

Attitude Is the Father of Action

Father Martin's Chalk Talks · The Recovery Files

Father Martin's Teaching on the Mindset That Makes or Breaks Recovery
From Stinking Thinking to Spiritual Awakening — The Recovery Files

Stinking Thinking · Resentment, self-pity, entitlement · Attitude of Gratitude · Humility, willingness, action

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

Attitude Is the Father of Action: Father Martin's Core Teaching

"Attitude is the father of action." This single statement, delivered with characteristic warmth and simplicity by Father Joseph C. Martin in his legendary "Chalk Talk" series, captures one of the most profound truths about addiction and recovery. It is a truth so simple that many people hear it, nod in agreement, and then completely fail to apply it to their own lives. Because simplicity, as Father Martin understood, is not the same as easiness.

What Father Martin meant was this: every action you take — every drink you pour, every meeting you skip, every lie you tell, every phone call you make to your sponsor, every moment of honesty, every act of service — is born from an internal state that preceded it. The action is the child. The attitude is the parent.

You do not suddenly, out of nowhere, pick up a drink or a drug. You first develop an attitude — a mindset, a disposition, an emotional orientation — that makes picking up seem logical, justified, necessary, or inevitable. By the time your hand reaches for the substance, the relapse has already happened. It happened in your mind. It happened in your attitude.

This is a radical reframing of how most people think about relapse. Most people in early recovery focus almost exclusively on the behavior — don't drink, don't use, don't pick up. And that focus is important; behavior matters enormously. But Father Martin understood that focusing only on the behavior is like trying to stop a river by building a dam at the bottom of a mountain. You can contain the water for a while, but the source keeps flowing. If you want to truly change the course of the river, you have to go to the headwaters.

The headwaters of addiction are not the substances. The headwaters are the attitudes that make substances attractive, necessary, or seemingly unavoidable.

Father Martin identified this dynamic through decades of working with alcoholics and addicts, long before neuroscience would validate his observations. He watched people with enormous intelligence, talent, and resources fail at sobriety — not because they lacked information about the dangers of addiction, but because their attitudes remained unchanged. They stopped drinking but kept thinking like drinkers. They put down the drug but held onto the resentment, the self-pity, the entitlement, and the grandiosity that had fueled their using in the first place.

Their behavior changed, but their attitude didn't. And eventually, like a compass needle returning to north, their behavior realigned with their attitude. They relapsed — not because they were weak, but because they were living in the gap between changed behavior and unchanged thinking.

Father Martin's insight was not merely intellectual. It was deeply practical. He didn't just tell people to "have a good attitude" — a piece of advice so vague as to be almost useless. He pointed to specific attitudinal patterns that reliably precede relapse, and he described specific attitudinal practices that reliably support recovery.

His approach was grounded in the conviction that recovery is not primarily about stopping a behavior. Recovery is about undergoing a fundamental transformation in how you think, what you value, how you relate to yourself and others, and what you believe is possible. That transformation — that "spiritual awakening" described in the Twelve Steps — is, at its core, a profound change in attitude.

Father Martin also understood something else that is critical for people in early recovery: you do not have to wait until your attitude changes to start taking positive action. In fact, the reverse is often true. "Bring the body, and the mind will follow," he would say.

This is the paradox at the heart of attitude-based recovery: while your attitude determines your actions, your actions can also reshape your attitude. If you wait until you "feel like" going to a meeting, you may never go. But if you bring your body to the meeting — even reluctantly, even resentfully, even in a terrible mood — the experience of being there, of hearing others' stories, of speaking your truth, will begin to shift your attitude.

The action changes the attitude, which then changes the next action, which further changes the attitude. This is the positive feedback loop that Father Martin saw as the engine of sustainable recovery.

This teaching is not about toxic positivity. Father Martin was not asking anyone to pretend that life is wonderful when it isn't, or to paste a smile over genuine pain. He was asking something much harder and much more honest: to take responsibility for the internal state that drives your external choices. To recognize that while you cannot always control what happens to you, you always have a choice about how you respond to it. And that choice — that daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes minute-by-minute choice about your attitude — is the foundation upon which your entire recovery stands or falls.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the idea that "attitude is the father of action" land for you? Can you see the connection between your internal mindset and the choices you make?

2. Think about your most recent relapse or closest call. Can you trace it back to a shift in attitude that happened before the behavior? What was the attitude that preceded the action?

3. Father Martin said you don't need great intelligence to get sober — you need the genuine, emotional desire to change. Do you have that desire right now? What does it feel like? If it's wavering, what is threatening it?

4. "Bring the body, and the mind will follow." Have you experienced this paradox — taking a recovery action you didn't feel like taking, and finding your attitude shifted afterward? Describe that experience.

5. What is the single most dangerous attitude you carry right now — the one most likely to lead you back to active addiction if left unchecked?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Attitude Awareness & Self-Honesty

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can recognize when my attitude has shifted from positive to negative before it affects my behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am honest with myself about what I am really thinking and feeling on a daily basis

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I regularly check my motives before taking actions — asking "why am I really doing this?"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can identify the early warning signs that my mindset is drifting toward relapse territory

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am willing to examine my own role in conflicts rather than automatically blaming others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I notice the difference between how I present myself to others and what is actually going on inside

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am open to feedback from others about my attitude even when it is uncomfortable to hear

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I can distinguish between healthy confidence and the kind of pride that leads me into trouble

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Attitude Inventory

What's Running the Show Right Now?

Father Martin's Insight

Before you can change your attitude, you must know your attitude. Most people operate on attitudinal autopilot — running mental programs they've never examined. This inventory brings those programs into the light. Rate how active each attitude is in your life RIGHT NOW, then explore where it comes from and where it's leading you.

Resentment

Holding onto anger about past wrongs, replaying grievances

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Self-Pity

Feeling uniquely victimized, "poor me" thinking

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Entitlement

Believing you deserve special treatment or exceptions

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Grandiosity

"I've got this figured out," excessive self-reliance

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Fear

Chronic worry, catastrophizing, dread about the future

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Dishonesty

Small lies, omissions, presenting a false self

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Complacency

"I don't need to keep working this hard," letting up

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Gratitude

Active appreciation for what you have, recognizing gifts

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Willingness

Openness to change, to help, to do things differently

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Humility

Honest self-assessment, neither grandiose nor self-deprecating

How active is this attitude in your life right now? (1 = barely present, 5 = dominant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

When is this attitude strongest? What situations, people, or times of day trigger it?

What actions does this attitude produce in your life? What do you DO when this attitude is running the show?

Is this attitude helping or harming your recovery? Be brutally honest.

Inventory Summary

1. Looking across all ten attitudes, which three are most dominant in your life right now? Are they working for you or against you?

2. What is the relationship between your negative attitudes and your positive ones? Does gratitude reduce your resentment? Does willingness counter your entitlement?

3. If someone who knows you well were to fill out this inventory about you, would their answers match yours? Where would they disagree, and why?

4. Based on this inventory, write a one-sentence description of your current attitudinal state — the mindset that is fathering your actions today.

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Stinking Thinking: The Attitudes That Kill Recovery

Father Martin coined the unforgettable term "stinking thinking" to describe the specific patterns of thought — the attitudes — that reliably precede relapse. The term is deliberately vivid and slightly humorous, which was characteristic of his teaching style. He understood that people are more likely to remember and apply a concept if it is delivered with warmth and accessibility rather than clinical detachment.

"Stinking thinking" is a phrase that sticks in the mind precisely because it is memorable, even playful — and yet it describes a process that is deadly serious.

Stinking thinking is not just "negative thinking" in the generic sense. It refers to very specific attitudinal patterns that are characteristic of the addictive mindset — patterns that existed before addiction, were amplified by addiction, and persist in recovery unless they are deliberately identified and addressed.

These patterns include resentment, self-pity, entitlement, grandiosity, victim thinking, rationalization, minimization, and what the recovery community calls "terminal uniqueness." Each of these represents not just a thought, but an entire orientation toward self and world — an attitude that, left unchecked, will inevitably produce the actions that lead back to active addiction.

RESENTMENT is perhaps the most dangerous form of stinking thinking. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous calls it "the number one offender," and Father Martin agreed wholeheartedly. Resentment is the act of re-feeling — of returning again and again to a perceived wrong, replaying it, refueling the anger and hurt, and carrying the grievance like a burning coal in your pocket.

The person you resent may have genuinely wronged you. The injustice may have been real. But resentment is not about justice — it is about the corrosive effect of holding onto the injury. It poisons your attitude from the inside. It creates a constant low-grade state of anger, bitterness, and victimhood that makes the temporary relief of substances increasingly attractive.

Father Martin often pointed out that resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. The other person moves on with their life. You are the one being consumed.

SELF-PITY is resentment's close companion. It is the attitude that says, "Poor me. Why does this always happen to me? No one understands. No one has it as bad as I do. Life is unfair — specifically to me."

Self-pity is seductive because it contains a kernel of truth — life may indeed have dealt you a difficult hand. But self-pity takes that legitimate pain and transforms it into an identity. Instead of "I have experienced pain," it becomes "I am a victim." And once you identify as a victim, you have given yourself permission to stop trying, to stop growing, and to stop taking responsibility for your recovery.

After all, if the world is doing this to you, what's the point of trying to change? Self-pity is one of the most common precursors to relapse because it provides an internal justification for giving up.

ENTITLEMENT is the attitude that whispers, "I deserve this. I've been working so hard. I've been sober for [insert time period]. I deserve a break. I deserve to feel good. I deserve to be rewarded."

Entitlement thinking is particularly dangerous because it often masquerades as self-care. There is nothing wrong with treating yourself well. But entitlement is not self-care — it is the belief that the rules don't apply to you, that your hard work has earned you an exemption from the disciplines of recovery.

GRANDIOSITY is the flip side of low self-esteem, and both are forms of self-centeredness. Grandiosity says, "I've got this figured out. I'm smarter than the average addict. I can do this on my own. I don't need a program, a sponsor, or a higher power — I just need willpower and intelligence."

Father Martin was always clear: intelligence is not what gets people sober. Many of the most brilliant people he worked with were the most resistant to recovery, precisely because their intelligence allowed them to construct elaborate rationalizations for continuing their addiction.

Grandiosity is dangerous because it isolates — the person who believes they have all the answers stops listening, stops learning, and stops accepting help. And isolation, as Father Martin knew, is where addiction thrives.

TERMINAL UNIQUENESS is the attitude that "my situation is different." "My addiction isn't like theirs." "You don't understand my circumstances." "What works for other people won't work for me."

This attitude is the ultimate defense against change, because if you are truly unique — if your situation is genuinely incomparable — then no one can help you, no program applies, and no approach will work. Terminal uniqueness is the addiction speaking through the language of specialness, constructing a fortress of exceptionalism that keeps recovery from getting in.

RATIONALIZATION AND MINIMIZATION are the support systems of stinking thinking. Rationalization provides logical-sounding reasons for attitudes and behaviors that are, in fact, driven by the disease. Minimization shrinks the consequences to a manageable size: "It wasn't that bad." "I can stop whenever I want." "Nobody got hurt."

Together, rationalization and minimization create a smokescreen that allows the addict to maintain destructive attitudes while believing they are thinking clearly.

Father Martin's genius was in making these patterns visible. Most people engaged in stinking thinking do not recognize it as such — these attitudes feel like the truth. They feel like accurate descriptions of reality. That is what makes them so dangerous.

Stinking thinking does not announce itself. It does not arrive with a label that says "WARNING: THIS THOUGHT WILL LEAD TO RELAPSE." It arrives disguised as insight, as justified anger, as reasonable self-assessment, as simple honesty about how unfair life is.

The work of recovery is learning to recognize these disguises — to develop what Father Martin might call a "nose for stinking thinking" — so that you can identify the attitude before it produces the action.

Reflection Questions

1. Which form of stinking thinking — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, grandiosity, terminal uniqueness, rationalization, or minimization — is your most dominant pattern? Be ruthlessly honest.

2. Think of a specific example of stinking thinking from the past week. What was the thought? What disguise was it wearing — did it feel like truth, justified anger, or reasonable self-assessment?

3. Father Martin said resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Who are you currently poisoning yourself over? What would letting go of that resentment change about your attitude?

4. Have you experienced "terminal uniqueness" — the belief that your situation is so different that recovery principles don't apply to you? What is your version of this story?

5. If you could install an early warning alarm in your mind that goes off when stinking thinking starts, what would it need to detect? What are your personal red flags?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Stinking Thinking Patterns

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I frequently catch myself dwelling on resentments — replaying old hurts, betrayals, or perceived injustices
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I notice patterns of self-pity in my thinking — feeling uniquely victimized, that life is unfair specifically to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I experience entitlement thinking — believing I deserve special treatment, exceptions, or shortcuts others do not receive
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I find myself making excuses for my behavior rather than taking honest responsibility
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I engage in "terminal uniqueness" — convincing myself that my situation is so different that recovery principles don't apply to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I rationalize or justify behaviors that I know are harmful to my recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I catch myself comparing my insides to other people's outsides and feeling inadequate or superior
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I notice black-and-white thinking — things are either perfect or catastrophic, with no middle ground
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Attitude-Relapse Warning Signs

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have noticed my attitude deteriorating gradually without my substance use returning — yet
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I find myself romanticizing my past substance use — remembering the "good times" and minimizing the consequences
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I am becoming increasingly isolated, withdrawn, or resistant to connection with my recovery community
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I notice growing dishonesty — small lies, omissions, or presenting a "false self" to people who care about me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am becoming complacent — feeling like I have this figured out and don't need to keep working at it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I notice increasing irritability, frustration, or anger that I am not addressing through healthy channels

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have started skipping meetings, therapy, or other recovery supports while telling myself it's fine

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I catch myself thinking "I can handle just one" or "It would be different this time" or similar minimization

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Stinking Thinking Tracker

Identifying the Thought Patterns Behind the Attitudes

Why Track It?

Stinking thinking operates below conscious awareness. These patterns feel like truth, not distortion. By learning to name the specific type of distorted thinking you're engaged in, you break its power. A thought you can name is a thought you can examine — and a thought you can examine is a thought you can change.

Black-and-White Thinking

EXAMPLE

"If I can't do it perfectly, there's no point in trying."

RECOVERY COUNTER

Recovery lives in the gray area — progress, not perfection.

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Catastrophizing

EXAMPLE

"One mistake and everything falls apart."

RECOVERY COUNTER

One setback is not a collapse. What is the evidence for this worst-case scenario?

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Mind Reading

EXAMPLE

"They think I'm a loser. Everyone is judging me."

RECOVERY COUNTER

You cannot read minds. What do you actually know versus what are you assuming?

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

"Should" Statements

EXAMPLE

"I should be further along. I shouldn't need help."

RECOVERY COUNTER

Replace "should" with "I choose to" or "I would like to" and notice how the pressure changes.

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Mental Filtering

EXAMPLE

Ignoring nine good things to focus on the one bad thing.

RECOVERY COUNTER

What are you filtering out? What evidence contradicts the negative conclusion?

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Personalization

EXAMPLE

"This happened because of me. Everything is my fault."

RECOVERY COUNTER

What other factors contributed? Not everything is about you — and that's a relief.

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Fortune Telling

EXAMPLE

"I know this won't work. I'm going to fail."

RECOVERY COUNTER

You are predicting, not observing. What would happen if you tested the prediction instead of accepting it?

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Emotional Reasoning

EXAMPLE

"I feel like a failure, therefore I am a failure."

RECOVERY COUNTER

Feelings are not facts. What would the evidence say if you looked at it without the emotion?

Write a recent example from YOUR life when you used this thinking pattern. What was the specific thought?

What attitude did this thinking pattern produce? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Now write a more balanced, honest counter-thought. Not toxic positivity — genuine accuracy.

Stinking Thinking Summary

1. Which stinking thinking pattern is your "go-to" — the one you default to most often? Why do you think this pattern became your favorite?

2. How does your dominant thinking pattern connect to your dominant attitude? (e.g., catastrophizing → fear → avoidance → isolation)

3. What would it take to catch these patterns in real time rather than identifying them after the fact?

4. Write a commitment: "When I notice [specific pattern], I will counter it by [specific action] — such as sharing it with someone, writing it down, or applying the recovery counter."

YOUR EXERCISE

Resentment Excavation

Digging Out What You Have Been Living On Top Of

Why Excavation and Not Expression

Resentment is re-feeling — the word means to feel a thing again, and again, and again. Father Martin taught that the alcoholic cannot afford it the way other people seem to, because in you it does not stay a feeling. It becomes an attitude, and the attitude fathers an action. This exercise is not about venting, which only rehearses the injury and deepens the groove. It is about digging one resentment out whole, root included, and looking at what it is attached to. You will be asked for your own part. That question is not an accusation — it is the only part of the situation you can actually reach.

1. The Oldest One

The resentment you have carried longest — old enough that you have stopped questioning whether it is still true.

WHO OR WHAT — name the person, institution, or situation. If it is a person, use their name here where only you will see it.

WHAT HAPPENED — the facts only, as a camera would have recorded them. Leave out the interpretation for now; you will add it in the next question.

WHAT IT TOUCHED IN YOU

Self-esteem · Security · Ambitions · Personal relationships · Pride · Sense of fairness

Which of those did it threaten, and how? Be exact — "it made me feel small in front of people whose opinion I need" is an answer; "it hurt" is not.

MY PART — where were you dishonest, frightened, self-seeking, or inconsiderate? If the honest answer is "none, this was done to me," write that; some things are. Then ask what you have done with it since.

THE RENT — what does carrying this cost you now, today? Hours of thought, a relationship you keep at arm's length, a decision you will not make, a drink you have justified with it.

How much heat is still in this one? (1 = cold, I can tell it without rising; 5 = it is hot right now, writing it)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

What would setting this down actually require of you? Not forgetting, and not pretending it was acceptable — what would you have to give up, admit, say, or stop expecting?

2. The One You Rehearse

The one you argue in the shower and in the car. The conversation you have already won a hundred times, alone.

WHO OR WHAT — name the person, institution, or situation. If it is a person, use their name here where only you will see it.

WHAT HAPPENED — the facts only, as a camera would have recorded them. Leave out the interpretation for now; you will add it in the next question.

WHAT IT TOUCHED IN YOU

Self-esteem · Security · Ambitions · Personal relationships · Pride · Sense of fairness

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What would setting this down actually require of you? Not forgetting, and not pretending it was acceptable — what would you have to give up, admit, say, or stop expecting?

3. The One Closest to Home

A resentment against someone you live with, are related to, or cannot avoid. Proximity makes these the most expensive to keep.

WHO OR WHAT — name the person, institution, or situation. If it is a person, use their name here where only you will see it.

WHAT HAPPENED — the facts only, as a camera would have recorded them. Leave out the interpretation for now; you will add it in the next question.

WHAT IT TOUCHED IN YOU

Self-esteem · Security · Ambitions · Personal relationships · Pride · Sense of fairness

Which of those did it threaten, and how? Be exact — "it made me feel small in front of people whose opinion I need" is an answer; "it hurt" is not.

MY PART — where were you dishonest, frightened, self-seeking, or inconsiderate? If the honest answer is "none, this was done to me," write that; some things are. Then ask what you have done with it since.

THE RENT — what does carrying this cost you now, today? Hours of thought, a relationship you keep at arm's length, a decision you will not make, a drink you have justified with it.

How much heat is still in this one? (1 = cold, I can tell it without rising; 5 = it is hot right now, writing it)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

What would setting this down actually require of you? Not forgetting, and not pretending it was acceptable — what would you have to give up, admit, say, or stop expecting?

4. The One Against Yourself

Father Martin was direct about this: the resentment most people never write down is the one aimed inward. It runs the same machinery and does the same damage.

WHO OR WHAT — name the person, institution, or situation. If it is a person, use their name here where only you will see it.

WHAT HAPPENED — the facts only, as a camera would have recorded them. Leave out the interpretation for now; you will add it in the next question.

WHAT IT TOUCHED IN YOU

Self-esteem · Security · Ambitions · Personal relationships · Pride · Sense of fairness

Which of those did it threaten, and how? Be exact — "it made me feel small in front of people whose opinion I need" is an answer; "it hurt" is not.

MY PART — where were you dishonest, frightened, self-seeking, or inconsiderate? If the honest answer is "none, this was done to me," write that; some things are. Then ask what you have done with it since.

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What would setting this down actually require of you? Not forgetting, and not pretending it was acceptable — what would you have to give up, admit, say, or stop expecting?

What the Excavation Turned Up

1. Read your four "what it touched in you" answers side by side. Is the same thing threatened every time? Most people find one nerve being struck repeatedly by four different people. Name the nerve.

2. Which resentment is hottest, and which has cost you the most? They are often not the same one — and the expensive one is usually the quiet one.

3. Father Martin said resentment is a luxury you cannot afford. Trace one of these four forward: resentment, to attitude, to action, to consequence. Where does yours end up if nothing changes?

4. The resentment against yourself — would you accept the same list of facts as grounds for condemning someone else permanently? If not, what standard are you applying to yourself that you apply to no one else?

5. Which of the four are you actually willing to work on first? Name it, name one step, and name who you will tell. Willingness with no step attached is still resentment, just better dressed.

YOUR EXERCISE

Self-Pity vs. Self-Compassion

They Sound Alike. They Do Not End in the Same Place.

The Confusion This Exercise Exists to Clear Up

Father Martin named self-pity as one of the deadliest attitudes in recovery, and people who take that seriously often overcorrect — they become merciless with themselves and call it honesty. That is not the alternative to self-pity. It is the same disorder with the polarity reversed, and it produces the same shame and the same relief-seeking. The real alternative is self-compassion: telling yourself the truth about a hard thing without either inflating it or using it against yourself. Below are four tests that separate them. Learn the tests, then apply them to six situations from your own life.

DIRECTION

SELF-PITY

Turns inward and stays there. The world shrinks to you.

SELF-COMPASSION

Turns inward, then outward. You are one of many people who struggle.

COMPARISON

SELF-PITY

Requires an audience or a rival. Someone has it easier; someone owes you.

SELF-COMPASSION

Needs no comparison. Your difficulty is real whether or not anyone else has it worse.

HONESTY

SELF-PITY

Edits the facts — enlarges what was done to you, omits what you did.

SELF-COMPASSION

Keeps the whole record, including your part, and does not flinch from it.

WHERE IT ENDS**SELF-PITY**

In permission. Nothing is required of you, and often a drink is excused.

SELF-COMPASSION

In action. Something small and specific is required of you next.

A Setback You Did Not Cause**SELF-PITY SOUNDS LIKE**

"Of course. This always happens to me. Why do I even bother trying."

SELF-COMPASSION SOUNDS LIKE

"This is a genuinely bad break and I am allowed to feel it. What is the next thing I can actually do?"

Describe the last time this happened to you. What was the situation?

Write what you actually said to yourself at the time, word for word. Do not clean it up.

Run it through the four tests. Which was it — and specifically, where did it end? In permission, or in an action?

Now write the self-compassionate version in your own voice — honest about the difficulty, and ending in one thing you would actually do.

Something Unfair

SELF-PITY SOUNDS LIKE

"After everything I have been through, and this is what I get. Nobody has any idea."

SELF-COMPASSION SOUNDS LIKE

"This is unfair, and saying so does not fix it. What is in my control here, and what is not?"

Describe the last time this happened to you. What was the situation?

Write what you actually said to yourself at the time, word for word. Do not clean it up.

Run it through the four tests. Which was it — and specifically, where did it end? In permission, or in an action?

Now write the self-compassionate version in your own voice — honest about the difficulty, and ending in one thing you would actually do.

A Slip or a Failure of Your Own

SELF-PITY SOUNDS LIKE

"I am hopeless. I always ruin it. There is no point pretending anymore."

SELF-COMPASSION SOUNDS LIKE

"I did this, it matters, and it is not the whole of me. Who do I call before the shame decides my next move?"

Describe the last time this happened to you. What was the situation?

Write what you actually said to yourself at the time, word for word. Do not clean it up.

Run it through the four tests. Which was it — and specifically, where did it end? In permission, or in an action?

Now write the self-compassionate version in your own voice — honest about the difficulty, and ending in one thing you would actually do.

Being Alone**SELF-PITY SOUNDS LIKE**

"Nobody checks on me. If I disappeared it would take a week for anyone to notice."

SELF-COMPASSION SOUNDS LIKE

"I am lonely tonight, which is information, not a verdict. Who could I reach first instead of waiting to be reached?"

Describe the last time this happened to you. What was the situation?

Write what you actually said to yourself at the time, word for word. Do not clean it up.

Run it through the four tests. Which was it — and specifically, where did it end? In permission, or in an action?

Now write the self-compassionate version in your own voice — honest about the difficulty, and ending in one thing you would actually do.

Being Behind Other People

SELF-PITY SOUNDS LIKE

"Everyone else has a life. I am starting from nothing at my age."

SELF-COMPASSION SOUNDS LIKE

"I lost years and that is a real loss. What can be built from where I actually stand today?"

Describe the last time this happened to you. What was the situation?

Write what you actually said to yourself at the time, word for word. Do not clean it up.

Run it through the four tests. Which was it — and specifically, where did it end? In permission, or in an action?

Now write the self-compassionate version in your own voice — honest about the difficulty, and ending in one thing you would actually do.

Work Nobody Notices

SELF-PITY SOUNDS LIKE

"I do all this and not one person acknowledges it. Why keep doing it."

SELF-COMPASSION SOUNDS LIKE

"I would like to be seen for this, and I am doing it because it is mine to do. Who could I tell honestly that I need some recognition?"

Describe the last time this happened to you. What was the situation?

Write what you actually said to yourself at the time, word for word. Do not clean it up.

Run it through the four tests. Which was it — and specifically, where did it end? In permission, or in an action?

Now write the self-compassionate version in your own voice — honest about the difficulty, and ending in one thing you would actually do.

Telling Them Apart in Real Time

Across the six situations, how often did your actual words land on the self-pity side? (1 = rarely, 5 = almost every time)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

1. Which of the six situations pulls you into self-pity fastest? What is it about that one specifically — what does it threaten that the others do not?

2. Self-pity always asks for something. Across your six answers, what is it asking for — rescue, acknowledgment, permission, an exit? Name the request underneath.

3. Some people read this exercise and swing the other way, calling themselves names and labeling it honesty. Which error is yours: too soft, or too hard? Give evidence from what you wrote, not an impression.

4. Self-pity isolates and self-compassion connects. Name one person you could say the compassionate version out loud to. What stops you, and is that reason good enough?

5. Write the question you will ask yourself the next time you catch this voice running. One sentence, easy to remember, that reliably tells you which of the two you are in.

YOUR EXERCISE

Entitlement Examination

The Quiet Claim That I Am Owed Something

Why This One Is Hard to See

Resentment and self-pity announce themselves; you can hear them while they are happening. Entitlement does not sound like an attitude at all — it sounds like fairness. It arrives as an obviously reasonable claim about what you are owed, and because most of the underlying facts are true (you have worked hard, you have suffered, you are carrying a great deal), the conclusion slips past unexamined. Father Martin's warning was blunt: of all the attitudes, entitlement is the one that writes the permission slip. Six claims are below. Read what each one sounds like, then find your own version of it.

The Earned Exception

HOW IT SOUNDS

"I have worked hard at this. I have earned the right to ease off."

WHAT IS UNDERNEATH IT

Recovery is being treated as a sentence with time served rather than a way of living. The claim converts effort into credit, and credit into permission.

Write your version of this claim in your own words. If you are certain you have never made it, write the closest thing you have said out loud — the honest answer is rarely "never."

How often does this claim run in you? (1 = almost never, 5 = it is a regular tenant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT IS TRUE IN IT — every entitlement claim is built on something real. What is the legitimate grievance or genuine need at its center?

WHERE IT GOES WRONG — the true part does not license the conclusion. Name the leap the claim makes between what happened to you and what you are therefore owed.

THE LEGITIMATE VERSION — the real need does not disappear when the claim is refused. How could you meet it honestly — by asking someone plainly, by resting, by saying no to something? Be specific.

The Suffering Account

HOW IT SOUNDS

"After what I have been through, I deserve something good — and nobody gets to tell me what."

WHAT IS UNDERNEATH IT

Real pain is used as currency. The account is never settled, because the thing it buys never satisfies it.

Write your version of this claim in your own words. If you are certain you have never made it, write the closest thing you have said out loud — the honest answer is rarely "never."

How often does this claim run in you? (1 = almost never, 5 = it is a regular tenant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT IS TRUE IN IT — every entitlement claim is built on something real. What is the legitimate grievance or genuine need at its center?

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THE LEGITIMATE VERSION — the real need does not disappear when the claim is refused. How could you meet it honestly — by asking someone plainly, by resting, by saying no to something? Be specific.

The Family Debt

HOW IT SOUNDS

"I have made amends. They should be over it by now. I am owed some trust."

WHAT IS UNDERNEATH IT

Trust is treated as a payment due on a schedule you set, rather than something rebuilt at the speed of the person who lost it.

Write your version of this claim in your own words. If you are certain you have never made it, write the closest thing you have said out loud — the honest answer is rarely "never."

How often does this claim run in you? (1 = almost never, 5 = it is a regular tenant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT IS TRUE IN IT — every entitlement claim is built on something real. What is the legitimate grievance or genuine need at its center?

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THE LEGITIMATE VERSION — the real need does not disappear when the claim is refused. How could you meet it honestly — by asking someone plainly, by resting, by saying no to something? Be specific.

Terminal Uniqueness

HOW IT SOUNDS

"That rule is for people who need it. My situation is different — they do not understand the specifics."

WHAT IS UNDERNEATH IT

The exception always turns out to be the same exception everyone else made. Father Martin heard it in every room he ever spoke in.

Write your version of this claim in your own words. If you are certain you have never made it, write the closest thing you have said out loud — the honest answer is rarely "never."

How often does this claim run in you? (1 = almost never, 5 = it is a regular tenant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT IS TRUE IN IT — every entitlement claim is built on something real. What is the legitimate grievance or genuine need at its center?

WHERE IT GOES WRONG — the true part does not license the conclusion. Name the leap the claim makes between what happened to you and what you are therefore owed.

THE LEGITIMATE VERSION — the real need does not disappear when the claim is refused. How could you meet it honestly — by asking someone plainly, by resting, by saying no to something? Be specific.

The Reward Claim

HOW IT SOUNDS

"Today was brutal / today was a triumph. One would not hurt. I have this handled now."

WHAT IS UNDERNEATH IT

This is the claim that most directly authorizes use, and it works in both directions — a bad day and a good day produce the identical conclusion. That should tell you it is not really about the day.

Write your version of this claim in your own words. If you are certain you have never made it, write the closest thing you have said out loud — the honest answer is rarely "never."

How often does this claim run in you? (1 = almost never, 5 = it is a regular tenant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT IS TRUE IN IT — every entitlement claim is built on something real. What is the legitimate grievance or genuine need at its center?

WHERE IT GOES WRONG — the true part does not license the conclusion. Name the leap the claim makes between what happened to you and what you are therefore owed.

THE LEGITIMATE VERSION — the real need does not disappear when the claim is refused. How could you meet it honestly — by asking someone plainly, by resting, by saying no to something? Be specific.

The Credit for Intentions

HOW IT SOUNDS

"I meant to. I was going to. Nobody gives me credit for how much I am carrying."

WHAT IS UNDERNEATH IT

Intention is being submitted in place of action — the exact inversion of everything this module teaches. Attitude fathers action; it does not substitute for it.

Write your version of this claim in your own words. If you are certain you have never made it, write the closest thing you have said out loud — the honest answer is rarely "never."

How often does this claim run in you? (1 = almost never, 5 = it is a regular tenant)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

WHAT IS TRUE IN IT — every entitlement claim is built on something real. What is the legitimate grievance or genuine need at its center?

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THE LEGITIMATE VERSION — the real need does not disappear when the claim is refused. How could you meet it honestly — by asking someone plainly, by resting, by saying no to something? Be specific.

Examining the Ledger

1. Which of the six runs most often in you? Is it the one you would have guessed before starting this exercise?

2. Read your six "what is true in it" answers together. Is one real, unmet need showing up behind several claims — rest, recognition, trust, relief? Name it, and say whether you have ever asked for it directly.

3. The Reward Claim reaches the same conclusion from a bad day and a good day. Where else in your six answers does the reasoning work in both directions? That pattern is the clearest evidence that the claim is a conclusion looking for a premise.

4. Entitlement is a claim on other people. Whose name comes up most often in these six answers, and what do you believe they owe you? Would you put that claim to them in those words?

5. Humility was the answer Father Martin gave to entitlement — not self-abasement, but an accurate assessment of what you are actually owed. Write the entry that balances this ledger: what you are genuinely owed, what you are not, and what you intend to ask for out loud instead of collecting quietly.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Attitude-Action Chain: How Mindset Drives Behavior

Understanding that attitude is the father of action is important. But for that understanding to protect your recovery, you need to see how the process actually works — how an attitude, which is an internal and invisible phenomenon, translates into an action, which is external and observable.

This translation does not happen instantaneously. It happens through a chain of events, each link forged by the one before it, creating a pathway from mindset to behavior that feels, in the moment, as natural and inevitable as water flowing downhill.

The Attitude-Action Chain typically unfolds in five stages:

STAGE 1: THE SEED ATTITUDE. Every relapse begins with an attitudinal shift — a change in how you are relating to yourself, your recovery, or the world around you. This shift is often so subtle that you don't notice it happening. It might be a growing sense of resentment toward your spouse. A creeping feeling of boredom with meetings. A quiet belief that you've been working too hard and deserve a break. A flash of envy when you see someone else enjoying a drink at a party.

These are seed attitudes. They are not yet dangerous in themselves. Everyone in recovery experiences negative thoughts and difficult emotions. The danger is not in having the attitude — it is in what you do with it next.

STAGE 2: THE NURTURING ENVIRONMENT. A seed attitude becomes dangerous when it is given an environment in which to grow. The nurturing environment for stinking thinking is secrecy, isolation, and rumination.

When you have a resentful thought and you share it immediately with your sponsor, therapist, or support network, the thought loses its power. It is exposed to air and light, and it withers. But when you hold the thought privately, turn it over in your mind, argue with invisible adversaries, and rehearse your grievances in silence — you are watering the seed. You are giving it exactly the conditions it needs to grow.

Isolation is the greenhouse of stinking thinking. This is why Father Martin was so emphatic about the importance of connection, honesty, and accountability in recovery.

STAGE 3: THE ATTITUDINAL SHIFT. As the seed attitude is nurtured through secrecy and rumination, it stops being a passing thought and becomes a settled disposition. This is the stage at which your overall attitude changes.

You may not be able to identify a single moment when it happened, but you begin to notice — or others begin to notice — that something has shifted. You're more irritable. More withdrawn. More critical. More restless. More defensive. Your fundamental orientation toward recovery has changed. Where you were once engaged, you are now going through the motions. Where you were once grateful, you are now resentful. Where you were once humble, you are now either grandiose or defeated.

This attitudinal shift is the critical turning point. It is the moment when the internal landscape has changed enough to begin producing different external behavior.

STAGE 4: THE BEHAVIORAL DRIFT. Changed attitudes produce changed behaviors — but not usually the dramatic, obvious kind. The behavioral drift that follows an attitudinal shift is typically gradual and seemingly minor.

You start hitting the snooze button instead of getting up for your morning routine. You skip a meeting because you're "tired." You stop calling your sponsor because "there's nothing to talk about." You start staying up later, eating worse, isolating more. You pick fights with people you love. You begin lying about small things — where you were, how you're feeling, whether you went to the meeting.

Each of these behavioral changes is small enough to rationalize on its own. But taken together, they represent a systematic dismantling of the structure that supports your recovery. And that dismantling is not random — it is directed by the attitude that is now running the show.

STAGE 5: THE ACTION. By the time the actual relapse behavior occurs — the drink, the drug, the destructive choice — it is not a sudden event. It is the logical conclusion of a process that has been unfolding for days, weeks, or even months. The attitude produced the environment. The environment nurtured the attitude into a disposition. The disposition produced the behavioral drift. And the behavioral drift dismantled the supports that were keeping you safe.

By Stage 5, the person often experiences the relapse as something that "just happened" — as though it came out of nowhere. But it didn't come out of nowhere. It came from the attitude that started the chain.

Understanding this chain is not about creating fear or anxiety about every negative thought you have. It is about developing awareness — the ability to catch the process early, when intervention is easiest and most effective.

At Stage 1, all you need to do is notice the thought and share it. At Stage 2, you need to resist the pull toward secrecy and reach out. At Stage 3, you need honest self-appraisal and feedback from others. At Stage 4, you need to recognize the behavioral drift and reconnect with your recovery structure. By Stage 5, you may still be able to make a different choice, but the internal momentum is powerful, and the supports you need are the ones you've already dismantled.

This is why Father Martin emphasized action over analysis. He wasn't dismissing the importance of understanding your psychology. He was recognizing that the time for intervention is early — before the chain is fully formed.

"Bring the body, and the mind will follow" is not just motivational advice. It is a strategic interruption of the Attitude-Action Chain. When you bring your body to the meeting, you are breaking the isolation that nurtures stinking thinking. When you call your sponsor, you are exposing the seed attitude to light. When you take the next right action even though you don't feel like it, you are inserting a new link into the chain — one that leads toward recovery rather than relapse.

The goal is not perfection. You will have negative attitudes. You will experience resentment, self-pity, fear, and entitlement. These are human experiences, and they are particularly common in early recovery, when the brain is healing, emotions are raw, and the old coping mechanisms have been removed.

The goal is not to never have stinking thinking. The goal is to develop such a keen awareness of your own attitudinal patterns that you can catch the chain early and choose a different direction.

That awareness — that willingness to look honestly at what is happening inside you and take corrective action — is the practical application of Father Martin's teaching. It is how "attitude is the father of action" becomes not just a saying you've heard, but a principle you live by.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you trace a past relapse or close call through all five stages of the Attitude-Action Chain? Identify the seed attitude, the nurturing environment, the attitudinal shift, the behavioral drift, and the final action.

2. At which stage of the chain are you currently? Be honest — is there a seed attitude growing right now? Is it being nurtured in secrecy? Has your overall disposition begun to shift?

3. What is your typical "nurturing environment" for stinking thinking? Where do you go, mentally and physically, when you are feeding negative attitudes? (Isolation, rumination, specific people or places?)

4. What specific behavioral drifts have you noticed when your attitude has started to deteriorate? (Skipping routines, isolating, small lies, picking fights, etc.) What are YOUR warning signs?

5. Father Martin said to "bring the body, and the mind will follow." Describe a specific situation where you could use this strategy right now to interrupt a developing attitude-action chain.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Action-Oriented Recovery Behaviors

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I take daily, concrete actions to support my recovery rather than just thinking about it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I "bring the body" — I show up even when I don't feel like it, trusting the feeling will follow the action
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I practice what I learn in treatment, meetings, or therapy rather than just accumulating information
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am willing to do things differently even when change feels uncomfortable or unnatural
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I prioritize my recovery actions over convenience, comfort, or the approval of others
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I take the next right action rather than waiting until I feel motivated or inspired
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have a daily structure or routine that supports my recovery rather than leaving my day to chance
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I am willing to ask for help and follow through on suggestions from people I trust
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Attitude-Action Chain Mapping

Tracing the Path from Mindset to Behavior

The Five-Link Chain

Every relapse follows a chain: Seed Attitude → Nurturing Environment → Attitudinal Shift → Behavioral Drift → The Action. Map three personal examples below. The goal is to see the chain clearly so you can learn to break it early — ideally at Stage 1 or 2, before it gains momentum.

Chain Map #1

LINK 1 — The Seed Attitude: What was the initial thought or attitude? (resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Name the attitude that started the chain...

LINK 2 — The Nurturing Environment: How did you feed this attitude? (Isolation, rumination, secrecy, avoiding support?)

How did the attitude grow?

LINK 3 — The Attitudinal Shift: How did your overall disposition change? What did others notice? What did you stop doing or start doing differently?

Describe the overall shift...

LINK 4 — The Behavioral Drift: What small behaviors changed? (Skipping meetings, lying, isolating, neglecting self-care?)

List the specific behavioral changes...

LINK 5 — The Action: What was the final behavior? (Relapse, blowup, destructive decision, giving up?)

What did the chain produce?

WHERE COULD YOU HAVE BROKEN THE CHAIN? At which link could you have intervened, and what would that intervention have looked like?

Identify the point of intervention...

Chain Map #2

LINK 1 — The Seed Attitude: What was the initial thought or attitude? (resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Name the attitude that started the chain...

LINK 2 — The Nurturing Environment: How did you feed this attitude? (Isolation, rumination, secrecy, avoiding support?)

How did the attitude grow?

LINK 3 — The Attitudinal Shift: How did your overall disposition change? What did others notice? What did you stop doing or start doing differently?

Describe the overall shift...

LINK 4 — The Behavioral Drift: What small behaviors changed? (Skipping meetings, lying, isolating, neglecting self-care?)

List the specific behavioral changes...

LINK 5 — The Action: What was the final behavior? (Relapse, blowup, destructive decision, giving up?)

What did the chain produce?

WHERE COULD YOU HAVE BROKEN THE CHAIN? At which link could you have intervened, and what would that intervention have looked like?

Identify the point of intervention...

Chain Map #3

LINK 1 — The Seed Attitude: What was the initial thought or attitude? (resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear, etc.)

Name the attitude that started the chain...

LINK 2 — The Nurturing Environment: How did you feed this attitude? (Isolation, rumination, secrecy, avoiding support?)

How did the attitude grow?

LINK 3 — The Attitudinal Shift: How did your overall disposition change? What did others notice? What did you stop doing or start doing differently?

Describe the overall shift...

LINK 4 — The Behavioral Drift: What small behaviors changed? (Skipping meetings, lying, isolating, neglecting self-care?)

List the specific behavioral changes...

LINK 5 — The Action: What was the final behavior? (Relapse, blowup, destructive decision, giving up?)

What did the chain produce?

WHERE COULD YOU HAVE BROKEN THE CHAIN? At which link could you have intervened, and what would that intervention have looked like?

Identify the point of intervention...

Chain Mapping Summary

1. Looking across all three chain maps, what seed attitude appears most frequently? This is your most dangerous entry point.

2. What is your most common nurturing environment — the way you typically feed stinking thinking? How can you disrupt that environment?

3. At which link in the chain do you typically become aware that something is wrong? How can you train yourself to catch it earlier?

4. Write a Chain-Breaking Plan: "When I notice [specific seed attitude], I will [specific intervention] within [specific timeframe] to prevent the chain from forming."

YOUR EXERCISE

"Bring the Body" Action Plan

Act First. The Attitude Catches Up.

Father Martin's Instruction

Bring the body and the mind will follow. It sounds like a slogan and it is actually a reversal. Everything else in this module traces attitude forward into action, because that is the direction the chain usually runs. This exercise runs it backward on purpose. When the attitude is wrong and you cannot think your way out of it, you move the body anyway — into the chair, onto the phone, out the door — and let the attitude arrive late. You are not waiting to feel like it. Feeling like it is what happens afterward.

Meetings

WHAT THE ATTITUDE SAYS

I am not in the mood. I have nothing to share. It will be the same people saying the same things.

BRINGING THE BODY LOOKS LIKE

Which meeting, which day, which time. Not "more meetings" — a specific chair in a specific room.

Write your own version of the argument. When you skip this, what does the voice in your head actually say? Use its words, not the ones above.

THE COMMITMENT — what, where, and when. A day and a time, not an intention.

How often do you currently show up here when you do not feel like it? (1 = almost never, 5 = reliably)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recall one time you went anyway, against the attitude. What was your mood walking in, and what was it walking out?

Reaching Out

WHAT THE ATTITUDE SAYS

They are busy. I have nothing urgent. I will call when something is actually wrong.

BRINGING THE BODY LOOKS LIKE

A name and a time. The call you make when nothing is wrong is the one that makes the call possible when something is.

Write your own version of the argument. When you skip this, what does the voice in your head actually say? Use its words, not the ones above.

THE COMMITMENT — what, where, and when. A day and a time, not an intention.

How often do you currently show up here when you do not feel like it? (1 = almost never, 5 = reliably)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recall one time you went anyway, against the attitude. What was your mood walking in, and what was it walking out?

Service

WHAT THE ATTITUDE SAYS

I am not well enough yet to help anyone. Let me get myself sorted first.

BRINGING THE BODY LOOKS LIKE

Setting up chairs counts. Making coffee counts. Service is the fastest exit from your own head that recovery offers.

Write your own version of the argument. When you skip this, what does the voice in your head actually say? Use its words, not the ones above.

THE COMMITMENT — what, where, and when. A day and a time, not an intention.

How often do you currently show up here when you do not feel like it? (1 = almost never, 5 = reliably)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recall one time you went anyway, against the attitude. What was your mood walking in, and what was it walking out?

Physical Care

WHAT THE ATTITUDE SAYS

I am too tired. I will start Monday. One day off will not matter.

BRINGING THE BODY LOOKS LIKE

Sleep, food, movement, water, daylight. The attitude you wake up with is partly manufactured the night before.

Write your own version of the argument. When you skip this, what does the voice in your head actually say? Use its words, not the ones above.

THE COMMITMENT — what, where, and when. A day and a time, not an intention.

How often do you currently show up here when you do not feel like it? (1 = almost never, 5 = reliably)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recall one time you went anyway, against the attitude. What was your mood walking in, and what was it walking out?

Step Work & Writing

WHAT THE ATTITUDE SAYS

I will do it when I have the time to do it properly. I need to be in the right frame of mind.

BRINGING THE BODY LOOKS LIKE

Twenty honest minutes beats a perfect session you never schedule.

Write your own version of the argument. When you skip this, what does the voice in your head actually say? Use its words, not the ones above.

THE COMMITMENT — what, where, and when. A day and a time, not an intention.

How often do you currently show up here when you do not feel like it? (1 = almost never, 5 = reliably)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recall one time you went anyway, against the attitude. What was your mood walking in, and what was it walking out?

Ordinary Obligations

WHAT THE ATTITUDE SAYS

I will deal with it tomorrow. It is not important enough to force myself.

BRINGING THE BODY LOOKS LIKE

The dishes, the appointment, the email, the person you owe an answer. Small undone things accumulate into a mood.

Write your own version of the argument. When you skip this, what does the voice in your head actually say? Use its words, not the ones above.

THE COMMITMENT — what, where, and when. A day and a time, not an intention.

How often do you currently show up here when you do not feel like it? (1 = almost never, 5 = reliably)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recall one time you went anyway, against the attitude. What was your mood walking in, and what was it walking out?

The Plan, Read Back

1. Look at your six ratings. Which arena do you abandon first when your attitude turns? That is the hinge — the one that gives way before the others do.

2. Read your six excuses together. Do they share a single underlying claim? Most people find one sentence doing all the work in six different costumes. Name it.

3. Exercises 1 through 4 asked you to change the attitude and let the action follow. This one asks the opposite. In your own experience, which direction has actually worked more often — and what does your honest answer mean for how you plan your week?

4. Who will know whether you kept these six commitments? A plan with no witness is a plan you can quietly amend. Name the person and what you will tell them.

5. Write your instruction to yourself, in one sentence, for the next morning you wake up with the wrong attitude. Make it something you can follow without negotiating.

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Brain Science of Attitude and Addiction

Father Martin's teaching that "attitude is the father of action" was based on decades of clinical observation and personal experience working with people in recovery. He did not have access to functional MRI scans, neurotransmitter studies, or the vast body of research that now exists on the relationship between cognition, emotion, and behavior.

And yet, modern neuroscience has validated his insights with striking precision. The brain science of attitude change reveals exactly why Father Martin was right — and provides additional tools for applying his wisdom in daily recovery.

THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX AND ATTITUDE REGULATION. The prefrontal cortex — the area behind your forehead — is the brain's executive control center. It is responsible for planning, decision-making, impulse control, and perhaps most importantly for our purposes, the ability to evaluate and modify your own thinking patterns.

In a healthy brain, the prefrontal cortex acts as a kind of attitude regulator — it can examine a thought ("I deserve a drink"), evaluate it against known consequences and values ("But drinking destroyed my marriage and my health"), and choose a different course of action.

In the brain that has been altered by addiction, this regulatory function is compromised. The prefrontal cortex has literally been weakened by chronic substance use, making it harder to catch and correct stinking thinking. This is not a character defect — it is a neurological reality. And it means that in early recovery, you may need external supports (sponsors, therapists, meetings, structure) to do the attitude-regulating work that your prefrontal cortex cannot yet do reliably on its own.

THE AMYGDALA AND EMOTIONAL ATTITUDES. The amygdala — a small, almond-shaped structure deep in the brain — is the brain's threat detection center. It processes emotional experiences and assigns emotional significance to memories.

In the context of attitude and addiction, the amygdala plays a critical role: it is the part of the brain that associates certain emotional states (anger, loneliness, boredom, anxiety) with the learned response of substance use. When you experience resentment, your amygdala doesn't just register the emotion — it retrieves the associated memory that substances "solved" this feeling in the past.

This is why negative emotional attitudes don't just make you uncomfortable — they actively trigger craving. The amygdala is connecting the attitude to the action through a neurological pathway that was reinforced by every episode of use.

NEUROPLASTICITY AND ATTITUDE CHANGE. Perhaps the most hopeful finding from neuroscience is the concept of neuroplasticity — the brain's ability to form new neural connections and pathways throughout life.

Neuroplasticity is the scientific basis for Father Martin's insistence that attitudes can be changed through repeated action. Every time you practice gratitude, you strengthen the neural pathways associated with positive emotional processing. Every time you share a resentment with your

sponsor instead of nursing it in isolation, you weaken the old pathway (resentment → isolation → use) and strengthen a new one (resentment → disclosure → relief).

Every time you "bring the body" to a meeting when your attitude says "don't go," you are literally rewiring your brain — creating new associations between recovery actions and positive outcomes.

This rewiring does not happen instantly. Neural pathways are strengthened through repetition, which is why Father Martin and every recovery tradition emphasize daily practice. A single act of gratitude does not rewire a brain that has spent years reinforcing resentment. But that single act, repeated daily for weeks and months, creates measurable neurological change.

This is not motivational rhetoric — it is observable neuroscience. Brain imaging studies have demonstrated that regular practices like meditation, gratitude journaling, and cognitive restructuring produce detectable changes in brain structure and function, including increased gray matter density in the prefrontal cortex and decreased reactivity in the amygdala.

THE DEFAULT MODE NETWORK AND RUMINATION. The brain has a network of regions called the Default Mode Network (DMN) that activates when you are not focused on a specific task — when your mind is wandering, daydreaming, or, critically, ruminating.

The DMN is the brain's "idle mode," and for people in recovery, it is often where stinking thinking does its most dangerous work. When you are busy, engaged, and focused, your stinking thinking has less room to operate. But when the DMN takes over — during quiet moments, before sleep, during long drives, in unstructured time — the resentments, self-pity, and negative attitudes begin to cycle.

Research shows that mindfulness practices, structured daily routines, and purposeful engagement in recovery activities all reduce harmful DMN rumination. This is the neuroscientific explanation for why Father Martin emphasized action over contemplation — not because thinking is bad, but because unfocused, unstructured thinking in an addicted brain tends to drift toward the attitudes that precede relapse.

DOPAMINE, REWARD, AND THE ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE. Father Martin's insistence on maintaining an "attitude of gratitude" also has a neurochemical basis. Gratitude activates the brain's reward system — the same dopaminergic pathways that were hijacked by substance use.

When you experience genuine gratitude, your brain releases dopamine, creating a natural sense of reward and wellbeing. Over time, regular gratitude practice begins to recalibrate the reward system that addiction distorted, teaching the brain that there are sources of dopamine and pleasure beyond substances.

This is why gratitude is not just a nice sentiment — it is a neurochemical intervention. It is literally retraining your brain to find reward in recovery rather than in substances.

MIRROR NEURONS AND ATTITUDINAL CONTAGION. One final neuroscientific insight helps explain why Father Martin placed such enormous emphasis on community and fellowship. The brain contains mirror neurons — neurons that fire both when you perform an action and when you observe someone else performing that action.

This means that attitudes are, to a significant degree, contagious. When you surround yourself with people who carry attitudes of gratitude, humility, and willingness, your mirror neurons begin to encode those patterns. When you surround yourself with people who carry attitudes of resentment, cynicism, and entitlement, your mirror neurons encode those patterns instead.

This is not metaphor — it is neurology. Your brain literally mirrors the attitudes of the people around you. Father Martin's advice to "stick with the winners" is not just practical wisdom — it is neuroscientifically sound.

All of this science converges on a single practical truth: your attitudes are not fixed. They are neurological patterns that were formed through experience and repetition, and they can be reformed through new experience and new repetition.

Recovery is, at the neurological level, a process of deliberate attitude reconstruction — of weakening the old pathways that led to addiction and strengthening new pathways that lead to freedom. Father Martin intuited this decades before the science confirmed it. His teaching gives you the map. The neuroscience confirms you are on the right road.

Reflection Questions

1. Knowing that your prefrontal cortex may be weakened by addiction, how does this change how you think about needing external supports like sponsors, meetings, and structure in early recovery?

2. Can you identify moments when your amygdala connected a negative emotional state to a craving? What was the attitude, and how quickly did it trigger the urge to use?

3. Neuroplasticity means your brain can literally rewire itself through repeated practice. What specific recovery practices are you doing daily that are building new neural pathways? What practices have you neglected?

4. The Default Mode Network activates during unstructured time. When is your brain most "idle" — and is that also when your stinking thinking is loudest? What could you do to structure those vulnerable times?

5. If attitudes are neurologically "contagious" through mirror neurons, whose attitudes are you absorbing most? Are you surrounding yourself with the attitudes you want to develop, or the attitudes you need to leave behind?

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily Attitude Check-In

Seven Days of Catching It Early

Why Daily, and Why Written

Attitude drifts. It does not announce a change of direction; it moves a few degrees at a time, and by the time you notice, you are somewhere else entirely and it feels like where you have always been. A daily reading catches the drift while it is still degrees. Fill this in the same day, not from memory on Sunday — a week reconstructed at the end is a week edited to look like the week you meant to have. Seven honest entries are worth more than seven thorough ones.

Day 1

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

Day 2

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

Day 3

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

Day 4

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

Day 5

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

Day 6

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

Day 7

Where was your attitude when you woke up? (1 = resentful, flat, dreading it; 5 = clear and willing)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where was it by the end of the day? (same scale)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

How much stinking thinking ran today — resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear? (1 = barely any, 5 = it ran the day)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Name today's dominant attitude in one word. Do not explain it — just the word.

What action did that attitude father today? Something you did, or something you avoided doing.

Did anything shift it today — in either direction? A conversation, a meeting, a message, a memory, a skipped meal.

One thing you are grateful for today. Specific, and not one you have used already this week.

The Week in Review

Read all seven days back before answering these. Work from what you wrote, not from your impression of the week — the gap between the two is itself one of the findings.

1. Compare your morning and evening ratings across the seven days. Does your attitude generally improve as the day goes on, or degrade? What does that tell you about when you are most exposed?

2. Look at your seven one-word answers. Is there a repeat? The word that shows up three or four times is your baseline attitude, whatever you would have said it was before this week.

3. Find your worst day. Trace it: what was the attitude, what action did it father, and what did that action cost? Then look at the day before it — was the drift already visible?

4. Find your best day. What was different about it? Not how you felt — what you did, who you saw, what you had slept and eaten. Best days are usually built, not granted.

5. Compare your stinking-thinking ratings with your evening ratings. Do they move together? If a high-distortion day did not produce a low-attitude day, what protected you — and can you do that on purpose?

6. Based on this week, name the single earliest reliable signal that your attitude is drifting. Not the crash — the first degree of it. What will you do when you next see that signal, and who will you tell?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

The Attitude of Gratitude: Building Your Recovery Foundation

Of all the attitudes that Father Martin discussed, the one he returned to most often, with the most emphasis and the most passion, was gratitude. He called the "attitude of gratitude" a vital defense against the self-centeredness and fear that fuel addiction.

This was not a throw-away phrase. Father Martin chose his words carefully, and calling gratitude a "defense" reveals how he thought about it: not as a pleasant spiritual practice, but as a survival tool — a shield against the attitudinal forces that would otherwise drag a person back into active addiction.

To understand why gratitude is so central to recovery, you must first understand what it opposes. The core attitudinal posture of active addiction is self-centered fear. "I'm afraid I won't get what I want. I'm afraid I'll lose what I have. I'm afraid people will find out who I really am. I'm afraid I can't handle life without substances."

This fear generates the attitudes that Father Martin identified as stinking thinking: resentment (someone or something is threatening what I want), self-pity (I'm not getting what I deserve), entitlement (I should have more), and grandiosity (I can handle this myself).

All of these attitudes are fundamentally self-centered — they place the self at the center of the universe and evaluate everything based on "What does this mean for me?"

Gratitude breaks this cycle because it requires you to look outward. Genuine gratitude — not the performative kind, not the "I should be grateful" kind, but the deep-in-the-bones awareness that you have received something you did not earn and could not have produced on your own — shifts the fundamental orientation of the self from demanding to receiving.

When you are genuinely grateful, you cannot simultaneously be resentful, because gratitude acknowledges gift where resentment sees theft. You cannot simultaneously be self-pitying, because gratitude recognizes abundance where self-pity sees deprivation. You cannot simultaneously be entitled, because gratitude receives humbly what entitlement demands imperiously.

Father Martin understood that gratitude is not a feeling — it is a practice. You do not wait until you feel grateful to practice gratitude, any more than you wait until you feel athletic to go to the gym. You practice gratitude, and the feeling follows.

This is "bring the body, and the mind will follow" applied to the interior life. You write a gratitude list even when you feel resentful. You say "thank you" even when you feel entitled. You look for the gift in a difficult situation even when every part of you wants to focus on the injustice. And over time — not immediately, not dramatically, but gradually and reliably — the practice of gratitude begins to reshape your attitude.

The practice of gratitude in recovery has several dimensions:

GRATITUDE FOR SOBRIETY ITSELF. This is the foundation. Many people in early recovery do not feel grateful for their sobriety — they feel deprived, punished, or restricted. "I can't drink. I can't use. I can't do what everyone else does."

Father Martin would reframe this entirely: "You don't have to drink. You don't have to use. You have been given the gift of awareness and the opportunity to live differently."

Sobriety is not a punishment. It is the most valuable thing you possess. But this perspective requires cultivation — it does not come automatically, especially in early recovery when the losses are fresh and the gains are not yet visible.

GRATITUDE FOR PAIN. This is one of the more challenging dimensions, but Father Martin addressed it directly. The pain that brought you to recovery — the consequences, the losses, the hitting bottom — was not punishment from a cruel universe. It was the alarm system that woke you up. Without the pain, you would still be dying. The pain saved your life.

This does not mean the pain was good, or that you should seek more of it. It means that even the darkest chapters of your story can be held with gratitude, because they led you here — to the possibility of a life you never imagined.

GRATITUDE FOR OTHERS. Addiction is a disease of isolation, and recovery is a process of reconnection. Gratitude for others — for the people who stood by you, for the strangers in meetings who share their experience, for the counselors and sponsors and friends who invest in your recovery — is a powerful antidote to the isolation and self-centeredness of addiction.

Expressing gratitude to others is not just polite; it is a recovery practice that strengthens the relationships that keep you alive.

GRATITUDE FOR THE ORDINARY. Father Martin had a gift for pointing out the extraordinary nature of ordinary things. Clean sheets. A cup of coffee. The ability to wake up without withdrawal. A conversation with your child where you are actually present. The smell of rain.

These are the things that addiction steals, so gradually that you don't notice until they're gone. And they are the things that recovery returns to you, so gradually that you might not notice unless you practice looking for them.

Gratitude for the ordinary is the daily practice that builds the attitude Father Martin described — the attitude that defends against the self-centered fear at the root of addiction.

GRATITUDE AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE. Father Martin was a Catholic priest, and his understanding of gratitude was deeply rooted in his faith. But he was careful to present gratitude in a way that was accessible to people of all spiritual backgrounds — and to people with no formal spiritual practice at all.

He understood that gratitude, at its deepest level, is a recognition that you are not the source of your own existence, that you have received more than you have earned, and that the appropriate response to that recognition is humility and service.

Whether you call that recognition "faith," "spirituality," "the Twelve Steps," or simply "being honest about reality," the practice is the same: turning your attention from what you lack to what

you have, from what you demand to what you have received, from self-centered fear to grateful awareness.

The attitude of gratitude is not the entirety of recovery. It does not replace therapy, medication-assisted treatment, community support, or the hard work of addressing underlying trauma and mental health issues. But it is the attitudinal foundation upon which all other recovery work rests.

A person who practices gratitude daily is a person whose fundamental orientation is toward life, toward connection, toward growth. And that orientation — that attitude — is the father of every positive action that follows.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you currently practice gratitude, or do you just think about it? What is the difference between the two in your experience?

2. Father Martin said gratitude opposes self-centered fear. What are you most afraid of right now in your recovery? How might genuine gratitude address that specific fear?

3. Can you find gratitude for the pain that brought you to recovery? What did that pain teach you? What did it make possible that would not have been possible without it?

4. Name five ordinary, everyday things that addiction stole from you and recovery has returned. Are you actively noticing and appreciating them, or are you already taking them for granted again?

5. Write a gratitude statement that you are committed to practicing daily for the next week. Not a list — a statement of genuine appreciation that addresses your biggest attitudinal challenge right now.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Gratitude & Positive Orientation

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I actively practice gratitude on a daily basis rather than just talking about it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I can find something to be grateful for even on my worst days
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I recognize the good in my life without minimizing the challenges I still face
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I express appreciation to others regularly and genuinely
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I focus more on what I have than on what I have lost or do not yet possess
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I can celebrate other people's successes without resentment or envy
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I view my recovery as a gift rather than a burden or punishment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I notice the small, ordinary things in life and appreciate them rather than taking them for granted
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Gratitude Practice Builder

Building the Attitude That Defends Against Relapse

Father Martin's Defense

Father Martin called gratitude a 'vital defense' against self-centered fear. Gratitude is not a feeling you wait for — it is a practice you build. This exercise develops gratitude across six dimensions of your life, creating a comprehensive practice that addresses the specific attitudes that threaten your recovery.

Recovery Gratitude

What aspects of your recovery are you genuinely grateful for today — even the hard parts?

Which stinking thinking pattern does this gratitude most directly counter? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear?)

How can you express this gratitude through action this week? (Not just feeling it — doing something with it.)

People Gratitude

Who in your life are you grateful for? What specifically have they done or been for you?

Which stinking thinking pattern does this gratitude most directly counter? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear?)

How can you express this gratitude through action this week? (Not just feeling it — doing something with it.)

Ordinary Gratitude

What small, ordinary, everyday things are you grateful for that addiction once stole from you?

Which stinking thinking pattern does this gratitude most directly counter? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear?)

How can you express this gratitude through action this week? (Not just feeling it — doing something with it.)

Pain Gratitude

What painful experience can you now see as a teacher, an alarm, or a turning point? What did the pain make possible?

Which stinking thinking pattern does this gratitude most directly counter? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear?)

How can you express this gratitude through action this week? (Not just feeling it — doing something with it.)

Growth Gratitude

What changes have you made in recovery that you are genuinely proud of? What can you do today that you couldn't do six months ago?

Which stinking thinking pattern does this gratitude most directly counter? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear?)

How can you express this gratitude through action this week? (Not just feeling it — doing something with it.)

Possibility Gratitude

What is now possible because of your recovery that was not possible in active addiction? What are you grateful for in advance?

Which stinking thinking pattern does this gratitude most directly counter? (Resentment, self-pity, entitlement, fear?)

How can you express this gratitude through action this week? (Not just feeling it — doing something with it.)

Your Daily Gratitude Practice

1. Based on this exercise, design your daily gratitude practice. When will you do it? (Morning? Night? Both?) How long? (5 minutes? 10?) What format? (Writing? Speaking? Mental?)

2. What is the biggest obstacle to you actually doing this practice consistently? Be honest about what has stopped you in the past.

3. How will you protect your gratitude practice from becoming mechanical — just going through the motions? What keeps gratitude genuine rather than performative?

4. Write your personal Gratitude Statement — a sentence that captures the core of what you are grateful for in recovery, that you can return to when stinking thinking threatens to take over.

YOUR EXERCISE

Attitude Transformation Action Plan

Nine Exercises, Assembled Into Something You Can Carry

What This Exercise Is For

The nine exercises behind this one each opened something. Left as nine separate worksheets they will close again, and in six months you will remember that you once did some good work on your attitude without being able to say what came of it. This is the assembly. Every pillar below sends you back to a specific exercise for an answer you have already written — go and read it rather than producing a fresh answer from memory, because the version you wrote while doing the work is more honest than the version you would write now. Attitude is the father of action. A plan is where the paternity gets established.

The Attitude to Retire

FROM EXERCISES 1 AND 2

Which single attitude did your inventory rate highest, and which thinking pattern feeds it? Name both, and say how they work together.

What goes in its place? Not an absence — an attitude you are choosing. Name it, and say what it would have you do differently this week.

How much of this pillar is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action for this pillar. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Chain to Interrupt

FROM EXERCISE 3

Write out your most dangerous attitude-to-action chain in full: attitude, thought, feeling, action, consequence.

Where in that chain can you realistically intervene? Pick the earliest link you can actually catch, and say what interrupting it looks like in practice.

How much of this pillar is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action for this pillar. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Practice to Build

FROM EXERCISE 4

What is your gratitude practice — when, how long, in what form? Copy the version you designed rather than improving it here.

What has stopped you from keeping a practice like this before, and what is different in this design that addresses it?

How much of this pillar is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action for this pillar. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Body to Bring

FROM EXERCISE 5

Which two of your six commitments matter most? Write them with their day and time.

What is your rule for the mornings when the attitude argues against them? Write the rule so it requires no decision at the time.

How much of this pillar is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action for this pillar. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Weight to Set Down

FROM EXERCISES 6 AND 7

Which resentment did you commit to working on, and which self-pity situation catches you fastest? Name both.

What is the first concrete step on the resentment — a conversation, a letter you may not send, a sponsor, a step? And what is your real-time question for catching the self-pity?

How much of this pillar is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action for this pillar. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

The Claim to Refuse

FROM EXERCISE 9

Which entitlement claim runs most often in you, and what real need sits underneath it?

How will you meet that need out loud instead — who will you ask, for what, and when?

How much of this pillar is genuinely in place today? (1 = nothing yet, 5 = built and running)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

THE STEP — one action for this pillar. What, with whom, by when. One line, with a date in it.

How You Will Know

Exercise 8 gave you a seven-day reading. A plan with no measurement is a wish with a deadline — this section decides how the plan gets checked.

1. When will you run the seven-day check-in again? Set the date now. Comparing two weeks months apart is the only way you will see whether any of this moved.

2. Which number from that check-in is your headline measure — morning rating, stinking-thinking rating, or the repeat word? Pick one and say what a real improvement would look like in it.

3. Who is reading this plan, and when? Name the person and the day. A plan nobody has seen is a plan you can quietly revise.

4. Set a review date six months out, when things will be going well and reading this will feel unnecessary. Write the date, and write one sentence to your six-months-from-now self explaining why you are being made to read it.

The Statement

Count your six steps. How many name a person and a date, and how many are intentions wearing a plan's clothes? Give the count, then rewrite any that failed.

Count them honestly...

Look at your six strength ratings. Your weakest pillar is where the next drift will start. Name it, and say plainly why it is the weakest — lack of time, lack of willingness, or lack of anyone to do it with.

The honest reason...

Write your closing statement in your own words: "The attitude that has been fathering my actions is _____. The attitude I am choosing instead is _____. What makes that more than a wish is _____, _____, and _____ — and _____ knows about all three."
