



Signpost Two

I am Honest, Open and Willing. I have an open mind and an open heart.

It was 1986. I just walked into the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous for the very first time. The meeting was in the basement of a country church social hall, and a brass-framed, cross-stitched "H.O.W." was displayed on the wood-paneled wall. I can see it now. I remember sitting there with my arms crossed and legs stretched out in front of me thinking, "Here I am, in the basement of some old country church with elderly people. (Who were actually probably in their 30s and 40s). That cross-stitched H.O.W. is some shit that would be hanging in my grandmother's house."

"H.O.W." I now know is the acronym for Honest, Open, and Willing, a principle of AA.

Clearly, I had a very long way to go to being Honest, Open and Willing.

HONESTY

When I started on this journey, my definition of honesty meant not cheating, stealing or lying. And that was about the extent of it.

But what I continue to learn is that **honesty** is much deeper, more spacious, changes and becomes an unfolding of a lifetime. This honesty that I am speaking of is **compassionately becoming aware of what is in your heart.**

This version of honesty means being willing to pull back the layers and discover what is there. It is a continual path that is fluid and changing. What was honest for me at age 20 is not honest for me today. Even what was honest for me yesterday may not be what is honest for me today. Honesty is a continual process that keeps

unfolding. It asks us to connect with our hearts without making up a "mind story" about it. It's the courage to examine our hearts and acknowledge what is there, without judgment. Sometimes it requires sharing and sometimes it doesn't.

In recovery, the foundation of sobriety is built on the ability to be honest, open and willing. If we can't be completely honest with ourselves, our foundation isn't strong, and it is only a matter of time before our sobriety crumbles. It is the same with life. The depth and quality of my life is determined by the depth and quality of my relationships. The quality of my relationships is determined by how honest I am willing to be. The more I can share with another, the deeper the relationship.

My problem wasn't that I didn't know how to be honest, but that I honestly had no idea what my truth was. How could I be honest when I didn't even know how to connect with what was true for me?

I had an ingrained pattern of saying "yes" when my heart said "no." This definition of honesty that I was invited into, and that I now share with others, is to open to a lifelong journey of awareness, curiosity and discovery. Compassionately meeting yourself, again and again. It is a discipline and a practice to hear what your heart and God are saying to you. (I believe that they say the same thing, maybe in different ways, but the same thing).

I was on autopilot for so long, saying what I thought others needed me to say and being who I thought others needed me to be, that I was hearing the world, not my heart and not God. I was drowning in the strong undercurrent of culture, society and people-pleasing. I desperately wanted to be seen and heard, so I would be dishonest with myself and my answers according to the world's expectations of me. I was asking others to see me and hear me, yet I wasn't willing to see or hear myself. I was asking others to give me something that I had not been willing to give myself.

I continue to learn that our truth changes as we change, so to be authentic I need a regular practice of checking in with my heart, connecting with what is there, not judging it, and sharing it with others (when necessary), but always sharing it with me.

"Knowing thyself," the deepest part of my heart and spirit, begins with a relationship between God and me. In the beginning, I didn't know what it looked

like to be honest with God or myself. Choosing to spend time throughout my day conversing and being with God is how it started to shift. Just small moments throughout my day practicing sharing with God what was really going on deep down inside of me.

“The inner life of any great thing will be incomprehensible to me until I develop and deepen an inner life of my own.”

~ Parker J. Palmer

My relationship with God is real, raw and stripped down. There are no layers of pretense, pretty prayers or religious language in the way I communicate with God. It is honest talking, listening and being present. Not being lost in mind complaining (reliving the past or anxiously fearing the future) but being open, getting curious, cussing a little and communing the whole time with God. This has made all the difference in learning to be real and honest with myself. Once I'm honest with myself, it moves outward and I'm honest with others.

What I continue to learn around this spiritual principle is that honesty and vulnerability are branches of the same tree. Vulnerability is allowing ourselves to be honest and real despite how others might judge us. It's letting go of the fear of what others might think while staying true to ourselves.

OPENNESS

Where there is openness, there is space. Where there is space, there is freedom.

When I am open, there is room to freely move around and explore. The more I can open something up, including my mind and my heart, the more space is created.

Openness means that I let go of gripping, clinging, attachments and control and see that my perspective is just that ... mine. Our individual perspectives are based on every imaginable variable of where and how we grew up, race, beliefs, religion, relationships, life experiences, conditioning and on and on. So of course each person has their own set of eyes with how they view everything. Openness asks us to expand our view and see from a wider perspective.

Which includes being willing to see from another person's point of view.

“People are doing the best that they can from their own level of consciousness.”

~Deepak Chopra

Life is always revealing things to us, and if we are not open, we will miss important information, inspiration, and only see what we have always seen from our very limited perspective.

To remind myself of openness, I take a physical posture of opening my hands, arms and heart. “As within, so without.” When we are open, the light, healing and love can get in. When I have some openness, my body feels more playful and childlike, less rigid. I start asking questions, exploring, getting curious and just following where all this openness is taking me. There is room for the unexpected and a reverence to surrender throughout my days.

I heard Abraham and Esther Hicks describe it like this in one of their live talks: It feels like the difference between swimming frantically, violently, and harshly upstream because I think the outcome of what I need is upstream. Or, allowing myself to open up, roll over on my back, slightly bend my knees, turn my hands upwards and allow the steady, powerful river to take me where I'm meant to go. Ancient Chinese wisdom calls this wu-wei, going with the flow, effortless action in harmony with nature/ the universe.

When there is not some openness in my mind, I get confused and frustrated easily. If things are too close together, I get overwhelmed, start spinning, and find myself on the world's frantic, fast pace, kicking ass and taking names, wide open, you gotta get more, it is never enough rhythm. My truth becomes blurred. I resent the people that I am close to. Simply being **open** profoundly affects my life and my relationships.

Being open and being spacious gives me a gift of simplicity that I crave. It also gives time, energy and the ability to be present for myself and others. By giving my spirit what it craves, I have so much more to give others.

I need uncluttered, openness and space even in between physical things. Sometimes when there is a lot of stuff, I literally find it hard to breathe. My spirit craves space. My mind craves space between my thoughts. I have learned that I need space to feel God's presence. This is openness for me.

With openness, my connection with God is so deep. I feel and experience God's continual presence everywhere, I am on God's rhythm, the experience is beyond words. This is the gift that I receive with *I am open*.

“What the world needs most is openness: Open hearts, open doors, open eyes, open minds, open ears, open souls.”

- Robert Muller

WILLINGNESS

“Willingness is open to the good; willfulness is closed to it. If we are not willing to concede that our way has not worked very well for us and that perhaps AA does have a better way, we don't have the slightest chance of getting and staying sober.” ~A.A. member

I know that the gifts of AA are not just for people who struggle with addictions and are in recovery. These principles, Honesty, Openness and Willingness, have the power to change everyone.

In my experience, willingness becomes a choice that includes accepting and surrendering.

I had to be willing to accept that my thinking was what caused me to be living a lie, an inauthentic life. I could no longer pretend; I was exhausted and tired of the same lessons showing up. I was willing to do whatever it took to let go of my way and surrender to another way. This was the beginning of my sobriety, and it continues to be a part of my life. When I get on the world's rhythm, it is the willingness to accept that I am here in this place, and the willingness to ask for

help from God and others, that help me move back into the rhythm of the music that is playing in my heart and feeds my soul.

OPEN MIND, OPEN HEART

I have heard it said that my mind and heart are hinged to the same door. They both open and shut simultaneously. When my heart is open, my mind is also. When my heart is closed, my mind is also.

I know I am living from an open heart when I can ask questions and just be with the questions themselves before compulsively rushing to the answer.

This open-heart living also helps me to remember that when I think I have someone else's answers, when I think I know what is best for others, to give them the same openness to find their way and their answers.

**“I have learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart,
I usually make the right decision.”**

~ Maya Angelou

What I do to myself is what I will eventually do to others. The relationship I have with myself IS the relationship I will have with others. If I am closed, judgmental and critical with myself, eventually I will be that way with the people in my life. If I am open, allowing, and compassionate with myself, I will be that way with others.

God's love and guidance are always available to every single one of us at every single moment. God waits for us, *longs for us*, to surrender and ask. We have to be willing to open our hearts and our minds and open up to everything: life, love, forgiveness and healing. God is always helping us right where we are with whatever we need.

My prayer for you is that you are honest about what brings you closer to the Creator, honest about where you are, honest about your deepest desires and

what your soul craves. And that you create some openness to receive awareness. With this awareness, I hope you are willing to remember who God created you to be.

The Practice: Sewing It to Your Heart

Think of a person who is honest and authentically living their life. What is it about them that you connect with?

What are some obstacles that have gotten in your way of being honest?

Do you think surrender and acceptance have any correlations with the ability to be willing? If so, how?

Do you think you could be attached to false beliefs that keep you from being completely honest, open, and willing? If so, can you specify these beliefs?

Are there areas in your life where you would like to experience more openness?

Are you willing to listen and see what lies at the bottom of your heart?

What is there?

Get yourself into a quiet and comfortable place of stillness. Breathe deeply. Can you compassionately connect with some things that are in your heart that you have not been honest about?

“The truth will set you free.”