

Recognizing Spiritual Hunger

Objectives

- Identify needs met by “getting high”.
- Explore feelings that come from the state of intoxication or being high.
- Understand psychology underlying addiction; i.e., the need for feelings of getting high; i.e., altered states of consciousness.
- Understand that the need for altered states of consciousness is a basic human need.
- Identify ways of experiencing altered consciousness without mood-altering drugs.
- Create openness to experiencing altered consciousness apart from AODs.
- Identify the relationship between desire to get high and hunger for the spiritual.
- Make decision to seek for ways to experience altered awareness without AODs.
- Explore client’s hunger for the spiritual.

Human need for spirituality

German psychiatrist, neurologist, surgeon, Walther Lechler utilized a therapeutic dimension called, “medicine of whole person.” In his clinic he found that there were three things that bound the diverse population of patients together: their pain, the need for a caring family and a deep spiritual hunger. Lechler (personal conversations, 1998) asserts: “When you deal with humans without relating to God, you don’t succeed. We don’t feel at home on earth without a knowledge of a loving Father. With this knowledge comes the certainty that you can experience an enjoyable dialogue with life. Crisis and sickness is a chance to wake up to direction in the Bible.”

Carl Jung also acknowledged this spiritual hunger when he wrote to Bill W (founder of AA), “The craving for alcohol is the equivalent on a low level to the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness and a union with God. You see, alcohol in Latin is *spiritus* and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison.” Jung closed his letter with a line from a Psalm, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1).

Jung believed that authentic religious experience is vital to our very growth as people. Jung (as cited in Standard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000) observed that people are psychospiritual, not just psychosexual and psychosocial. Bullis (1996) observes that, more than just biopsychosocial beings, clients are, in fact, beings with “a spiritual cosmology, a spiritual anthropology, and a spiritual hierarchy of needs” (p. 99).

Charlotte Towle (as cited in Bullis, 1996), in acknowledging the importance of spirituality in social work practice, observed that “man does not live by bread alone, that spiritual needs must be seen as distinct needs and they must also be seen in relation to other human needs” (p. 6). According to Bullis (1996), spirituality, far from standing alone, is pivotal to all other experiences and our consciousness. He suggests that, recognizing the importance of the spiritual nature of clients, “a spiritual, even mystical element” should be brought back into social work practice. He even asserts that “the mystical process is vitally connected to mental health” (p. 92).

According to Dallas Willard (1995), “People hunger to do more than just believe the right things. There is a hunger for some experience of God in their lives” (p. 16). Monte, C. (1980) states: “Without God to aspire to, people are forever condemned to the incompleteness of their own existence. What is important is humanity’s belief in God’s existence, for without that belief, their inherent need for wholeness is denied” (pp. 300-301).

Recovering addicts fear facing life sober without the *feeling* induced by consciousness altering chemicals. This feeling is called “getting high”, intoxication, altered awareness, transcending. The goal of this activity is to help clients make the connection between AODs and the need for feelings that come from “getting high”—being intoxicated, or in altered states of consciousness. Clients need to discover that all people are seeking for an experience of being lifted outside of themselves. It is the highest level of human possibility. Clients need to discover alternative ways to transcend themselves: *the spiritual path offers them another way.*

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Activity: Play video, “Hooked, The Psychology of Addiction“ (35 min.)

The jacket says this about the contents of the video: “The video helps viewers to understand that the desire to get “high” is not something new, but has been central to human experience since the beginnings of history. The desire to experience a different state of consciousness—a state in which one experiences an altered sense of time and perception, an intensification of feelings and senses, and moments of serenity, clarity, calmness, and unity—is as old as humanity. However, to find and capture this state via mood-altering drugs is destructive and ultimately provides at best a poor imitation of the real thing. *Hooked* introduces viewers to the many ways of achieving this state which are healthier, safer, and life-affirming.”

Key Points In Video

- Mankind likes the feeling of being intoxicated, an altered state of consciousness.
- Mankind’s search for the state of intoxication throughout history.
- Central role intoxication plays in our society.
- Description of the state of intoxication.
- Identifies ways to achieve this state without mood-altering substances.

Intoxication is an altered state of consciousness

Sobriety discriminates, diminishes and says “no”; drunkenness unites, expands, and says “yes” (Wm. James). Thus, the state of intoxication is a desired state. The video illustrates how the metaphor of drunkenness has been used by poets to describe the “high” that comes from other ways of experiencing intoxication. Intoxication is an altered state of consciousness in which one experiences an altered sense of time and perception, an intensification of feelings and senses, and moments of serenity, clarity, calmness, and unity. It enhances, comforts, consoles, assuages, and relaxes. It changes our awareness. Time halts. It gives us the feeling of being lifted outside of self and the ordinary world. It brings us into contact with elements that make us more alive.

States of Consciousness

Some examples of states of consciousness include: bored, depressive, hypnotized, dreaming, daydream, highly creative state, “high”, transcendent mystical state, and intoxication.

What happens when one is intoxicated or high?

- Time changes.
- Feeling of freedom, liberation
- Awareness of life, light, air.
- Intensifies all sensations.
- Changes emotional state: calms, relieves tensions.
- Lifts one outside of self and of ordinary world.
- When we come out of this altered state we feel melancholy or nostalgia and like a stranger.

Benefits of achieving intoxication via mood-altering drugs.

- Meets needs
- Makes you feel good
- Improves your self esteem
- Improves your confidence
- Makes life interesting and exciting
- Overcomes your feelings of shyness and loneliness
- Makes life’s problems and life itself easier to bear
- Enhances sense of aliveness
- Relaxes tensions

Characteristics Found in State of Intoxication or Altered Consciousness

1. Feeling of deep and profound peace
2. A certainty that all will work out for the good
3. Sense of one’s own need to contribute to others
4. Conviction that love is at the center of everything
5. Sense of joy and laughter
6. Sense of great emotional intensity
7. Sense of great increase in understanding and knowledge—meaning, unity, reality
8. Sense of new life or living in a new world
9. Confidence of one’s own personal survival
10. Feeling one couldn’t possibly describe what was happening
11. Sense of being alone
12. Sense of warmth, fire
13. Feeling of being bathed in light
14. Loss of concern about world problems

Central to human experience

The video author hypothesizes that the search for altered awareness is central to human experience and necessary for full human development. That intoxication is not mere perversity, but offers mankind a substitute for a core human need; i.e., the feeling of being lifted to another plane.

An altered state of consciousness is the most important of all human experiences. People change as a result of experiencing this altered state. It often enables them to achieve new heights of accomplishment.

Two Significant Research Findings:

- Gallop Poll: 35% of adults report they have experienced a state of altered consciousness—without mood-altering substances.
- Sociologist, Andrew Greely: 40% of adults report that they have been in the presence of something larger than themselves that lifted them outside of themselves. Most said that this was the most significant thing that ever happened to them in their lives. 90% of these say they never have told another person of the experience.

Acknowledge the attractiveness of the state of intoxication.

It is an honorable, known, and shared desire to be in a state of intoxication—the feeling of being lifted outside of ourselves. Clients are seeking something great, but are looking for it in detrimental ways that offer a poor imitation of what is real. The feeling of an altered state of consciousness can be attained, but without the resulting suffering, exploitation, and crime.

Our goal to help clients investigate non-chemical methods to achieve altered consciousness that are healthier, safer, and more personally affirming. The joy of sobriety can never be attained unless clients are willing to pursue other ways of experiencing an altered state of consciousness.

How can we achieve “Altered States of Consciousness”

1. Physiological ways—fasting, vigils, sex, rotating, running around in circles
2. Relationships—set off by a certain person, falling in love.
3. Moment when an adult looks down at a child and the heart melts.
4. Nature—woods, wilderness.
5. Athletics, running, etc.
6. Music, performing, singing,
7. Arts, theater, drawing, painting, etc.
8. Creative moment.
9. Spontaneous moment—taken by surprise, almost like magic.
10. Organized religion: almost all religions incorporate an expectation of transcendence, transport, ecstasy—transcendent mystical state.

Processing video

1. Was there a feeling you were trying to capture when you were using? Can you describe it?
2. Have you ever been able to get that feeling without using? If so, how?
3. Did anything in the video bring to mind activities you've done which made you "high"?
4. List activities through which one can achieve altered awareness—other than mood-altering drugs.
5. Were you reminded of activities you've not done in a long while and would like to do again? If so, what are they?
6. Could you enjoy some of the positive activities or experiences described in the video?
7. If not, what might prevent you from enjoying them?
8. Have you ever had the feeling of being very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself? Describe it.
9. How could religion or spirituality...?
10. What was the most significant thing that ever happened to you in your life?
11. What have you found that is valuable? What do you treasure most?
12. Draw a picture of the feeling of intoxication or getting high.
13. Journal about the price you are paying to get this state of intoxication.

Reflect on Jung's words to Bill W.

"The craving for alcohol is the equivalent on a low level to the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness and a union with God. You see, alcohol in Latin is *spiritus* and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison." Jung closed his letter with a line from a Psalm, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 42:1)

➤ Exercise: expressing spiritual hunger—journal, drawing

- Write a psalm expressing your deepest longings.
- Write a letter to God about how you feel about hearing Him.
- Write a letter to God from one who is in exile.
- Write a letter to God from one who wants to get out of slavery to...
- Write a letter to God telling Him what you want, what you need.
- Draw picture of your heart; where is God in it?
- Draw a Bible story: Easter—cross, tomb; banquet table; City of God, temple; stable scene in Bethlehem; wedding at Cana. Where are you in the picture?

Quotations For Reflection

1. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the chambers of the belly." (inward parts) Proverbs 20:27
2. The root of the word religion, *religare*, means to reconnect , to bind back together.
3. People on a spiritual quest seek to find the reality of life and of God. The process of spiritual growth requires a decision. It is conducted against a natural resistance, inclination to keep things the way they are, cling to old ways, and take the easy path (Unknown).
4. A spiritual adventurer has a revolutionary spirit—having passed through an experience of revolution in their spiritual life; i.e., passed from nominal Christianity, conformist, routine of religion, static, conventional to a living personal faith (Unknown).
5. Listening to God is key to moving into realms of spiritual growth and spiritual life (Unknown)
6. We must learn how to perceive reality through our spirit, not only the mind. Intuition is voice of one's heart, our spirit (Watchman Nee).

Note: The aforementioned material is based on *Hooked, The Psychology of Addiction*. 1987. Hazelden Foundation. Center City, MN: 1 800-328-9000. <http://www.hazelden.org>. Order No. 4024.

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Awareness of The Miracle of Grace

The miracle of grace

Psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck (1978) argues for the existence of “a powerful force originating outside of human consciousness which nurtures the spiritual growth of human beings” (p. 260). Throughout history, the religious have called this force *grace*. Peck suggests that grace is a common phenomenon, even though it is not explainable within the conceptual framework of conventional science and natural law. He calls it something miraculous and amazing.

Peck offers four specific examples of what he describes as miracles of grace: health, the unconscious, serendipity, and evolution. From these four miracles of grace, Peck hypothesized the existence of a God who loves us and wants us to grow. Peck argues that this grace is available to everyone, but some do not take advantage of it.

Miracles of grace

1. **Health:** Peck repeatedly observed a force in most of his patients that—even under extremely adverse conditions—protects and fosters mental health.
2. **The Unconscious:** This vast part of our minds is below our conscious awareness, but it is rich beyond imagination. It is accessible to us through dreams, idle thoughts and slips of the tongue. The unconscious must be explored; it is wiser than we are, and it is our interface with God.
3. **Serendipity:** Highly implausible events that have no natural cause occurring with implausible frequency is known as synchronicity. When those synchronous events come to us at critical times for our benefit, they are miracles of serendipity, i.e., "the gift of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for."
4. **Evolution:** The evolution and growth of all life in the universe is a miracle, because the force of entropy (energy naturally flows from a state of higher to lower differentiation) says everything should wind down eventually, not move upward.
5. **New birth:** Some people add this, a term many used to describe a conversion experience that leads to a radical transformation, as a fifth miracle of grace.

Exercises—The miracle of grace

➤ Exercise: Your response to grace

In your journal, draw the following line and then put a mark where you feel you are on the continuum from totally rejecting to totally accepting the miracles of grace:

Reject grace totally

Embrace all aspects of grace

Now write in your journal why you placed yourself at that point on the line.

➤ **Exercise: When have you felt grace at work in your life?**

Journal about times you have felt *grace* at work in your life.

➤ **Exercise: In what ways do you resist grace?**

Journal about all the ways you resist *grace* in your life.

➤ **Exercise: Notice the miraculous**

The miraculous can be seen by paying close attention to things we usually simply take for granted. Notice what you see happening around you, then write in your journal what you observe. List at least five miracles you observe.

➤ **Exercises: Review your experience with grace**

1. Make a note of experiences of synchronicity in your life—some coincidences that you can't explain.
2. Ponder some of the dreams that have helped you, and write them in your journal.
3. Share incidences of healing you have experienced that point to a miraculous force of grace at work in your life. What incidences of health dangers have you successfully survived?
4. Journal on other ways have you enjoyed experiences of grace at work in your life in areas such as: partner, friends, children, community, church, music, art, creation, undeserved forgiveness, laughter, play...

Read Meditation: Confessions by St. Augustine

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new!
Late have I loved you! And behold
You were within, and I without,
 And without I sought you.
And deformed I ran after those forms of beauty You have made.
You were with me and I was not with You.
You called; You cried;
 And You broke through my deafness.
You flashed; You shone;
 And You chased away my blindness.
You became fragrant;
 And I inhaled and sighed for you.
I tasted, and now hunger and thirst for You.
You touched me; and I burned for your embrace.

(Howard & Howard, 1985)

➤ **Exercise: Brief inventory of your life based on acceptance of grace:**

Make two columns and then list the ways you resist and accept grace in your life:

| Ways I resist grace in my life | Ways I accept grace in my life |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|

➤ **Drawing exercise: Draw a picture of grace.**

What does grace mean to you? Draw a picture to illustrate the meaning of grace to you.

➤ **Exercise: Write a letter, poem, prayer, or psalm addressed to the giver of grace**

Meditation: Thoughts on mystical emotions, by Albert Einstein

“The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all science. [The one] to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is a good as dead. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of religiousness” Albert Einstein, quoted by Lincoln Barnett in *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* (as cited in Howard & Howard, 1985, p. 109).

Word Definitions

1. **Awe:** Gr., fear; fear mingled with admiration or reverence; a feeling produced by something majestic, sublime. *An intuition for the creaturely dignity of all things and their preciousness to God; a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something absolute. Is more than feeling, it is an answer of the heart and mind to the presence of mystery in all things, an intuition for a meaning that is beyond the mystery.* (Heschel, 1955).
2. **Mysticism:** the doctrine that it is possible to achieve communion with God through contemplation and love without the medium of human reason; any doctrine that uses the possibility of attaining knowledge of spiritual truths through intuition or acquired by fixed meditation. *Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in a greater or less degree, or who aims at and believes in such attainment. It is to possess the infinite in the finite. . The technique of mysticism properly practiced, may result in the direct intuition of, and union with, an ultimate spiritual reality that is perceived as simultaneously beyond the self and in some way within it* (Jung, C.)
3. **Mystic:** one who professes to undergo mystical experiences by which he intuitively comprehends truth beyond human understanding

4. **Mystery:** Gr., *mysterion*, something to be known, “but it was an initiated knowledge which a person could acquire only through his own individual insight and experience, and which could not be communicated through an ordinary educational process” (Unknown source) (See Luke 13:11, Luke 8:10, Mark 4: 11.)
5. **Intuition:** Latin, *intuitus*, to look at, the “power or faculty of attaining direct knowledge or cognition without rational thought and inference”—seeing something directly, or, in other words, “getting the picture,” without having to figure it out. Intuition is defined as perception via the unconscious. The immediate knowing or learning of something without the conscious use of reasoning; instantaneous apprehension; the inner eye; “the eye of the heart”. *The source of our knowledge of God is the inner eye, “the eye of the heart,” a medieval name for intuition.* (Maimonides, cited by Heschel, 1955, p. 148).
The spirit man or inner man has spiritual senses or capacities. It can speak; it has a voice: call it inward voice, intuition, inner guidance, or inward witness. It can see: call it visions, spontaneous images and pictures. We must learn how to perceive reality through our spirit, not only the mind. Intuition is voice of one's heart, our spirit (Nee, 1968).
6. **The true religious school** teaches that direct experience of God in this life is possible. It teaches one how to contemplate things in such a way that it creates WONDER. Our heart needs to learn how to be ceaselessly attuned to the ‘wordless’ which resounds in the words we read or listen to (de Mello, 1992).

True mystics don't rely on their ability to pray well, nor do they give up because they can't pray well. The true mystic knows that God's love is an unearned gift and longs to pray even when he or she can't. Actions spring out of the attitude of giving love and receiving love. Work is a time of being loved whether there is success or failure!
(Source Unknown)

➤ Journal Exercise

Think of a time when you experienced the feelings of awe or of a mystical moment and write about it in your journal.

Meditation

“My children, mark me, I pray you. Know! God loves my soul so much that His very life and being depends upon God’s loving me whether He would or not. To stop God from loving me would be to rob Him of His Godhood” (Meister Eckhart, as cited in Howard, & Howard, 1985, p. 123).

➤ Journal Exercise: Write a letter to a friend describing your experiences with grace

Meditation: Welcoming Grace (25 minutes)

Write the following words on the board.

**Whatever your mind can conceive,
and your heart believe,
you can achieve.**

Have everyone sit comfortably with both feet on the ground and nothing in their laps. Have them shut their eyes and breathe slowly and deeply a few times. Explain that for a few minutes you are going to give them the opportunity to envision themselves fully open to Grace. Encourage them to relax and, being receptive, let images come on the screen of their minds' eyes of what they would like if they were in the presence of total love and acceptance, loved for who they are and for who they are becoming.

Ask the following questions slowly, deliberately, pausing sufficiently between them to allow the visioning to take place:

- How would you look?
- What would your posture be?
- The expression on your face?
- How would you feel?
- What would you be doing with your life?
- How would you be spending your money...your time?
- What interest would you be developing?
- What would your relationships be like?

When sufficient time has elapsed, invite them to open their eyes and use colored crayons to create a symbol, or image, of what they envisioned. When all have finished, have them display their symbols by attaching them with tape to their chests and move into the final exercise: Sing together "Amazing Grace" (Howard & Howard, 1985, p. 185).

Sing the hymn "Amazing Grace" by John Newton (1725-1807).

This hymn was written by former captain of a slave ship after he survived a violent storm where he feared his ship would sink, and he cried out to God, "Lord, have mercy on us." As he reflected later on this experience, he believed God had touched him with grace (Rogers, 1996).

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;

'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

Reflection: Struck By Grace

...We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace. It happens; or it does not happen. And certainly it does not happen if we try to force it upon ourselves, just as it shall not happen so long as we think, in our self-complacency, that we have no need of it. Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us and they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage.

Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. *You are accepted*, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. *Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!*" If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement. And nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral or intellectual presupposition, nothing but *acceptance*...

It is such moments that make us love our life, that make us accept ourselves, not in our goodness and self-complacency, but in our certainty of the eternal meaning of our life. We cannot force ourselves to accept ourselves. We cannot compel anyone to accept himself. But sometimes it happens that we receive the power to say 'yes' to ourselves, that peace enters into us and makes us whole, that self-hate and self-contempt disappear, and that our self is reunited with itself. Then we can say that grace has come upon us.

The aforementioned material is a quote from Paul Tillich's work called *The shaking of the foundation*, (as cited in Howard & Howard, 1985, p. 120-121).

Discussion point: What does it mean to you to be struck by grace?

Note: much of the aforementioned material is based on thoughts from M. Scott Peck (1978) in *The Road Less Traveled*, (pp. -), and from *Exploring the road less traveled : A study guide for small groups*, the workbook by Howard & Howard (1985) based on Peck's work.

It is recommended that both therapists and their clients read the section on grace in Peck's book, at a minimum pp. 235-268. For a better understanding of some of the exercises below, it is recommended that therapists refer to the book, *Exploring the road less traveled : A study guide for small groups*, by Howard and Howard.

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Clarifying Religious/Spiritual Beliefs And God Image

Exploring religious or spiritual beliefs

In order to be able to offer the client an alternate, more positive construction that is consistent with his/her beliefs, it is important for a therapist to understand a client's belief system (Prest and Keller, as cited in Sahlein, 2002). With this insight, a therapist can propose improved possibilities consistent with the client's belief system. The possibility that the therapist might be able to help a client achieve a more rewarding religious experience may even provide more incentive for therapeutic work.

"Without God to aspire to, people are forever condemned to the incompleteness of their own existence. What is important is humanity's belief in God's existence, for without that belief, their inherent need for wholeness is denied" (Monte, C., & Sollod, R., 2002).

➤ Exercise: journal about personal beliefs

Find a childhood photograph of yourself. Locate a place where you can be quiet and undisturbed, and get comfortable, with your feet on the floor and your back erect. Breathe deeply and slowly, relax and let go of any tightness in your body.

Now look at your photograph and allow yourself in your imagination to be that child, visualizing you are that size again. Shut your eyes and recollect the place you lived—your room, the kitchen, the yard, the neighborhood, your school, etc.

Once you have absorbed yourself into your childhood world, start remembering some of the your *childhood* beliefs, and write them in your journal.

- What you believed about yourself
- What you believed about your parents
- What you believed about your siblings
- What you believed about your place in the family, in the neighborhood, and in school.
- What you believed about your church
- What you believed about God

Note the following:

Now consider how your *current* beliefs are similar, different than your parents' beliefs. How similar/different than your siblings? Your peers? Drift back to your teen years experiences and how you felt during that time. What were your beliefs then? Distinguish childhood beliefs that you have since abandoned.

➤ Exercise: clarify beliefs about life

Articulating your beliefs is a significant part of the process of spiritual growth. A statement of beliefs sets down your operational beliefs, the principles by which you actually live your life. Take three or four minutes to write down some of your beliefs, simply noting them without expanding or evaluating. Don't try to guess what you *should* believe, simply what you actually believe. Just put on paper what has value to you.

Now suppose you can have only three beliefs. Which ones would you choose as most important to you? Describe why they are important to you and how they affect your daily behavior. Note what you discovered about yourself from this exercise. Do your beliefs and your daily behavior match? What would you change?

Note: the aforementioned material is based on thoughts from M. Scott Peck in *The road less traveled*, and Howard & Howard in *Exploring the road less traveled: a workbook...*

Exploring distorted images of God

How we view God is molded by the way our parents treated us, and our image of God determines how we respond to God and how much we let God give us. Harsh, punitive parents give us a legacy of a harsh, punitive deity. Physical, sexual, emotional, or mental abuse by a parent sends a message to the child saying, "I can treat you however I want." Our God image can be twisted by the unloving ways we were treated, making us open to sin patterns based on those distortions.

With which of the following views of God do you identify?

1. **Reluctant parent.** We had to cry out loud and long before we would be heard. With this view, what little hope and trust we have works hard to get God's attention, and it focuses our mistrust and despair onto God. Sin pattern: can't surrender to God.
2. **Rescuing parent** who saves us from our awfulness. This view focuses our mistrust and despair on ourselves, and we feel like a lowly worm. We passively wait for God to rescue us from a rotten world, instead of working with God to redeem creation. Sin pattern: we hold contempt for ourselves and all of creation.
3. **Wrathful parent** who punished us because we deserve it. Miserable creatures serving a dangerous, punitive God. Sin pattern: since suffering is sent by God (as punishment), we do nothing to prevent it.
4. **Cruel, capricious.** Fear of God is more akin to terror instead of reverential awe. Especially if we have been abused in brutal ways, or parents betrayed us or abandoned us, we cannot submit to a loving God. Sin pattern: we have trouble praying to Our Father; we don't trust men.
5. **Unforgiving and demanding.** God is a scowling task master. Abuse probably took the form of substantial verbal and emotional abuse, and neglect. Sin pattern: we become the responsible one, still performing before a demanding God.
6. **Unfair and selective.** God is capricious and demanding—only with us, not everyone. We feel as if we are different and not-as-good-as other people.
7. **Distant and unavailable.** God keeps his distance, doesn't get directly involved in people's lives, simply cannot be reached.
8. **Kind, but confused.** God is seen as benign, but ineffective in dealing with people. All the chaos in the world confuses poor God.

9. **Angry, punishing.** We view our parents' voices like they were God's voice. We feel like a bad sinner in the hands of an angry God, wondering what punishment He will deal out next.
10. **Killjoy.** God stands ready to punish whatever weak efforts we put forth.
11. **Perfectionist.** We feel God acts like a parent or teacher, loving us more when we do well, and less when we mess up. We make futile efforts, either trying hard to please God or just giving it up as impossible. Sin pattern: We think we have to do "good works" to be good enough to deserve God's love.

➤ **Exercise: clarify God representations – journal, drawing**

1. Write ten beliefs you hold about God.
2. I view God most as...
3. When I think of God I feel...
4. God is the most real to me when ...
5. Draw a picture of God in symbolic form.
6. Draw a picture of your earliest impression of God. Put yourself somewhere in the picture.
7. Draw a Biblical theme: Easter story—cross, tomb; Banquet table; City of God; Temple; Manger. Where are you in the picture?
8. Describe the ten most disturbing doubts about your faith and its meaning.
9. The path to spiritual growth lies through questioning everything. What have you questioned on your journey so far? Where has it led you? What are you questioning now?
10. Write what you really believe about the nature of God and your relationship to Him.
11. Has your concept of God change? How have your feelings changed? Using symbols or words, describe God as you perceive Him today.
12. Draw a picture of your heart, and identify where God is in it.

➤ **Exercise: exploring spiritual experiences – journal, drawing**

1. Ask God to show you the various kinds of intuitive, spiritual experiences you have had with Him in your life.
2. List spiritual experiences, those times when it seems God had broken through and touched your life.
3. Draw whatever will express what happened to you. Express the significance of the grand encounter to you. Record what happened to you while you did this drawing.
4. Write a spiritual autobiography.
5. Make a spiritual life map.
6. Write out the story of your spiritual experiences, using novel form, dialogue, poem, allegory, or essay.
7. Recall the time in your life when you came to Jesus or God. What factors in your life led you to the point that you wanted to know Jesus better?
8. What was the precipitating cause that led you to the actual experience of commitment? mystical experience? intellectual decision? emotional decision?
9. Describe one thing that God has done for you.
10. How has God been there for you? How has He not been there for you?

➤ **Exercise: spiritual awareness – draw a graph**

For various periods of your life, draw a graph that expresses the level of your spiritual awareness. The horizontal axis stands for the various periods of your life (your age, education, your position, philosophy, insights you gained, key individuals, etc.), and the vertical axis depicts your spiritual awareness. List significant personal experiences as they relate to your spiritual growth, then categorize them according to these guidelines:

1. Was the experience due to “agreement knowledge,” i.e., second-hand knowledge that resulted from merely agreeing with authorities or what experts said?
2. Did it result from, or was it based on, personal experience?
3. Did the basis of this experience come from spiritual phenomena?
4. Was this experience based on reason and the so-called five senses?

Christianity is not a set of principles or systems of truth or a formula, but a Living Person (Dr. Bruce L. Morgan¹).

➤ **Exercise: explore beliefs from a Christian perspective (Heb. 6:1-2; Acts 26:18)**

1. What do you believe is the basic message of Jesus of Nazareth?
2. Have you received forgiveness of your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ? (Acts 2:38; Acts 16:18)
3. Have you had a rebirth, conversion experience? (John 3:3)
4. Have your eyes been opened so you may turn from darkness to light? From the dominion of Satan to the dominion of God? (Acts 26:18)
5. Have you applied faith towards God? (Heb. 6:1-2)
6. Examine who or what does your faith rest in? (I. Cor. 2:5).
7. What is the major premise of the New Testament? (Col. 1:27; I Cor. 6:19; II Cor. 4:7; Eph. 3:21; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 3:14; Rom. 8:15,16,17; Rom. 8:9,10; John 14:16-18,20; II Cor. 1:22).

In the history of Christianity, theologians and teachers have dwelt upon the unworthiness of man, his proneness to sin, his worthlessness, in contrast to God's supreme goodness; they have even laid the responsibility for evil at our doorstep.

There is none of this in the teachings of Jesus. He is often disappointed in men, but only because we are potentially of the highest value, the inheritor of God's very own kingdom. We harbor the kingdom within our own soul. (Sanford, J.)

¹ Morgan, B.L. (Personal communication August 7, 1983)

➤ Exercise: expressing spiritual hunger—journal, drawing

- Write a psalm expressing your deepest longings.
- Write a letter to God about how you feel about hearing from Him.
- Write a letter to God from one who is in exile.
- Write a letter to God from one who wants to get out of slavery to...
- Write a letter to God telling Him what you want, what you need.
- Draw picture of your heart: where is God in it?
- Draw a Bible story: Easter—cross, tomb; banquet table; City of God, temple; stable scene in Bethlehem; wedding at Cana. Where are you in the picture?

Exploring toxic beliefs

Our faith has been poisoned because of the lies and false beliefs that have been integrated into our beliefs and views about God.

Examples of Toxic Beliefs

1. Problems in your life result from some particular sin. (In truth, pain is often a result of sin, but not necessarily a punishment for it.)
2. True faith means waiting for God to help me and doing nothing until He does. (In practice, this becomes the foundation for laziness and disaster.)

Intervention:

Explore client's view of God in order to help client reframe his or her faulty belief system to assist in developing a better self concept.

Note: the aforementioned material is based on thoughts from Linn, M., Fabricant, S., & Linn, D. (1987). *Healing the eight stages of life*.

Explore the meaning of the following words:

1. Sinner: Gr. *harmartia*, refers to sin in the New Testament. In early Gr. writings this word meant "to miss the mark"; later it came to mean "an offense committed against someone or some rule"; another Gr. word for sin is *adikia*, a legal term meaning unrighteousness or injustice; another term is *parabasis*, means to act beside the mark or to miss the standard of behavior.
2. Salvation: Gr. *Soteria*, safe, rescue or safety (physical or moral) i.e. deliver, health, salvation, save, saving.
3. Saved: Gr. *Sozo*, to save, i.e. deliver or protect—heal, preserve, be made whole.
4. Spiritual: Gr. *pneumatikos*, non-carnal; non-physical; not originating from the natural world. Primarily denotes wind or breath. Connotes ideas of invisibility and of power; divine, of God; supernatural. Characterized by the ascendancy of the spirit.

5. Spirit: Gr. *pneuma*, a current of air—i.e. breath or breeze. L. *spiritus*, breath, courage, vigor, the soul, life: a) the life principle bestowed on man by God; the soul as the resulting life constituted in the individual; b) a supernatural being, especially one thought of as haunting or possessing a person, etc. c) a divine animating influence or inspiration.
6. True Knowledge of God (Eph. 4:13): *epignosis*, recognition. Gr. *gnosis*, knowing (the act). Knowledge that is obtained through effort and experience: the source for our knowledge of God is the inner eye, the eye of the heart, a Biblical name for intuition. True knowledge of God lies through insight and revelation, does not come about by a way of thinking that proceeds from concept to concept or by a series of abstractions. Man's quest for God is not a quest for mere information; little is attained by straining the mind. (Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man*).
7. Heaven: Heb. *shameb*, from an unused root meaning to be lofty; the sky (as aloft), Greek: *ouranos*, perhaps from the same as oros (to rise or rear) through the idea of elevation; the sky, by extension heaven as the abode of God. Belonging to or coming from the place that is above; i.e., the spiritual dimension.

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Emotions Provide Key To Core Questions About God

Cultivating emotional wisdom is one of the seven essential spiritual practices enumerated by Walsh (as cited in Sperry, 2001). Transforming emotions is accomplished, according to the great religious traditions, in three ways: minimizing painful affects such as fear and anger; encouraging cultivating positive attitudes such as thankfulness and generosity; nurturing positive emotions such as compassion and love. The goal is to minimize wide mood swings and instead achieve balance and appropriateness in our emotional responses—the basis of emotional wisdom.

Emotions reveal our basic questions

Allender & Longman (1994) assert that all of our emotions are focused on God, and at the very root of all our emotions is the question, *God, are you good?* The emotions we experience come in response to others treat us. Our feelings are aroused when people relate to us in one of three essential ways:

1. Attack—they move against us
2. Abandonment—they move away from us
3. Love—they move toward us

In relating with others, our response is generally either “fight or flight.” The following diagram shows how our reactions trigger one of six central negative emotions:

| Relational movement | Fight response | Flight response |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Attack (against) | Anger | Fear |
| Abandonment (away) | Jealousy | Despair |
| Love (toward) | Contempt | Shame |

When we are attacked by someone, how do we react emotionally? Return the attack in anger, or retreat in fear. How do we respond to loss or abandonment? We either withdraw in despair from the pain, or we cling desperately, even in jealous rage. How do we act when someone loves us? Flee from the need exposed by the love by withdrawing in shame, or fight off our need for love with contempt and skepticism. In each case these negative emotional reactions can reveal our deeper questions about God (Allender & Longman, 1994).

Attack: the violation of our dignity

An attack provokes us to fight (anger) or flight (fear). When someone attacks us, they threaten us with destruction—of our property, position, person, or power. At the very least, they want to keep us from enjoying what we have. Sometimes the attacks we experience are so subtle that we ignore their cumulative effect. But our emotional response is likely to be a movement between anger and fear. Both reactions are self-justifying—they simply move us in opposite directions from danger.

1. Anger: fighting fire with fire.

Anger is a response to what we view as an unjustified act against us, and we try to counteract the wrong done to us. Anger protects against potential harm, energizes us for the fight, empowers us to act when God seems passive. However, anger is also a reaction against God for apparently failing to act to protect us. Anger vocalizes the core question, *Is God just—will He let the wicked win and prevail against me?* (Allender & Longman, 1994).

2. Fear: anger in reverse

Fear energizes us to run when we face an assault. In order to preserve ourselves, we will do whatever seems reasonable to escape, to ensure our survival. Fear helps obscure the pain of our desperate need for protection. The feeling is, if God doesn't protect me, I must act on my own. Fear vocalizes the core question, *Can I trust God to protect me from harm?* (Allender & Longman, 1994).

Abandonment: withdrawal of intimacy

Abandonment leads to loneliness because of the loss of people who mean most to us. Although it is actually separation, we experience it like death because it means the end of relationships. Every one of us is haunted by potential abandonment, from spouse, children, friends, and it makes intimacy more difficult. Loss and abandonment result in either jealousy or despair.

3. Jealousy: possessive rage

Envy and jealousy both demand that our soul not suffer loss. Envy wants to get what we don't have; jealousy wants to guard what we desperately fear to lose. Jealousy can be a controlling fury, keeping other suitors away. Envy can make us thieves to get what others enjoy. Instead of trusting God to give us what we need, we strike out against others. Jealousy vocalizes the core question, *Is God good—will He satisfy my hunger? Or will He bless others and leave me empty?* (Allender & Longman, 1994).

4. Despair: flight from loneliness

We despise being lonely, isolated from others. We want intimacy, but despair makes us feel like we don't care about our relationships. Despair stifles any hope of rescue or redemption, so we refuse to even try. Despair vocalizes the core question, *Is God good, or will He leave me in isolation? Will He offer His presence to others and leave me alone?* (Allender & Longman, 1994).

Love: the pursuit of our hearts

Connecting with other people is a parallel to our desire for redemption, so that we can have a relationship with God. Intimacy means separation and loss have been overcome. Repeated cycles of disappointment with relationships leads to despair, and even hatred of desire, lest we be thwarted in our attempts at intimacy. When someone moves toward us with kindness, tenderness, and love, we either retreat in shame or fend off the approach in contempt.

5. Contempt: the shield of mockery

Although we desperately want love, the passion it arouses in us seems dangerous. So we reject love, grace and kindness offered to us, treating it with contempt. Desire is seen as an enemy that can be defused through contempt.

Contempt vocalizes the question, *Does God love me or will He turn away in disgust?* (Allender & Longman, 1994).

6. Shame: A Flight from Intimacy

Shame results when our desire for intimacy exposes us as naked and needy. It is a base fear—we will be isolated and mocked forever. Shame drains us of energy and withers our desire to exist. We try to escape by insulating ourselves from people and things that might expose us. Shame vocalizes the core question, *Does God love me, or will He hate me if He sees me as I really am?* (Allender & Longman, 1994).

➤ Exercises: check your emotional reactions

1. What is your emotional reaction when someone attacks you?
2. How do you respond to losses?
3. How do you feel when someone loves you?
4. How do you feel when someone gets something you wish you could have?
5. Who or what provoked an emotional response from you this week?
6. Which of the 3 relational movements did the person who provoked the response use?
7. Which of the six core emotions do you identify with?

➤ Exercise: answer the following questions (in your journal)

1. Does God love me, or will He hate me if He sees me as I really am?
2. Is God just—will He let the wicked win and prevail against me?
3. Is God good, or will He leave me in isolation? Will He offer His presence to others and leave me alone?
4. Is God good—will He satisfy my hunger? Or will He bless others and leave me empty?
5. Can I trust God to protect me from harm?
6. Does God love me or will He turn away in disgust?

Note: Most of the aforementioned material has been adapted from *The cry of the soul* by Dan Allender & Tremper Longman (Allender & Longman, 1994).

References

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- Sperry, Len (2001). *Spirituality in clinical practice*. Ann Arbor, MI: Sheridan Books.

Spiritual Inventory

1. List your spiritual experiences, those times when it seems that God had broken through and touched your life. Ask God to show you the various kinds of intuitive, spiritual experiences you have enjoyed in your life.
2. Recall the time in your life when you came to Jesus or God. What factors in your life led you to the point that you wanted to know Jesus better?
3. What was the precipitating cause that led you to the actual experience of commitment? Mystical experience? Intellectual decision? Emotional decision?
4. Write out the story of your experience: in novel form, dialogue, a poem, an allegory, an essay.
5. Draw that which expresses what happened to you. Convey the significance of the grand encounter to you. Record what happened to you during this drawing.
6. Write a spiritual autobiography.
7. Describe one thing that God (Higher Power) has done for you.
8. How has God (Higher Power) been there for you? How has He not been there for you?

Spiritual Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is the use of books (or other media) to help express feelings and gain new insight. The term “bibliotherapy” is derived from two Greek words—*biblio* (book) and *therapeia* (healing).

Reading on topics such as forgiveness, grace, love, trust, spiritual identity, and the role of suffering, are all potentially useful ways to engage clients. Spiritual literature can help clients challenge their dysfunctional religious beliefs as they see from reading that they are not consistent with Scriptures or other authoritative spiritual writings.

The approach with readings in spiritually-oriented therapy could either be to encourage reading self-help books, or the clinician may facilitate discussion with the client about the reading materials. These discussions should be designed to help a client reflect on her/his spiritual situation and creatively generate new understanding and sense of meaning².

Literature, movies, videos, DVDs, websites, multimedia sources, all can be used to help clients grow and expand their awareness of spiritual possibilities. If a client tends to be rigidly defensive about his/her spiritual views, perhaps prescribed reading can help to expand their perspective, correct misinformation, challenge misperceptions, and contribute to a sense of belonging and understanding. After assigning readings, follow up on their assignments, and process client’s understanding and/or interpretation of the material (Sperry, 2001).

References

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² For more information on spiritual health interventions to restore meaning, see:
http://www.meaning.ca/pdf/2000proceedings/spiritual_health_interventions.pdf

Spiritually-Modified Cognitive Therapy

The flexibility inherent in the theoretical perspective of cognitive therapy allows this approach to include the spiritual dimension. Content of cognitive therapy can vary widely according to a particular client's needs, offering a treatment approach especially suited to modifying all manner of beliefs, including religious belief as they affect the psychological and spiritual health of clients (Propst, as cited in Sperry, 2001).

Biblically based cognitive therapy

Modification of traditional cognitive-behavior therapy with Christian tenets has been a fairly widely researched intervention (Hawkins, Tan, & Turnk; Johnson, Devries, Ridley, Pettorini, & Peterson; Propst, as cited in Hodge, 2004b). According to [Johnson et al. \(1994\)](#), therapy modified along Biblical principles has seen success in treatment of depression and has helped people adjust their negative thinking patterns and minimize irrational thinking and general pathology.

Several researchers have contributed to this effort. A short introduction to this approach was offered by Propst (1996); Backus (1985) provided a book-length treatment of the topic; Ellis (2000) made a revised edition of his work on the subject available for use with theistic clients (as cited in Hodge, 2004b).

Cognitive therapy intervention strategies

Four religious cognitive therapy intervention strategies are outlined by Propst (as cited in Sperry, 2001):

1. ***Understand the influence of cognition on emotions and behavior.*** Because a basic tenet of cognitive therapy is for clients to be aware that their assumptions strongly affect their emotions, religious clients need a spiritual framework for understanding their thinking and beliefs. Thus consideration of theological issues could be a cognitive therapy strategy for religious clients.
2. ***Monitor cognitions (thoughts, beliefs, assumptions).*** Religious clients can monitor their thoughts and assumptions motivated by spiritual themes in the cognitive therapy process. Introduction of these spiritual topics can help to overcome any initial hesitation about the therapy process.
3. ***Challenge cognitions.*** Themes from most spiritual belief systems can be useful in helping clients challenge their current position, and these religious ideas can actually become cognitive restructuring methods. Especially with clients with perfectionist tendencies, linking challenges to religious understanding that life is not perfect can help alleviate anxieties in this area.
4. ***Cognitive restructuring and behavior modification.*** Since images are more important than thoughts for intensifying traumatic memories, religious imagery can be a helpful cognitive restructuring technique. Propst (as cited in Sperry, 2001) noted that it was helpful with religious clients to use images of Jesus in addressing stressful situations (especially for abused female clients who visualized Jesus as present with them in the image). If elements of a client's religious belief system are used to challenge some of the client's dysfunctional thinking, cognitive behavioral therapy is enhanced.

References

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12 Step Process And Spirituality

In this manual, the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are considered to be an important spiritual intervention. Included in this manual are a listing of the 12 steps, plus some additional helpful supporting materials discussing the spiritual aspects of this program.

This program has long been recognized in the treatment of many different problems. The 12 steps are considered to be both a treatment method and an intervention. Of particular importance are step 3—involving surrender to a Higher Power than ourselves—and step 4—making a moral inventory of ourselves. This essentially involves, in spiritual terms, a confession of our faults to one another.

Worldwide groups help many people

Programs based on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have sprung up all over the country, indeed worldwide, over the past several decades. Many people have found help and relief through attendance at these self-help meetings where they can share in freedom among others with similar struggles. Groups are available to help with a wide variety of issues, including alcoholism, close relatives and friends of alcoholics, co-dependence, sexual problems, emotional difficulties, eating disorders, etc.

The results of using the 12-step principles have been overwhelmingly positive, and many successful clinics for treatment of emotional and addictive disorders have based their therapeutic approach around the 12 steps.

Acknowledging a Higher Power

All 12-step groups begin with some form of statement that we are powerless over our lives and our lives have become unmanageable. Having made this fundamental acknowledgement, participants then proceed to state that they believe a power greater than themselves can restore their lives. Then they make an active decision to turn their lives over to the care of the Higher Power they have acknowledged.

Themes covered in spirituality promoted by AA include the following:

- Spiritual awakening
- Relying on a Higher Power
- Faith
- Surrender, or letting go
- Acceptance
- Humility
- Gratitude
- Meditation and prayer
- Making amends

Taking inventory

The 12 steps include making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The following material is excerpts of Step 4, taken from the **Big Book** of Alcoholics Anonymous, also called the **Basic Text**, (1st edition printed in 1939).

...We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations.

Resentment is the "number one" offender. ...From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principle with who we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships, (including sex) were hurt or threatened...

We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it carefully. The first thing apparent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong....

It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feeling we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit...

We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look for it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done."...

Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight....

If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can....

We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Him. If you have already made a decision, and an inventory of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning.

The aforementioned material was retrieved April 5, 2005 from:
<http://www.12step.org/steps/bigbook.php#Step4Sex>

Resources for spirituality and recovery: *Stop the chaos*. pp 105-114.

References

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