

BECOMING RECOVERED

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## BECOMING RECOVERED

The purpose of this book is to change your life. If you are suffering from an addiction—either your own or someone else’s—you might need a spiritual awakening in order to recover. This book will provide clear directions as to how you can acquire such an awakening. Those of us who have walked this path can assure you of its effectiveness. We once suffered in hopelessness and despair. Now, we are new people with a new purpose. We have been transformed. Becoming recovered means never having to use again. We don’t have to fight off obsessive thoughts. We have been given perfect freedom by a Power beyond our understanding.

The process we describe in this book is not an easy one. Most who begin this work will not complete it, deciding instead to seek an easier, softer way. This program requires that we be completely willing to turn our lives over to God, make a complete confession of our wrongs, provide full restitution for the harm we have caused, and spend the rest of our lives working to help others experience spiritual healing. Clearly, this work will not appeal to everyone. We have no desire to convince anyone that they need to follow our path. Those who need a spiritual awakening will find that our path can help them to meet that need. Those who do not need or want a spiritual solution will not want to attempt this work.

We encourage those who think they can get by without a spiritual awakening to give other methods a try before working through this book. Many people who suffer from addiction are able to maintain abstinence through religious practice, by working with a psychologist or psychiatrist, or by simply attending recovery meetings. Other people will want to try a new location, new relationships, exercise and diet, or even just simple self-control. We do not wish to argue these points with anyone. We are only interested in sharing our path with those few who really need and want what we have to offer.

Most of us who needed this book needed it desperately. We tried many other methods, but nothing seemed to work. Religion, psychology, medicine, and meeting attendance all fell short of our need. Even when we managed to stay abstinent, our basic problem with life remained unsolved. Our minds raced. We had trouble sleeping. We were anxious, irritable, and depressed. We were unable to navigate simple interpersonal relationships. We felt alone and cut off from life. Every day was a day of temptation. The desire to use haunted us. We were miserable. No social or geographical change had any lasting affect on our mood. At least active

addiction offered temporary relief—in abstinence we had no relief at all. Actually, when we were totally honest with ourselves, most of us found that we were rarely fully abstinent. Instead, our addiction switched from substance to substance, from behavior to behavior. We had to have something at all times to comfort us. Life was just too much for us to handle on our own.

Not everyone enters our way of life in a state of desperation. Many have walked our path and benefited from it even though they might have gotten help by another method. The gift of desperation is that it is a great motivator. People who cling to the program of action described in this book as their last hope tend to be thorough and dedicated in their work. Those of us who were less desperate tended to test the limits of this program to see what we could get away with. Any time we felt a little relief during this process, we stopped our work and slowly fell back to our old ways of thinking. We wanted to get what we could from this book and then get on with our lives. We treated this work as a trick to maintain abstinence rather than a path of spiritual transformation. We didn't want to change. We didn't want to help other people. We just wanted to feel better and be done with it. Unfortunately, we found that the relief we gained from this work quickly faded when we fell out of practice.

We are understanding when someone decides to take a break from this work. When we stop getting phone calls from someone, we don't hunt them down. Each of us is free to test the limits of the Spirit at our own pace. We are always ready to welcome someone back if they decide they need our program again. Addiction is a powerful and painful thing. It is always hard to watch addicts take to this work, begin to have an experience, and then, for whatever reason, fall away. Harder still is watching these addicts' families struggle in agony and disbelief. Many addicts die before ever fully accepting our way of life, and many families have to mourn the loss of a loved one to an addiction they do not understand.

In the following chapters, we will first describe the experience of addiction and show how it is different from normal substance use and recreational behavior. If you are unsure whether or not you are an addict, our description of addiction should help you decide. If you can identify experiences in your own life that are similar to the experiences we describe, then you may be an addict like us. If someone you love is an addict, our description of addiction may help you to understand your loved one's behavior and to recognize the limits of your ability to control that behavior. It is possible that you, too, may find yourself identifying with our description of

addiction, either in relation to some substance or behavior, or in relation to your loved one. It is possible to become addicted to another person. It is also possible to be addicted to the effort to control another person's behavior. These addictions can be just as painful and destructive as any other addiction.

Readers who can identify with our description of addiction are likely to benefit from the solution presented in this book. Readers who cannot identify with our description may not be addicts and will probably not need our help. We encourage those who can identify and feel they need this work to continue on to the outline of our approach to spirituality. Those who have trouble with religious and spiritual terms need not worry. Many of us began this work without formal belief. The only belief required here is that change is possible beyond our own efforts. We all have our own understanding of the Power that takes over where will power fails us. When we began this work, most of us were unwilling to believe anything based on another person's testimony. We needed to experience this thing for ourselves if we were going to have faith.

Once we have explained our approach to spirituality in more detail, we will move on to present the series of actions that make up our program. Each action will provide an opportunity for the reader to have a spiritual experience. These experiences will be the evidence upon which we can build our faith. It is extremely important to note that these actions must be taken by the reader who wishes to experience change. No good comes of simply reading and talking about this book. In order to have faith, we must have experience, and in order to have experience, we must take real action.

This book is a tool for action and nothing else. Though we may use this book to introduce others to the experience of addiction and the possibility of spiritual transformation, we ought not ever let our opinions about spiritual things become more important than direct spiritual action. Some of us have fallen prey to the desire to have others admire us as spiritual people, and we have found that this inhibits our ability to do the real work of becoming recovered and helping others.

If you decide you need this program and want to take the actions described in this book, you will need an experienced guide. Few of us were able to understand the instructions for each action without help. None of us understood the significance of these actions until long after our

first experience with them. Most addicts have a highly disordered thought process. We overcomplicate things and try to make ourselves out as the exception to every rule. There are many ways to confuse the purpose of these actions. If we do get confused, we run the risk of performing these actions in a way that is unhelpful to us and possibly harmful to others.

Spiritual power is not to be trifled with. Some who have tried this work on their own, or who have disregarded sound advice, have turned these actions into a way of hurting others for selfish gain. Many attempt to pretend an experience without doing the work in order to boost their esteem, soak up attention, and take advantage of newcomers. Such behavior almost always results in relapse. Please do not attempt this work alone.

In all probability, if you are holding this book in your hands, it has been given to you by someone who has worked through our program and has had a spiritual awakening as a result. In fact, you may be reading this book in a room full of people who are practicing our way of life. You will recognize these people by the relative sense of ease and comfort that surrounds them. They will speak about how they used to be before they did this work, and it will be obvious that they have changed dramatically. They will not harass you or try to intimidate you. Nor will they judge you or pressure you into this work. They will simply express their willingness to be helpful to anyone who asks. You are not likely to find them strict or narrow-minded. In fact, they will be interested to hear your questions and experiences. They may not be the kind of people you would normally spend time with. They may not look the way you imagine spiritual people should. You may even find them a little weird. But if you want to experience the kind of change they have experienced, the only way do it is to ask one of them for help.

It is our greatest joy today to be able to offer a spiritual awakening to those who need it, and to watch as God enters their lives and transforms them. At such times we feel as though we are participating in a miracle. No other earthly pleasure is as selfless or as sweet.

We have written this book in the hope that it will reach those who need it, want it, and are willing to do the work. Our prayers are with you all. May the Spirit bless you in whatever path you chose to walk upon this earth. May you find peace and understanding at last. May your life be filled with a sense of higher purpose and the evidence of spiritual power. We are here if you should need us. God bless you until then.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF ADDICTION

Let's imagine a normal person. We'll call him Joe. Joe comes home after a long day of work and has one beer to relax. Some nights he has a second beer with dinner, but only very rarely does he get drunk. Joe used to drink heavily in college. He even got pretty deep into cocaine for a while, but once he graduated, got married, and landed a decent job, Joe seemed to lose interest in getting drunk and high. He simply likes working and being married too much to let that sort of thing get in the way. Frequently, Joe will go without his daily beer for long stretches of time, for example when his in-laws visit or when he just slips out of the habit for a while. These periods without beer cause Joe no distress.

Let's imagine another normal person called Betty. Betty smoked marijuana every day of her life between the ages of 14 and 37. During this time she also became a chronic overeater. When she turned 37, Betty began having anxiety attacks. She saw a doctor, who suggested that she try weaning herself off pot. Betty did so, and after a few hard weeks she found her mood improved greatly. She discovered that she had more energy than ever and began to exercise regularly. Betty never went back to drug use, and has maintained a healthy diet. When she looks back on her years of pot smoking and overeating, Betty feels as if they had happened to another person. She is never tempted to get high. Betty likes her new life.

If you are an addict, Joe and Betty will seem like strange creatures to you. What is wrong with them? Shouldn't they be miserable? How can they do what they do? How can Joe go from coke-head to casual drinker without any effort? How can Betty just stop drug abuse and overeating without serious struggle? The answer is that Joe and Betty are normal people, and normal people are just built differently than addicts. Normal people can use and even abuse substances and behaviors to the point of becoming physically dependent upon them. They may even make many sacrifices to continue their using. But when it comes time to stop or moderate, normal people can do so on their own power. When normal people stop using or moderate, their lives get better, not worse.

As addicts, we can never use in moderation. Once we start using, we lose all control over our intake. Often this means a spree—we use until circumstances stop us. Either we run out of money, end up in jail, our body quits on us, or otherwise cannot get what we want to use. Not being able to get what we want is agony for us. We become totally preoccupied with our own

discomfort and begin to obsess about using again. Even when we manage to stay abstinent for a long time, our misery does not leave us. We are broken people without our drug. Once we start using we can't stop; once we finally do stop, we can't live normal lives.

The experience of addiction has two parts: a compulsion and an obsession. We experience a compulsion when we start using and find that we lose control over our consumption. Usually, this means that we cannot stop using until we are forced to by circumstance. Occasionally, the experience of compulsion is sporadic, meaning that sometimes we can use a limited amount, and other times we cannot, but we are never in control of what the outcome will be once we start using. As most addictions progress, the compulsion is experienced more consistently. We may begin our addictions with the experience of some control, but as we continue to use, our loss of control becomes more severe until every time we pick up, we fall into a spree. As our sprees become longer and more demanding, our addiction begins to have consequences. We begin to lose the people and things that we love, but we are still unable to stop ourselves from using. Many of us were not able to recognize the compulsion in our experience until we had lost almost everything we cared about.

We experience an obsession when we are trying to stay abstinent and are overpowered by thoughts of using. Obsession can take a variety of forms. An intrusive obsession is a thought of using that seems to enter our minds from out of nowhere. When we are hit by an intrusive obsession, we find ourselves suddenly dropping our plans and responsibilities, and pursuing the substance or behavior that we crave.

A reoccurring obsession is a thought of using that enters our minds over and over again throughout the day. Fighting with this thought consumes all of our energy. We try to remind ourselves of the importance of not using, of all the things we will lose if we use again, and of what always happens to us when we are on a spree, but the thought keeps coming back and seems to grow stronger over time. If we are able to hold out against the reoccurring obsession, we become exhausted and depressed. We are easily irritated and find that normal daily tasks require an enormous amount of effort. Even if we don't use, the reoccurring obsession wins by beating us down.

A third kind of obsession is called circumstantial obsession. We experience a circumstantial obsession when we are presented with the opportunity to use and cannot think of

any good reason not to, even though we have everything to lose. We may give ourselves some silly excuse for using, or we may not think at all. Before we know it, we are deep into active addiction again, wondering what happened to our common sense.

A fourth and final kind of obsession is called the fundamental obsession. The fundamental obsession may not be experienced as a thought of using at all. Instead, we experience this obsession as a basic preoccupation with ourselves and how we feel. It is usually hard for us to identify the fundamental obsession at first, because it is so much a part of how we experience the world. It is like water to fish—we are so familiar with it that it is hard to see. Those of us who have been abstinent for long periods of time without a spiritual solution know the pains of fundamental obsession all too well. Life is unsatisfying. We are constantly agitated and restless, even though we may be quite depressed. We are unable to form meaningful or lasting relationships. We have a deep sense that life is treating us unfairly. People seem cruel and selfish to us; they ignore us and our needs. No matter what we try, we do not seem to be able to get any peace of mind. We are constantly trying to adjust the circumstances of our lives in an attempt to find some comfort. We may have a vague sense that something is wrong with us, but we do not know what it is.

Reoccurring, and circumstantial obsession may actually get easier to cope with over time, but the fundamental obsession only gets worse. The pain of daily living builds up inside us and we have to vent it somehow. Some of us become violent; others tax the patience of our friends with complaints. Many of us find some substance or behavior that provides us with temporary relief. In other words, we switch addictions in order to cope with the pain of fundamental obsession.

As addicts, we suffer from compulsion and obsession. This means that once we start using, we lose control over our intake. It also means that once we stop using, we are miserable and usually cannot stay stopped for very long. Those of us who do remain abstinent for long periods do so at the cost of great suffering. This puts us addicts in a pretty tough spot—we can use and suffer or not use and suffer. Fortunately, there is a third option. We can have a spiritual awakening. As addicts, our spiritual awakening begins when we are able to identify ourselves as addicts. This means finding examples of compulsion and obsession in our own experience.

In this chapter and the next, we will look at compulsion and obsession in more detail, and share the stories of some of the members of our fellowship. We encourage readers to look for ways in which their own experience is similar to our description of the addictive experience. If you find examples of compulsion and obsession in your own life, then you are probably an addict and can benefit from the program of action described in this book. If you cannot identify with the experience of addiction, then you are probably not an addict and will have no need to pursue our way of life. Of course, anyone who wants to may work through this book. There may be many people who would like to have a spiritual awakening who are not addicts at all, and we welcome you to this work. However, we do not want anyone to be confused about whether or not this process will be necessary for them to live a normal life.

We will now look at the compulsion to use in more detail. If you think you may be an addict, you will want to pay attention to our description of compulsive behavior and ask yourself whether or not you act in a similar way. If you love someone who is an addict, you may want to ask yourself whether or not you can identify a compulsion in the way you relate to the one you love. When we have a compulsion, we are unable to control our behavior. We do things we do not want to do. If you take a drink of alcohol and are unable to control what happens after you take the first drink, then you have the compulsion for alcohol. If, once you make an initial effort to control an alcoholic's behavior, you find you are unable to stop yourself from continuing your efforts at control, then you have the compulsion for controlling behavior.

We have found that compulsion often follows a progression. It gets worse over time. When many of us began using our substance or behavior, we experienced the ability to control when, where, and how much we used. We could stop for periods of time without too much trouble. As things progressed, we began to notice the first signs of compulsion. Sometimes when we used, we behaved responsibly, and other times we were completely out of control. As long as no one got too badly hurt, we imagined we were simply having a good time. We told ourselves it was ok to let loose once in a while. When we were totally honest, we noticed that we did not seem to be able to choose which nights we would behave responsibly, and which nights we would abandon our selves to addiction. More and more we began to get reckless on nights when we would have preferred to moderate. And even when we did have a moderate

reaction, we tended to lose sight of our responsibilities. Once we got what we wanted, we forgot where we were supposed to be.

One of our members describes this experience as follows: “I wasn’t someone who drank until I passed out every time. In fact, it didn’t matter how much I drank. When I had a drink, I would forget about whatever I was really supposed to be doing. I’d have a really rotten day and go to the bar and there were all those people that were there yesterday. I hated those people, or I hated the world anyway. But soon as I started to down the first glass, I would just get this glow over me and I would feel better and forget about where I was supposed to be. That’s the start of it. I didn’t have to follow that through and go on a binge for days. I just wouldn’t go home. And I would be late. And I would forget about my responsibilities to my family.”

As things got worse, we stayed away from home longer, used more, and our sprees became more frequent. Soon our recklessness began to have consequences. We got in trouble at work, and with our family and loved ones. We may have been able to smooth things over for a while, but we only did so in order to continue our using. We were not about to change our ways. The truth was that we couldn’t have changed even if we had wanted to. Some of us made an attempt to stop using very early in our career as addicts. We reasoned that things were starting to get stressful at home and in our public lives. We decided that it would probably be a good idea to cut back or wean off the stuff altogether. More often than not we found ourselves using again within a week, telling ourselves that we had been making too big a deal out of a simple pleasure.

The consequences of active addiction only get worse over time, and usually by the time we were in real pain and chaos, we were unable to do anything but plummet into a spree as soon as we started using. The first taste brought comfort, and then we lost control. We found we could not stop until we had consumed ourselves into oblivion. The first was always followed by the second, which was always followed by an all out spree. We began falling away from life, sacrificing responsibilities and relationships as we went. As using meant more to us, our remaining relationships took on a utilitarian nature. People were either helping us to get what we wanted or they were in our way. Before long, people started to leave us. We can only hurt people so long before they give up on us.

The truth is that once we enter a spree, we are not able to pull out of it until circumstances intervene. No amount of pleading from our loved ones, and no threat of loss is

great enough to stop us. We can have every good reason in the world to pull ourselves together, but if we are addicts, we find we absolutely cannot manage to do so until our spree is finished with us. We are in the grip of a destructive force that will not let us go.

Let one of our members illustrate: “My son’s birthday was coming up and I promised myself that I would not mess it up by getting high. I loved my son and wanted him to be proud of me. Plus, I was separated from my wife and wanted to make a good impression on her. I had been clean all week, but two days before my son’s party, a friend came by my house. I told myself I would just get high that night, then I would have a clear head in time for the party. Two days later I stumbled into the party late, drunk, and stoned. I didn’t have a present. Within a few minutes, I was shouting at my wife after she asked me very nicely to leave. My son was embarrassed in front of all his friends, and my wife called the police. So much for making a good impression. I ran away and didn’t stop running for another month.”

We found that once we started using, we could not stop, no matter what the consequences were. Many of us have lost jobs and our relationships with loved ones because we simply could not pull ourselves away from using. We were locked into a chase and could not let it go. Before long, entering a spree was like entering another world. We didn’t know if or when we would return to reality. Only when a spree left us exhausted and without resources to continue using were we dropped back into the normal world. On these brief visits, we cleaned ourselves up, made our apologies and promises, and even made a brief effort to cope with life in a world that was becoming increasingly alien to us. Normal life was strange and painful. The using life seemed normal to us. We didn’t take little dips into addiction any more; we lived underwater, only coming up now and then for air.

At this stage, some of us experienced little windows of clarity in which we could pull out of active addiction for a while. We would wake up one morning knowing we had the freedom not to use for that day. If we took advantage of that freedom, we could sometimes piece together weeks or even months of abstinence without needing any support beyond our own will power. Sooner or later, these windows always closed. Either life got too hard for us, or circumstances put us in a vulnerable position. One way or another, the obsession took our legs out from under us and we found ourselves using once more. As soon as we started using, we lost contact with reality all over again. That first taste took us over—body and soul. The compulsion owned us.

These windows of clarity came to us less frequently as our compulsion progressed. It was sometimes years before we surfaced from the depths of our addiction again.

Losing touch with reality began to mean losing touch with our conscience as well. The values and ideals of normal people no longer made sense to us. We became increasingly willing to do whatever we had to do to use. If we had to lie a little, we lied. If we had to steal a little, we stole. We learned the patterns of other people's reactions and tried to manipulate them however we could. We were sweet and apologetic or aggressive and even violent as circumstances demanded. We said all kinds of harmful things to the people who loved us in order to get our way. This is the process of demoralization: the more we do what we have to do to use, the less we care about the consequences our actions have for ourselves and others. Most of us tried to hide as long as we could behind the lie that we were only hurting our selves. All lies wear thin eventually, and even when we knew we were hurting others, we kept pursuing our next fix, come what may. Most of us have done things we are not proud of to satisfy our compulsion. Many of us have acted horribly during periods of abstinence. Once we are fully demoralized, we cease to care how we behave. We simply act out on whatever impulses we have.

Everyone experiences demoralization differently. There are those of us whose spirits are broken because we once lied to someone we loved, and there are those of us who deserve to spend a long time in prison. However deeply demoralized we have become, there is hope of recovery. The process described in this book will put us back in touch with the voice of our conscience so that we will not ever have to become demoralized again. On the other hand, let no one who still has some contact with their conscience question the severity of their addiction. Not all of us sink to the bottom of life, and we are grateful for it, but our loss of control over our using is just as hazardous and as real.

The following example of the progression of compulsion is offered by one of our members who originally came to us because of her husband's drinking. She discovered that she had a compulsion for her husband that eventually led her to alienate her family of origin and her own children. She also discovered that she had the beginnings of a compulsion for certain kinds of food.

“A lot of alcoholics talk about not being able to drive past the mom and pop store without buying beer. I found I couldn’t drive past those stores without buying a twenty-five cent bag of salt and vinegar chips. I’d stop in just to get chips and they’d be gone before I left the parking lot. Eventually, I bought two bags, so I could have some for the road as well. The next time I stopped in I realized that the little bags were four for a dollar, but for a few cents more than a dollar I could get a big bag. It didn’t make sense to buy those little bags—it wasn’t cost effective. So I bought a big bag. But if I bought that many chips, I ate that many chips. Now I was eating ten times as many as I was before. And I kept buying big bags.

“Then I started doing something that I would never usually do—buying candy bars. There were certain foods that I would never buy because I knew that if I bought them I would eat them. So I would never buy candy bars. But now I was buying lots of candy bars. I was on a spree and didn’t have any control over it. Of course at the time, I thought I was behaving normally. When I went to visit my daughter, I ate non-stop. Just a chip here and some candy there, then some ice cream after that. My grandson had a jar of candies that were his treat when he was a good boy, and I ate those. Of course, I thought nobody noticed my eating until my daughter said something about it to me. I was so embarrassed that I decided to stop eating.

“I said, ‘Ok, next time I’m going to behave differently. I know what the problem is and I will just change my behavior.’ On the next visit I interacted with people and engaged with my grandchildren. I didn’t eat and was able to really connect. Then came dessert. My daughter brought out a cheese cake and said ‘This is the best cheese cake in the world.’ And that was the end of my ability to interact with my family. For the rest of the visit I stopped interacting, and I stopped engaging with the grandchildren. I never left the kitchen and stayed right by the cheese cake the whole time. I counted and recounted the pieces and the number of people. The only thing I could think about was having a piece of cheese cake all to my self after everybody was gone. Someone said to me ‘Well, why don’t you just set one aside for later?’ I couldn’t even think of a healthy way to obsess! I was just out of control.”

Here we have all the qualities of a real addictive compulsion. This woman was unable to control her behavior, her consumption grew worse over time, and her compulsion had consequences in her relationships with her children and grandchildren. If this compulsion had continued, this woman has every reason to believe that the consequences to her health and her

family life could have been severe. Take the example above and substitute any substance or behavior for “salt and vinegar chips.” If you are suffering from an addiction, this description should fit the early stages of your compulsion perfectly.

Some may think this example is too silly. They would protest that drugs and alcohol are far more serious addictions than potato chips and cheese cake. To some extent, we agree. It is only common sense that whatever is killing us fastest deserves the most attention. However, for some addicts, addictions to things like food, sex, or gambling are killing us faster than anything else. Heart disease, type II diabetes, and obesity are all serious conditions that can be caused by something as simple as not being able to control how many potato chips we eat. Even when an addiction like overeating isn't threatening to kill us physically, it can threaten to kill us spiritually. Overeating, sex and gambling addictions and similar addictions can cause a loss of interpersonal relationships, a decrease the quality of our lives, and can cut us off from God. There are no silly addictions. Any behavior that we cannot control, gets worse, and causes harm to us and others qualifies as a compulsion and should be taken seriously.

Those of us who are drug and alcohol addicts found that when we entered periods of abstinence without a spiritual solution we began to act out in other ways. Our relationship with substances like food and sex spun out of control. As addicts, we have to exercise caution and pay attention to any and all compulsive behaviors. If we are using any substance or behavior to solve our basic problem with living, we run the risk of developing a new addiction.

When our compulsion had progressed far enough, we lost everything that meant anything to us. Our jobs and families—our whole lives were taken from us. We were useless, worthless, and alone. Abstinence was too painful for us to bear for any length of time. Using threw us deeper into the abyss. We contemplated suicide, or simply resigned ourselves to the fact that our addiction would kill us. We welcomed the idea. Death meant peace of mind. Our struggles would finally be over and we could rest. Many of us who have found spiritual healing in the process described in this book had once progressed to the very bottom of addictive compulsion. We now live in the kind of peace and freedom we once thought could only come from death. If you are living only to use and feel that you are close to the end, we encourage you to consider our way of life. No matter how deeply we sink into addiction and despair, there is always that

quiet Power who pulls us back to a life of spiritual freedom as soon as we let go of our pride and ask.

### ADDICTIVE OBSESSION

Some of us made the mistake of thinking our lives would get better if only we could stop using. If we were addicts, the opposite was true—our lives got worse. Life is hard for addicts. Using was our way of getting through life. With our source of comfort gone, we had nothing left to help us through this world. When abstinent, we were even more alienated, restless, and full of rage than when we were using. The longer we stayed abstinent, the worse things got. We clung to other people and then cast them away from us, becoming reclusive and antisocial. When we couldn't stand the isolation any more, we threw ourselves desperately at people once more. We grasped for anything and everything that might ease our discomfort. We raced through our days, and then our minds raced at night. Some of us fell into depression, developed crippling anxieties, or even began to have delusions and hallucinations. In abstinence, we were losing our minds. We saw those ahead of us—our elders with twenty or more years of abstinence—and they were as miserable as we were. Some of them took their own lives. We couldn't blame them. Twenty years of this kind of pain would be unbearable.

Many of us could not put twenty days together, let alone twenty years. In part, this was due to the pain of normal life, and in part it was due to the fact that we were insane. Our minds were suffering from thoughts beyond our control. As soon as we gained abstinence, we began to experience the obsession to use. Our thoughts of using were stronger than and did not respond to reason; they controlled our behavior even when we didn't want them to. No matter how we fought with these thoughts, they always won. Either they caused us to relapse or they beat us into exhaustion. We have already mentioned the four kinds of obsession that abstinent addicts experience. These are the intrusive, reoccurring, circumstantial, and fundamental obsessions. We will now look at each kind of obsession in more detail, and offer the experiences of some of the members of our fellowship. Again, we encourage readers to test our description against their own experience. If you have experienced anything like what we describe below, you are probably an addict and may need a spiritual awakening to recover. If you have not experienced anything like what we describe, you will not need this book.

The intrusive obsession is one that arises suddenly in our minds and takes over. Whatever we were thinking or doing before the intrusive obsession arose, is quickly set aside. We hear the command to use and we obey, no matter what the cost. Appointments are missed, promises broken. We show up late and high or not at all. Many of us had been working hard to stay abstinent when we were hit by an intrusive obsession that undid all our hard work in an instant. It doesn't seem to make a difference whether things are going well or poorly for us. We may be in a sour mood, or we may be having the best day of our lives—the intrusive obsession comes when it wants to come and we are powerless against it even if we have every good reason not to use. One of our members describes the phenomenon like this: “I'd have money and I'd stop using for a while. Then one day, I'm driving home to see my family and all of the sudden—Bam!—I'm driving to the dope man's house. Meanwhile I'm thinking, ‘Why am I doing this? What am I even doing?’”

Another of our members who is an opiate addict tells the following story to explain the power of intrusive obsession. “My parents were making me take urine tests whenever they wanted to. They didn't know what else to do. My father said to me, ‘If you can pass three urines, I'll buy you any new car under \$30,000.’ In my head I was like, ‘Wow, the dude really wants me to get clean!’ Of course, I'm thinking, ‘Once I have this car I can start using again.’ So I muster together one clean urine. I was still using one pill a day, and I would always have a couple of those drinks to clear your system hidden in my room. My father woke me up one morning and says, ‘Alright, we're going for your next urine.’ So I drank two of those drinks just to make sure I passed. One thing I will never forget is the happiness that I saw in my father's eyes when I passed my second clean urine. That killed me because I knew I wasn't even clean.

“After that we took a trip to a dealership to look at this car I liked. I was so excited. Everything seemed to be going so good. I woke up the next morning and I was hit so hard by this mental obsession. I wanted to get high so bad. I tried to fight it. I said to myself, ‘All you have to do is wait four more hours and pass this last urine.’ An hour went by and I couldn't take it. I ended up finding methadone from a friend of mine. I couldn't pass that urine.”

Even in the face of obvious self-interest, our friend was not able to hold out against the intrusive obsession for more than an hour. Sometimes our reasons to stay abstinent have been more noble. We have tried to abstain for our family and loved ones. Or we have tried to abstain

in order to keep a job. Those of us who had progressed deeply into our addictions tried to abstain in order to save our own lives. No reason was strong enough to save us from the intrusive obsession.

Another of our members was in danger of losing her life to drugs if she didn't stop using. She sought professional help and had every resource at her disposal to keep her abstinent. But when the intrusive obsession hit, she had no power to resist it.

“I once went to a drug and alcohol counselor and sat in her office weeping uncontrollably. It was the first time I'd ever told anybody everything I'd been doing since I started using, which was a pretty powerful experience for me. There it was all in front of me—everything I had done. She made arrangements for me. She wanted me to go to a rehab, but there was nothing open until Thursday, so I would come to the outpatient Tuesday and Wednesday. She said, ‘All you have to do is come back tomorrow morning.’ She started telling me to do it one day at a time. I looked at her and I started crying again. I said, ‘I don't know if I can make it until tomorrow morning.’ Then she said, ‘Well then, you take it an hour at a time, five minutes at a time. Here's what we are going to do.’ She gave me her home number and told me to call her every time I wanted to use. I made arrangements with my girlfriend to go to a meeting that night. I left her office with every intention of following the plan we had made.

“My friend came to pick me up for the meeting. Then the thought to get high entered my mind and I said, ‘I don't know what you are going to do, but I'm going downtown.’ I desperately wanted not to use, but I had no defense against that thought.”

The reoccurring obsession is different from the intrusive obsession because it does not immediately change our behavior. We can fight off the reoccurring obsession, but it keeps coming back at us. If we can fight off the reoccurring obsession for a whole day—perhaps by calling people for support or attending recovery meetings—we are exhausted by the effort. What usually happens when we are hit by a reoccurring obsession is that we try to reason with ourselves, presenting every good reason why we should not use. We may even convince ourselves that staying abstinent is the right thing to do. However, even as we present our argument, the thought to use hits us again and again. The reoccurring obsession does not need to argue with us—it is stronger than our reasoning. Even while we convince ourselves that we should not use, we find ourselves using anyway.

One of our members describes it this way: “Once I was clean for about two weeks when I started obsessing about how I just wanted to have one more really good high. I thought about the consequences—there would be no pot left and my fiancé would know that I had finished it even though I promised him I wouldn’t. I would have lied to him and he would be upset. My mind was running through all these consequences and trying to tell myself not to use. Meanwhile, I walked to the closet, got out my box, got my stuff together, and went and smoked. All my logic and reason and fear didn’t do a thing.”

Another friend tells it like this: “It’s like all day I can’t think about anything but getting high, and those thoughts don’t respond to thought or reason. I knew I was going to lose my daughter if I used again, and I knew I was going to lose my job and family, and I knew it was wrong, and I knew they would find out because the money was gone, but it didn’t make a difference. I’d go and do it anyway.”

With the intrusive and reoccurring obsessions attacking us, it is no wonder few of us can remain abstinent for very long. Sometimes, even when our minds are free from thoughts of using, we find ourselves relapsing. This usually happens when we stumble upon the opportunity to use. Circumstances conspire to put us in front of a substance or give us access to a behavior to which we are addicted. In those circumstances, if our spiritual condition is not good, we use without a second thought. We refer to instances like this as circumstantial obsession.

Let us provide an example from one of our members: “A few months after I started smoking dope, I decided to stop. I went for a walk. It was a sunny day. I thought about how the weed was affecting my mind. I had lost my motivation to do things I loved. I was starting to have trouble with my parents and some of my friends. I couldn’t seem to think clearly most of the time, and I was starting to get paranoid now and then. So I decided to quit. It felt good. I would get back to the things that mattered to me in life.

“Right then I saw two guys sitting on a curb in broad daylight getting high. They had a pretty big pipe and didn’t seem to care who saw them. I watched them offer a smoke to the mailman when he walked by, and I thought, ‘Maybe I’ll just walk by to make sure this is really happening.’ When I walked past them they were real enough to ask me if I wanted to join them. Without thinking about it, I sat down. Before I knew it, I was high. In fact, I wasn’t high enough. I wanted more than they were giving me so I left to go call my connection.

“At the time, I didn’t even remember my decision to quit. When they made the offer, there was no question in my mind—of course I was going to get high. Why wouldn’t I? One second earlier I was telling myself I was done forever. As soon as someone put weed in front of me, my mind went blank and I was helpless.”

Moments like these are the great test of our spiritual condition. If we have no spiritual condition at all, we relapse before we even know what we are doing. Sometimes, we are able to resist using—we strain against the desire and walk away. Then we are overwhelmed by a reoccurring obsession. We spend the next several days repeating the incident over and over again in our minds. We cannot shake the idea of using. Even as we assure ourselves that we did the right thing, the strength of our obsession drags us down into anxiety and depression. If our spiritual condition is good, however, we will let the opportunity to use come and go without a second thought. A solid spiritual condition keeps the intrusive and reoccurring obsessions at bay, and it gives us the power to walk freely in this world. We do not have to fear substances and behaviors that once overpowered us. Becoming recovered means gaining freedom from addictive obsession.

We often hear it said that addicts must avoid people, places, and things that remind them of their addiction. This is sound advice for anyone who still suffers from circumstantial obsession. However, we have found that those addicts who are thorough in their work on the program of action described in this book have no reason to fear anyone or anything that once was associated with their addiction. A spiritual awakening puts us on new ground. We can go anywhere as long as our aim is to be useful to the people around us. Spiritual power protects us. We never have to use again.

We have already discussed the fundamental obsession in some detail, and we will return to it again in our chapter on surrender. At the moment, let us simply remember that the fundamental obsession lies beneath all the other forms of obsession. Fundamental obsession may not appear in the form of thoughts of using, and will not cause an immediate relapse. This obsession is our constant preoccupation with ourselves and how we feel—it is the self-obsession that is basic to our character. For some addicts, the intrusive, reoccurring, and circumstantial obsessions get easier to cope with over time. The fundamental obsession, on the other hand, only grows worse during long periods of abstinence. We have watched addicts worsen as

decades of abstinence pass. As addicts, we have a problem with living life. Trying to remain abstinent without a solution to our basic problem with living is horribly painful. Life does not get easier with time. Life only continues, and we continue to be unfit for living.

If you have identified with our description of compulsion and obsession, then you are probably an addict. This means that you will never be able to use in safety, and that your efforts to stay abstinent will either fail or prove extremely painful and unsatisfying. We have never met an addict who was able to remove addictive obsession on their own power. Nor have we ever found any human power that could do the job. When we find that we suffer from compulsion and obsession, we discover that we are doomed. Without spiritual help, our addictions will drag us down to demoralization, institutionalization and death.

To some of us, this news came as a relief—it meant that we could stop fighting. The compulsion and obsession also helped to explain our irrational behavior. Most of us have had the experience of listening to our loved ones plead with us to stop using. They told us what good people we were, what great lives we could have if only we stopped. They insisted that if we really loved them, we would change our ways. Sometimes they threatened us, or tried to limit our freedom. Eventually, they left us, telling us it was too painful to watch us destroy ourselves. These confrontations left us feeling guilty and ashamed of ourselves, but they never stopped us from using. Usually, the more uncomfortable we were during such confrontations, the more desperately we needed to use afterwards. When our loved ones tried to control our behavior by hiding things from us—like bottles or car keys—or by placing us under certain restrictions, we always found a way to use in spite of their efforts. To our loved ones, we seemed hell-bent on destroying ourselves and taking them with us. The truth was that we were not in control of our own behavior. We were insane. We could not stop no matter how badly we wanted to or how hard we tried.

We do not like to engage in controversy or to criticize other methods of addressing addiction. Each of the many methods available has its benefits and keeps some people from using. However, those of us who needed the solution offered in this book found that no other method worked for us. Medicines, counseling, or showing up at church or a recovery meeting did nothing to remove obsession from our minds. People more functional than we were could benefit from these methods. It is no one else's fault that we were too far gone to be helped by

human power. All the same, we want to be sure that our readers know that our program of action can succeed where other methods have failed. In our experience, nothing else was able to help us until we found a spiritual awakening.

One common method we tried was the self-awareness cure. This cure comes in various forms, but it always involves giving the addict insight into his or her condition and then hoping that this insight will result in freedom from the need to use. Well-meaning councilors have advised us to list our “triggers,” those things that make us think of using. Once we had a list of our “triggers,” they suggested we stay away from all the things on our list. If we were never triggered, we would never relapse. The problem with this method, for us, was that our lists were very, very long. We wanted to use when we woke up, when we went to sleep, when we were happy and when we were sad. Intrusive obsession could enter our minds without any warning at all, and the reoccurring obsession pounded away at us no matter where we were or who we were with. Avoiding “triggers” might keep us away from the circumstantial obsession, but most of us would have to live under lock and key to stay away from every circumstance that could possibly lead to using.

Other versions of the self-awareness cure encourage addicts to remember past traumas and to feel all our feelings. Our problems, they say, are rooted in the past, in our experiences of our family of origin, perhaps. Under this kind of treatment, we have learned much about ourselves and our personal histories. We may have learned to communicate better or even found some peace around certain painful moments in our past. We know many normal people who have benefited greatly from this kind of therapy. Unfortunately, as addicts we have found that self-awareness cures of this kind fall short of our need. They do not remove obsession, and in some cases the fundamental obsession only grows worse under this kind of treatment. Knowing ourselves does not necessarily mean that we can control ourselves any better. When an obsession hits, all the self-awareness in the world cannot keep us from using.

Another common method of treating addiction is the meeting-attendance method. The advice is widely given that addicts should attend many recovery meetings. If you feel like using, we are told, go to a meeting. Go to ninety meetings in as many days in order to prevent yourself from getting complacent about your recovery. When you’re in a pinch and can’t find a meeting, call someone in the program and have a meeting over the phone. For many people, this is an

excellent way to stay abstinent. We are grateful for the number and diversity of recovery meetings, and we have known plenty of addicts who gain long years of abstinence simply by going to meetings regularly. However, those of us who needed this book found that going to meetings didn't do anything for us except make us crazier. Usually, we didn't last long in meetings. Once an intrusive obsession hit us, it was too late to make a phone call or look for a church basement to hide in. Even when we were able to make meetings for a while, we suffered horribly as a result. Long periods of abstinence only meant long battles with obsession. Each meeting and each phone call served to keep us abstinent for as long as they lasted. Sometimes we even forgot about using for a little while. But when we hung up the phone or the meeting was over, we were left alone with our broken minds again. We used so that we could escape the unbearable psychic pain that results from our inability to fit ourselves into this life. Meetings never took away that pain for us. Nor did they offer us anything that could change us so that we could be useful, productive people. Meetings offered friends and fellowship, but they didn't offer a solution that could show us how to live.

When we work the program of action described in this book, we have a spiritual awakening that completely transforms us. Our minds and lives are changed. Released from addictive obsession, we enter a world of freedom and power. We can go wherever we please without fear of relapse. Frequently, we are called to the depths of hell to comfort someone who suffers there and offer them a new way of life. The worries and concerns that once made life seem unbearable are now petty to us, for our lives are rich with a new sense of purpose. We are connected to a network of people who have found spiritual freedom and our gatherings come alive with a sense of the presence of God.

We encourage anyone who wants to experiment with self-awareness cures or meeting attendance to go ahead and do so. If you are not as severely affected by obsession as we were, there is a good chance that one of these methods may work for you. On the other hand, if you find yourself identifying strongly with our description of addiction, then you may discover that these methods will not work for you. Of course, there is no way of knowing whether or not you really need a spiritual awakening until you have tried the other methods available to you. It might be worth an experiment with self-awareness cures or regular meeting attendance if it convinces you of your need for spiritual healing. In fact, if you are not totally convinced of your

need for the solution presented in this book, it is best if you try your luck elsewhere first. When it comes to spiritual work, half-hearted efforts produce half-hearted results or no results at all. We trust each addict to his or her own conscience on these matters. Our only suggestion is that before anyone decides to work this program, they be sure that this is really what they want to do.

## SURRENDER

So far, we have tried to provide our readers with every opportunity to avoid committing themselves to spiritual work. Spiritual work involves a full confession and restitution for our wrongs and a lifestyle of prayer and charity. If you are not interested in our spiritual solution, or feel that you might still be able to control your using, if you prefer to try some other method of addressing your addiction, or if you do not believe that you are an addict, then this book is not for you. On the other hand, if you have identified with our description of addiction and are interested in a spiritual solution, then we are at your service.

Our program involves a series of actions designed to be taken in order. We feel it is best not to worry too much about the actions that are ahead of us in the process. When we focus on the task at hand, we find that we are ready for each action when its time has come. Things that seem impossible to us now will simply be the natural next step when we come to them. This book will describe each action in order, and we recommend that no one read too far ahead of themselves. You are not under any obligation to do anything that doesn't feel right to you. If ever you reach an action that you are not willing to take, you are perfectly free to walk away from this program. We will understand—this work is not for everyone. What we would like to avoid is the idea that anyone can skip around in this process or pick and choose the actions they want to use. These actions are ordered—one follows the next and isn't of any value unless it is taken after the actions that precede it and followed up with the actions that come after it. If we want our work to result in a spiritual awakening, we have to be willing to follow suggestions. Many of us suffered from the temptation to make up our own program. The results of such invention were never good.

Before we describe our first action, we should outline our general approach to spirituality. Most of us started this work without any spiritual beliefs. We didn't believe in God, or we didn't think that God would help us. Some of us were angry at the very idea of God. We had bad

experiences with religion and religious people, and so we rejected anything that reminded us of organized religion. When we heard the word “God,” we thought of a particular idea of God we had come to resent. This attitude made it difficult for us to explore spiritual things. Before we had even begun to consider spiritual principles, we closed our minds to them. We were unwilling to give the spiritual side of life a fair trial. As long as we maintained this frame of mind, we were unable to make any progress along a spiritual path. The first requirement of this program is that we set our prejudice aside and become willing to give spirituality a try.

We do not have to accept any one else’s ideas about God. Each of us is free to choose our own conception, or to start our work without any conception of God at all. The program of action described in this book provides the opportunity for each of us to have a series of spiritual experiences. When we take an action, we have an experience. With each experience, we gain new evidence that spiritual power is at work in our lives. Once we have enough evidence, we begin to grow in faith. Based on our experiences, we can develop our own personal understanding of God. Our understanding will probably change over time as we continue to have new experiences.

Most of us found that it was best to begin this work by forgetting everything we thought we knew about God and starting over. A few of us had strong religious convictions, but we had to admit that our beliefs did little or nothing to keep us from using. What we needed was not beliefs, but direct experience—we needed to be changed. If we had hesitations about setting our religious beliefs aside, we asked ourselves this: were we willing to put our faith to the test? Those beliefs that were true would still be true once God had changed us. In fact, this process would only prove the validity of our beliefs and deepen our faith in ways we never dreamed possible. If any of our beliefs were invalid or even harmful to us, this process would expose them as such and we could be free of them. Were we willing to let God shape our faith through experience? Or weren’t we willing to trust God that much?

Those of us who began this process without religious beliefs faced a different set of problems. We struggled with intellectual reservations. We wanted to argue about God. We wanted to ask impossible questions, point out contradictions, and dare anyone to convince us that God could really exist. Our intellectual reservations, at their root, were usually nothing more than simple unwillingness to believe. We didn’t want to believe in God, so no one could

convince us otherwise. The God idea made us uncomfortable. If God was real, it meant we would have to make some changes above and beyond simple abstinence. We wouldn't be able to pretend that we were in control of our lives anymore. We would have to get honest and set things right. We had secrets we wanted to take to the grave. We had people in our past we never wanted to have to face again. We just wanted to stop using and then go back to a life based on serving our own needs. We did not want to spend any time helping other people. Beneath all our clever arguments lurked these moral reservations. We didn't want to believe in God because we didn't like the consequences of that kind of belief.

We cannot convince anyone that God exists, nor do we wish to enter into that kind of argument. All who are willing to believe in the possibility of God and do a little work will soon find proof of God's existence in the evidence of their own experience. Once we were open-minded about spiritual things, we were able to begin our work. A pragmatic attitude served us well. We tested spiritual ideas by their results. A spiritual idea only had value to us if it proved itself useful in some way. If an idea's effects were harmful or none at all, then we didn't bother with it any further. In this spirit, we approached the work before us. We were willing to give spirituality a try. We hung on to those things that improved our lives and changed us in positive ways, the rest we let fall away. At the same time, we tried to remember that the spiritual ideas that worked best were usually not the ones that made us the most comfortable. We had to be willing to give ideas a trial even if they didn't feel good to us at first.

The first idea we would like to propose here is that the fundamental obsession—our basic obsession with ourselves—is at the root of all our problems. Fundamental obsession warps our view of the world. We can only see those things that relate to our wants and needs. In this way, we miss out on almost everything that is happening around us, and we often do not know the truth of our own experience. Because our perception is so limited, we can never really be sure that the way we remember things is the way they actually happened. Our relationships suffer because we are not able to see other people for who they really are. We can only see them for who we want them to be. Other people's needs are invisible to us. We can only think of them in terms of the service they might provide us. When people don't behave the way we want them to, we get confused and believe that they have wronged us. We are not able to recognize that they are whole people, with desires and motivations all their own.

If people are hard on us, life itself is more so. In our self-obsession, we have grand ideas about who we should be and how we ought to be treated. We have plans and visions for our future. We dream great dreams of who we will be. But somehow, life never goes according to our plans. Something always comes between us and our dreams, and we rarely take disappointment well. We feel we are the victims of life. We aren't getting our fair share. As addicts, we are the tragic heroes of our own imaginations. Convinced that we could have been something wonderful if only life hadn't intervened, we cannot see that our own self-obsession is the cause of our condition. Instead of taking responsibility for our lives, we sit around feeling sorry for our selves.

This sort of drama gets played out on a daily basis. We wake up in the morning with a sense of what we want and start making plans to get it. Then we spend our day pursuing what we want and become increasingly frustrated as people and circumstances get in our way. We do our best to manipulate events so that things fall in our favor. The stronger our self-obsession, the more likely we are to be insensitive or cruel as we carry out our plans. A day goes well for us when nothing comes between us and what we want. A day goes poorly when all our efforts result in dissatisfaction. More often than not, the effort to get what we want takes the pleasure out of our achievements. We seem to be working too hard for too little reward. A life approached in this manner cannot yield much happiness. The decisions we make based on self-interest lead us to pain and alienation. All the powers of our self-will are worthless—they cannot keep us from using and they cannot make our self-obsessed dreams come true. If we are to have any hope of living a life of contentment and peace, we have to negate the power of our fundamental obsession, and this means ending our efforts to control our own lives.

The first action of this program is to make a complete surrender of our will and our lives to the care of God. If we need this program, we suffer from addictive compulsion and obsession and cannot control our using. No human power that we know of is able to set us free. We struggle under the weight of a fundamental obsession and cannot live like normal people. If we are going to ask the Spirit to change us, we have to be willing to give it control of our lives. We do not know which parts of our lives need to be changed and which need to remain the same. We do not know which parts of our character need to be removed, or what our spiritual ideal should be. God knows. And God's Spirit can change us, but only if we get out of its way.

Before we decide to take this action, we take some time to make sure we really want to. Are we ready to let go completely? We do not know what God will do with us; all we know is that we will change. Do we have any reservations, or can God really have it all? If this action doesn't scare us a little, then we may not understand what we are about to do. We are going to give our selves over to spiritual power and let it rearrange us in any way that it sees fit. None of us rushed into this action. We took time to search our conscience until we were certain that we wanted to change.

Once we are sure we want to continue, we can take this action anywhere and with anyone we choose. It is important to have at least one witness—the person who is going to guide us through this program—but it can be helpful to have other witnesses as well. The formal part of this action is simple. We gather our witnesses together and say the following prayer.

*God, please take all of me—my will and my life.*

*Free me from self-obsession and give me a heart to serve others.*

*Transform me, and make me an example of what your power can do.*

If we can say this prayer in the presence of witnesses and mean it, then we are ready to move on to the next chapter's work. Again, we do not have to believe in God in order to make our surrender. We only have to be willing to let God change us. In taking this first action, we enter into a living prayer that will continue throughout the work of the next two chapters. In this living prayer, our thoughts and actions will gradually grow closer to God. We will begin to have spiritual experiences and will find evidence for the existence of spiritual power.

The action of surrender opens a door to the world of the Spirit. Once we have invited spiritual power into our lives, it stays with us. As we stick to the tasks of this program, this power grows and demonstrates itself in all areas of our lives. We change for the better in ways we never could have predicted. Our lives are no longer any of our business. When we try to take control of our lives again, we feel the pull of the Spirit in the form of a deep restlessness. When we surrender again, restlessness vanishes and contentment returns. We have learned the hard way that the further we move away from this work after our initial act of surrender, the

worse our restlessness becomes. If we move too far from the work of the Spirit, the fundamental obsession becomes as powerful as it ever was and we find ourselves in danger of relapse.

Some people have dramatic emotional experiences when they make their surrender. Some people do not. We do not think these kinds of experiences are necessary or that they are better than less dramatic experiences of this action. Dramatic emotional experiences can be pleasant, but they can also be distracting. We have seen many people who have powerful surrender experiences abandon the rest of this work. Thinking they are cured, they feel they do not need the rest of our program. More often than not, they soon find themselves in more pain than ever. Many of us are tempted to cut this process short at one point or another. At the first sign of comfort, we want to quit. We are more interested in feeling better than in changing. And so we get what we want—temporary relief without any real change.

The proof of a successful surrender is the willingness to continue with the work of getting to know God through the program of action described in this book. We need no big experiences, though these are pleasant if they come. If we are willing to work and be changed, then we have completed our first spiritual action.

There is no sense reading any further until surrender is made. Our progress through the rest of this book will be determined by how we perform the actions each chapter describes. The instructions for the actions that follow surrender can be confusing and off-putting to individuals who have not yet surrendered. If you have come this far and are not yet ready to give yourself over to spiritual healing, we understand. Anytime you find yourself in need of us, we will be prepared to guide you up to this action again. God bless you and protect you until then.

## SOUL SEARCHING

If you have made your surrender, you are ready for more action. The next action of this program is a thorough soul-searching, and this will require making four lists: one of our resentments, one for our fears, one of sexual misconduct, and another for miscellaneous items that trouble our conscience and need to be confessed. Self-obsession has affected every aspect of our lives. Our job now is to expose and root out this obsession in those areas where it is blocking us from spiritual power and keeping us from being useful to others. Self-obsession keeps us isolated. If we are to find spiritual healing, we have to be able to connect to God and

the people around us. When we find the areas where we are blocked and expose them to the light of God's love, we feel new power coursing through us. This action is usually not easy. It rarely feels good, because it requires that we look at and get honest about the ugliest parts of our character. And we must be absolutely thorough. Any piece of darkness we try to hold on to will rot inside us and continue to block us from spiritual healing. We have seen many addicts fall back into active addiction because they would not turn their whole soul over to the light.

By making surrender, we have invited God's Spirit into our lives. Now we must let that Spirit demonstrate its power through us by allowing it to show us the parts of our character that are blocking us from God and others. Soul-searching is an act of prayer. In making our lists, we ask God to direct our attention to the things inside us that are blocking us. God will guide us if we ask. We will find insight flowing into our minds when we become quiet and listen for God's voice.

We begin with resentment. Most addicts are sensitive creatures. When someone gets in our way or hurts our feelings, we feel sorry for ourselves and form a resentment against them. We get angry and stay angry. We cannot seem to let anything go. Anytime we think of a person we resent, our pain and anger are churned up all over again. We replay events over and over again in our minds, growing more resentful as time passes. Suffering endlessly over every harm, we are soon hopelessly depressed. Resentments pile up and our minds race. We are constantly irritable and discontented. Ordinary life is made extraordinarily difficult as a result of our unwillingness or inability to forgive.

Some of us have trouble recognizing our resentments at first. We don't think we are angry at anyone, or we only think we are angry at ourselves. In this case, we found it helpful to think of resentment as a process by which we re-feel old feelings over and over again even though the cause of those feelings is no longer active in our lives. For example, when we re-feel our childhood jealousy against a sibling or mentally relive our ill will toward a former coworker. Jealousy, ill will, disappointment, and pain can all be forms of resentment. Anytime we find ourselves obsessively reliving the same event over and over in our minds, we have a resentment.

We begin our soul-searching by making a list of all the people, places, things and ideas we resent. Sitting alone with paper and pen, we say a prayer for God to guide us: "God, please show me the things that separate me from you and others." Then we begin to make our list. We

trust that any name or image that comes to mind belongs on our list. We do not suppress anything, no matter how troubling or seemingly inconsequential. After making our surrender and praying for insight, we trust fully that God will guide us to those resentments that need our attention. If nothing comes to mind, or if we seem to reach an impasse, we think back over our lives from our earliest memories forward, asking God to show us anything that should be added to our list. We don't have to strain ourselves by endlessly scouring the past. We do not need to rely on our own power to dredge up every ghost—God will show us what we need to see.

The only thing we leave off our list is our own name. The purpose of soul-searching is to find those things that block us from God and others. We generally find that our struggles with self-esteem are resolved in the process of restoring our human relations and getting right with the Spirit.

We make our list in a single column, leaving plenty of space between each name. In our experience, it is best to be as honest and thorough as possible. Some of us wanted to pretend that we didn't have resentments against certain people, or we felt too guilty about our resentments to feel comfortable writing down their name. It is extremely important that we write down the resentments that come to us in this exercise, whether we feel guilty about them or not. Maybe we shouldn't be resentful, maybe it shows a lack of kindness on our part, but part of being honest is admitting where we are less than perfect. We need to let ourselves be as petty and resentful as we really are.

When we've completed our column of names, we start again at the top of our list and write out a second column. Next to each name, we state the reasons for our resentment. In writing out our reasons, we are brief and specific. We need not elaborate at great length. We want to get right at the heart of the matter. We find it helpful to be as specific as we possibly can. If there is a particular event or instance that stands out in our memory as a way to explain the reasons for our resentment, then we write it down. The more specific we are, the more emotional content our soul-searching will have. The more brief we are able to be the, less our self-obsession will be able to warp the truth. We want just the bear facts, as specific as possible.

If we are not sure why a name is on our list, we are patient and we pray. Something will come to us if we are willing to see it. If we are completely willing to see the truth and nothing comes, then we may skip this entry and come back to it later. We keep the person in our prayers,

asking the Spirit for insight into our relationship with the person, institution, or idea in question. If, after completing our other entries, we can still find no reason for this name, then we might want to remove it or simply place a note in our second column that we are uncertain why we carry this resentment.

After we have finished our second column, we move on to write a third, in which we list the affects that the behavior of each person, place, or idea had on us. We use the following categories: finance, security, sex, personal relationships, pride, self-esteem, and ambitions. If the behavior of those we resent affects us in any of these categories, we make a note of it. We may also make a brief note of the details.

At this point, our list should look something like the example on page 34.

If we have been thorough in our work so far, this action has probably brought up a lot of emotions. If we have trusted God's guidance, there are some things on our list that make us uncomfortable. Some of us are confronted by overwhelming feelings of anger or shame as we move through this part of our work. When this work gets hard, we find ourselves dragging our feet. Often, we delay writing as long as possible, and then have trouble staying focused when we sit down to write. Getting all our shortcomings on paper doesn't feel good. Many people walk away from spiritual work during the action of soul-searching. We encourage anyone having trouble during this action to be in close contact with their recovered friend, who is guiding them through this process, and to keep in mind that we are only listing these things in order to be rid of them. This pain has an ending. We have been haunted by these resentments as long as we can remember, but once we are through with soul-searching and confession, we won't ever have to feel them again. Better to push through the pain now than to suffer these things for the rest of our lives.

Our first three columns are a catalogue of all our resentments as we understand them from the perspective of our self-obsession. We have before us an outline of the world as it affects us, not the world as it truly is. The time has come for us to learn a new way of thinking, and to see some hard truth about ourselves. We will now look at our behavior in relation to each of the items on our list. We want to see how our own behavior affected other people. Often, we have made the mistake of thinking that our self-obsession didn't affect anyone but ourselves. In

fact, when we acted from self-obsession we caused great harm to the people in our lives. The moral term for self-obsession is selfishness. When self-obsessed, we act selfishly and hurt the people around us.

In our fourth column, we write out specific instances in which we have been selfish, self-seeking, dishonest, and afraid in relation to each item on our list. Because most of us are not used to examining our resentments in this way, our fourth column will require a lot of prayer. We ask for God to give us insight. If we are thinking too hard and straining to figure out how we were selfish, then we are inhibiting the inspiration that will come as soon as we are willing to let God show us the truth.

Our fourth column should contain no reference to the wrongs or shortcomings of others. This is a list of our own moral failings, not anyone else's. If we find ourselves being critical of someone else in our fourth column, then we will need to pray and start again. Often we find that in circumstances where we think we are the victim, we made a selfish decision that placed us in a position to be hurt. Also, we are frequently the perpetrator of a kind of harm for which we resent someone else. We must become willing to see our resentments from a new perspective. As soon as we are willing, the truth will come to us.

An example of what a fourth column might look like for the examples provided earlier is printed on page 35.

This fourth column may look as if we are being excessively hard on ourselves, but we are only trying to see the facts from an outside perspective. We try to look at our behavior objectively, and we find this allows us to let go of our resentments. When we find where we have been wrong, we are able to forgive others. If we have trouble seeing where we have been selfish, self-seeking, dishonest, and afraid—for example in cases where we have been the victims of violence or abuse—then we look before, during, and after the event. Did our behavior before

## Resentments

I resent:	Because:	Affects my:
1. Ed	He flirted with my wife at the Christmas party. He told my wife that I was cheating on her.	Sex: threatens my marriage and my affairs. Relationships: my wife, my kids Pride: He disrespected me.
2. Millie	Wants me to get a divorce and to give the kids to my wife. Asking for money.	Relationships: my wife, my kids Sex: with my wife, with Millie Finance: She wants too much money.
3. My Boss	Threatened to fire me in front of the whole staff. He's lazy and makes us do all the work.	Pride: I should be treated better. Self-esteem: Made me ashamed. Ambition: I should have his job. Finance: If I lose this job, I'm broke.

1. Selfish: I'm the one that cheated on my wife. I've only been thinking about my own pleasure. It must have really hurt to find out that I betrayed her.

Self-seeking: I want to appear to be a good husband and father. When my wife is interested in other men it shows everyone how lousy a husband I really am.

Dishonest: Ed was just being kind. I ignored my wife so I could go flirt, and she was lonely.

Afraid: I'll lose my wife. I'll be exposed to everyone as a poor husband.

2. Selfish: I just want to get pleasure out of Millie and not have to give anything to her in return. I got into this relationship purely to please myself even though I knew it could hurt my wife and kids.

Self-seeking: I want to be the successful playboy and the upstanding family guy at the same time. I guess it doesn't really work that way.

Dishonest: I told Millie I loved her and that I would do anything to be with her. I lied. I never intended to give up my family.

Afraid: To lose Millie and my family. I'll be lonely and I won't be getting laid.

3. Selfish: I'm not thinking about this from his point of view. He's got a guy on his hands (me) who can't show up for work on time and is always leaving early. My mind is always drifting away at work. My output is way below average. He's just doing what he has to do.

Self-seeking: I think I can be the boss, but I can't even be a decent worker.

Dishonest: He threatened to fire me in front of everyone because I was late again with another hangover. I kind of earned it.

Afraid: Of looking stupid. Of being embarrassed. Of losing everything and ending up broke and alone.

the event lead up to it in some way? Was our behavior during the event selfish? If not, how did we behave after the event? How did we carry the event of violence or abuse into our lives in ways that were selfish and harmful to others?

When we have finished with resentment, we move on to our fear list. Many of us begin this list believing that we aren't afraid of anything. The truth is that our lives are full of stress, anxiety, worry, morbid reflections, paranoia, insecurity, and many other forms of fear. This emotion is at the root of so many of our troubles. We worry about ourselves and then we behave poorly in an effort to protect our interests. Our fears are irrational, and many times they are not grounded in any reality at all. Our efforts to protect ourselves actually create more problems than they solve. In some cases, they create the exact circumstances we are afraid of.

Just as when we made a list of our resentments, we begin to examine our fear by praying for God's help and then making a list of names. We write down everything we are afraid of, regardless of whether something seems trivial or overwhelming to us. Finishing our first column, we move on to a second column, in which we write down our reasons for having each fear. We take our time with this second column, explaining the causes of each fear until we feel we have found the root of it. In a third column we list our reactions to each fear, the ways we think and behave when we are under the influence of that particular fear.

An example of the first three columns of a fear list is printed on page 39.

Our fourth column is an opportunity to examine how our self-will is involved in each of our fears. More often than not, fear is a result of our desire to control something over which we are powerless. When we try to run our lives based on self-interest rather than turning our will over to God, we begin to feel fear. In self-obsession, we place our will against the world. Inevitably, we grow nervous about all the things that could go wrong and cause us harm or loss. Rather than surrendering ourselves and embracing whatever God sends our way, we obsess about how to gain power over all the forces that are beyond our grasp. Much of our worst behavior is a result of this kind of fear-driven ambition.

If we can locate our self-will in relation to each of our fears, we will know where we need to let God take over our lives. Fear can then be replaced by faith. When we rely on God rather than on ourselves, we have nothing to fear. Our own worries and interests seem petty in

comparison to the vastness of divine grace. We know we are loved and cared for no matter what happens to us in this life. We may suffer. We may fail. We may be embarrassed or attacked. In all circumstances, we find that faith is a better basis for our actions than fear. In all things we know that God is with us and working through us toward the betterment of the world. We are a part of a project that is larger than us and our efforts. The Spirit was working in this world long before we came along, and it will continue without us long after we are gone. We feel specially blessed to have lived a life in which we could share the power of the Spirit in our own small way. When we have our four columns of fear, we look back over our list again and pray, asking the Spirit who it would have us be in relation to each thing we fear. If we want, we can include God's answers in a fifth column.

An example of a fourth column for the examples above might look like the example on page 40.

Finishing with fear, we move on to our sex list. When writing about our sex lives, we ask God to show us where we have hurt others and to help us shape a healthy ideal for future sexual behavior. Sexual energy is a powerful thing. When used selfishly, it has the power to do great harm. Anytime we were condescending or cruel, when we took advantage of another person's vulnerability, when we lied or cheated, when we abused, when we demanded sex or when we withheld it to punish our partner—in all of these circumstances we used sex to cause harm. There are also more subtle ways in which we misused sexual energy. We created jealousy, bitterness, envy, suspicion, and fear. We flirted and engaged in intrigue in order to satisfy a selfish yearning or to manipulate another person's emotions. We only paid attention to a person if we were attracted to them or wanted their approval, and we have ignored others or treated them unkindly because we did not find them appealing. We occasionally used sexuality to mock and belittle another person. We used sexual energy to increase our status, or tease and lead other people on. In many ways we were selfish and inconsiderate.

The first column of our sex list contains all the instances in which we have caused someone harm through our misuse of sex and sexual energy. We write down the name of the person involved and a brief description of how we harmed them. In our second column, we return to the top of our list, and for each item we name all the people who were affected by our

actions. Usually, this includes more than just the other person immediately involved. There are boyfriends and girlfriends, wives and husbands, children, family members, loved ones, and future partners to consider as we make out our second column. In a third column, we make a note of where we were selfish, dishonest, and inconsiderate in relation to each item on our list.

An example of the first three columns of a sex list is printed on page 41.

Finding out where we were wrong is only half the task of our sex list. Once our first three columns are in place, we ask God to help us shape an ideal for future sex conduct. In a fourth column, we go back to each item on our list and ask God what we should have done instead, or what we should do in the future in such situations. For each addict making a sex list, the sexual ideal will look different. We make no rules and offer no commandments. Each of us is free to rely on our own conscience and our relationship with the Spirit of God to discover a sexual ideal that suits us. The example of sex list fourth column below is only an example and is not meant to be used as a rule for anyone's conduct other than our imaginary friend who has cheated on his wife. Our only guiding principles are that we must be honest in all our sex relations, and we must not cause any harm. As addicts, we can't afford to have anything blocking our conscience, for a clear conscience is our connection to God.

An example of Sex list fourth column is printed on page 42.

With our resentment, fear, and sex lists all complete, we have only one task left before we are done with this action. We make a final list of anything that is eating at our conscience that does not appear on any of our other lists. Perhaps we hurt somebody or we are carrying around a secret we are ashamed of. Anything we are hoping to take with us to the grave should be written down in this fourth list. We do not need to elaborate on these items. There is only one column to this list. We just get the facts down on paper in as concise a manner as possible. When this is done, we review our lists to make sure we haven't left anything out. If there is nothing we are intentionally suppressing, then we are ready to move on to confession.

I'm afraid of:	Because:	My reaction:
1. Millie will leave me	I'll miss her affections. I'll have to work hard to get sex. I'll be alone and unwanted.	I make her promises I know I won't keep. I fight with her. I threaten to leave her and try to make her jealous. I stop calling her for a few weeks to make her feel what it would be like to be alone.
2. Getting fired	I'll look foolish and incompetent. Trouble at home. My wife might leave me. She might find another, better man. I'm worthless as a provider. I'm afraid I'm no good to anyone.	Not much. I keep showing up drunk. I mostly just worry about it and get stressed out and then come home angry. We have a lot of fights about money. I blame my wife for our money troubles.
3. Losing my family	Being alone and lonely. People would look at me like I'm a loser. Embarrassment. Pain. Loneliness. I'm afraid that deserve what I get. There is something wrong with me.	I lie to my wife and kids. I try to win their affection by buying them things we can't afford.

My self-will:

1. I'm trying to have a mistress and a family at the same time. This is an impossible situation. I can't sort this out. I need God to take over my sex life.

2. Blaming my wife for our debt doesn't do anything to help me keep my job. I'm trying to look like a good provider by acting like a jerk.

3. My lies will never hold this family together. I've done too much harm between the drinking and the affairs. My spending money is what is making us broke. It's up to God now whether I keep my family or loose them. God knows I deserve to be alone after all I've done. I'm willing to do whatever God wants for me.

## Sex List:

### I hurt:

1. My wife  
By cheating on her

2. Millie  
Lying and leading  
her to think I would  
leave my family for  
her

3. Susan  
Took advantage of  
her while she was drunk.  
Left her alone in a hotel  
room and stuck her  
with the bill.

### My actions also hurt:

My kids and in-laws.  
My mom is disappointed in me.

Her parents who love her and  
trusted me, too. Her sister.  
Whatever man is with  
her next.  
My wife and kids.

Her husband. Her kids.  
My family.

### Where I was wrong:

Selfish: I wanted to get my  
way even if it hurt my family.  
Dishonest: I told many, many  
lies so I could keep cheating.  
Inconsiderate: I didn't even  
think about how this would  
affect my son and daughter  
who have to grow up with a  
cheat for a father.

Selfish: Just wanted to feel  
good at her expense.  
Dishonest: Our whole  
relationship was based on  
my lies to her.  
Inconsiderate: I didn't ever  
stop to think how this would  
affect Millie, or her family or  
mine.

Selfish: Used her for sex and  
then abandoned her. She was  
not in her right mind, and  
never would have acted that  
way sober. I left her alone  
because I didn't want to have  
to deal with her surprise and  
guilt.  
Dishonest: Took advantage  
of her and played on her  
insecurities when she was  
drunk.  
Inconsiderate: I just didn't  
care how it would make her  
feel or how it would affect  
her family.

What I should have done instead:

1. I shouldn't have cheated. I should have worked out my troubles with my wife without getting other women involved. I don't know if we will stay married or not, but the least I could have done is to make sure that I keep my commitment to her until our relationship is over. In the future, if I'm lucky enough to keep my family, I should consider my wife's feelings. God help me honor my commitment to my wife and kids.

2. I should have been honest from the beginning. Millie never would have gotten involved with me if she knew my true intentions, and that would have saved everyone from a lot of pain.

3. I should have driven Susan home. I never should have started flirting with her. I saw her from across the room and knew that she was vulnerable and that I could take advantage of her. I should have prayed right then for God to take my bad intentions away and to show me what to do instead. In the future, I'm going to need to do a lot of praying when I'm around vulnerable women.

Once we've finished making our lists, we are ready for our next action, which is to read our lists aloud to God in the presence of our recovered friend. This is the action of confession. If we have been thorough in our soul-searching, confession will be an opportunity to get our souls clean. We've written down all our shortcomings, now is the time to ask God to take them away. Sitting down with our friend, we say a prayer that the Spirit will be with us and hear what we have to say. Then, we read through our lists. Unless our friend asks us to explain something, we need not elaborate. There can be a temptation to embellish our work, or to explain ourselves to our friend, but this is counterproductive. By explaining too much, we often are trying to make ourselves look good, or to justify our behaviors. We stick to the written word, trusting that God has helped us to get everything that needs to be said on paper.

This confession is between us and God; the person guiding us through this process acts as our silent witness. As we read, our friend will not comment or correct us. It is his or her job simply to listen and stay present.

We wrote our lists column by column, but we read them row by row, reading the full entry for each item before moving on to the next. Often, this allows us to see our work in a new light. We see the patterns of self-obsession that have poisoned our emotional lives. By the end of our confession, we should feel ready to invite the Spirit of God deeper into our personalities so that it can change us.

When our reading is complete, our recovered friend might share a few things from his or her lists, just to assure us that no matter what we've just confessed, we are not alone or beyond God's help. Our friend will ask us if there is anything else we need to confess. Then he or she will leave us alone so that we may meditate for an hour in solitude. For some of us, this will be the first time in our lives that we have been able to sit still and think clearly for any amount of time. If there is anything remaining on our conscience that needs to be confessed, we contact our friend and get it off our chests so that we can have a clear mind during this hour. We spend our time looking over our work and making sure we are ready to let go of everything. If there is anything we still want to hang on to, we pray for the willingness to let go until it comes.

Our next action is to ask God to remove the things that block us from spiritual power and from the people in our lives. We cannot take this action until we are ready for God to take everything from us. If we are going to become new people, we have to be willing to let our old

selves die. Some of our members talk about soul-searching and confession as a process of finding out who we are not. When we let God take these things away from us, we get to find out who we really are.

If we have reservations, or find that we are unwilling to trust the contents of our lists to God, then we speak with our recovered friend before taking any further action. We have seen some people attempt to cope with the contents of their soul-searching lists on their own power. This usually leads to despair and often ends in relapse. In soul-searching, we have exposed some things that are unmanageable and must be removed if we are going to become recovered. Of course, each of us is free to experiment with our own experience. No one can force surrender on another's soul. Our friend will not bully us into continuing this program if we express reservations, he or she will simply be there to listen and offer support. If we have no reservations, then we can spend the rest of our hour in prayer, asking God to direct our thoughts. When we are ready to take our next action, we say the following prayer.

*God, I am ready for you to make me a new person.*

*Please remove everything that is blocking me from you and others*

*Make me useful to you*

*And let me take part in the work of your Spirit.*

When this action is taken, we find that we are changed. Some of us have powerful spiritual experiences. We suddenly find ourselves in possession of a clarity of mind and peace of spirit that we have never known. We have a palpable sense of the presence of God. After a lifetime of self-obsession, we find ourselves full of compassion and wanting to be useful to people in pain. Some of us begin praying in the morning that God will send us someone to help that day.

For a few of us, the result of this action is almost traumatic. Our old way of living has been removed from us, and so we don't know how to live. We've lost the worst parts of our old selves, and now we don't know who to be. To anyone who is having this sort of trouble, we recommend patience and prayer. If we trust God to guide us, we will soon find that a new and better way of living has replaced the old. Anything God has in mind for us to do or be is going to be far better than anything we could invent for ourselves. We relax and let this process unfold in its own time.

Many of us do not experience a sudden, dramatic change with this action. Some of us don't feel different, and some of us are afraid that we are not really as different as we feel. Over time, however, the difference in our personalities is proven to us by our actions. As we continue to take the actions of this program, we find ourselves doing and saying things that are most unlike our former selves. We are on a path of spiritual growth and each day reveals some new development, however subtle, in our relation to spiritual power. Often, the people around us will notice a change in us before we notice the change in ourselves. In many ways, steady growth is preferable to dramatic experiences. While dramatic experiences feel good, and make for great stories, they can be unsettling. It is all too common for people who feel some relief after soul-seeking and confession to walk away from this work. At this point in the program, we are nowhere close to recovered. Perhaps we have learned some truth about ourselves and have had a real spiritual experience, but we are still newborns in the world of the Spirit. Without further work and growth, we are likely to fall back into our old ways again and give ourselves over to addictive obsession.

The proof of the effectiveness of our work so far is not in the intensity of our experience of change, but in our willingness to move on to the next actions of this program and make full restitution for all the harm we have caused in the past.

## RESTITUTION

Going back to the people we have harmed and making restitution to them can be a scary proposition. It should be. Most of us have caused harm that we may never be able to fully heal. At the same time, it is the action of making restitution that makes it possible for us to become recovered. The promise is that by the time we have finished making restitution, addictive obsession will have left our minds and self-obsession will be replaced with a genuine concern for the well being of others. When the power of our self-obsession is neutralized, we will not experience any of the other forms of addictive obsession, and so we will never need to use again. Our acts of restitution make it possible for us to become recovered by clearing away the harm in our past that blocks us from God and others. We cannot expect to become recovered without making restitution.

We begin this action simply by writing down a list of all the people and institutions we have caused harm over the course of our lives. We pray for God to guide our thinking, and then we write down the names that come to us. If there is ever any doubt about whether or not a name belongs on our harm list, we write it down. We are as thorough as possible, writing down everything that comes to us even when we aren't sure why a name is on our list or how we've harmed them. When we believe someone has caused us more harm than we have caused them, we write down their name anyway. When we think that we were justified in causing harm to a person, we write down their name with the rest. We will be able to go over our list with our recovered friend once it is finished. Our friend will be able to help us sort out which harms demand restitution and which do not. At this time, it is in our best interest to be as honest and thorough as possible.

While we are making this list, we do not worry about what we will need to do to make restitution. Nor do we project what will happen if we really do approach the people and institutions on our list. At this point, we don't know who on our list will need restitution and who we can leave alone. Nor do we have any idea what needs to be done to make restitution where it is necessary. We cannot possibly imagine or control the outcome of approaching a person we have harmed—these events are always surprising and full of God's grace. While we are making our harm list, we put all of these reflections and worries aside and simply write down

the names of people we have caused harm. When possible, we make a brief note next to each name regarding how we think we have harmed them.

When we've finished with our list, we bring it to our friend who is guiding us through this process. We go over our list in detail, explaining why we think each name is on our list. Our friend will help us decide which harms require restitution and which people may be better left alone. Generally, we make restitution only when we are sure we have caused the other person harm. We do not make restitution to save face. Those situations when we embarrassed ourselves or for which we feel ashamed but caused no real harm are taken off our list. We also do not make restitution to relieve a guilty conscience. If we have a general sense of guilt in relation to someone, but are not able to point to any evidence that we have actually harmed them, then we leave these poor people alone. They do not need us to pester them with our guilt. On the other hand, any situation where we are sure that we caused harm—even when we received more hurt than we returned or felt justified in our actions—will require some restitution on our part.

If we find ourselves unwilling to approach anyone who remains on our list, then we may have some more soul-searching to do. If we still resent someone or are too afraid to approach them, then we can work through these feelings using the tools we have learned so far. We write out our columns, searching for our selfishness and self-will. We make our confession and pray for God to change us. Under no circumstances do we let unwillingness keep us from making a start on our acts of restitution. If there are any names on our list who we are willing to approach, we begin with these. For many of us, the freedom that comes of making restitution brings with it a strong motivation to approach all the people on our list.

Our recovered friend will also help us to divide up our list into two separate types of restitution—direct and living. An act of direct restitution is offered to someone who we have harmed in the past and is not an ongoing part of our lives. These require setting up an appointment to meet with the person we have harmed and offering to make restitution to them. Living restitution is directed toward those people who are an ongoing part of our lives and for whom a simple appointment and transaction would seem insufficient. We have lived selfishly toward these people, and now we must live kindly toward them over an extended period of time.

We make restitution for the purpose of giving the people we have wronged an opportunity to heal from the harm we've caused them. We approach these people without any expectations. They may accept or reject us. Our job is simply to offer healing if we can. We never apologize. Apologies are often a means of requesting forgiveness without taking full responsibility for our actions. In our past, we have said that we were sorry to get a person off our backs, or so that we could soften them up and take advantage of them again. We have given false apologies too many times for the words "I'm sorry" to mean anything any more. We must own the wrong we have done and make good on it. It is also a mistake for us to assume that we know how we caused these people harm. We might know some things we did that were painful, but we do not know what hurt them most, or how our behavior affected them.

In making direct restitution, we make appointments with the people on our list and meet with them in person. After telling the person that we are an addict in a program of recovery and must make restitution in order to heal, we state that we know we have harmed them, probably in more ways than we know. We ask if there is anything the person wants to tell us about how we have affected them and express our willingness to do anything necessary to set things right. Then we listen. If we pay attention and remain open to whatever the person we've harmed has to say, we will learn something about ourselves and other people's needs. We are often surprised to hear that what caused the most harm was not what we imagined. We may also be surprised by how the person wants us to repay them. Of course, the terms of our restitution are entirely in their hands, provided they do not ask us to do something in violation of our conscience or which jeopardizes our spiritual condition. If the person asks nothing of us, we do not let ourselves off the hook too easily. We give the person our contact information so that they can get in touch with us if they should ever think of something we can do. Sometimes, even years later, we may get a phone call and the opportunity to help out someone we once caused harm.

If we have stolen something from someone, then we are upfront about our wrong and are willing to make necessary repayment. We approach these people as soon as possible, even if we don't have the money. We are honest about our circumstances, and make arrangements to repay our debt however we can. If we have harmed someone in a way that they are unaware of, then we must exercise discretion. We don't want to turn restitution into a selfish act. When it will cause someone harm to be approached by us, we do not approach them. Such cases are rare,

however, and we must not use the remote possibility of harm to be our excuse for inaction.

Prayer and the advice of our recovered friend are great resources in sorting these matters out.

Occasionally, we will contact someone who indicates that they do not want to see or hear from us. Whenever appropriate, we make sure that they can find us if they change their minds, but we never push ourselves on anyone or harass them when they clearly want to be left alone. They have given us the terms of our restitution—we are to stay away, and this is easily done in most cases. Nobody owes us anything. We have turned our lives over to God, and are cleaning up our past as best we can without expectation of return. Our job is to walk through the pain we have caused others in whatever manner they chose for us, in the hope that it may help them to heal from the harm we have caused.

If the person we owe restitution to is deceased, a visit to their grave may be in order. We go in a prayerful spirit and make some gesture that is personally meaningful. We ask if there is anything we can do to right the wrong we have done, and then wait for a reply. Often, something will occur to us that we can do to settle our accounts with the dead.

If the person to whom we owe restitution is living far away, we may need to make a trip. It can be especially useful to make a trip when we have several people we need to contact in the same area. It is always better to offer restitution in person, but we try other methods rather than postpone this action. If we do not have the means to travel, sometimes a phone call or written message can serve instead. When we are unable to locate someone, we pray for help in finding them, and prepare ourselves to make restitution if and when they surface.

In some cases, offering to make restitution places us in danger of going to prison, or losing a job. This is almost always a result of our doing something for which we deserve to serve some time or get fired. We have done our wrong, and now our job is to accept the consequences. Sometimes these situations are complicated, but we find that the right course of action will come to us if we disregard the consequences to ourselves and pray for guidance. When we take ourselves out of the picture, we gain the proper perspective in thinking about what must be done. When there is a real threat that someone will be violent with us, we meet them in a public place and take along an understanding friend.

On the other hand, we are never reckless where the security of others is involved. If we have dependents or others who would be negatively affected by our loss of income or freedom,

then we must consult with them and take their needs into account. In any case, we find it wise to consult with a lawyer before we confess to a crime or get ourselves involved with the law. We do not let a lawyer talk us out of doing what our conscience tells us we must do, but we are grateful for sound advice as to how we should proceed.

Sometimes the harm we caused is far beyond our ability to repay. Perhaps we have hurt children or have taken a life. This kind of harm can never be mended in this life—the hurt is too deep. We believe direct restitution should be made whenever possible, so long as doing so will not cause further harm. In addition, we believe that when we have perpetrated great evil, we owe the world great acts of good. If we have taken a life, we now must save life. If we have hurt children, we now must save children from harm. Dedicating our lives to the betterment of the world through acts of charity is indirect, but in some cases it may be the higher form of restitution. We cannot lay down any rules here. We recommend lots of prayer and good council to anyone in such a situation.

In making living restitution, we live differently toward the people we harmed on an ongoing basis. We must demonstrate our new way of life to them by working steadily toward their healing. Because we've harmed these people deeply, it may be some time before we make any progress. Some of us made the mistake of thinking that we should be praised for our abstinence and treated like a hero returning from war. In actual fact, we have behaved horribly to family and friends, and they are likely to be skeptical of our new attitude at first. We have made promises before and raised the hopes of those who loved us, but it wasn't too long before we broke their hearts again. Most likely, our loved ones are afraid to get their hopes up. The pain of watching someone you love relapse is unbearable, people can only go through that kind of pain so many times before it kills their spirits. It will take time and solid demonstration before we can restore our loved ones' faith. We find it is best for us to be gentle in this process, for these are wounded people.

In making living restitution, our job is to learn to pay attention to other people and to help them meet their needs. We seek to be understanding, rather than understood. When dealing with a person to whom we owe living restitution, we ask ourselves, "How is this person suffering, and how can I help alleviate that suffering? What is it that brings this person joy? What do they need from me?" When we converse with these people, we try to put ourselves into their shoes

and to see them as they see themselves. We also listen for their hopes and dreams so that we can encourage their development. People are not always clear about what they want and need, but each has his or her way of communicating when they want company or when they want to be left alone, when they need to talk, and when they want to know us better. We learn to read these signals as best we can. By paying attention to others, we begin to be capable of loving them for who they really are. To truly know someone and accept them, to listen and understand—these are the gifts we try to bring to our loved ones in living restitution. Usually, this requires a good amount of soul-searching and confession in order to maintain a helpful attitude.

We also make ourselves useful in practical ways. We provide for our families. We clean up around the house. We become regular in making visits to those that don't live with us. We show up on time and keep our promises. We even take ourselves to the doctor and dentist so that no one has to worry about our health. We make every effort to be responsible with the tasks of daily living that we have ignored for so long. When opportunities arise to be useful, we set aside our personal plans and get to work. Over time, our loved ones will begin to lose their anxiety about us and will start to trust that we really have recovered. This peace of mind is the best gift of all.

At some point, after making good demonstration over a period of time, it will be helpful to sit our loved ones down and make direct restitution to them as well. By asking them how we've harmed them and what we can do to make it right, we learn much that is useful to us in our ongoing efforts at living restitution. Sometimes our loved ones notice that we are making direct restitution to other people and can't help but wonder if they will receive our attention as well. Having an open conversation about what we are trying to do can ease our loved ones' minds and deepen our relationships with them.

If at any point our friends and family become interested in our spiritual path, we share it openly with them. However, we are never insistent that anyone do this work. We are only beginners on this path and are in no position to tell others whether or not they need our program. Usually, normal people will not need a spiritual awakening the way addicts do. We make sure that our loved ones know that they are welcome to this work and fellowship if they are interested, and we leave it at that.

Between direct and living restitution, we have our work cut out for us. None of us much liked the idea of approaching the people we harmed, but we find it necessary if we are going to be rid of addictive obsession. We have seen many people experiment with this action. They try to see how many people on their list they can ignore or avoid and still stay abstinent. Some try to avoid making any restitution at all. If you are contemplating a similar experiment, we offer you our experience: we have never seen a single person stay sane and abstinent who approached their restitution in this way. We are addicts, we like to get away with as much as we can, and we like dangerous games. Gambling with our sanity is nothing new—avoiding restitution is just business as usual. Unfortunately, business as usual will kill us if we don't make a change. You need not take our word for it, but we'd like to save you some trouble if we can.

Spirituality is not a solitary affair—we have to share it. We cannot ever expect to have a spiritual experience and hold on to it in isolation. Experiences are temporary. As time passes, old experiences are of no value to us. When we have an experience and share its benefits with the people around us, the experience grows. Real power spreads through people and comes back to us a hundred fold. Making restitution is our training period for a life of spiritual action. We are learning to care about other people and work toward their healing. We are learning the value of prayer in righting wrongs. With each act of restitution we grow in faith. We get scared, we pray, and God is with us. Over and over again, our acts of restitution unfold in ways we never could have predicted. The results don't always feel good, but they are always for the best. We find ourselves growing spiritually with each new act. In the best moments, someone we harmed is set free from pain and bitterness. People are restored to faith when they witness what the Spirit is doing through us.

We haven't told many stories in this chapter. Our hope is that your recovered friend and the people in your fellowship will share their restitution experiences with you. One of the greatest joys of becoming recovered is the restored relationships that come from making right on past wrongs. We live for those moments when we get to share deeply in the life of our loved ones. There is no better reward than to be loving and useful to the people around us. In this way, our lives are rich and full of joy. One woman in our fellowship reached the action of restitution when her father was dying of cancer. She was a mother of two children, and due to her addiction, her entire family was in chaos. She was able to make peace with her father before he

died, support her mother as she grieved, and become a mother to her own children all at the same time. On her own power, she could have done none of this. Had she been merely abstinent without a spiritual solution, her father would have died with a restless spirit and her family would have fallen to pieces. This program offers us so much more than abstinence. It gives us contact with the power of God and the ability to share that power with the people in our lives.

### A NEW WAY OF LIFE

We have said that our surrender entered us into a period of living prayer. When we have completed our last act of direct restitution, we can say amen. By this time, we have gathered some solid evidence for the existence of spiritual power. We have done the impossible several times over. None of us could have possibly seen the truth about our resentments on our own, yet when we prayed, the power was there. None of us had the ability to remove the uglier aspects of our personalities, yet when we prayed, the power was there. None of us would have ever found the means to heal the harm we caused to others, yet when we prayed, the power was there.

If we have been thorough in our work, we are beginning to notice some changes in ourselves. We no longer feel depressed or agitated. We are not haunted by old resentments or guilt over past misdeeds. We need not fear anyone or anything, for we have cleaned our conscious and can face all people in freedom. Our obsession to use has been lifted. We can walk freely through this world, no longer hiding ourselves from circumstantial obsession. Our self-obsession has been inverted—we are now eager to be useful to the people who need us. When the obsession is gone, we have become recovered. We no longer need to fight to keep our abstinence. We are free. As long as our spiritual condition remains good, we will never need to use again. If ever we are tempted to use or find ourselves in a fit of self-obsession, our reaction is sane. We retreat and pray, and we search our souls until we have found the root of our trouble. We take action if there is restitution we need to make.

Our program of action is now complete, but the tools we have learned in the process will be useful to us for the rest of our lives. Life is life. This means we will all experience loss, illness, pain and tragedy over the course of time. Many circumstances will arise that cause us to form resentment or to become afraid, and most of us will continue to have sex troubles. When problems arise, we do some soul-searching and find an understanding friend to whom we can

confess. We remember to take time for quiet prayer and meditation after we confess, and find that most of our troubles pass without a second thought. With practice comes improvement. By applying the tool of soul-searching to our lesser troubles, we grow accustomed to opening up to God's light. Then, when hard times come, we are prepared for them.

We encourage people who have just finished this program to engage in regular soul-searching and confession, even when it feels like there is nothing to write about. Often, if we sit down with pen and paper and clear our minds, something will come to us that requires our attention. As time passes, we will develop an automatic response to resentment and fear. We will find ourselves praying when angry or afraid, and asking God to show us the truth behind these emotions. Sometimes we will feel the need to write out formal lists, and sometimes we will not. In the context of our relationship with God, many things get worked out that would have formerly required a greater amount of effort.

We aren't perfect and we will continue to cause other people harm. When we do cause harm, we find it best to make direct restitution as quickly as possible. If we delay restitution, we must suffer our conscience and the separation that unmade restitution places between us and the Spirit. Making restitution does not get easier with time, but it continues to be healing and keeps us humble.

As we continue to walk this spiritual path, our attention is drawn to other areas of our lives where we need to surrender to God. Perhaps we discover a new compulsive behavior or find some place in our routine where we make poor use of our self-will. Once the Spirit is in us, it wants to spread through all parts of our lives. We are now grounded in the experience of spiritual power, and it is only natural for us to want to reshape our lives to be consistent with that experience. We are not moralists. We do not impose codes of behavior upon anyone. Instead, each of us is free to test our behaviors against our ability to stay connected to spiritual power. When we find that some behavior draws us away from the Spirit, then we know we must let it go. Each of us is likely to have our own level of tolerance for what we can and cannot do in the context of our relationship with God. There is no judgment among us over such things. We know we cannot hurt anyone and must maintain our honesty, and so we encourage each other to test our behaviors in prayer and see where the Spirit leads us.

There are many areas of our lives where we will want to introduce spiritual principles. Ongoing spiritual growth depends upon our ability to surrender to God at home and at work, and in all our relationships. We work to become consistent in what we say and do. Can we stay close to the Spirit when waiting in line or sitting in traffic? Are we able to do right by our friends and family? Can we be fully honest in our business dealings? Are we making progress toward our sexual ideal? Can we remain compassionate when we bear the brunt of someone's self-obsession? Living out an answer to these types of questions will help us continue our spiritual awakening.

Central to our new lives is the joy we take in prayer and meditation. We have worked hard to clear out a space in our minds where real prayer can take place, and now we can enjoy the fruits of our labor. Some of us prefer a disciplined routine. We have a time of prayer in the morning before we begin our day, and a period of meditation at night before bed. Others prefer a more spontaneous approach to the life of prayer. We turn our hearts and minds toward God throughout the day whenever we are so inspired. We try to cultivate a relationship with the Spirit in all our activities. There is no one right way to pray. Nor is there a single exercise that can unlock the whole spiritual world for us. Many of us find ourselves experimenting with different forms of prayer and meditation. We stick with an exercise as long as it proves useful, and then we move on. Our work has opened up a new world for us to explore.

Whereas some of us once resented organized religions, we now are deeply grateful for them. In religions we find a chronicle of human experience with the divine that extends back over thousands of years. Religions are rich with ideas about how to pray and meditate, and they gather together communities of faith—people who are attempting to live their lives in a way that reflects spiritual truths. There are many books, both religious and non-religious, that can offer us guidance as we try to improve our relationship with God. We have become seekers of spiritual experience and understanding, and we find our world full of avenues to explore. Each of us is free to roam as we please in the realm of God's Spirit. We have no specific advice as to how to proceed, except to say that we believe that God speaks to each of us differently. If we ask the Spirit to guide us closer to God's grace, it will direct us to something uniquely suited to us.

We can test the value of spiritual exercises in the same way we tested the value of the program of action outlined in this book—we give spiritual exercises a try and see if their results

are good. In general, the results of an exercise are good if they lead to a decrease in self-obsession and an increase in humility. Results are good when we are able to attend to and participate more deeply in the lives of the people around us. When we are better suited to the task of introducing others to spiritual healing, then an exercise has proven itself effective. The results of an exercise are bad when they lead us to believe that we are superior to others spiritually, or when they drive us to isolate ourselves and become less useful to people in need.

The greatest demonstrations of Power take place in the action of helping another addict have a spiritual awakening. Watching someone move from doom to healing is our best evidence for the existence of God, and each time it happens, our faith is renewed. Most of us find that we must stay close to the work of helping others if we are to have any faith at all. We are forgetful people. God can work great miracles of healing for us, but give us a month and we will be back to wondering whether or not God is really active in this world. Without new experience, our faith fades. In order to stay close to the Spirit, we keep ourselves in the midst of people who are in need of its power. When we share our experience and make a connection with an addict desperate for a solution, new Power is born between us. At no other time do we feel further from using and closer to God.

In our experience, helping other addicts recover is the single most important aspect of our spiritual program. All our work so far and all our efforts to maintain a clear conscience and improve our contact with God are without any value until we apply our growth to the work of helping others. The tools we have learned do not allow us to become fully autonomous spiritual beings; these tools are designed for the sole purpose of making us useful to others. As soon as we begin the work of helping others to recover, all our work so far will take on new meaning, and the value of the exercises we've learned will become clear.

Additionally, we are not immune to fits of self-obsession. When our spiritual condition is low, or we are hit by circumstances for which we were not prepared, we suffer. When prayer and soul-searching fail to get us out of self-obsession, working with others comes through. Sometimes a fit of self-obsession is so strong that nothing is able to break through it until we sit down with a suffering addict and turn our hearts and minds toward their need.

In our next chapter, we will discuss our experience of working with others in more detail. This will include some suggestions as to how this book might be used as a tool to help addicts

recover. If you have made solid restitution, and have become recovered, you are likely to be eager to share the good news with someone in need. We hope we can help prepare you for that work, or at least point out some of our mistakes so you will not have to repeat them.

## HELPING PEOPLE

Most of us begin the work of helping others with a high level of enthusiasm. When you feel as though you've been pulled back from the jaws of hell and given a second chance at life, the natural response is a desire to share this experience with others in need. Sometimes, our enthusiasm has been too strong, and we have approached addicts in an overly aggressive manner. We wasted our energy on a resistant audience. They didn't want a spiritual awakening, and so our efforts only antagonized them. Really, we should have been more understanding. When we were using, there was nothing anyone could say to convince us to stop. When we were abstinent without a spiritual solution, we were miserable, and our suffering was only made worse when someone harassed us with a spiritual program that we didn't want any part of. Our efforts are misdirected when we insist that people work our program who do not want or need it. On the other hand, our enthusiasm and our confidence in the effectiveness of this work go a long way toward interesting addicts in spiritual change. We are sometimes casual, and sometimes controversial. As long as our goal is to be of maximum service to others, and so long as we are not driven by resentment and self-seeking, we find ourselves making a positive contribution to the work of the Spirit.

Some of us have found it difficult to get started in the work of helping others. We didn't know how to find someone interested in a spiritual solution. We felt we weren't ready to be useful to others, and we were unsure of the value of our own experience. The truth is that if we have experienced spiritual change as a result of working through the program of action described in this book, then we have everything we need to be helpful to suffering addicts and the people who love them. Our experience of change is the only thing necessary to begin this work. By sharing our experience with others, we are breaking ground and sewing seed for the Spirit. Generally, we find it helpful to pray for guidance before we speak. Rather than preparing something to say or thinking too much about it, we ask God to fill us with grace so that we can

be useful to the people around us. Then we open our mouths and trust that the right words will come.

If we share our story on a consistent basis, sooner or later, someone will be interested in what we have to say. When this happens, we befriend the person and find out all we can about them. Do they want to stop using? Are they really ready to give it up? Have they ever spent time abstinent before? If so, what was that like for them? What methods have they tried to stay abstinent in the past? What is their position on spiritual matters? Finding out the answers to questions like these allows us to get to know the person better and to help them assess whether or not they might be interested in a spiritual solution.

Whenever appropriate, we relate our own experience to theirs. We even tell funny stories from the days of our active addiction when this helps us make a connection. Our goal is to befriend and encourage the newcomer. We never push someone into a program that they don't want, or which might not be well suited to them.

Sometimes we will encounter people who only want to use us as a place to dump their unprocessed resentments and fears. We find it wise to discourage this sort of thing by being very clear at the beginning of each relationship that we are not therapists or counselors, but that we are available to help our friend work a program of spiritual action if they are interested. Most people who are interested in a spiritual program will use us for a bit of dumping as well. Each of us has our own attitude toward this tendency. Some of us listen supportively, and some of us try to prevent dumping whenever possible. Usually, we try to be sensitive to the needs of the people we are working with, and remind them that the solution to their troubles lies in the program of action that they have begun.

Many people we work with are mentally ill or have symptoms of mental illness. Our fellowship is full of people who have been committed to mental hospitals and diagnosed with some form of psychosis. Many of us find that our symptoms of mental illness are removed along with addictive obsession when we work through this program of action. However, we cannot promise this outcome to everyone. We find it best to be as unprejudiced as possible when dealing with someone who is mentally ill. We are all crazy and we all need help. We believe our program has benefits for all who are capable of being honest with themselves, and so we never turn down anyone who asks us for help, no matter how odd their affect or behavior.

There is often the question of what to do about psych meds. Many medications inhibit our ability to be honest with ourselves, or to be fully present to the tasks of this program. Some medications are addictive, and being on them is the same as being high. On the other hand, there are some of us who suffer from severe mental illness and require medication to handle our symptoms. No rules can be made here. Each situation must be handled individually in prayer and with the guidance of our network of recovered friends. We find it best to wean off all psych meds whenever possible, so that we can give this program a chance to work on us.

It is also common to have people ask us for help who we do not like personally. Perhaps we find them awkward or unfriendly. They may come from a part of society we have actively tried to avoid, or they may be using different substances or behaviors than we did. Their values, religious leanings, and political attitudes may be drastically different from our own. Or, they may simply be as rude and intolerant as we were, when we were newly abstinent. In any case, our job is to be helpful to anyone who asks. If we have resentments that prevent us from being helpful to others, these must be listed and confessed immediately. Our ability to help others is the one thing that keeps our spiritual condition in tact and prevents us from free-falling into self-obsession. It is not our job to pick and chose who we work with. Nor do we have the ability to predict who can and who cannot benefit from our program. We are simply grateful that we can be of service to anyone. Fortunately, we do not have to like everyone we help. We just have to be willing to give them our time and attention.

As soon as someone is interested in working with us and expresses their desire for a spiritual solution, we introduce them to this book. We read through the first few chapters together, taking our time and bringing our memories to bear on the text. We take pains to explain what this book means by the terms compulsion and obsession. As often as possible, we tell stories from our past, which illustrate the experience of addiction and then encourage our new friend to share his or her own experiences. This book is of no use to anyone on its own. Those of us who have had real spiritual experiences in this work are the only ones who can bring this book alive for someone who needs it. If our new friend can identify as an addict and is interested in our program, we make sure they know what they are getting themselves into. If they are still interested, we invite them to make surrender and begin this work.

Our role in this relationship will be that of an understanding friend. We listen more than we talk, and encourage more than instruct. We demonstrate a spiritual way of life in our expression of compassion for our friend. We make ourselves available when we are needed, offering any part of our experience that may prove useful. It is important that we be able to keep our friend's confidence and not make public those things he or she has told us in private. We don't make rules for people and we don't try to predict what will happen for them in this process. Each person who comes to this work has a unique experience with it, and we learn much from watching new experiences unfold.

Many, many people will begin this work only to fall away when the going gets tough or they get distracted. This can be hard to take, especially if we have any ego about our status as recovered addicts. It is not our job to fix anyone—we don't have that kind of power. There is nothing magical about what we do when we help people through this book. In fact, nothing in this book can fix anybody or keep them from using. Only God can do that. Our purpose and the purpose of this book are to point people in need toward an experience of spiritual power. We do not control whether or not someone will have the experience they need. In fact, we make mistakes with everyone we work with. The people that succeed in this work do so in spite of us. Those that fall away have their own reasons for doing so. The less we let our egos get involved in these relationships, the more we are able to trust that God is working in the lives of each of our friends. All the same, it will still hurt to watch someone relapse and die.

Anytime we start working with someone, we invite them to involve their friends and family in our fellowship. Often, an addict will not be ready to recover, but their family will need the support and insider knowledge of addiction that we have to offer. Many people who love addicts will be relieved to find out that they can start becoming recovered before their addict does. People who love addicts are in a lot of pain, and if they are not addicts themselves, then they probably do not have a way to escape from that pain except to accept spiritual help.

Once our new friends have made surrender, they can begin work on their soul-searching lists. We encourage our friends to begin on this work without delay. If they have had an overwhelming experience of surrender and are not motivated to continue this work, we explain to them the dangers of becoming lazy after a great experience and let them make their own choice. We have experienced this program as an ongoing, ever-deepening surrender to the power

of God. Surrender is something that one must choose—it can never be forced. We do not force our views on anyone because to do so would be to rob them of their own surrender. If someone does take their will back, they will one day have the opportunity to surrender again if we do not interfere.

If our friend desires to continue, we explain the soul-searching lists one column at a time and meet to review our friend's work. We find that our friends have all the same troubles with soul-searching as we did. They get busy and distracted. They can't seem to find the time to sit down and write. When they do sit down with paper and pen, their minds wander and they have trouble sitting still. Suddenly, they find themselves thinking of all the little chores that need doing, or perhaps they are hit by an overwhelming urge to watch TV. Some are overcome by rage and terror—writing lists seems to evoke emotion in them that they have been working to suppress. We make sure we are available to our friends when they are struggling with soul-searching.

At the same time, soul-searching tends to be a time when our friends begin to rely on us less and trust the Spirit more. We cannot answer every difficulty that our friends encounter; instead they must turn to prayer. Explaining to our friends that we are always available for support, we also remind them that if they are to become recovered, they cannot treat us as a crutch. We will fail them. Instead of relying on human power, they must learn to put their own souls into right relation with God. We share our experience and point the way, but we cannot carry anyone across the threshold to spiritual change.

Many of the people we work with will begin to have experiences of insight into their condition as they work through their lists. We encourage them to share their experiences with other addicts. This will give them practice for the work of helping others and may interest newcomers in spiritual experience.

When it comes time for our friends to make confession, we make an appointment with them and clear our schedule for the better part of a day. When hearing confession, our job is to be respectful and attentive. We are never critical of our friends' efforts, unless they have missed the mark completely. None of us wrote perfect soul-searching lists at first. In fact, many of us look back at our first lists and wonder how they could have helped us as much as they did. Also,

no one will have the same insight into their experience as we do. We each seek out and receive our own truth in the context of our relationship with God.

So long as our new friends are recognizing their selfishness and experiencing insight into their moral condition, then the process is working. If they are not intentionally withholding anything from confession, then they will probably get the experience they need from this exercise. However, if someone's confession demonstrates an incredible lack of insight, then we might ask them some questions to move them in the right direction, or we might suggest they work on their lists some more before they confess. These are difficult decisions to make, and we suggest that no one make them who has not first asked the Spirit for advice. There is also the option of continuing to work with a person in soul-searching after they have made their first confession. Soul-searching is a life-long process; it is a tool that we will need for the rest of our lives. If we meet regularly with a confessional group, we might ask our new friend to join us. This gives us the opportunity to continue to provide support to our friends as they gain insight into their moral condition.

When listening to a friend's confession, we pray for the Spirit to be present with us. We ask for the strength to be attentive and for God to bless our friend with the insight he or she needs. It is not our job to remember every detail of a confession. In fact, it might be better if we forget the details completely. Our job is simply to listen and stay tuned-in to the emotional experience of our friend. Sometimes we laugh together, and sometimes we make a sympathetic gesture to show that we understand. Some people will look to us for reassurance. They want to know that they have done their work well. Others attempt to solicit empathy in the wrong places, for example by embellishing the second column of their resentment lists. When appropriate, we remind our friend to stick to the written word, and to read their lists not to us, but in an act of prayer to God.

When someone has finished their confession, we thank them for their honesty. With those who seem to feel anxious about what they have read, we share something from our own first confession. Most of the things we are ashamed of are far more common than we believe. It is important to make some kind of statement or gesture that communicates to our friend that we have not judged them and that instead of being disgusted by what we've heard, we admire their

courage and honesty. We are grateful to have been invited to participate in such an important part of their spiritual experience.

We do not linger long after a confession. We explain the instructions for the hour of prayer and meditation that should follow confession, and make sure that our friend can reach us if he or she finds something more to say. Some of us prefer to return to our friend after their hour of solitude and witness their confessional prayer. Others of us prefer to leave our friend with instructions to say that prayer on their own when they are ready; in this case we make sure our friend can reach us by phone if need be.

Before we meet our friend again, he or she will want to complete their restitution list so that we can go over it together. Some people will have long restitution lists with lots of horrible things on them. Others will have short lists of relatively minor crimes. We can console those with big lists by assuring them that the hardest acts of restitution result in the most powerful experiences, which in turn yields a moving testimony to other addicts. Those who have shorter lists should know that there is no telling how the Spirit might move us even in a seemingly minor act of restitution. The great benefit of restitution is the willingness it produces in us to help others heal. If we open ourselves to this process, God will work wonders through us.

We go over our friend's list in detail, helping to sort out which items require action. We also sort out which items will require direct restitution, and which will be living. We go over the chapter on restitution together, and discuss any questions that come up as we go along. Special emphasis should be placed upon the instructions for direct restitution, which recommend that we do not apologize to those we have harmed. Upon this subtle point hangs the whole power of the restitution process, and many of us are confused by it at first. We may also help our friend make a plan for approaching their first acts of restitution, specifying which people ought to be approached by a specific date.

Making clear that we are here to be of support in any capacity that we can during this process, we also explain that this phase of the program is one in which our friend will rely on our support less and less. It is a great joy to us to hear the stories of our friends' acts of restitution, and watch as they grow in reliance upon spiritual power. As god-dependence grows, friend-dependence recedes. Soon, our newly recovered friend will be a colleague in the work of the Spirit. Often, our friends who have just finished significant acts of restitution are closer to the

experience of this program than we are, and their testimony is an extremely important tool in the work of helping others. We encourage our new friends to share their experience of this program with newcomers at every step along the way. Because they are so close to their initial experience of this work, their insights will provide invaluable evidence of this program's effectiveness. Newcomers who can witness someone in the midst of change are likely to understand what this work is really about.

As our colleagues enter their new way of life, we welcome them with open arms. Rare are the people who actually complete this process, and we are always grateful to have new members in our fellowship. We encourage our friends to explore the world of spiritual things. We may even provide them with a few books or practices that have been helpful to us. We usually suggest some form of regular spiritual practice—something in the morning to begin the day, and something at night to review. However, we should not be disappointed if our friends find themselves interested in a path different from our own. Spiritual exploration is a highly personal affair, and we need not meddle with someone else's newfound relationship with God. We have helped them open the doors of the Kingdom, now they can run freely within.

Above all, we encourage our new colleague to enter into the work of helping others as soon as possible. We may ask them to chair a meeting, if we have a meeting to chair. We may arrange for them to speak at a recovery meeting, or an institution like a hospital or jail. When appropriate, we may suggest that an interested newcomer ask our newly recovered friend for help. This way, our friend can gain first-hand experience with helping others.

Some of us will want to get creative about this work. We may want to bring the message of this book to the world of professional drug and alcohol treatment, to the Church, or to some other place where we think people may need to hear some truth and hope. Perhaps we will find a way to present this program to people who are not suffering from addiction, but have some other reason to need a spiritual awakening. Many of us experience a desire to be useful in ways that do not involve the program of this book. We take on charitable work of various kinds and find this provides us with a place to grow spiritually.

We find it effective to start meetings that make use of this book to introduce newcomers to the experience of addiction and the possibility of spiritual change. We are careful to avoid too much ritual these meetings as ritual can become a substitute for reliance upon spiritual power.

Of course, it will be a good idea to begin these gatherings with prayer. What we want to do is create an environment where need and experience can connect in as spontaneous a manner as possible. Our gatherings should provide an open space for the Spirit to do its work. We tell a few of our stories to bring this book to life, and then encourage newcomers to offer questions, objections, and their own experience. Opportune moments arise when someone who has no experience with our work expresses their confusion about what we do. This allows us to offer ourselves at exactly the point of another person's need, and to correct what is probably a general misunderstanding. It is always best to begin where someone is struggling and move forward from there. If we present a rigid, ritualized agenda, we run the risk of not being able to connect with people's needs.

At the same time, this book can provide a structure that keeps us from wandering too far off track. We can read just enough to generate discussion, and then return to the text when conversation runs dry or is becoming unfocused. There will be many times when someone comes to our gathering to start an argument or to dump the mental garbage that goes along with their fundamental obsession. At these times, we will be grateful to be able to take a deep breath, pray, and return to the book. We don't avoid hard conversations when they will be helpful to those present. In fact, some of our most productive meetings include a bit of debate. However, we do avoid getting sucked into arguments that are not related to the business at hand, which is to provide people in need with access to the hope of a spiritual awakening. Any time our discussion strays from this purpose, it is time to regroup.

If a meeting goes poorly, or does not yield the kind of energy we had hoped for, we are not overly concerned. Meetings come and go. The real work of helping others is a one-on-one process. We use meetings only as a way of giving people the opportunity to do this work. Some of us once made the mistake of expecting our gatherings to make us feel good. Because we were attached to a fixed outcome, we tried to control the course of conversation and were frustrated when things didn't work out as we had planned. Self-will is a persistent little beast. It follows us along our path of spiritual growth and worms its way into everything we do. If we are not careful, self-will can take over even the best parts of our program. We will find ourselves praying for fixed outcomes and meditating in order to make ourselves happy. We will turn surrender into a fix-all and reduce soul-searching and confession to cheap tricks we use to

control our addiction. We must pay attention and continue to turn back to God every time we discover that we have strayed.

As time passes, and we remain at the work of helping others, our network of recovered addicts will grow. Our collective experience builds on itself and together we become capable of generating a good amount of spiritual energy. Our gatherings become places where the power of God is palpable at times. Each of us has our own understanding and our own unique experience. We are constantly learning from each other and gaining new perspectives on this process. As we each explore our own creative potential for bringing a spiritual solution to those in need, our network diversifies its aims. Some of us work through a church, others get into professional treatment, still others do work in hospitals and prisons, and some work within other spiritual movements. We attend a variety of types of recovery meetings and let our message be known. As our individual potentials are developed, the creative potential of the movement as a whole is increased. Together we are able to accomplish things that no one of us could have pulled off alone. We pool our resources and put our heads together. Not every idea is productive, but as long as we keep stirring the pot, we find that new opportunities to help others continue to arise.

Where the Spirit moves, we follow. When we stay close to God's work, our lives are rich with miracles. God's broken children are our connection to spiritual power. We dredge the bottom of this world with our net, catching only those who need and want to be caught. Our family grows, and with it grows the reach of the Spirit. Each of us has our own unique set of skills and attributes to contribute to this work. Each of us is able to make contact with others' needs in a way that the rest of us are not. Together we stand in the long line of people whose lives have preserved the stream of spiritual experience that flows through this world. For the next generation and all posterity, we humbly offer our hand to the addicts who are still suffering and introduce them to a new way of life.

This work never ends, nor does the joy of helping others ever grow old. Addiction is boring—we repeat the same behaviors over and over again. The work of the Spirit, on the other hand, constantly requires fresh inspiration. We are called to bring about the highest good in any given situation, and this requires dependence upon divine aid. God breaks into the world through us and lives are changed. If you are ready for this kind of life, we invite you to the task of helping others. Welcome to the trenches of spiritual work. We know of no better place to be.

## IF YOU LOVE AN ADDICT

If someone you love is an addict, you probably want to know what you can do to help them stop using. In this chapter we will describe three stages of addiction and provide our best suggestions about what might be done for an addict at each stage. Before we begin, we wish to make one point perfectly clear—there is nothing any of us can do to control an addict’s behavior. All addicts suffer from addictive compulsion, which means that once they start using, they cannot stop themselves. All addicts suffer from addictive obsession, which means that once they finally stop using, they are overwhelmed by thoughts of using again. This means that an addict is suffering from a condition that is beyond the powers of their will and reason. Addicts cannot control their own behavior, and neither can anyone else.

It is a grave mistake to think that we can save addicts from their addictions. We have watched many friends and family members cling to the hope that there may be something they can do to turn the addict they love around. In doing so, they pin their own well-being to that of their addict. As addicts grow sicker and more desperate, so do those who are trying to save them. In fact, many loved ones begin to develop addictive compulsions and obsessions.

We tend to see two forms of compulsive behavior in people who love addicts. One is “helping” and the other is “fixing.” People try to help addicts by providing them with goods and services when they run into minor difficulties. When addicts run out of money, become homeless, get sick, need bail money or a lawyer, don’t have transportation, run out of cigarettes, haven’t eaten in a few days, or any one of a host of other minor inconveniences that result from their sprees, many loved ones make the mistake of trying to help. It is both painful and confusing to watch someone you love fall apart, and it is only natural to want to ease their pain. Unfortunately, by helping addicts through their bumps and bruises, we are only allowing them to continue using without suffering the consequences. Instead of working toward the addicts’ health, we are actually aiding the process of their destruction. Addicts do not get better until they want to get better and are willing to do the work. No addict will ever want to get better until using hurts. By helping addicts avoid the consequences of their addictions, we actually prevent them from becoming aware of their problem.

Even knowing full well that helping actually hurts addicts, many people find themselves helping anyway. The compulsion to be involved in their addicts' lives and to protect their addicts from suffering is too strong. If you find yourself giving when you know you shouldn't, if you are unable to leave or kick out of your house an addict who is causing agony and chaos in your family life, or if you can't help but drive your addict around or bail them out of every scrape they get themselves in, then you may have an addictive compulsion for helping addicts.

People try to fix addicts by attempting to control their behavior. We have seen people try all kinds of things to bring their addicts under control. People try bribes, guilt, and brute force. People beg and plead, then they demand and scream. They hide bottles and dump drugs down the toilet. People follow their addicts around to monitor them, or go out searching for their addicts when they are out on a spree. Parents revoke privileges and introduce restrictions. Spouses leave and come back again. People have their addicts committed to mental hospitals or turn them over to the police. One poor woman we know thought she could save her son by reforming her state's drug laws. The last time we saw her, she looked as if she hadn't slept in a month.

The compulsion to control can be as subtle as the desire to win an argument. One of our friends speaks about her compulsion to prove that her husband was lying about not using. "The best way I can describe it for me was the drive to prove that my ex-husband was not telling the truth, or to prove my sense of reality. Looking through his pockets, following him to a bar—I would do things to assure myself that he was lying to me.

"One time my husband came over and he dropped some drugs in the house. The next time he came over I confronted him. He said to me, 'I didn't do that.' In the past I would have needed to prove the reality by searching through his pockets or starting a fight. Once I begin that sort of behavior I will keep on behaving that way until I am totally insane.

"The next time he came over I had the sense of wanting to search his pockets. God said to me, 'Don't go down that road.' For me, if I had searched his pockets once, the craving would kick in and I would be lost. I can't engage that way or else the thing owns me."

It is impossible to control an addict's behavior, and so our attempts to do so inevitably lead to frustration and pain for everyone involved. Those who hold onto the delusion that they

can save their addict tend to escalate their efforts at control over time. When minor efforts prove ineffective, they employ ever more drastic measures until their own lives are out of control.

One man explained to us how he and his wife tried to cope with their son's addiction: "We were watching my son around the clock. My wife and I both worked fulltime, but somehow we juggled our schedules so that one of us could always be at home watching him. We stayed up at night worried sick, waiting for the sound of him sneaking out. We were exhausted and irritable. We fought all the time. Our finances were a mess. Our adolescent daughter was getting neglected, and we alienated ourselves from all of our friends. But nothing we did stopped him from getting high."

People who love addicts often develop an addictive obsession about their addict. They worry constantly about their addict and what more they can do to help or fix them. They lose sleep waiting up anxiously to see if their addict will return from a spree. People who love addicts lose their ability to focus on their work or to be present to the people around them. As their world collapses around their addict, they become isolated, irritable, and depressed. The consequences of addictive obsession are just as severe for the people who love addicts as they are for the addicts themselves.

One member describes her obsession this way: "I was absolutely obsessed about the relationship that I was in with my husband to the point that it almost destroyed me, my family, and almost every other relationship I had. It was my drug of choice. It was something that I wanted to the point of being willing to let go of everything else. I was estranged from my family. I had abandoned and jettisoned most of my friends. I was pretty much totally isolated and absolutely terrified of being apart from my husband. And it wasn't a healthy relationship—it was awful!

"My sense of ease and comfort came from the moment my husband would return. If I was in the house and he'd drive in the drive way, I would go 'Ah, I'm okay.' That feeling lasted about as long as it took for him to get in the door. It was a sick relationship and as soon as he came in the door I was immediately irritated. But I was absolutely sure that what I needed to make me okay was to have him. It drove him crazy. It drove everybody else crazy. There are legions of horror stories around my obsession with that relationship. I couldn't sleep for years. I was self-abusive. I would drive around in the night when I hadn't had sleep in three days. I

should have been dead many times over, and people look at you like ‘You’re just a normal person. You don’t have the trouble that an addict has.’ They really don’t know. We are *not* okay!”

Let no one say that the problems of addicts are greater than those of the people who love them. If anything, the problems of the people who love addicts are worse. At least addicts have a substance or behavior that helps them deal with the insanity and pain of their condition—people who love addicts are left to suffer the insanity of addictive obsession without any relief whatsoever. The desperation of those who love an addict can get so bad as to cause serious health problems. High blood pressure, ulcers, and other stress related ailments are not uncommon among us. Many of us found ourselves vulnerable to suicidal thinking.

One woman we know described the problem like this: “We die spiritually and mentally, but we also die physically. We place ourselves in all kinds of dangerous situations, either by being with someone who is so unstable, or by being so unstable ourselves. We put ourselves at risk for violence and accidents. Taking care of children when you can’t pay attention or think straight, being obsessed and distracted when we are at work—these sorts of things are really dangerous.”

Another of our members described it this way: “My husband was an alcoholic when I met him, and his drinking grew worse and worse over the years. He eventually started getting irritable and even violent. At one point it got so bad that the best thing I could think to do was put the kids in the car and drive us all off a bridge. I just wanted my mind to stop racing. I thought about suicide every day.”

It is extremely dangerous to believe that we can do anything to save addicts from their addiction. As long as we hang on to the hope that something we do will turn the tide, we are trapped in the undertow. If you find yourself helping or fixing even when you know it will only make things worse, and if you are consumed by thoughts of how to save an addict from his or her addiction, then you are probably suffering from addictive compulsion and obsession.

One objection we commonly hear from people who love addicts is that they are simply doing what people do when they love someone. When you love someone, they claim, you will go to any lengths to get them back. This may be the case in normal circumstances, but when the same behaviors are applied to an addiction, the results are disastrous. If addiction is like a

disease, then you have become infected. By trying to save an addict, you have lost control of your own life. This being the case, you will probably benefit greatly from working through the program of action described in this book.

Below we will discuss three stages of addiction—early, middle, and late. At each stage, we will speculate about the chances of an addict becoming recovered, and we will make suggestions about what you might do to protect your own sanity. Do not mistake this as a guide for how to fix your loved one. There is nothing you can do for your loved one but look to your own spiritual condition. When you cease to help and fix, your loved one will have the best chance to become recovered. Addicts start getting better when they want to stop using and are willing to do whatever it takes to get better. This does not happen until addicts are in a great amount of pain, which usually comes about only when their addictions are allowed to progress without interference.

Early addiction is a time of joy and discovery for addicts. When we start using, we feel as though we have fallen in love for the first time. Suddenly, the world is filled with magic and beauty. Where once we felt restless and uncomfortable, we are now at ease. Where once we felt as if we were on the outside of life looking in, we now find ourselves at the center of things. We can laugh and talk freely with others. We can be comfortable and even have fun. While it may be hard for the loved ones of addicts to understand, using not only feels good to addicts, it presents itself as a solution to the addict's basic problem with life. Using for the first time is a moment of self-discovery. It is as if we have finally found who we were meant to be.

In early addiction there are no major consequences for using. Even though using may entail certain lifestyle changes that are hazardous for addicts, or that make the addicts' loved ones uncomfortable, there are no major losses for addicts at this stage. The addicts have discovered a way of life that is amazingly pleasant and in which they can be the person they always wanted to be.

We do not think it is possible for addicts to stop using at this stage. In order for addicts to stop using, they must first want to stop using, and in early addiction addicts have no good reason to want to stop. On the contrary, they have every good reason to want to keep using. Using feels good and it makes life so much easier. Asking an addict to stop using in early addiction would be like asking a young lover to stay away from his girlfriend—we might have good reasons for

making such a request, but we can hardly expect a positive response. When asking someone to give up something they love, and which causes them no difficulties, we should expect them to get defensive and try to protect the source of their joy and comfort.

If your loved one is just beginning their addiction and has not encountered any major losses as a result of using, it is unwise to attempt to come between them and their addictive substance or behavior. The more insistent you are with your addict, the more passionate and defensive they will become. As you set greater restrictions on their behavior or make increased efforts to sabotage their using, you will find that instead of halting an addiction, you are simply creating an environment of animosity. We addicts do not forgive easily. When we hold a grudge, it sticks for a lifetime unless a higher power intervenes. If you attempt to control an addict in early addiction, you will set up a pattern of conflict between you and your addict that will become increasingly painful as the addiction progresses. As hard as it may be, it is best not to interfere with your addict's behavior or to moralize with them. If you have strong feelings about using, or if you do not feel safe around your addict, we recommend that you take whatever measures necessary to secure your own conscience and safety. The sooner you take such measures the better, as you may save yourself a lot of chaos and worry on the road ahead.

In middle addiction, the consequences of compulsive using begin to surface. Addicts cannot function as well as they used to, and this results in a series of losses. Jobs, relationships, health, sanity, financial security, reputation, and social standing are all in jeopardy at this stage. Some addicts do a little jail time or have a brief stay in a mental institution. Most of the people in the addicts' lives are beginning to reconsider their relationship with them. As addicts begin to lose resources, they may begin to steal or act out in other ways in order to meet their need. It is unlikely that addicts in this stage will realize that they are addicted or that their using is a problem. Addicts in middle stage usually think that life would be just fine if everybody would just get off their back. Increasing frustration and self-pity mark this stage. Life begins to seem awfully unfair as the joy of discovery fades, giving way to the toil of daily maintenance.

If your addicts are in middle addiction, it is unlikely that they will want to get help for their problem. They probably do not believe that they have a problem, and the suggestion that they need help to stop using is likely to anger them. In their mind, the world is a cruel and difficult place where using is the only thing that can provide them with a bit of relief. Addicts

who were defensive in early addiction are likely to be even more so now. In middle addiction, addicts come to depend on using to get them through life. Using is no longer a love: it is a necessity.

At this stage, the best thing you can do as a loved one is to take stock of what your attachment to your addict is costing you. In middle addiction, the costs for the addict increase, and the costs for loving an addict increase as well. How much have you lost in this addiction, and where will you draw the line? These are important questions to answer at this stage, because as the addiction progresses, your losses and those of your addict will grow ever more severe. Addictions do not go away on their own, nor do they ever level out. Addictions always get worse over time, ending with insanity and death. Now is a good time to think about when you might like to get some help for yourself. You can get better even if your addict does not, but you will have to become willing to leave your addict to the natural course of his or her addiction.

If you decide to begin setting limits around your relationship with your addict, it is important that you be both clear and consistent. First, tell your addict exactly what your limits are and exactly why you are setting them. If you are able to do this in a loving manner, it will go a long ways toward helping your addict to realize that their using is a problem. Second, keep true to your word and hold your limits firmly. Your addict is likely to try any thing he or she can think of to break your resolve, so do not set limits you know you cannot keep. As soon as you deviate from your promised limits, your addict will know that they can take advantage of you all over again. Your caving-in will be a sign to them that they don't really have a problem, and that they can continue on with business as usual.

It can be extremely difficult to set limits with an addict. Telling someone you love that you are going to place restrictions on your relationship with them can be scary and painful. It can also make you feel guilty, as if you were shirking the responsibilities that come with love and abandoning someone at the time of their greatest need. But the opposite is true. Setting limits with addicts is the greatest expression of our love for them. By refraining from helping and fixing, and by setting limits on your relationship with your addict, you are creating an environment in which it is more likely that they will become aware of their addiction and decide they want to stop using.

Of course, there is no guarantee that setting limits will stop your addict's using, but at least you will know that you are not making things worse, and you will probably save your own sanity. Should your addict ever want to stop using, they will need you to be sane and stable in order to provide them with healthy support. In the meantime, your sanity can be put to good use in the lives of your other loved ones, who may have been neglected during your obsession with the addict. If you decide to engage in spiritual work, you may be able to help others who love addicts—or even other addicts—by showing them how to become recovered. By taking on this work, you will find that you are not alone in your suffering. Even if your addict does not recover, your most painful experiences will serve good purpose in helping others.

In late addiction, it is much more difficult for an addict to deny that using is a problem. Health complications and personal losses are dramatic in this stage. Anyone who has hung on to the delusion that they can do anything to help or fix their addict has done so at great personal cost. It is our hope that you were able to set reasonable limits with your addict when they were in middle addiction, thus saving yourself a good deal of heartache and chaos. However, if you were unable to do so, it is not too late for you to get help at this stage. Setting limits now just might save your life. At this stage, it must be abundantly clear that there is nothing left for you to do but leave your loved ones to the hands of God and trust that good can come of even the most painful circumstances.

When addicts are at their worst they have the greatest chance of getting better. Not only do the severe consequences of late stage addiction make it difficult for addicts deny their problem, they can also motivate addicts to seek help. In desperation, addicts are more likely to realize that their own efforts to control their addiction are useless, and that some form of spiritual power will be needed to help them change. Most addicts do not get better, but in late stage addiction, it is more likely that they will want to.

It is perfectly appropriate at this stage to ask addicts if they might like to get some help to stop using. If they say yes, introduce them to this book and someone who is recovered and can help them through the process that this book describes. If they say no, it will be more important than ever that you set appropriate limits on your relationship with them and engage in spiritual work. Even if your addict does die or go permanently insane, you can become recovered and live a new and better life.

In case your addict does stop using, it will be important for you to understand the difference between “abstinent” and “recovered.” When addicts are abstinent, they have simply stopped using. When addicts are recovered, they are no longer using because they have been given freedom from addictive obsession.

Because addicts who are merely abstinent still suffer from addictive obsession, they are irritable, restless, and depressed. Often, they are more miserable when they stop using, even though the consequences of active addiction may be severe. If your addict is abstinent but has not become recovered, you can expect difficult times and probably an eventual relapse.

Abstinent addicts are usually hard to live with. They are petty, sensitive, and resentful. They are inconsiderate and selfish. Abstinent addicts are preoccupied with their own state of mind. They spend long hours lost in their heads, only coming out again when they need something from you. Abstinent addicts will rarely inquire about you and your affairs, but will speak at length about their own experiences and interests. Some abstinent addicts isolate themselves, or have periods when they become alienated and rarely speak to those closest to them. Some abstinent addicts become aggressive or even violent when provoked. When your addict stops using, there is a high likelihood that he or she will become compulsive in some other area of his or her life. A sharp increase in libido or appetite, or a sudden interest in drinking, drugs or gambling is a sign that your addict is switching addictions.

Abstinent addicts may try many non-spiritual strategies to remain abstinent. Some of these strategies are helpful for a period of time, but none of them will cause a real addict to lose the addictive obsession. Medications, meeting attendance, psychotherapy, and religious compulsivity are a few of the many abstinence aids of which to be aware. If your addict becomes dependent on prescription medications to control depression or mood swings; if they cannot get through a day without attending a recovery meeting or church function; or if their state of mind only worsens the longer they spend in therapy; the chances are that your addict is trying to hang on to abstinence without addressing the basic, spiritual nature of their condition.

If addicts are not relieved of their addictive obsession, their lives get worse over time whether they are using or not. Some addicts can remain abstinent and obsessed for decades without spiritual help. The results are not pretty. After long years of mere abstinence, many

addicts sink deep into depression. Some of them take their own lives. Just because your addict stops using doesn't mean that your troubles are over.

It is generally true that the longer an addict has been abstinent without spiritual help, the less likely they are to be interested in becoming recovered. Once addicts have found a human-powered solution with which they feel comfortable, they tend to stop seeking freedom from addictive obsession. Instead, they work on managing their lives with obsession. Managing an obsession is hard labor, a full-time job. If your addict is maintaining abstinence in this way, we suggest you support their efforts. Abstinence, although painful for the addict, can be a blessing for society. One less active addict is one less threat to the safety of others.

However, because your addict has not recovered, they may find new ways to act out on their addictive obsession. It is important that you remain attentive and continue to make an honest examination of your addict's behavior. There are many addicts who are actually a greater threat to society in abstinence than when using. Without a substance or behavior to quell their obsession, they become extremely volatile. Deep resentment boils within them, and the slightest pressure can provoke an outburst of rage.

If your addict is emotionally unstable and yet insists that they do not need spiritual help, we suggest that you take measures to protect yourself. If you do not feel safe around your addict, set appropriate boundaries with them as soon as possible. Do not let the fact of their abstinence dissuade you from taking necessary action. Many who love an addict have feared that setting boundaries with their addict during abstinence would cause their addict to relapse. The fact is that abstinent addicts run a constant risk of relapse because they are not addressing the spiritual causes of their addictive obsession. Addicts will not want to become recovered until managing the obsession becomes too painful to tolerate. Tip-toeing around an abstinent and hostile addict will not serve the cause of their recovery, and it places you in harm's way. Setting boundaries with your addict may help them to realize that their strategy for maintaining abstinence is not working.

Watching addicts struggle with abstinence can be a difficult process for those who love them. Contending with the addict's demands and resentments; coping with the constant fear of relapse; watching your addict continue on a self-destructive path even though they are no longer using; these stresses can be unbearable at times. You likely have been hoping and praying for

your addict to stop using for a long time, never imagining that abstinence would look like this. It will probably be of great help to you in learning to live with an abstinent addict to look after your own spiritual condition. The tools of the program of action outlined in this book can be great aids in helping people who love addicts to navigate through abstinence.

Whereas abstinence is just as problematic as using, when addicts become recovered, their lives change dramatically. Lives that were once driven by addictive obsession now follow a course of ease and freedom. Once consumed by a preoccupation with their own state of mind, recovered addicts now have a genuine interest in the well-being of others. Where once there was resentment, there is now forgiveness. Where once there was fear, there is now faith. Addicts who have become recovered were once guided by their own selfishness, but now follow the newfound voice of their conscience.

If your addict has become recovered, you will notice a change in the way they interact with you. Instead of treating you as a means to an end or ignoring you completely, your addict will be interested in you for your own sake and will want to know how they can be useful. Instead of spending days in fits of depression and rage, they will be uncharacteristically tranquil. These people, who once seemed utterly soul-less, will begin to talk of God.

This is not to say that addicts who have become recovered are happy all the time--far from it. But the level of stress and anxiety they experience has been so dramatically reduced that they are, for all practical purposes, completely transformed. When these addicts get grumpy or anxious, they have tools to gain perspective on their mood and do not stay in sour spirits very long. When addicts who have become recovered cause harm, they care. They examine their conscience in prayer and approach the person they've hurt to make amends. By applying the tools they have learned after working through our program of action, these addicts maintain a spiritual connection that grants them freedom from addictive obsession.

Addicts who have become recovered are not cured of addiction. Make no mistake: addicts can never use in safety. They have only been given freedom from obsession, which makes it possible for them to stop using and live healthy, productive lives. Freedom from addictive obsession is granted to addicts only so long as they continue to grow spiritually. If addicts fail to apply the tools they've learned in this program, or do not share what they have

learned with others, they run a risk of losing their spiritual connection and falling back into addictive obsession.

If your addict has become recovered, their spirituality is now of central importance in their lives. They may spend long hours away from home in an effort to help others. It is important for you to understand how important this work is to their on going spiritual growth. At the same time, any addict who neglects their loved ones or their problems at home by throwing themselves into helping others is neglecting a huge part of their spiritual lives. Giving time and attention to loves ones is equal in importance to the work of helping other addicts. However, it does take some time for most recovered addicts to find a balance.

Even if your addict has become recovered, it is likely that you are not ready to trust them, or to let yourself believe that they've really changed. This is a perfectly natural reaction to the experience of loving an addict. Anyone who loves an addict has been lied to by their addict many times over. Most grow weary of giving their addict too much trust. You probably have had the experience of getting your hopes up when your addict stopped using, only to have your heart crushed when they relapsed. Some loved ones have been through this cycle many times and have developed a thick skin as a result--they refuse to get their hopes up only to get hurt all over again.

Becoming recovered means entering a lifetime of spiritual growth and reconstruction. There is a long road ahead, and it is perfectly okay for you to take your time. Give your addict trust when you feel they have earned it. If your addict comes to you demanding your forgiveness and praise, and that you adopt a spiritual way of life, then they still have a lot to learn. On the other hand, if your addict demands nothing of you, but demonstrates consistently over a period of time that they really have changed, your faith in them will return naturally.

Many loved ones make the mistake of thinking that their personal problems are over when their addicts become recovered. However, your addict's mental health is not just going to rub off on you. When your addict was active, you had the opportunity to recover without them. Now that they are recovered, your lack of action will not serve you. You may still suffer from obsessions, resentment, and anxiety. If so, your addict has learned how to use some tools that can be of great use to you. If you find yourself growing interested in spiritual things, don't be

afraid to ask. Your addict will be more than happy to share their experience with you, and they probably know someone who can take you through this program of action.

It may be the case that you do not really want your addict to get better. You have grown used to their addiction and are not ready to let go of it yet. Your loved one is changing, and it feels like your whole life will have to change with them. Change can be scary, even when it is healthy. Many loved ones feel threatened when their addicts recover because they don't want to have to change themselves.

It might be the case that you are resentful of your addict's recovery. After all of your hard work to help and fix your addict, someone else has come along and brought them back to life. Perhaps this leaves you feeling cheated or unloved. The truth is that no human power caused your addict to recover. Their efforts weren't enough. Your efforts weren't enough. And no one else's efforts could have possibly caused the change you are witnessing. Your addict's recovery is a result of their newfound relationship with God.

Sadly, we have seen many families broken apart when an addict recovers and the rest of the family doesn't want to change. If you are not ready to let go of your addict's addiction, you are running the risk of breaking off your relationship with them and possibly replacing it with a relationship in which you can recreate the destruction and chaos of active addiction.

Whether your addict is using, abstinent, or recovered, help and hope are available to you. If you obsess about controlling your addict's behavior; if you cannot stop yourself from helping or fixing your addict even when you know you are only making things worse; or if you have seen a dramatic change in your addict and are hoping that a similar change might happen to you; we are here to help. All you have to do is ask.

### WHAT IS ABSTINENCE?

Abstinence means not using. When we abstain from the use of addictive substances or behaviors, then we are practicing abstinence. For an addict, abstinence without a spiritual solution can be an extremely uncomfortable experience. Not using means having to fight off the desire to use, and this leaves us miserable, resentful, and depressed. Many of us have found ourselves switching addictions in order to cope with the pain of abstinence. In this case, we were hardly abstinence at all.

Because we have a tendency to switch addictions, it can be hard to say just what true abstinence is and how we know when we are practicing it. Can the abstinent drug addict have an active sex life without becoming a sex addict? Can the abstinent sex addict have a beer now and then without becoming an alcoholic? What exactly is abstinence for a sex or food addict? We are sexual creatures and we have to eat, so where do we draw the line? Is it possible for different people to have different definitions of abstinence? If so, does abstinence mean anything at all? It is important for us to find an answer to these questions because, in our experience, abstinence always comes before recovery. We have never seen anyone complete the program of action described in this book and experience real spiritual change who was still actively using. Abstinence must come first.

But if abstinence means abstinence from everything all at once, then none of us are ever going to be able to make a start. For this reason, we find it helpful to make a distinction between addictions and compulsive behaviors. Both addictions and compulsive behaviors are activities over which we are powerless; the difference is that addictions present us with a solution to our basic problem with life. When we are addicted to something, we use it as a substitute for spiritual power. We come to depend upon our addiction to get us through the day, and begin to develop an obsession for it when we cannot indulge. Addictions create havoc in our lives. They hurt the people we love; they drive us insane; and they kill us.

Compulsive behaviors, on the other hand, do not seem to present us with the same kind of solution to our fundamental obsession. They do not interfere with our relationship with God, and they do not have the same kind of consequences for our health and relationships. We may not be able to exercise much control over our compulsive behaviors. We may not like to admit that we engage in them, but they are not currently causing the same kind of trouble for us as addictions. A normal process for someone making regular use of the tools of our program is to become recovered, gaining freedom from addictive obsession, and then to slowly lose interest in and desire freedom from compulsive behaviors. One of our members describes the process like this:

“After working through this program, I didn’t want to smoke pot or drink anymore. I haven’t had the obsession for those things in years now. At the time that I became recovered, I was still smoking cigarettes, drinking a lot of caffeine, and using porn to masturbate. These things didn’t seem to keep me from helping people or praying, so I didn’t think they were a big

deal. After a while, though, I started feeling like my spiritual life would be improved if I let these things go. Each one was a struggle to surrender, and they went one at a time. I still struggle with the porno some times. And now it seems like God is asking me to pay attention to how much sugar I eat.”

We have success in helping addicts to become recovered when they gain abstinence from their addictions. Once abstinence from addictions is attained, we addicts are able to work through the program of action outlined in this book even though we may still have some compulsive behaviors. It is important that we be honest with ourselves in this process. If we pretend that an addiction is only a compulsive behavior, the results will be disastrous. We will not be able to work through the program of action outlined in this book; we will not gain the spiritual experience necessary to be rid of addictive obsession; we will suffer the consequences of our addiction; and we will probably experience a relapse into those addictions from which we were practicing abstinence.

One of our friends had this experience: “As soon as I quit heroin I started overeating. I put down the spoon and picked up the fork. I gained several hundred pounds in a very short time. It got to the point where I was having trouble rolling out of bed.” When we ignore any addiction or compulsive behavior, it gets worse. All compulsive behaviors have the potential to present themselves as life-solutions when we are abstinent from our addictions. Any time a compulsion becomes the mechanism we use to cope with life, it develops into an addiction and cuts us off from God. We believe in the old saying “first things first,” but we also believe in “second things second.”

Whether a sex addict can drink or a drug addict can sleep around becomes a question of conscience for each individual. We are not the purity police. Our job is not to mandate a fixed standard and demand that all addicts comply. However, one thing we do know from hard experience is that no drug addict can safely drink alcohol, and no alcoholic can safely use drugs. Many of us have experimented with this guideline and suffered the consequences. We have also seen so many addicts switch from one addiction to another in order to pretend that they are abstinent that we do have a general suggestion to make: When attempting to work through the program of action outlined in this book, we consider taking on a general abstinence. Any time we have a question about whether or not we may be addicted to a substance or behavior, or any

time a substance or behavior is sufficiently mood altering for us, we stay away from it while we are working on becoming recovered. If we apply this guideline thoroughly, we can hardly go wrong.

Those of us who have spent some time trying to help others have seen many lives destroyed by too casual an attitude toward seemingly lesser vices. The people we work with who continue to grow spiritually are also those who continue to drop compulsive substances and behaviors as they grow. We've not yet met a perfect saint. All of us have a long ways to go on the road of purity. At the same time, progress along this road seems to make life a little bit easier at each step. Each new compulsive behavior we drop provides an opportunity to surrender and bear witness to the power of God.

The question of how to define abstinence for those who are primarily addicted to food or sex is another issue. We tend to be a bit stricter about sex, since it is less essential to our survival. We strongly recommend that anyone who identifies themselves as a sex addict abstain from all sexual activities—including those that do not involve other people—until they have completed the program of action outlined in this book. Sex is a tricky thing. We can very easily deceive ourselves about what is and what is not compulsive behavior, and so we find it best to put sex down completely until we have some spiritual power on our side. Once we have entered a new way of life and begun the work of helping others, we will be in a relationship with God that will guide us toward a sex life that is safe for us. Once we have learned the tools of this program of action, we can test our motivations when it comes to each sexual behavior or act. Are we engaging in this sexual activity for selfish reasons? Are we being completely honest with our partner and the other people who may be affected? Are we hurting anyone? Is this behavior compulsive? Does it come between us and the Spirit? If we can be honest with ourselves in answering these questions, and if we stick with a group of recovered friends who can hold us accountable, then we should be in a good position to begin reshaping our sex lives.

When it comes to food, we must obviously take a different approach. We do not recommend that anyone starve themselves until they enter a relationship with God. Instead, we suggest that anyone who identifies as a food addict or a compulsive overeater begin to practice moderate and attentive eating habits while eliminating from their diet every food that sets off a compulsive reaction. In general, sugar is more problematic than broccoli, and potato chips more

dangerous than peas. We identify problem foods and stop eating them. The foods that we do eat, we eat with care and in moderation, praying before we begin. Many of us find it helpful to develop an eating plan and to stick to it, not snacking between planned meals or eating more than we've planned. Eating healthy usually requires that we educate ourselves about our body's nutritional needs. We need to know which foods will nourish us, and which will harm us. We need to develop a diet that feeds us without requiring that we take in too much food. Each food addict's abstinence diet will look a bit different, but so long as every compulsive substance has been eliminated, each may claim abstinence and begin the work described in this book. Eliminating problematic foods is a process of discernment and may involve some trial and error. We encourage anyone in this process to be thoroughly honest with themselves and their recovered friend.

Because different addicts are addicted to different things, abstinence may look a bit different for each of us. This does not mean that the term "abstinence" is meaningless. Abstinence means not using. It means the elimination of addictive substances and behaviors from our lives. We begin abstinence by ceasing to act out in our addictions, and we continue abstinence by bringing the spiritual tools we have acquired to our compulsive behaviors. We believe that addicts of all kinds can find the help they need in the program of action described in this book. If you are just beginning this program, our prayers are with you as you enter abstinence and begin to work toward spiritual change.