

# ALL IN

## Became Willing

At the age of 21 years old I lost all faith in the world and was losing faith in myself. It was hard for me to have faith. I'd been robbed, beaten, bullied, and exploited: unwanted and unemployable. I had no money, no car, no bank account and no credit card. My parents threatened to kick me out if I didn't get work. What was I to do?

I reached out to a 12-Step Program to help me with a problem and the members kept suggesting that I "do the steps."

## Going 'ALL IN'

I did the Steps, got a spiritual experience, and tapped into an unseeable and unexplainable reality. I say it's reality because anyone can sense it and gain awareness of it if they go 'all in' with mind, heart, soul, and strength. I gave all of myself, my inward authority, to learn and to gradually develop a new way of thinking, feeling, and behaving through reliance upon spiritual principles. Basically, I practiced different choices and attitudes consistently with perseverance. It took some time, through trial and error, to sense the spiritual reality. My mind was accustomed to focus away from spiritual things.

I practiced, tested, and tried new conceptions and ideas. If I hadn't changed my thoughts and practices I would not have had such a change. God for me in the beginning was simply 'Good Orderly Direction.' My mind, heart, and actions had to be more in line with God.

I committed myself completely, but imperfectly, to God and I was ready to confess my hurt, anger, fear, and selfishness. This was not easy. I prayed regularly for guidance to do God's will. Most days I prayed for help to save me from anger and fear; I sought peace and serenity. I made restitution to those I had hurt or stolen from. I made things right on my part. I had episodes of anger, depression, and anxiety throughout this transition. Sleeping was difficult for a while. Yet it was that spiritual experience that kept me going. It helped me to believe. Faith was essential.

## Love

I have always struggled with understanding love. I just didn't find it much growing up and it didn't help that I chose places where it wouldn't exist.

There were some people in my life who spoke love to me and I heard it. But I could not really understand it until I tried to do it. I was having a relationship problem and asked a spiritual advisor what to do. The man asked me if I loved her, so I said, 'yes.' Then he said, "then love her."

When I take this idea of love and put it into practice — keeping with truth, justice, mercy, and forgiveness — something usually spiritually profound happens, but it happens to me. My intention was to give to someone, but then I get a reward. I learned that God's grace and spiritual transformation comes through my giving and caring for others without expectations or pursuing rewards. The more pure my action, the better the reward. Humility, servitude to God, and compassion for other people are powerful components when used together.

I believe this action, mixed together with other inward spiritual development, was crucial to my spiritual experience with God. This spiritual experience was the difference between believing there is a God and knowing there is a God.

I first experienced this when I was about 22 years old. And then forgot about it soon afterward.

## Worldly Distractions

I was 'ALL IN' for a couple of years. My spiritual sensations increased to where I could just sit and be in it. Still, no money, no job, no car, but full with God. I understood that my feeling content was not dependent upon material things or what other people thought of me. Such peace and confidence with God required me to let go of mental attachments to material and worldly ways. I had to surrender self-centered thinking; my expectations, entitlements, demands, insistence upon outcomes, and trying to control any results. God was the potter and I was the clay. The clay chooses to give into the guiding hands of the potter. Instead of me

conjuring up ideas of what is good for me I sought to do God's will and trust it.

I moved away from my support system to a university with a roommate in a one room dorm with no barriers for privacy. Meditation and prayer became very inconvenient. I stopped doing it. My mind, heart, and actions participated less and less with God's will and goodness. Six months later I was questioning my spiritual experience with God and I was wondering if it was just some fluke or chance happening. I was praying to God to help me see and know if God really existed: "If you are there please give me a sign."

That week I got one of those unexplainable coincidences. A set course of unrepeatable experiences happened in a way that was amazing and surprising. My faith was regained. Due to my mind, heart, attitude, and actions set elsewhere, I still struggled to be with God and sense God. I thought about God, but I wasn't living my life for God. I was not 'ALL IN.'

## **Grafted in again**

Romans 11:23 NKJV "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

I continued to live life my way. Eventually, I got so empty, lonely, and depressed, I called a friend for help. We went to a meeting. A man was sharing his story of how he recovered from a hopeless condition. He was in tears over how good his life had become. I wanted what he had so I approached him for help.

He said those magic words to my broken and willing heart: "Trust God." It wasn't what he said, but how he said it. I looked straight into his eyes and I knew that he knew. I knew that he knew what I used to know. His expression said to me that the sensation with God that I used have was real and still available. He spoke the words I used to live by. Although I had once known the path and words, I needed someone else to speak them to me and to teach me with his faith so that I could believe again. Because I was ready and willing, He guided me back to experience God and faith again. Once I got that sense back, I could trust and follow it. Following the free gift of the Spirit within has helped me to answer many difficult life questions ever since.

Maintaining a connection to hear and see spiritual reality requires making time for the spiritual relationship and exploration. If I'm not 'All In' applying my mind, heart, soul, and strength to seek God, then I am the problem. It's not God, it's me. I'm to choose God with my 'All.' I changed then to the degree I was willing to change and I grew spiritually to the degree I was willing to grow. God molded the parts of me I chose to let God mold. I have the ability to choose God or not. As long as I could sense spiritual truth, goodness, and grace, I no longer needed a man to guide me. The mind has many self-deceptive ways. I still desperately need people to help me see what I cannot see alone.

## **Bible Curious**

I read books about the beginnings of the Twelve-Step Program and learned how much the Bible influenced its early start. I heard some verses that sounded a lot like the Steps. I became curious about the Bible and wanted to learn more.

## **Then I came to church**

Seven years later in the year 2000 I married someone who wanted to go to church. I believed it would be good to support my wife, so I went with her. The worship service was very difficult for me; It was culture shock for me. The last time I stood in a crowd where people were singing with the band there was a cloud of smoke in the air. This was different though. Families were together. It looked like some were ridiculously into it while others were totally not into it. There was a sense of false happiness or exaggerated joy presented by some of the participants. The people were very nice. I could tell there was some unwritten rule that while at church we needed to be 'appropriate.' It wasn't the place for expressed anger or conflict, like where I found God. It was a major adjustment for me. But when the pastor began teaching I understood what he was talking about and I appreciated the message. The teaching got me interested.

I had just started reading the Bible and I was noticing so many similarities between what was written and my experiences. As my wife and I attended small groups I drew a conclusion that church people, generally speaking, don't go 'ALL IN.' I had taken the role of the new guy, because I did not

speaking Christianese. Everyone treated me as though I didn't know anything, but I knew they were the ones who didn't know. I didn't know what to say, so I stayed silent.

## **We moved**

I was born and raised in Arizona and met my wife there. She was from California. We got an opportunity to move to the Sacramento area and took it. It felt right and if I try to explain what I mean by that I could write another 10 pages, so I'll just leave it as that.

Following God does not always go with the way the world moves. I was in the middle of great spiritual challenges. My mind and heart had to work through many developments over the first few years of moving. I had surgeries on my face, deaths in the family, loss of professional credentials from AZ., a new career, a new church, adjusting to a higher economic neighborhood, and much more. I let my professional credentials expire since they were invalid in California.

## **Looking for a church**

My wife and I began church shopping. We tried two churches and just didn't quite feel at home with them. I was looking for a place to start a 12-Step group and heard about a church that might let me use a room. I looked up the church online, read about it, and I noticed their pursuit of character development. We started attending the church and I began a 12 step group there. I was there every week for many years and it grew.

## **I chose the Bible**

I was in a men's small group for about two years studying Romans. Throughout my few years in church I had been trying to think of ways to communicate my experience with God, but just couldn't come up with anything people could understand.

(Imagine coming upon a group of people who had never ridden a bicycle. The group would have book studies every week about bikes and stories of how people rode bikes. They would theorize and ponder what it would be like to ride it. They believed riding a bike was beyond their ability. Then

imagine someone coming in who has ridden a bike, but couldn't prove it with any tangible evidence. How would the group respond? Disbelief of course. Imagine how the new person might feel.

This church was claiming interest in character transformation. Here I was a living example of character transformation. Yet the leaders demonstrated little to no interest in what I was trying to teach. The information I was bringing forward may have been too new and unorthodox. It didn't fit with their system. It's like someone speaking a different language. They would have to relearn and who wants to relearn?)

Back to my study group. I was trying to be patient, waiting for God to guide me, flipping through the Bible as the group theorized, and then I saw a verse I had read before, but this time I saw it in a new light. For me it was the answer, the proof. It was the greatest Biblical message.

Matthew 22:38 NIV "This is the first and greatest commandment."

When I read this passage this time, I stared at it as if going into a trance. I tuned out the men's conversation and just meditated on this for a few minutes. I was changed at this moment when my brain understood I needed to make this commandment a much higher priority in my life. I am to love God with my whole being. There is nothing greater.

I wondered why Biblical teachers wouldn't center everything around this idea. The churches I had attended would rotate through book studies, ideas, and plans every year. Churches would switch up how to have groups, use different topic, and apply new catch phrases. I had yet to see a church stick to one idea and go deep into it, like Matthew 22:38.

My mind was full of questions. Why wouldn't we be dedicated to develop the character of deep, authentic, sincere, compassionate, and merciful love? Again, no one knew how. I didn't know how. I was far from love. I was calloused, guarded, and defensive. But I knew this was the answer. I had experiences in my first year of seeking God that proved to me love was important for my spiritual condition. I knew this command was the answer in current daily living and now I understood it was the answer from Jesus and Moses. This was it!

Matthew 22:40 NKJV “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

The scripture was essentially saying, “ride the bike and learn.”

Matthew 11:29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

I sought to grow my participation with this idea. My experience taught me that character building was a slow and gradual process. Making continuous minor adjustments with my actions would have an effect. I began each morning praying and meditating to understand this love more. I would think about how it looked and how to partake in it outwardly toward others.

Mark 12:30 “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This *is* the first commandment.”

As an analytic, I needed to get as specific as possible to define the words God, love, heart, mind, soul, and strength. To learn what these words meant, I chose to use the Bible. I wanted to eliminate third-party materials where the information could be skewed to another person’s bias. (This is why I list material straight from the Bible.)

I reasoned that I could learn what the Bible means through reading all the verses on the topic. I figured I could find patterns and gain understanding through repetitive descriptions.

I performed concordance searches and read thousands of verses on the topics. The real learning though, came through my participation. I began putting into practice Biblical instructions on how to love. Humility was always the first action to take.

I saw the Bible emphasizing love, truth, compassion, mercy, justice, forgiveness, and peace. These traits were often used to describe God. So as I thought about God, I would think of these. I sought thoughts and actions around these principles.

## **The Action & Results**

There was a lot of turmoil in my marriage. We were very poor communicators. We were experts in passive aggressive responses, silent treatments, condescension, sarcasm, and self-seeking. We had many relational character defects. It wasn't hard for me to find somewhere to practice new Godly character traits.

I made changes in my thoughts and actions to better align with God's ways. I informed my wife that I was trying to move away from destructive behaviors. I knew she wouldn't believe me until I demonstrated it successfully for a while. But I had faith in God that these principles could work. There are far too many studies that prove different actions create different reactions. How I act can make a difference. Instead of choosing a reaction based upon my wife's attitude or action, I chose to do what I believed God wanted me to do. If God is my boss, then I am going to listen to God first and foremost.

The test began. When my wife would yell, I would withhold my normal response of defensiveness and talk about her yelling. When my wife would interrupt, I would let her know. I explained that we needed to speak to each other without yelling, interrupting, or condescension. If she would not comply I would end the conversation and even leave the house for a few hours. She did not like that. So when I informed her I was going to leave, she would correct herself in bits and pieces as best she could.

Growth and learning new behaviors takes time. The Bible has many stories and examples of perseverance, endurance, and standing firm. As I stood firm to this new process, my wife improved as well. She began calling me out when I was being rude. We helped each other improve and stay right.

Year after year I would set new goals on how I could improve with God's character. How could I experience more peace, compassion, mercy, and love? I chose to reduce sarcasm. I chose to stop watching sports. I chose to practice empathy and demonstrate compassion. I prayed for patience and humility. Anyone who has known me over the years has witnessed changes. These changes would not have come by just reading. Action is necessary to grow. Without new action, little change can occur.



My mind had many conflicts to sort out, and it still does. There is an ongoing pressure to conform to others' expectations or beliefs. I don't want to upset others or create conflict. Yet I must not worry about it. I must not fear disapproval. I need to be okay with people getting mad at me. It's a reality that will exist, always. Peace can come when I stop trying to control, manipulate, or skew information. Conflict is uncomfortable, but necessary. The Bible is full of stories of characters who experienced conflict and disapproval. Things got better when they submitted to and relied upon God.

God insists I conform to God's ways, not man's. Sometimes cooperating with what people expect or want from me agrees with God's principles, and sometimes it does not. To grow with God involves pondering God's ways long enough to come to a new understanding about myself, how I can practice them, and how I can become better aligned with God. I am to think about God's goodness in a way where that goodness becomes part of who I am and what I do. I am still far from perfect alignment with God's principles, but I am growing closer, little by little, through letting go of pieces of me, and clinging to God's good more and more.

## **Great confusion**

The great confusion is the fact that people don't do what they know is right, true, healthy, and good. Why eat sugar? Why avoid exercising or stretching? Why take on debt? Comfort is usually the answer. Living for comforts: drugs, sex, alcohol (drug), gambling, etc. are obviously unhealthy choices. Also, any form of obsession: work, exercise, body image, food, sports, money, reading, shopping, cleaning, etc. is also unhealthy.

Obsession is unhealthy. We all make choices to do things we know are not the best for us and create reasons why that is okay. We set our minds to do things thinking it is somehow good or acceptable. We justify our actions. We develop reasons to convince ourselves to remove guilt or remorse. And if anyone was to try to tell how we are wrong, most of us could quickly become defensive in different ways. Yet deep down, if we were willing to really look at ourselves, we know we could do better.

Humility is the answer. Death to self and obedience or reliance upon God has always been the best idea and principle. And because so few people

proceed to obey God more than the mainstream (herd mentality) we easily develop reasons why that is okay. And if someone was to point out how our following God is lacking we could easily become defensive in different ways. But if we did seek humility and sincere truth, we might see how we could indeed follow God much more closely than we actually do.

People in general just don't want to change. I didn't want to change. I had to change. Many in 12 Step programs typically don't want to do the Steps. They have to do the Steps, or die. Getting someone to do the Steps who has other choices available, is highly unlikely to do them. Doing the Steps is to face ourselves and our wrongs so we can correct them. As we progress toward correction we quickly see how others avoid such a process.

I needed evidence of success before I was willing to go through the transformation. I needed to witness someone else who had done it, who would advocate the process.

When I was 15 years old I met a teenage street preacher. I could tell he was talking the talk, but didn't really know what he was saying. I mean his talk didn't have experience behind it. He was simply telling me what he had been told. I decided religion was for people who talk the talk, but not walk the walk.

In 12 Step meetings I believed some of the guys knew what they were saying and others did not. I would focus with intense curiosity upon the guys who seemed to know. These guys didn't have a cheesy Sunday best outfit or forced smile. They weren't greeting me like someone would in a retail store. No, these guys were much different. They were foul mouthed, tatted up, yellow toothed, and outwardly appearing broken, but inwardly appearing confident. Yet they were curious to know more how someone who had obviously lived a tough life could change their ways. I needed change. I listened with skepticism watching closely for any inclination of deception or trickery. But they were the real deal.

I was witnessing something extraordinary. I was impressed. The inward condition of these men were not matching their outward appearance. They looked changed. Once convinced these guys really believed in the 12 Step process I decided to give myself over to it. I wanted to know what these guys were talking about and that meant I had to do what they did.

I had to go through the experience to see the unseen reality of transformation. I learned what it is like to let go of my ways of doing things and live differently. I learned what it means to die to self and live for God. Both of which are equally challenging within my mind. Deciding to take action that directly goes against myself was and is extremely difficult to do.

Another piece of the great confusion is to walk differently than how everyone else is walking. When messages abound how vanity and pride are wonderful attributes, I am to seek humility. When money is all powerful and the masses worship it in different ways, I am not to love it. When many people are being fake, using false flattery, and staying superficial, I am to speak sincere truth in love. When others are seeking to please each other, I am to please the Spirit of God.

Implementing a new system that focuses upon truth, truth others are set to resist, is to accept continuous challenges and testing. Just as I had to face my own resistance within myself to trust and pursue God more, I now face similar resistance frequently in others. I can't convince others. Each of us will need to convince ourselves by looking squarely at how we are wrong how God is right, and how we can be better if we only give more of ourselves to align with God's ways. All I can do is keep saying, "we can do better" to others who are set to avoid such a message.

I have been moved by my spiritual senses to create helpful tools to guide those who are willing to experience the instructions so clearly laid out in the Bible.

I had a teacher once say, "First I will do it, then we will do it, and then you will do it." This was similar to Jesus. Jesus showed disciples, then disciples practiced with Jesus, and then Jesus sent them out. Paul would visit churches, live with them and demonstrate, and then check on them afterward to see how they were doing. The disciples were always correcting and guiding people into action with demonstration. Experience was always the instruction.

We can use tests and evaluations that are performance based. Loving each other is an action. Love is a behavior, not just an idea. Our training can be lived out through action. We can help to create trainers who know

the Bible because they have are increasingly obeying it with their minds, hearts, souls, and strength.

The Inward Experiential groups is all about this training process. Yet we will not be guiding anyone who doesn't want it. Each person must desire more of God and less of themselves. Mentorship is to be made available, but requested by the individual. Ultimately, we can only learn what we are ready and willing to learn.

## **Being Clay**

God is the potter, the one who forms the clay. We are the clay, but we have been given the choice to refuse the potter. I must maintain flexibility in my thoughts and actions to God's nudges. In what new ways can I let go of my position, how I think, where I work, who I associate with, hobbies, diet, etc? How 'ALL IN' am I willing to be for the potter?

Imagine a lump of clay set before a potter who wants to shape it. If part of the clay dried out and would not budge, wouldn't the potter just rip it off and toss it? Lucky for us, God is patient and guides us to be willing. Sometimes when we harden our hearts and stiffen our necks we can receive a sensation of discomfort that can guide us to the error of our ways.

John 15:6 NKJV "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned."

God gave us choice and free will. We can choose death. We can choose pride, vanity, idolatry, and worldly gains and many of us will.

I was helping a man years ago. He did not want to change certain things about himself. He was unwilling. We parted and a few years later I learned that his self-gratifying interests and inflexibility destroyed him and he died.

I can choose to hold on to pride and anger. I can choose to try to play God and think I know best. Through experience and thousands of examples I know that such an attitude leads toward spiritual, mental, emotional, and social problems. God's character begins with humility, sincere truth, and being flexible to the potter. It is the best way I have experienced for

spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, and social health. Self-discipline toward Godly good, perseverance, endurance, and following God's instructions through action has been my solution to my problems.

If I pursue self-interests and stop seeking God I know I can dry up inside and grow anger, remorse, emptiness, and loneliness. I know this through my experiences and listening to many stories from many different people. For me it is a fact. Being clay for the potter improves my life in ways I cannot understand until sometimes years later. Many times I serve God to do God's will without understanding why. I just know God wants it and that it will help me if I obey. Understanding spiritual growth only happens in hindsight. Each day I can seek being clay. I can choose to love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength.

I heard a story that went something like this: A poor farmer was plowing his field to get it ready. He woke up the next day and his horse had got out and left. He became very upset and feared not having enough food. The next day the horse came back with a mare. He was a little behind, but now his son could help with the extra horse and the two of them could both plow at the same time. That day his son broke his leg. Now the farmer was really upset and feared not having a good enough crop. The next day an army came through looking for recruits, but couldn't take his son due to his leg being broken.

When things go seemingly wrong in my life, I can choose to trust the process with faith. I cannot see what the future holds with my situations, so it's best I don't decide what is wrong or what is right with circumstance. I just need to keep trusting God with results. I only have one job, be clay for the potter. And being clay for the potter means I am to give my Inward Authority over to the potter and reduce resistance. But for the grace of God, I can go, if I am willing.