saul said that if he were to fight, he would have to be armed and protected. The king placed his own

armor upon David. Saul then gave David his own shield and sword. David was now fully protected, armed, and ready to fight. There was, however, a problem. The armor was so heavy that David could not move. In an effort to protect himself from being hurt, David had covered himself in heavy armor to the point that he had immobilized himself.

Point two of the story is that we too have put on armor, erected barriers, and picked up weapons all in an effort to protect ourselves from being hurt, when what we have actually managed to do is to immobilize ourselves. We cannot move, let alone reach out and fight. What shields have you put up, what weapons have you used in an effort to protect yourself, which have resulted in cutting you off and immobilizing you?

- drug/alcohol abuse
 - isolation
 - denial
 - blaming others
 - justifying behaviors
 - rationalizing
 - manipulation
 - lying
 - self-destructive acts
 - anger
 - violence
 - intellectualizing
-
-

While we must first come to see the giant(s) in our lives for who and what they are, we must also recognize the false weapons and defenses with which we have tried to protect ourselves. The danger in each of these defenses is that they work to some extent, that is, they keep the giant at bay to a greater or lesser degree. The problem is that they are self-destructive, distorting the reality of our situation and cutting us off from true help and support.

David knew that he could not fight Goliath weighed down by these false weapons and shields. But he knew that he had to fight, because to not fight was to already be a slave, and David would not be a slave. David chose to take a great risk. He set down the sword and shield and took off the armor. There he stood the shepherd boy open and vulnerable before the giant. But David was not a fool. He knew that he alone was no match for Goliath. David reached out to draw upon power beyond just his own strength. For David, that power was God. David got on his knees and prayed. He did not, however, pray that the giant would somehow magically disappear. This was David's giant; it was not going to

disappear, he had to confront it. David prayed instead for three things. First he prayed for courage. David was afraid. Goliath was a huge warrior and David was afraid to face him. Many people begin a healing journey, and yet are scared to death: “Will I be able to make the changes healing will call for?” “Am I willing to make these changes?” “What if I fail (again)?” David was afraid, and so he prayed for the courage to stand and do what he had to do.

David then prayed for strength. He knew that his strength alone against Goliath would not stand. In your battle with Goliath the point will come when your own strength alone will not be enough. Where will you reach to draw strength beyond just your own? David reached out in prayer for the strength to fight.

Finally, David prayed for guidance on how to fight. He could not fight from behind the false shields that had immobilized him. He needed new weapons with which to do battle. David then stood and took up his weapon, the weapon of a shepherd, a simple sling. The shepherd's sling was not a slingshot which allows one to stand at a distance and shoot stones at a target. It was, rather, a leather strap about three feet

long. The two ends of the strap were held in one hand, and a stone was placed in the bottom of the loop formed by the strap. The shepherd would swing the sling over his head building up speed and then let go of one end, allowing the stone to fly at the target (or hopefully somewhere close). Certainly an exciting way to do battle, but this was the weapon that David knew.

David took his sling and collected a handful of smooth stones. He set one of the stones in the loop of his sling, and running toward the giant, started swinging it above his head. Goliath could only laugh at the sight of this young shepherd bravely running with his rock. But the story says that David let the stone fly and it planted itself in the giant's forehead, and he fell dead.

The final point of the story: you too have weapons and tools with which to fight this battle. These are not the false, self-destructive defenses of the past, but true means of standing and fighting your Goliath.

- willingness
- support people
- 12-step groups
- Bible
- Lessons in Forgiveness
- faith
- prayer
- honesty
- communication

Some will no doubt look at these and say, “This is all you’ve got? But my giant is huge! My giant is a pain like no other, and all you have to offer is this little bag of tools?” David had a leather strap and a rock, but with God’s help and David’s willingness it was more than enough. If you will learn how to use these tools and use them consistently, they will be more than enough.

ANOTHER ROCK STORY

Several years ago, I had a wonderful opportunity to study abroad for several months. It was an exciting time and I was truly learning and being challenged to grow in so many ways as part of an international and ecumenical community of pastors and seminarians. Yet, at the same time, I was the father of three very wonderful young children; our youngest, Kelsey, was 20 months old when I left. She was growing and changing so quickly. Suffice it to say that by the time Christmas was approaching, home, with my wife Kathy and our children, was the only place I really wanted to be. If I stayed it would be several more months before I would see them. In the midst of that unique and gracious community into which I had been invited, I began to feel lonelier than I had ever felt in my life. As I walked one bright crisp morning through the countryside, I prayed, “Lord, I know that I made a commitment to be here, to study and to work together with these others to build a community. But I can’t do it. I need to go home. I miss my family. Lord, I feel so alone.” And as I said those last words, I put my hands in the pockets of my jacket against the cold.

I felt something in my left pocket. I took it out and looked at it, a small brown stone. I saw the scene so clearly of a brisk morning two years earlier walking with my then three-year-old daughter Whitney. As we walked along she reached down and picked up a little stone, handed it to me and said, “Here, Daddy, hold this for me.” I put it in my jacket pocket, and there it stayed. As I looked that morning at that plain, little, brown, beautiful stone, tears filled my eyes as God let me know that I was not alone, that I am never alone. In that moment I knew that He who held me so very close held just as close those whom I loved. Through the grace of Christ, in whom our love for one another is so deeply grounded, not even an ocean could truly separate us.

I always know where that stone is. It is either with me, in my pocket, or it is in the pocket of my winter jacket. There is nothing magical about that little stone, nothing significant about its appearance. But it is for me a reminder of how God so graciously comes to meet us right where we are, offering the loving gift of himself to heal our every need.

CLOSURE

We hope you have grown richly in your experiences with the Lessons in Forgiveness. Our hopes are that you have found what you were seeking during your work in this book. Forgiveness is a necessary response for spiritual development to take place. You will find this truth to play itself out in your life, and you will either enjoy the benefits or suffer the consequences of your spiritual journey. Our experience has taught us that the efforts we make do count towards enriching the lives of those around us. However, we cannot claim that the effort is what actually makes the difference entirely. In fact, we believe that the extent to which we are able to grant forgiveness to others has everything to do with being forgiven by another. This is the gift that we can pass along to only a select few individuals in our lives. Those individuals are the people who have wronged us. Forgiveness only makes sense when we have been injured or harmed in some way. Granting it to people is our way of giving back a gift received. In sum we hope you have found the forgiving spirit that brings healing and joy to us all.

A FINAL NOTE FOR YOU

Those who have been through the Lessons as a workbook or life experience, find that only two possibilities can prevent a full healing from taking place. One possibility is simply a choice that is made to not forgive. The pain of an old injury does become strangely comforting over time. This is the addictive trap. The second reason that people struggle comes when finding the ability to forgive is hindered by re-injury. When old wounds are reopened, we frequently need to return to our initial injury so that a complete healing takes place. If you have suffered a recent trauma, then you are likely to have difficulty in forgiving that event. We encourage you to allow for the healing of time to create opportunities to forgive in your life.

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Lessons In Forgiveness

A Ministry for Healing

The Lessons is a series of books created to help individuals to grow emotionally and spiritually. Lessons in Forgiveness is an absolute necessity for those suffering the pain of an unforgiven past. Within the Lessons in Forgiveness you will find a structured journey that offers hope and inspiration to those who need guidance along their spiritual journey.