

since a ferry and a remote toll bridge constitute the other exits. In all his years living and visiting the island, the passenger had left the island by the southern route only once. Despite his nonexistent comfort level, they safely arrived back at the starting point.

Get into the passenger seat with God behind the steering wheel. Do you trust him enough to be comfortable? Are you willing to let him select the route? If he wants to rid you of extra pounds by taking away the cravings so you can eat those things on the “ought to” list instead of the “must have for comfort” list, is that okay? If he wants you to talk to strangers, do you trust him? If he goes south when you expect the northern route, what will you do?

Slimming Steps

Get in the passenger seat. Write about the journey with God driving. How do you feel about it? What's your comfort level?

Triage

Can the patient be saved?

Depends on what you mean.

Her immortal soul?

Oh, yeah.

These martyrs have it made.

She's lived in hell through a marriage with a lout. Nothing post mortem could phase her.

Pshaw. You know that's not what I mean.

Physically? She's not too far gone, lots of stress injuries even to muscles and ligaments not from exertion but from, well – stress.

Come on. Quit being cute. I'm serious.

I'm serious, too. The levity's a cover for my spirit rupturing when I see the psychic pain.

I know. Can she be saved?

Yeah. She's reached the bottom.
She's ready to give up using all
her substantial resources trying
to hold it all together, to make
a life for the kids he taunts,
to build her self-respect that's
atrophied under his onslaughts,
to grow against his attempts
to espalier her like a bonsai tree.

And reaching the bottom is good?

Oh, essential. Now she can let go
reach up, admit she can't,
and God's there, waiting for
the slightest hint of her invitation
to come in and fix it all.

So she'll live.

Oh, more than live. Now she'll
thrive, she'll fly, soaring to
heights of talent and energy and
success she'd buried so deep and
so long she'd thought they never even
existed when they're who she is.
Yes, now finally – she'll **live!**

Spiritual, Not Religious

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness...

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?” – Matthew 23:27-28, 33 (NIV) [Read Matthew 23:2-33.]

The history of the Christian church isn’t pretty. Consider the Crusades, the Inquisition, witch burnings, the immoral lives of the clergy including the papacy, war in our own lifetimes between protestants and Catholics in Ireland – these merely scratch the surface. Still, I am and will continue to be a member of the great organization that is the Body of Christ. I believe in the church, but oh, so much more I believe in the God and the Christ whose story and essence has been handed down through the centuries by organized religion.

Looking at the Big Book chapter “We Agnostics” I’m certainly NOT drawn by the title. On the other hand, the truth inherent in the words of the chapter changed my life. They brought the great principles of the Christian faith to me more clearly and more personally than sixty years of study, church membership, and teaching parishioners from kindergartners to nonagenarians. OA pulled the information from my head and planted it firmly in my heart.

Having faced the question of whether God is everything or nothing, the Big Book moves toward the logical explanation that God is not nothing.

But we believed in life – of course we did. We could not prove life in the sense that you can prove a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, yet, there it was. Could we still say the whole thing was nothing but a mass of electrons, created out of nothing, meaning nothing, whirling on to a destiny of nothingness? Of course we couldn't. The electrons themselves seemed more intelligent than that. At least, so the chemist said.

...

Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 54-55)

Is God everything, or is he nothing? The question seems simple. But is it? If God is everything – the easy answer for Christians to voice – then NOTHING can stand between you and God. Not your stubborn pride, not your ambition, not your husband, wife, father, son, mother, sister, brother or daughter. Patriotism has a huge role to play, but allegiance to country cannot come between you and your God. The church is called the bride of Christ in the Bible. But where does it fit when it comes to your relationship with God? Not at the top priority slot! The **MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR LIFE MUST** be a **closer relationship with God!**

I'm a United Methodist. I've agreed to sponsor other United Methodists, a Seventh Day Adventist, a Buddhist, a Jew, Catholics, members of the Church of Christ, and several others. One had a problem on her resentment list with a doctrine of her church. The old me would have debated theology with her. The OA me was stymied. I prayed about it, then went to bed listening to a tape of AA speaker Mark H. "The minute I put God in a box, I can't know any more nor will I experience any more about him." He

continued, “Please lay aside what you think you know.” He quoted God as telling him, “Why do you keep telling people you understand me? Who do you think you are?”

We are commanded, “You shall have no gods before me.” That includes organized religion. The church has a role, but that place is not higher than your being open to what God tells you.

Slimming Steps

What is your relationship with the church? Can you listen to God for firsthand knowledge and not rely on the church to give it to you secondhand? What is the role of the church after you have established and continue to maintain your relationship with God?

That said, don't ignore the church as a source of guidance and wisdom. Go to the source. The scripture's there for a purpose. Like those who figure they can do Twelve Step programs without the instruction manual *Alcoholics Anonymous*, relying on what you feel or what other people tell you may – and probably will – cause you to fall short. Is your own agenda so loud you really can't hear God's voice? Is the message you're receiving consistent with the God Jesus spoke of?

A Patient, Understanding God

Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised – look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew – a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.” That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew. – Judges 6:36-40 (NIV)

We know the story of Gideon’s fleece. Do you remember, though, earlier in the chapter he’d already asked God for a sign and gotten one – a burnt offering on a rock set on fire with a rod? (And that’s not Bible-talk for a match.)

Did you ever want God to do something real, something tangible, so you knew for sure? Like going to a haunted house and leaving disappointed we didn’t get scared – we crave the different, the unexplainable. If you’ve wanted something like that from God, did it happen?

I doubt that it did. However, there’s one case where it might well have happened – when you *needed* God to show you his presence. God’s not a parlor-game trickster. He doesn’t perform on command like a trained dog.

Instead, he's caring, compassionate, and involved with his children. Many years ago I was faced with two choices. One I had hoped mightily for and wanted badly to choose, but I'd committed to the other and could not do both. Choosing my favorite was legal, but it meant going back on my word. I went to a prayer chapel, knelt, and talked to God, not curious about whether he'd let me play Gideon but really needing his guidance. He gave it, emphatically and quickly. (I know I didn't manipulate the answer, for it wasn't my preference.) When you need God, he's there, time and time again. You can trust him.

Look at Jesus' miracles. When requests for wondrous acts were made out of curiosity or wrong motives, he declined. When people exhibited faith and made the first move, wonders happened. They still do.

Do you trust him? With your choices? With your decision? With your life?

Slimming Steps

When have you felt the presence of God? Have you asked him to prove something? Have you asked him for guidance? Tell what happened.

Spewed from God's Mouth.

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:14(b)-22 (NIV)

I live in a small city, a tad larger than 100,000. I go to a comfortable church, not in the ritziest part of town, but respectable. And many of the congregants do come from posh sections. Maybe a dozen blocks away is a poor area, not destitute, but obviously struggling. We serve them, have outreach projects. We have a lot in common with Laodicea. Probably your church does, too.

What about you? What about me? Does God want us to buy gold from him refined in the fire, to buy white clothes to

wear? What? In winter? I don't look good in white. I might spill stuff on it.

I bet you've prayed for God to help you lose weight. Right? I certainly have. What did you want to happen when you prayed? That he would remove the offensive pounds, that he would pull you to his comforting hug when travails and tribulations drove you to the food for solace? That he would make the excess calories you consumed evaporate? Or did you pray for him to give you the courage day after day after day to eat the right foods, to plan what you would eat and eat what you planned, to truly rely on God for comfort and consolation rather than putting your faith in the food?

Are you willing to ask God to take away your difficulties, to release you from your *self*? What would that mean? Honesty. Openness. Facing the blackness of your soul and forgiving yourself. Facing those you've wronged and seeking their forgiveness. That's what it means for God to take away your difficulties, to release you from yourself, from your self.

Is God everything, or is God nothing? What? You don't like those choices? If God is everything, we have no say-so. We don't decide our goals, our actions, who we like, who we hate. We don't run our lives. If God is nothing??? No. God is not nothing. What's the other choice? Can't I just be good, ask God's advice, let him in on the decision-making?

No. Halfway doesn't count. In or out. Hot or cold. Or get spewed from God's mouth.

The Third Step prayer is... Wait a minute. I won't do what the Big Book does and give you the prayer then the disclaimer. The warning from page 63 of *Alcoholics Anonymous* says:

We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him.

Okay. The Third Step prayer says:

God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always! (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 63)

Slimming Steps

Don't pray the Third Step prayer lightly. Think about it. If you're ready to pray it, you might want to do it with another person or in a church.

Bondage Gone

Bring me riches
Oh my god, I
Need good things.
Don't let me lose
Another game, and
Grant me peace,
Every day.

Guide me,
Only you I
Need, in your will
Each single day.

The God Kit

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” – Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)

God, how can I turn my will and my life over to you?

How, God?

Mama said when Sis drowned, just four years old,
you needed her more than we did.

Uncle Jess said that tsunami was your doing,
an “Act of God” he called it.

Preacher says you sent Jackie to Hell
'cause he messed up and shot himself
to keep from going to prison.

I can't do that Third Step thing, God!

That makes sense.

Who said that? Where are you?

Who were you talking to?

I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
– and David, Peter, Paul,
Martin Luther, Mother Teresa...

Holy Shit! I mean Jesus Christ!

That too, in a circular kind of way.

Great God Almighty!

That works. I am who I am.

Wow! That's what you told Moses –
with a burning bush.
Why don't I get a burning bush?

You started this conversation.
I didn't need to get your attention.

Oh.

Yeah.

But you told him take off his shoes,
the Holy Ground bit.

You're not wearing shoes.
And the cultural meaning is gone, too.
These days I'd be more likely to
ask for clothes that cover.
But that's beside the point.

What point?

Like I said, you started the conversation.
I think the language is
"Made a decision to turn our will
and our lives over to the care of God
as we understood Him."

Oh. Yeah. I guess I was pretty smart aleck.
So, are you going to zap me?

Certainly not.
At least it's real, not just rote recitation.
You got my attention with your passion.
You care.
That means something.

Why did you need a four-year-old, then?

I need all my children,
but that doesn't mean I reach out and
pluck them from lives and families.

I would have chosen she have a long life,
that she experience more of the give and take
of being human.

But she died.
She died.

I know, and I felt your pain,
your parents',
I gave you all the comfort you could accept.

You could have closed the gate.

I'm not a puppeteer.
People have free will.
I watch, but I don't meddle.
I watch and sigh and hurt
and wait for an invitation in.

Oh. And my griping was enough invitation?

Oh, yes. Anything real.
Anything thought and felt.

I'm honored.

Actually, I'm honored.
A real communication honors me.

Even gritching?

Even gritching.
So, what kind of God would you trust?

Oh, never mind. I can trust you.

You expect me to believe that?
You're not sure.

I've got to think about this.

There you go again.

What do you mean?

You don't find me by thinking.
You find me by knowing me,
by talking with me,
by walking with me.
Get out of your head and into your heart.

Okay. I'm talking with you.
I can't believe it, but I'm talking with you.

So, what kind of God would you trust?

One who knocks Jerry off his high horse
and loves me.

Would you really trust that kind of God?

I guess not, I'd be afraid Jerry would start praying.

So, you want a God who loves you, what else?

How about one who makes me not react
when Jerry pushes my buttons.

That's doable.

Well, obviously I need a God with a sense of humor.
You're certainly that.

Yes. All the somber faces and resignation sadden me.

Well, I don't want you making me
do things like handing out pamphlets on street corners.

What else?

I'd like explanations with orders.
And respect my intelligence.
Don't treat me like a child.

Speaking of orders,
it sounds like you're doing that

rather than describing the God you want.

I don't want a God who sends people to Hell.

Tell me where the Bible says that's what I do.

Preacher says so.

Go to the source.

What else?

Lead me gently. Don't push.

I'm not a puppeteer.

Did you get pissed off at that Gideon guy,
not being able to figure out what you were telling him,
asking for proof? Three times!

Honest communication doesn't anger me.

Sorry. Anger you. It's not my usual vocabulary.

I know.

What else?

Wise a... Smart aleck.

Good choice.

Patient.

Understanding.

Forgiving.

Okay. What else?

Can I save some wishes for later?

Do I have to do it right now?

I'll be here.

How many choices do I get?

Are you kind of like a buffet line?

I can pick and choose and

come back and get more or something different?

Maybe a buffet line is a poor analogy
for a compulsive eater.
How about a toolbox?

Yeah.

Can you take away my bingeing in buffet lines?

Yes.

But guiding you away from that eating establishment
could come into play as well.

I guess I need a God who gives abstinence
and wipes out my cravings.
No more buffets.

I didn't say that.
One day at a time.

One day at a time.
Every day?

I'll be here.

Slimming Steps

So. What kind of God would you trust enough to turn over
you life and your will?

Step Four

Came to believe that a
Power greater than
ourselves could restore us
to sanity.

List my tears, God!

All day long they twist my words;
they are always plotting to harm me.
They conspire, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
eager to take my life.
On no account let them escape;
in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.
Record my lament;
list my tears on your scroll —
are they not in your record? – Psalm 56:5-8 (NIV)

The big “THEY.” How huge a word that is. Resentment is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die. For the compulsive overeater, that poison has many names, among them sugar, corn chips, pizza, cola, and mashed potatoes lathered with gravy.

What is resentment? The word “resent” comes from the Latin root *sentire* meaning “to feel” with the prefix “re” meaning again. Feel what? Anger. Anger? What am I angry *about*, you may ask. Probably the real question is, “What are you *not* angry about.” Perhaps you grew up believing nice people didn’t feel anger, that good children don’t have bad thoughts. It’s time to rethink that old idea.

We do get angry, and over the slightest things. In the middle of preparing a meal, we’re interrupted when our child comes in, needing us to do something simple. We love the child, it’s appropriate we’re asked to help, but the interruption is, well, interrupting. The child’s business takes precedence

over ours. Maybe in the larger sense we even see it's proper that way, but it doesn't stop the fact we felt resentment.

Most resentments aren't that small. The ones we remember and re-remember – the angry moments we live time and time again – are far from small. It can be from decades ago when you were that child needing help and your mother would not have stopped, would have scolded you for asking. It can be a terrible wrong, a crime, committed against you. Until you take them out and look at them, the resentments remain. And as they remain, you deal with them. For compulsive eaters, dealing with most problems implies numbing the pain with food.

The psalmist resented. "All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life."

What do you resent?

Slimming Steps

Who is your "THEY?" Why do you resent them? Take a piece of paper, and along the left side of the page write all names that come to mind of people you resent or feel icky when you think of them, skipping a line between each. Add ideas (you can't date until you're 16, respect your father, etc.) and institutions (the church always just wants money, the bank won't leave me alone.)

Go back and briefly describe why you resent that person, idea, or institution.
