

Your Nightmare Is Over

Father Martin's Chalk Talks · The Recovery Files

Based on the Teachings of Father Joseph C. Martin

From Chaos to Serenity — The Recovery Files

The Nightmare · Chaos, lies, manipulation · The Awakening · Peace, saneness, serenity

"Your nightmare is over — if you want it to be. Recovery is an action word. Do the work, and recovery is possible."

In this workbook

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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

The Nightmare: Naming What Active Addiction Actually Was

Father Joseph C. Martin — recovered alcoholic, Catholic priest, and the voice behind the legendary "Chalk Talk on Alcohol" — had a gift for stripping addiction down to its unvarnished truth. Among his most powerful declarations was the simple, devastating statement: "Your nightmare is over."

Five words that carry the weight of everything that came before and the promise of everything that could come after.

But to understand why those words carry such power, you first have to be willing to name the nightmare honestly — to look at what active addiction actually was, without the filters of denial, minimization, or nostalgia.

The nightmare of active addiction is not a single catastrophic event. It is a slow, progressive unraveling of everything that makes a human life livable. It begins with small compromises — a drink to take the edge off, a pill to numb the pain, a line to feel alive — and it ends with a life that is unrecognizable.

The person who started using to feel better or to function better eventually finds that the substance has consumed every dimension of their existence: relationships, health, career, finances, self-respect, safety, integrity, and identity.

The nightmare is not just the substances — it is the person you became in the grip of the substances.

The chaos was the defining feature of the nightmare. Nothing was predictable. Nothing was stable. Every day was organized around acquisition, use, management of consequences, and concealment.

Plans were made and broken. Bills went unpaid or were paid with money that should have gone elsewhere. Health was ignored until it couldn't be. Relationships were maintained only to the degree that they served the addiction — and discarded, damaged, or exploited when they didn't.

The chaos felt normal because it was constant, but it was slowly destroying everything.

The lies were the currency of the nightmare. You lied to the people who loved you about where you were, what you were doing, how much you were using, and whether you had a problem. You lied to employers about your reliability, to doctors about your intake, to friends about your availability.

But the most devastating lies were the ones you told yourself: "I can stop whenever I want." "It's not that bad." "I'm only hurting myself." "One more time and then I'll quit." "I need this to function."

These internal lies formed a bulletproof shield of denial that kept the nightmare running long after any objective observer could see it was destroying you.

The manipulation was the nightmare's survival strategy. You learned to read people — not for connection, but for leverage. You knew who would bail you out, who would believe your excuses, who could be guilt-tripped into compliance, and who needed to be avoided because they could see through you.

You became skilled at emotional manipulation: anger to create distance, tears to generate sympathy, charm to rebuild trust just enough to exploit it again, and silence to punish anyone who confronted you.

These were not character traits — they were survival skills developed in service of a disease that required constant feeding.

Father Martin's genius was in naming all of this as a nightmare — a word that implies both the terrifying reality of the experience and the possibility of waking up. A nightmare, by definition, ends. You wake up. The terror was real, but it does not have to continue.

This is the profound gift of his teaching: the nightmare is over — if you want it to be.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe the chaos of your active addiction in specific, concrete terms. Not "it was bad" — but exactly what happened. What did a typical day or week look like in the nightmare?

2. What were the most significant lies you told during active addiction — to others and to yourself? Which lies were the hardest to maintain, and which were so practiced they felt like truth?

3. How did you manipulate the people around you to sustain your addiction? Who did you exploit, and how? Be as honest as you can — this is not about shame, it is about seeing the nightmare clearly.

4. Father Martin says the nightmare is over "if you want it to be." What does that conditional phrase mean to you? What does wanting it to be over actually require?

5. Is there any part of the nightmare you have not yet fully acknowledged — an event, a behavior, a consequence that you have been avoiding? What would naming it cost you, and what would it free you from?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Nightmare Awareness & Honesty

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

1. I can honestly describe how unmanageable my life became during active addiction without minimizing or glamorizing it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have fully acknowledged the chaos, lying, and manipulation that defined my active addiction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand that the nightmare of addiction was progressive — it was always getting worse, never staying the same

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have stopped telling myself that my addiction "wasn't that bad" or that I had it "under control"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can name specific moments when the nightmare was at its worst — not to wallow, but to remember why I cannot go back

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I recognize that the nightmare affected not just me but everyone connected to me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have stopped romanticizing any aspect of my active addiction — the lifestyle, the excitement, the numbness

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I accept that the nightmare will resume exactly where it left off if I return to using

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Nightmare Residue & Lingering Patterns

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

1. I still catch myself lying when the truth would work just as well — a habit from the nightmare
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I sometimes manipulate situations or people to get what I want rather than asking directly
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I struggle with trust because I spent so long being untrustworthy that I assume others are too
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I still have moments of chaos-seeking — creating drama, conflict, or crisis because calm feels unfamiliar
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I notice that I sometimes default to "survival mode" behaviors — controlling, isolating, people-pleasing — that I developed during active addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have difficulty being honest about my needs because I spent years hiding, minimizing, and performing
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I sometimes feel like I am "waiting for the other shoe to drop" because stability feels too good to be real
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I carry physical remnants of the nightmare — disrupted sleep, hypervigilance, health consequences, nervous system dysregulation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Nightmare Mapping

Naming What It Actually Was, While You Still Can

Why Map It at All

The title of this module is a promise, and the promise only means something if you can say what it is that is over. Memory does not preserve active addiction accurately. It softens it, keeps the moments that make a story, and quietly loses the texture of an ordinary bad Tuesday — and that softening is not a kindness, because the memory that fades is the one that stops arguing on your behalf. So this map is made deliberately, in six territories, while you are well enough to be accurate. Two instructions. Do not exaggerate; the record is bad enough without improvement. And do not romanticize; if something about it was genuinely good, say so, because a nightmare you have to lie about is one you will eventually go back to check on.

The Body

What was it actually like to live in your body then? The mornings, the sleep, the sweats, the appetite, the pain you stopped reporting. Describe a typical waking, in detail.

ONE MOMENT — a single specific memory from this territory. Not the worst thing that happened. Something ordinary, that you would have called a normal day at the time.

How much has this territory changed? (1 = it is much the same, 5 = it is genuinely different now)

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

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW — describe this same territory today, in the same detail. Where nothing has changed, write that plainly; it is the most useful line on the page.

The Hours

How was a day organized? Count the hours given to obtaining, using, recovering, concealing, and planning around it. Write what a Tuesday looked like from waking to sleeping.

ONE MOMENT — a single specific memory from this territory. Not the worst thing that happened. Something ordinary, that you would have called a normal day at the time.

How much has this territory changed? (1 = it is much the same, 5 = it is genuinely different now)

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

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW — describe this same territory today, in the same detail. Where nothing has changed, write that plainly; it is the most useful line on the page.

The Mind

What was the inside of your head like? The calculation that never stopped, the memory that came back in pieces, the conversations you could not recall having.

ONE MOMENT — a single specific memory from this territory. Not the worst thing that happened. Something ordinary, that you would have called a normal day at the time.

How much has this territory changed? (1 = it is much the same, 5 = it is genuinely different now)

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

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW — describe this same territory today, in the same detail. Where nothing has changed, write that plainly; it is the most useful line on the page.

The People

Who was in the room, and who had left it? Describe your actual social world then — who you saw, who you avoided, who had stopped asking, and who was still trying.

ONE MOMENT — a single specific memory from this territory. Not the worst thing that happened. Something ordinary, that you would have called a normal day at the time.

How much has this territory changed? (1 = it is much the same, 5 = it is genuinely different now)

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

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW — describe this same territory today, in the same detail. Where nothing has changed, write that plainly; it is the most useful line on the page.

The Fear

What were you afraid of, hour to hour? Not the large fears — the small constant ones. Running out. Being found out. A phone ringing. A particular person's face.

ONE MOMENT — a single specific memory from this territory. Not the worst thing that happened. Something ordinary, that you would have called a normal day at the time.

How much has this territory changed? (1 = it is much the same, 5 = it is genuinely different now)

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

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW — describe this same territory today, in the same detail. Where nothing has changed, write that plainly; it is the most useful line on the page.

The Self

Who were you being? What did you think of yourself in the quiet moments, and how much distance was there between that and the person you presented?

ONE MOMENT — a single specific memory from this territory. Not the worst thing that happened. Something ordinary, that you would have called a normal day at the time.

How much has this territory changed? (1 = it is much the same, 5 = it is genuinely different now)

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

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW — describe this same territory today, in the same detail. Where nothing has changed, write that plainly; it is the most useful line on the page.

Reading the Map

1. Which territory was hardest to write? Difficulty usually marks the part that has not been spoken about to anyone, and the unspoken part is the one that keeps its power.

2. Look at your six change ratings. Which territory has moved most, and which least? The one that has not moved is where the nightmare still has a room in your life.

3. Read your six ordinary moments together. That is the accurate record — not the crises, which are the ones that get told. What does the ordinary version show that the dramatic version leaves out?

4. Was there anything about it that was genuinely good — relief, company, a version of yourself you liked, a quiet that you have not found since? Write it honestly. This is the question most people skip, and skipping it leaves an unexamined argument in place for later.

5. Who has read a truthful account of this, in this much detail? If the answer is nobody, name one person who could, and say what stops you.

6. The module is called Your Nightmare Is Over. Having mapped it: is it? Answer in specifics rather than in hope — which parts are genuinely over, and which are in remission and would return if conditions changed?

YOUR EXERCISE

The Lies I Told

An Inventory, Not a Confession

What This Is For, and What It Is Not

This is an inventory, which means it is a count rather than a trial. Addiction requires dishonesty the way an engine requires fuel — not because people with addictions are liars by character, but because concealment is structurally necessary to continued use, and the intelligence that builds the concealment is the same intelligence that would otherwise be running your life. Counting what was built tells you two things: how much of your energy that machinery was consuming, and which parts of it are still standing today. One instruction that matters. Nothing here obliges you to go and confess anything. Some disclosures repair a relationship and some transfer your

discomfort onto someone who was managing fine without it. Sort that with another person — a sponsor, a counselor, someone who knows the situation — before you act on anything you write here.

The Cover Stories

Direct lies about where you were, what you had, how much, and when. The ones that required maintenance — a story that had to be remembered and kept consistent.

THE INVENTORY — list what belongs in this category. Specific items, not a general admission. Write as many as come.

WHAT IT PROTECTED — what would have happened if you had told the truth instead? Every one of these was doing a job. Name the job.

How much of this category is STILL STANDING today — things people currently believe that are not true? (1 = none of it, 5 = most of it)

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

WHAT IS STILL LOAD-BEARING — which of these are you currently maintaining? Name them, and say what maintaining them costs you in an ordinary week.

SETTING IT RIGHT — for this category, what would repair actually look like: a conversation, a repayment, a correction to a record, or simply not continuing it? And who should you talk to before deciding?

Money

What was spent, what was borrowed, what was taken, and what was said about all three. This category is the one people most often leave off the list.

THE INVENTORY — list what belongs in this category. Specific items, not a general admission. Write as many as come.

WHAT IT PROTECTED — what would have happened if you had told the truth instead? Every one of these was doing a job. Name the job.

How much of this category is STILL STANDING today — things people currently believe that are not true? (1 = none of it, 5 = most of it)

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SETTING IT RIGHT — for this category, what would repair actually look like: a conversation, a repayment, a correction to a record, or simply not continuing it? And who should you talk to before deciding?

To the People Closest

The lies told to the person who most wanted to believe you. These cost the most and were usually the easiest, which is a hard thing to write down.

THE INVENTORY — list what belongs in this category. Specific items, not a general admission. Write as many as come.

WHAT IT PROTECTED — what would have happened if you had told the truth instead? Every one of these was doing a job. Name the job.

How much of this category is STILL STANDING today — things people currently believe that are not true? (1 = none of it, 5 = most of it)

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SETTING IT RIGHT — for this category, what would repair actually look like: a conversation, a repayment, a correction to a record, or simply not continuing it? And who should you talk to before deciding?

To Doctors, Employers, Courts

The figure given to the doctor. The reason given to the employer. What was said, or not said, where there were consequences for saying it.

THE INVENTORY — list what belongs in this category. Specific items, not a general admission. Write as many as come.

WHAT IT PROTECTED — what would have happened if you had told the truth instead? Every one of these was doing a job. Name the job.

How much of this category is STILL STANDING today — things people currently believe that are not true? (1 = none of it, 5 = most of it)

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SETTING IT RIGHT — for this category, what would repair actually look like: a conversation, a repayment, a correction to a record, or simply not continuing it? And who should you talk to before deciding?

The Lies That Were Silences

What you let people believe by saying nothing. Most people in recovery told fewer outright lies than they remember, and maintained far more silences than they have ever counted.

THE INVENTORY — list what belongs in this category. Specific items, not a general admission. Write as many as come.

WHAT IT PROTECTED — what would have happened if you had told the truth instead? Every one of these was doing a job. Name the job.

How much of this category is STILL STANDING today — things people currently believe that are not true? (1 = none of it, 5 = most of it)

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

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SETTING IT RIGHT — for this category, what would repair actually look like: a conversation, a repayment, a correction to a record, or simply not continuing it? And who should you talk to before deciding?

To Yourself

The rules, the figures, the timelines, the promises. The ones you believed while you were saying them, which is what makes this the strangest category to examine.

THE INVENTORY — list what belongs in this category. Specific items, not a general admission. Write as many as come.

WHAT IT PROTECTED — what would have happened if you had told the truth instead? Every one of these was doing a job. Name the job.

How much of this category is STILL STANDING today — things people currently believe that are not true? (1 = none of it, 5 = most of it)

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SETTING IT RIGHT — for this category, what would repair actually look like: a conversation, a repayment, a correction to a record, or simply not continuing it? And who should you talk to before deciding?

What the Inventory Shows

1. Which category is largest? And was it the one you expected before you started counting?

2. Read your six "what it protected" answers together. Is one thing being guarded throughout — a relationship, a job, an image, one person's opinion of you? Name it. That is what the whole machine was built around.

3. Estimate honestly: at its height, how much of your week went into building and maintaining all of this? Then ask what that capacity is doing now, and whether it has actually been redeployed or just idled.

4. Look at your "still standing" ratings. Recovery does not require that every old concealment be dismantled, but each one still standing is a place where you cannot be fully known. Which one costs you the most?

5. Pick ONE thing you are willing to set right within ninety days. Name it, name the person, name who you will consult first, and name the week. One. A campaign is not a plan.

6. Father Martin taught that the alcoholic is not a liar by nature but a person whose disease requires lying. Does reading your own inventory feel like evidence of character or evidence of illness? Whatever your answer, say what it changes about how you speak to yourself now.

YOUR EXERCISE

Manipulation Pattern Awareness

The Skills That Do Not Stop When the Using Stops

Why This Exercise Is Uncomfortable, and Why It Is Not an Accusation

Addiction teaches a set of interpersonal skills, and it teaches them well, because they were necessary. If a substance has to be protected, then conversations have to be steered, people have to be managed, and needs have to be met indirectly — and you got good at it. Here is the part that catches people: these skills do not stop when the using stops. They were learned as a general method for getting through other people, and they keep running in sobriety, on the people you most want a real relationship with, often without any awareness at all. Reading this list will be uncomfortable. That discomfort is not evidence of bad character; it is what recognition feels like. Every tactic below has a direct alternative, and every direct alternative is harder, because it can be refused.

Anger as a Perimeter

HOW IT WORKS

Making a subject too expensive to raise. You do not have to win the argument — you only have to make having it costly enough that it stops being started.

THE DIRECT VERSION

Saying what you do not want to discuss, and why, without the temperature.

MY VERSION — describe how this worked in your hands. What did it look like, and how did you know it had worked?

WHO IT WAS USED ON — name them. Then write what it cost them, as far as you can see it from where they were standing.

Does this still run in you now, in sobriety? (1 = not at all anymore, 5 = I used it this month)

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

WHAT YOU ACTUALLY WANTED — underneath the tactic there was a real need. Name it, and write the sentence you would have to say to ask for it directly. Then say why that sentence is harder.

Guilt and the Ledger

HOW IT WORKS

Producing an obligation — something you did for them, something they did to you, something they owe. The conversation moves from what is happening now to who is in debt.

THE DIRECT VERSION

Asking for what you want as a request, which can be declined, rather than as a debt, which cannot.

MY VERSION — describe how this worked in your hands. What did it look like, and how did you know it had worked?

WHO IT WAS USED ON — name them. Then write what it cost them, as far as you can see it from where they were standing.

Does this still run in you now, in sobriety? (1 = not at all anymore, 5 = I used it this month)

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Charm and the Grand Gesture

HOW IT WORKS

The large apology, the surprise, the sudden burst of effort. Genuinely meant, usually, and doing the work of an amend without the cost of one.

THE DIRECT VERSION

The small consistent thing, done for the sixth week running, which convinces nobody in the first week and everybody by the third month.

MY VERSION — describe how this worked in your hands. What did it look like, and how did you know it had worked?

WHO IT WAS USED ON — name them. Then write what it cost them, as far as you can see it from where they were standing.

Does this still run in you now, in sobriety? (1 = not at all anymore, 5 = I used it this month)

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WHAT YOU ACTUALLY WANTED — underneath the tactic there was a real need. Name it, and write the sentence you would have to say to ask for it directly. Then say why that sentence is harder.

Helplessness

HOW IT WORKS

Becoming someone who cannot manage, so that others step in. This one is rarely conscious and is extremely effective, and it costs the people around you the most.

THE DIRECT VERSION

Asking directly for the specific help you need, which is harder because it can be refused.

MY VERSION — describe how this worked in your hands. What did it look like, and how did you know it had worked?

WHO IT WAS USED ON — name them. Then write what it cost them, as far as you can see it from where they were standing.

Does this still run in you now, in sobriety? (1 = not at all anymore, 5 = I used it this month)

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

WHAT YOU ACTUALLY WANTED — underneath the tactic there was a real need. Name it, and write the sentence you would have to say to ask for it directly. Then say why that sentence is harder.

Dividing the Room

HOW IT WORKS

Telling different versions to different people, keeping them from comparing notes, finding the one person who will take your side against the rest.

THE DIRECT VERSION

One account, told the same way to everyone, and letting the people who care about you talk to each other.

MY VERSION — describe how this worked in your hands. What did it look like, and how did you know it had worked?

WHO IT WAS USED ON — name them. Then write what it cost them, as far as you can see it from where they were standing.

Does this still run in you now, in sobriety? (1 = not at all anymore, 5 = I used it this month)

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WHAT YOU ACTUALLY WANTED — underneath the tactic there was a real need. Name it, and write the sentence you would have to say to ask for it directly. Then say why that sentence is harder.

The Partial Truth

HOW IT WORKS

Saying something entirely true that produces a false impression. The most sophisticated of the six, the hardest to be held to account for, and the one that survives longest into sobriety.

THE DIRECT VERSION

Volunteering the part that would change their conclusion, before they ask for it.

MY VERSION — describe how this worked in your hands. What did it look like, and how did you know it had worked?

WHO IT WAS USED ON — name them. Then write what it cost them, as far as you can see it from where they were standing.

Does this still run in you now, in sobriety? (1 = not at all anymore, 5 = I used it this month)

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WHAT YOU ACTUALLY WANTED — underneath the tactic there was a real need. Name it, and write the sentence you would have to say to ask for it directly. Then say why that sentence is harder.

What Still Runs

1. Which tactic was your best one? Everyone has a strongest, usually the one that fit their temperament — the angry ones use the perimeter, the charming ones use the gesture, the capable ones use helplessness.

2. Look at your six current ratings. Which is still running? A tactic that outlived the substance is one that was never really about the substance, and it is now operating on people you are trying to build something real with.

3. Read your six "what you actually wanted" answers. Is it the same need underneath more than one tactic? Name it. Most people find one need that has never once been asked for directly.

4. Who in your life has been on the receiving end of the most of this? What would it mean to stop — not to apologize for it, but simply to stop, this month, without announcing it?

5. The direct version is harder because it can be refused. Which are you more afraid of: being refused, or being seen to need something? Answer honestly; they are different fears and they need different work.

6. Name the one tactic you are retiring, name the person you are retiring it with, and write the direct sentence you will use instead. Then say when you will next be in the situation where you would have used it.

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Finding Peace in Recovery: The Revolutionary Act of Calm

For someone who has been living in the nightmare of active addiction, peace is not merely unfamiliar — it is suspicious. The nervous system of an addict in early recovery has been conditioned by years of chaos to interpret calm as dangerous.

When nothing is going wrong, the addicted brain whispers: "Something must be about to go wrong." When the day is ordinary, the addicted brain protests: "This is boring — something needs to happen." When relationships are stable, the addicted brain says: "This can't last — better create some chaos now so at least you control when it falls apart."

This is one of the most counterintuitive truths of early recovery: peace feels threatening.

The person coming out of the nightmare has been living in a state of perpetual crisis for so long that their nervous system has calibrated to chaos as the baseline. Cortisol and adrenaline have been the dominant chemicals for months or years — not the drugs themselves, but the stress hormones generated by the constant cycle of acquisition, use, concealment, consequence management, withdrawal, and desperate planning for the next use.

When the substances are removed and the crisis cycle stops, the nervous system doesn't immediately celebrate. It panics. It sends signals that something is wrong because something is different — and to a nervous system that has survived on hypervigilance, different equals dangerous.

Father Martin understood this at an intuitive level. When he said "Your nightmare is over," he was not just stating a fact — he was giving permission. Permission to stop running. Permission to stop the frantic survival behaviors that had become second nature. Permission to believe that the crisis is actually over and that it is safe to exhale.

For many people in early recovery, this permission is the most radical thing they receive — because no one in the nightmare ever said "You can stop now. You can rest. It's safe."

Finding peace in recovery is therefore not a passive experience. It is an active, deliberate, sometimes uncomfortable practice. It requires learning to tolerate stillness when every cell in your body is screaming for stimulation. It requires sitting with boredom without interpreting it as evidence that sobriety doesn't work.

It requires allowing relationships to be calm without creating conflict to test them. It requires accepting that a day without crisis is not an empty day — it is a successful day. It requires rewiring the fundamental definition of "normal" from chaos to calm.

The peace of recovery is not the absence of all difficulty. Life continues to present challenges, losses, disappointments, and conflicts. The difference is that these challenges are met by a person who is present, sober, and capable of responding rather than reacting.

The peace of recovery is the space between the stimulus and the response — the pause that didn't exist during active addiction, when every challenge was met with an immediate, impulsive,

substance-driven reaction.

That pause — that moment where you recognize what is happening, choose how to respond, and act from awareness rather than desperation — is the peace Father Martin was pointing to. It is not bliss. It is sanity.

The peace compounds. In the early days, it comes in flashes — a moment of quiet gratitude, a night of uninterrupted sleep, a conversation that doesn't end in manipulation. Over time, as the nervous system recalibrates and the recovery practices take hold, these moments connect into stretches, and the stretches become the new normal.

The nightmare fades — not from memory, but from dominance. It becomes something that happened rather than something that is happening. And in the space it leaves behind, peace — tentative, unfamiliar, and profoundly healing — takes root.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you experienced peace as threatening or suspicious in early recovery? When calm arrives, what does your internal voice say about it?

2. Describe a specific moment in recovery when you experienced genuine peace — even if it was brief. What were the conditions? What did it feel like?

3. How does your nervous system respond to stability? Do you find yourself creating chaos, seeking intensity, or testing relationships when things are going well? Be specific.

4. Father Martin says the nightmare is over — and that means you have permission to stop surviving and start living. What survival behaviors are you still running that no longer serve you?

5. What would it mean for peace to become your new baseline instead of chaos? What specific practices — daily routine, relationships, environment — would support that shift?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Capacity for Peace & Stability

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

1. I am developing the ability to sit in stillness without immediately needing stimulation, distraction, or escape

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am learning to tolerate boredom without interpreting it as evidence that something is wrong with my recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have experienced moments of genuine peace in recovery — moments where the internal chaos quieted

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am building a daily routine that creates predictability and structure rather than chaos

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am becoming more comfortable with the "ordinariness" of a sober life rather than needing constant intensity

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can recognize the difference between healthy calm and the numbed-out apathy that preceded my substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am developing relationships that are based on honesty rather than manipulation and control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am starting to trust that stability is not boring — it is the foundation upon which a meaningful life is built

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Peace Practice

Learning to Tolerate Calm — Which Is a Skill, Not a Reward

Why Peace Is Difficult

Nobody warns people that recovery will make them uncomfortable by being calm. But a nervous system trained for years on crisis, urgency and rescue does not read quiet as relief — it reads quiet as something being wrong, or about to be. That is why people in good stretches find themselves picking a fight, checking something they know will upset them, taking on a fourth commitment, or going back over an old injury at eleven at night. Almost none of it is conscious, and almost all of it has the same effect: it ends the quiet. Father Martin described the serenity of recovery as something that has to be practiced rather than waited for, and this is why. Below are five ways calm gets manufactured out of existence, and a ladder for building the tolerance deliberately.

What Calm Feels Like to You

How comfortable are you when nothing is happening? (1 = I cannot stand it, 5 = genuinely at ease)

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

Describe what an hour of genuine calm actually feels like in your body. Be precise — people often find the sensation is closer to unease or waiting than to rest.

The physical sensation, honestly...

When was the last stretch where nothing was wrong? How long did it last, and what ended it — an outside event, or something you did?

How it ended, and who ended it...

Starting Something

The remark that will land. Reopening a settled argument. Choosing the evening when everyone is relaxed to raise the difficult subject.

How often do you do this? (1 = rarely, 5 = most weeks)

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

MY VERSION — what does this look like specifically for you? Describe the last time, including what was going well immediately beforehand.

THE SUBSTITUTE — what could you do instead, in that exact moment, that does not end the quiet? It has to be something specific and available, not a resolution to be more serene.

Going Looking for Bad News

Checking the balance, the message thread, the account, the article, the thing you know will disturb you — at the precise moment nothing is wrong.

How often do you do this? (1 = rarely, 5 = most weeks)

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

MY VERSION — what does this look like specifically for you? Describe the last time, including what was going well immediately beforehand.

THE SUBSTITUTE — what could you do instead, in that exact moment, that does not end the quiet? It has to be something specific and available, not a resolution to be more serene.

Taking On Too Much

Saying yes to the fourth thing. Setting a deadline nobody asked for. Generating a legitimate emergency so that the quiet has a reason to end.

How often do you do this? (1 = rarely, 5 = most weeks)

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

MY VERSION — what does this look like specifically for you? Describe the last time, including what was going well immediately beforehand.

THE SUBSTITUTE — what could you do instead, in that exact moment, that does not end the quiet? It has to be something specific and available, not a resolution to be more serene.

Going Back Over It

Re-running an old injury or an old shame in a quiet hour. It is not reflection — nothing new is ever concluded. It is the nervous system finding something familiar to do.

How often do you do this? (1 = rarely, 5 = most weeks)

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

MY VERSION — what does this look like specifically for you? Describe the last time, including what was going well immediately beforehand.

THE SUBSTITUTE — what could you do instead, in that exact moment, that does not end the quiet? It has to be something specific and available, not a resolution to be more serene.

Filling Every Gap

The phone the instant there is a pause. Noise in every room. A schedule with no unassigned hour in it. Not resting, and calling it being busy.

How often do you do this? (1 = rarely, 5 = most weeks)

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

MY VERSION — what does this look like specifically for you? Describe the last time, including what was going well immediately beforehand.

THE SUBSTITUTE — what could you do instead, in that exact moment, that does not end the quiet? It has to be something specific and available, not a resolution to be more serene.

The Ladder

Tolerance for calm is built the way any tolerance is built — in increments, deliberately, starting below the level that is difficult. Rate where you are on each rung and write what practicing it would look like this week.

TWO MINUTES

Sitting with nothing — no phone, no task, no music. Most people find two minutes genuinely difficult, which is information, not failure.

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

FIFTEEN MINUTES

A walk without headphones. A coffee without a screen. A journey looking out of the window.

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

AN EVENING

An evening with no plan and nothing to fix, in which you deliberately do not start anything.

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

A GOOD STRETCH

A run of days where things are going well and nothing needs your intervention. This is the hardest rung, and the one where relapses cluster.

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

What the Practice Shows

1. Which of the five do you do most? And notice the timing — does it tend to arrive when things have been going well for a while?

2. Read your five "what was fine before it" answers together. How long does a good stretch typically last before something ends it? That number is worth knowing.

3. Where does the ladder become genuinely hard for you? Do not judge the rung — name it. Somebody who cannot sit still for two minutes is not failing; they are finding out where to start.

4. Who in your life is calm, and what do they do with an unassigned hour? Not as a comparison — as information. Most people have never actually asked.

5. Father Martin called serenity in stability the thing you build a life around so that you do not need to escape it. What would you have to stop doing for your life to be one you did not need a break from?

6. Name one specific hour this week that you will leave unassigned, and the substitute you will use if you catch yourself filling it. Write the day and the hour.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Saneness of Sobriety: Returning to Your Right Mind

Father Martin, drawing on both his personal experience and his understanding of the disease, frequently emphasized that alcoholism and addiction are forms of insanity — not in the clinical, psychiatric sense, but in the deeply human sense of doing the same destructive thing over and over while expecting different results, of violating your own values while insisting you are still the person those values describe, of watching your life fall apart while telling yourself everything is fine.

The insanity of addiction is not madness in the wild-eyed, dramatic sense. It is the quiet, normalized insanity of a person who has lost the ability to see their own situation clearly.

Consider the insanity objectively. A person who is destroying their health, their family, their career, and their self-respect through a behavior they claim they can control at any time — but never do. A person who has experienced devastating consequences from their substance use — arrests, hospitalizations, divorces, lost custody, unemployment — and returns to the substance anyway.

A person who lies to a doctor about their drinking while sitting in a hospital bed for alcohol-related liver damage. A person who hides bottles in the house while their spouse searches for them, and then feels persecuted when they're found. A person who genuinely believes, after the tenth attempt to "cut back," that this time will be different.

This is the insanity — not because the person is stupid or weak, but because the disease has hijacked the brain's ability to accurately assess reality.

The saneness of sobriety is the restoration of that ability. When the fog clears — and it does clear, though not all at once — the recovering person begins to see things as they actually are rather than as the disease needs them to appear.

Relationships that seemed fine are revealed as damaged. Financial situations that were "managed" are revealed as disasters. Health that was "good enough" is revealed as seriously compromised. And the self that was "in control" is revealed as someone who had lost control so gradually that they didn't notice it was gone.

This restoration of clarity is both the gift and the challenge of early recovery. The gift is obvious: you can finally see, think, feel, and make decisions with a brain that is no longer being chemically hijacked.

The challenge is that what you see is often devastating. The clear-eyed view of the wreckage — the real scope of the damage, the true depth of the harm, the honest assessment of where you are — can be overwhelming.

This is why many people in early recovery experience intense grief, shame, anxiety, and even the temptation to return to the substance: not because they want to be in the nightmare again, but because the nightmare at least obscured the view.

Father Martin's response to this challenge was characteristically direct: the pain of seeing clearly is the price of admission to a sane life. You cannot build anything on a foundation of denial. You cannot repair what you refuse to see. You cannot make amends for harm you won't acknowledge.

The saneness of sobriety includes the saneness of grief — honest, appropriate grief for what addiction took, for the time lost, for the relationships damaged, for the person you might have been. That grief is not a sign that recovery isn't working. It is a sign that you are awake.

The saneness also includes practical, everyday clarity. Making a decision without it being filtered through the question "How will this affect my ability to use?" Planning a weekend based on what you actually want to do, not based on where you can drink or use.

Having a conversation without calculating angles. Remembering what you said last night. Paying bills on time. Showing up when you said you would.

These mundane acts of sanity, taken for granted by people who have never been in the nightmare, are genuine miracles for someone who has been living in the chaos of addiction.

Every honest conversation, every kept promise, every morning you wake up remembering the night before — these are evidence that the nightmare is over and the saneness has returned.

Reflection Questions

1. Looking back, can you identify specific examples of the "insanity" of your active addiction — moments when your behavior was objectively irrational but felt completely normal to you at the time?

2. What has the restoration of clarity shown you that you could not see during active addiction? What has been the most difficult thing to see clearly?

3. Have you experienced grief in early recovery — grief for lost time, lost relationships, lost opportunities? How have you handled that grief so far?

4. What "everyday sanity" are you most grateful for in recovery? What mundane, ordinary thing can you do now that was impossible during the nightmare?

5. Father Martin says the pain of seeing clearly is the price of admission to a sane life. Are you willing to pay that price fully — or are there areas where you are still choosing comfortable denial over painful clarity?

YOUR EXERCISE

Sanity Checkpoint

Then and Now — Measuring What Has Actually Come Back

What Sanity Means Here

Father Martin used the word sanity in its plain sense — being restored to your right mind, the mind you had before, the one that can remember a conversation and hold a judgment overnight. It is not a psychiatric verdict and it is not about being well-behaved. It is about seven ordinary faculties that active addiction degrades quietly and that sobriety returns slowly, and unevenly, and mostly without announcement, which is exactly why people fail to notice they have come back. This checkpoint measures the distance. Rate each faculty at your worst and then today, and — this is the important part — give evidence. A rating with no example attached is a feeling about yourself, and feelings about yourself are the least reliable instrument you own.

Memory

Whether yesterday is available to you in one piece — conversations you can recall having, decisions you can retrace, evenings with no gaps in them.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Judgment

Whether your assessment of a situation is one you would still endorse a week later. Not being right — being consistent with yourself.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Keeping Your Word

Whether what you say you will do is a reliable indicator of what happens. To others, and to yourself.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Sitting With a Feeling

Whether an emotion can be experienced without immediately requiring an action to end it.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Hearing Something Unwelcome

Whether another person can tell you something difficult and have it land as information rather than as an attack.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Honest Time

Whether you can estimate how long something takes, keep an appointment, and plan a week that is actually possible.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Knowing Your Own Mind

Whether you can say what you think and what you want, without first checking what answer is required of you.

THEN — how was this faculty at your worst? (1 = gone, 5 = intact)

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

NOW — how is it today? (same scale)

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

EVIDENCE FROM THEN — one concrete instance of this faculty failing. A specific occasion, not a general statement.

EVIDENCE FROM NOW — one concrete instance from the last month of this faculty working. Something small counts; something small is usually more convincing.

WHERE IT IS STILL UNRELIABLE — under what conditions does this faculty still fail? Tired, with a particular person, about a particular subject, late at night?

Reading the Checkpoint

1. Write out your seven pairs of numbers, then and now. Which faculty has come back the furthest? Say it out loud to yourself — people are quick to itemize what is still wrong and slow to name what has returned.

2. Which has moved least? And is that because it needs more time, or because it needs something you have not yet done?

3. Look at your "still unreliable" answers. Do they share a condition — tiredness, a particular person, a particular subject? If one condition takes down several faculties at once, you have found something worth protecting against.

4. Which faculty would the people closest to you say has changed most? It is often not the one you would name, because the ones that recover first are usually the ones others see rather than the ones you feel.

5. If your NOW ratings are much lower than you expected, that is worth taking seriously rather than explaining away — exhaustion, low mood and early sobriety all depress these faculties, and some of them are worth mentioning to a doctor or counselor rather than simply enduring. Write what you would say, and to whom.

6. Set a date to run this checkpoint again — three months out. Recovery of these faculties is slow enough to be invisible day to day and obvious across a quarter, which is the whole reason for writing the numbers down today.

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

Serenity in Stability: Building a Life You Don't Need to Escape

The Serenity Prayer — "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference" — is recited at virtually every 12-Step meeting in the world.

Father Martin, who understood prayer not as passive request but as active orientation, taught that serenity is not a feeling you wait for — it is a state you build.

Serenity is the byproduct of a life organized around principles rather than impulses, around service rather than self-seeking, and around acceptance rather than resistance. It does not arrive as a bolt from the blue. It accumulates through thousands of small, deliberate choices to do the next right thing even when the next right thing is difficult, boring, or unrewarded.

Stability is the architecture of serenity. During active addiction, nothing was stable — not your mood, not your schedule, not your relationships, not your finances, not your health, not your identity. Everything was in flux, subject to the gravitational pull of the substance.

Recovery requires building stable structures where none existed: a consistent daily routine, regular sleep and nutrition, reliable attendance at meetings or therapy, honest and predictable behavior in relationships, financial responsibility, and a growing capacity to keep commitments.

These structures are not exciting. They are not dramatic. They will never produce the adrenaline rush that the nightmare provided. But they are the scaffolding upon which a meaningful, sober life is constructed.

Many people in early recovery resist stability because they confuse it with stagnation. The nightmare, for all its destruction, was never boring. There was always a crisis to manage, a drama to navigate, a scheme to execute, an emotion to numb, a consequence to outrun.

The intensity of that lifestyle — however destructive — produced a kind of engagement with life that sobriety, in its early stages, doesn't replicate. The recovering person looks at the stable, routine life of sobriety and thinks: "This is it? This is what I got sober for?"

And the temptation emerges — not necessarily to use, but to create chaos, to seek intensity, to engineer a crisis just to feel alive.

This is where Father Martin's teaching becomes essential. The nightmare is over — but only if you let it be over. If you keep recreating the chaos, if you keep seeking the intensity, if you keep testing the stability to see if it will break, you are not allowing the nightmare to end. You are directing the sequel.

Serenity requires the willingness to let go of chaos as an organizing principle for your life and to accept that a good day can be a quiet day, that a strong relationship can be a calm relationship, and that a life well-lived can be a life that looks, from the outside, remarkably ordinary.

The deeper truth that Father Martin pointed to is this: serenity is not the absence of struggle. It is the presence of a centered, grounded self that can encounter struggle without being destroyed

by it.

The serene person still faces job loss, relationship conflict, health problems, financial stress, grief, and disappointment. The difference is that these challenges are met by someone who has a foundation — a daily practice, a community of support, a relationship with something greater than themselves, and a set of principles that guide action.

The challenges of life are not the enemy of serenity. They are the context in which serenity is tested, strengthened, and proven.

Building a life you don't need to escape from is the ultimate answer to the question of why people use substances. They use because the life they are living is unbearable — or because they believe it is.

Recovery, therefore, is not just about removing the substance. It is about building a life that is worth being present for. A life with honest relationships. A life with meaningful work or purpose. A life with connection to community. A life where you can feel your feelings without being destroyed by them. A life where you know who you are and can live with that knowledge.

This is the life that makes the nightmare stay over — not just for today, but for the long arc of recovery.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you confuse stability with boredom? When life is calm and routine, what internal narrative arises? What does your addicted brain tell you about the ordinariness of sobriety?

2. What stable structures have you built in recovery so far? (Routine, sleep, meetings, relationships, finances?) Where are the gaps — where is chaos still winning?

3. Have you found yourself creating drama, conflict, or crisis in recovery — even unconsciously — because calm felt intolerable? Describe a specific instance.

4. What does "a life you don't need to escape from" look like for you? Be specific — describe the daily life that would make sobriety feel like freedom rather than deprivation.

5. The Serenity Prayer asks for acceptance, courage, and wisdom. Which of these three is most challenging for you right now, and how is that challenge showing up in your recovery?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Serenity & Saneness in Daily Life

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

1. I am developing the ability to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively to stressful situations

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am learning to accept the things I cannot change without it triggering a desire to use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have moments where I feel genuinely grateful for the saneness that sobriety provides

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am building a life in recovery that I do not need to escape from

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I practice some form of conscious relaxation, mindfulness, meditation, or spiritual connection regularly

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can handle disappointment, conflict, or frustration without it immediately threatening my sobriety

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am beginning to know who I actually am without substances — and I am willing to keep learning

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I can distinguish between the "high" of chaos and the deep satisfaction of genuine serenity

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Stability Architecture

Building a Life You Do Not Need to Escape

Structure Comes First, and Feeling Follows It

People wait to feel stable and then build, and the order is backwards. Stability is not a state of mind that eventually permits a routine; it is what a routine produces after several weeks of being kept badly. Father Martin's phrase was serenity in stability — not serenity as an achievement of the spirit, but as the ordinary byproduct of a life with fixed points in it. This exercise is deliberately unromantic. Six structural elements, what each one is actually like right now, and what one change to each would do. Answer the as-it-stands questions with facts rather than impressions; architecture is assessed by measurement, not by how the building feels to stand in.

The Fixed Points

The two times that shape everything else: when you get up and when you go to bed. Nothing in this exercise matters as much as these, and nothing is more routinely treated as unimportant.

AS IT STANDS — What time do you actually wake and sleep — not on a good day, on average across last week? How variable is it?

How solid is this element? (1 = nothing here at all, 5 = reliable and load-bearing)

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

THE ONE CHANGE — the single smallest change that would make a real difference here. Small enough that you would actually do it for six weeks running.

WHAT IS IN THE WAY — be specific. Money, another person, a job's hours, a habit, or not wanting to. Name it rather than resolving harder.

The Anchored Week

The things that happen on the same day at the same time regardless of how you feel. A recovery with no fixed appointments in it is being decided fresh every day, which is a lot of decisions to leave to a bad mood.

AS IT STANDS — List what is genuinely fixed in your week. If the honest list is short or empty, write it short or empty.

How solid is this element? (1 = nothing here at all, 5 = reliable and load-bearing)

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

THE ONE CHANGE — the single smallest change that would make a real difference here. Small enough that you would actually do it for six weeks running.

WHAT IS IN THE WAY — be specific. Money, another person, a job's hours, a habit, or not wanting to. Name it rather than resolving harder.

The Financial Floor

Not wealth — predictability. Knowing what comes in, what goes out, and when. Financial chaos generates a constant low emergency that people in recovery frequently mistake for a mood.

AS IT STANDS — Do you know what is due this month and whether it will be covered? What is the state of the unopened post?

How solid is this element? (1 = nothing here at all, 5 = reliable and load-bearing)

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

THE ONE CHANGE — the single smallest change that would make a real difference here. Small enough that you would actually do it for six weeks running.

WHAT IS IN THE WAY — be specific. Money, another person, a job's hours, a habit, or not wanting to. Name it rather than resolving harder.

Where You Live

The physical space. Whether it is somewhere you can rest, whether it is safe from the things that need to be absent, and whether it is yours enough to relax in.

AS IT STANDS — Describe the state of the place you sleep. Then say honestly whether you rest there or simply stop there.

How solid is this element? (1 = nothing here at all, 5 = reliable and load-bearing)

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

THE ONE CHANGE — the single smallest change that would make a real difference here. Small enough that you would actually do it for six weeks running.

WHAT IS IN THE WAY — be specific. Money, another person, a job's hours, a habit, or not wanting to. Name it rather than resolving harder.

The Body's Week

Meals at hours, movement of some kind, daylight, medical appointments kept. The least glamorous part of recovery architecture and the one that most reliably decides how a week goes.

AS IT STANDS — How many real meals last week? How many times outdoors or moving? What appointment is currently overdue?

How solid is this element? (1 = nothing here at all, 5 = reliable and load-bearing)

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

THE ONE CHANGE — the single smallest change that would make a real difference here. Small enough that you would actually do it for six weeks running.

WHAT IS IN THE WAY — be specific. Money, another person, a job's hours, a habit, or not wanting to. Name it rather than resolving harder.

Margin

Unassigned time and unspent capacity. A life with no margin has no room to absorb anything going wrong, which means every ordinary setback becomes a crisis — and crises are what the old solution was for.

AS IT STANDS — How many hours of your week are genuinely unassigned? And when something goes wrong, what gives way?

How solid is this element? (1 = nothing here at all, 5 = reliable and load-bearing)

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

THE ONE CHANGE — the single smallest change that would make a real difference here. Small enough that you would actually do it for six weeks running.

WHAT IS IN THE WAY — be specific. Money, another person, a job's hours, a habit, or not wanting to. Name it rather than resolving harder.

The Build Order

You cannot build six things at once, and attempting it is the most common way this exercise gets wasted. Structures are built in an order, and the order matters more than the ambition.

1. Look at your six ratings. Which element is weakest? Now ask a different question: which one, if fixed, would make the others easier? Those are often not the same, and the second one is where you start.

2. Sleep and waking times underpin nearly everything else on this list. If yours are variable, say by how much — and say what the first step toward a fixed waking time would be this week.

3. Read your six obstacles. How many are genuinely external — money, hours, another person's decision — and how many are yours? Sort them honestly; the two kinds need different help, and one of them needs someone else involved.

4. Name the ONE element you are building first, the specific change, the start date, and who will know. One. The six-element renovation started next Monday is how people arrive back here in a year with nothing built.

5. Structure is boring and that is the point — a life you do not have to escape is made of things nobody would think worth describing. What would an ordinary, unremarkable, sustainable week look like for you? Write it out, hour by rough hour.

YOUR EXERCISE

Chaos Triggers and Responses

The Event Is Not the Problem. The Escalation Is.

Separating the Event From the Escalation

Bad things happen to everyone and they are not, by themselves, what threatens a recovery. What threatens it is escalation — the way one difficult event becomes a difficult week, because of what gets canceled, who gets avoided, how little gets slept, and how many further decisions get made while inside it. Everybody in recovery can name a relapse that followed a crisis. Far fewer can describe the four days in between, and those four days are where the entire intervention lives. So the question for each source below is not how to prevent the event — mostly you cannot. It is: what has to stay standing while it happens?

A Person Who Brings It

Somebody whose arrival in your week reliably raises the temperature. Not necessarily an enemy — often someone you love, and often someone who is themselves in trouble.

MY VERSION — what is this specifically, for you? Name it plainly, including names where there are names.

THE ESCALATION — trace what usually happens in the days afterward. What gets canceled, who stops hearing from you, what stops being slept or eaten, what other decisions get made inside it?

How destabilizing is this source for you? (1 = I handle it, 5 = it takes the week)

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

WHAT STAYS STANDING — name the two or three things that must not be canceled during this, whatever else goes. Be specific: which meeting, which call, which meal, which bedtime.

THE PREPARED RESPONSE — what you do in the first hour and the first day. Written now, as instructions, because it will not be composed then.

THE PREVENTION — what would reduce how often this happens at all? A limit, a conversation, a changed arrangement, a subject you stop discussing, or a decision made ahead of the date.

The Recurring Argument

The same disagreement, in the same words, with the same person, that has never once concluded. You could both perform the other's lines.

MY VERSION — what is this specifically, for you? Name it plainly, including names where there are names.

THE ESCALATION — trace what usually happens in the days afterward. What gets canceled, who stops hearing from you, what stops being slept or eaten, what other decisions get made inside it?

How destabilizing is this source for you? (1 = I handle it, 5 = it takes the week)

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

WHAT STAYS STANDING — name the two or three things that must not be canceled during this, whatever else goes. Be specific: which meeting, which call, which meal, which bedtime.

THE PREPARED RESPONSE — what you do in the first hour and the first day. Written now, as instructions, because it will not be composed then.

THE PREVENTION — what would reduce how often this happens at all? A limit, a conversation, a changed arrangement, a subject you stop discussing, or a decision made ahead of the date.

A Money Shock

The bill, the letter, the shortfall. Financial events produce a specific kind of chaos because they are simultaneously urgent and slow to resolve.

MY VERSION — what is this specifically, for you? Name it plainly, including names where there are names.

THE ESCALATION — trace what usually happens in the days afterward. What gets canceled, who stops hearing from you, what stops being slept or eaten, what other decisions get made inside it?

How destabilizing is this source for you? (1 = I handle it, 5 = it takes the week)

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

WHAT STAYS STANDING — name the two or three things that must not be canceled during this, whatever else goes. Be specific: which meeting, which call, which meal, which bedtime.

THE PREPARED RESPONSE — what you do in the first hour and the first day. Written now, as instructions, because it will not be composed then.

THE PREVENTION — what would reduce how often this happens at all? A limit, a conversation, a changed arrangement, a subject you stop discussing, or a decision made ahead of the date.

The Family Occasion

The holiday, the funeral, the wedding, the visit. Dates you can see coming months ahead, which is what makes them the most preventable chaos on this list.

MY VERSION — what is this specifically, for you? Name it plainly, including names where there are names.

THE ESCALATION — trace what usually happens in the days afterward. What gets canceled, who stops hearing from you, what stops being slept or eaten, what other decisions get made inside it?

How destabilizing is this source for you? (1 = I handle it, 5 = it takes the week)

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

WHAT STAYS STANDING — name the two or three things that must not be canceled during this, whatever else goes. Be specific: which meeting, which call, which meal, which bedtime.

THE PREPARED RESPONSE — what you do in the first hour and the first day. Written now, as instructions, because it will not be composed then.

THE PREVENTION — what would reduce how often this happens at all? A limit, a conversation, a changed arrangement, a subject you stop discussing, or a decision made ahead of the date.

Work Turbulence

The restructure, the shift pattern, the difficult colleague, the stretch where there is too much of it.

MY VERSION — what is this specifically, for you? Name it plainly, including names where there are names.

THE ESCALATION — trace what usually happens in the days afterward. What gets canceled, who stops hearing from you, what stops being slept or eaten, what other decisions get made inside it?

How destabilizing is this source for you? (1 = I handle it, 5 = it takes the week)

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

WHAT STAYS STANDING — name the two or three things that must not be canceled during this, whatever else goes. Be specific: which meeting, which call, which meal, which bedtime.

THE PREPARED RESPONSE — what you do in the first hour and the first day. Written now, as instructions, because it will not be composed then.

THE PREVENTION — what would reduce how often this happens at all? A limit, a conversation, a changed arrangement, a subject you stop discussing, or a decision made ahead of the date.

The Chaos I Generate

Saying yes to the fourth thing. Leaving it to the last hour. Starting something the week everything else is happening. Be honest about how much of your turbulence is scheduled by you.

MY VERSION — what is this specifically, for you? Name it plainly, including names where there are names.

THE ESCALATION — trace what usually happens in the days afterward. What gets canceled, who stops hearing from you, what stops being slept or eaten, what other decisions get made inside it?

How destabilizing is this source for you? (1 = I handle it, 5 = it takes the week)

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

WHAT STAYS STANDING — name the two or three things that must not be canceled during this, whatever else goes. Be specific: which meeting, which call, which meal, which bedtime.

THE PREPARED RESPONSE — what you do in the first hour and the first day. Written now, as instructions, because it will not be composed then.

THE PREVENTION — what would reduce how often this happens at all? A limit, a conversation, a changed arrangement, a subject you stop discussing, or a decision made ahead of the date.

Reading the Six

1. Which source scores highest? And is it the one you would have named before doing the exercise, or has something quieter turned out to be more expensive?

2. Read your six escalation traces together. Does the same thing get canceled first, every time? That is your first domino, and protecting that one thing is probably worth more than all the rest of this plan.

3. Look honestly at the last source. What proportion of your chaos is generated by your own yes? If it is a large proportion, that is good news, because it is the part you can change without anyone else agreeing to anything.

4. The family occasion is the most preventable item on this list, because you can see the date. What is the next one, and what will be decided about it in advance — how long you stay, how you travel, who you go with, what you say when asked?

5. Who are the two people who should know when one of these is happening? Name them, and say whether you have ever actually told them at the time rather than afterward.

6. Write your general chaos rule — one sentence covering all six: "When something blows up, before I decide anything else, I ___ and I tell ___."

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

Recovery Is an Action Word: Doing the Work

Father Martin never allowed anyone to confuse the desire for sobriety with the practice of recovery. He understood, from his own experience and from decades of working with alcoholics, that the gap between wanting to be sober and actually doing what sobriety requires is where most recoveries fail.

Recovery is an action word. It does not live in your intentions. It does not live in your understanding. It does not live in your desire to change. It lives in what you actually do — today, this morning, this hour — to support your sobriety and build a life consistent with the person you are becoming.

The disease of addiction is profoundly persuasive on the subject of inaction. It whispers in the language of procrastination, rationalization, and entitlement.

"You've been sober for a month — you don't need to go to a meeting today." "You already know this stuff — reading recovery literature is for beginners." "You've had a hard week — you deserve to skip therapy." "You'll call your sponsor tomorrow." "You're different — you can recover without all the structure other people need."

Every one of these thoughts is the nightmare whispering from behind the closed door, testing to see if you've locked it or just pulled it shut.

The work of recovery is specific, concrete, and non-negotiable. It includes, at minimum:

Regular attendance at meetings, therapy, or structured recovery support. Working with a sponsor, mentor, or guide who provides accountability and wisdom. Daily personal inventory — a honest assessment of where you are emotionally, spiritually, and practically.

Reading and engaging with recovery literature that challenges complacency and deepens understanding. Service to others — helping someone else in recovery, contributing to your community, moving beyond self-obsession.

Practicing prayer, meditation, or some form of conscious contact with a power greater than yourself. Maintaining physical health through adequate sleep, nutrition, and movement. Building and sustaining honest relationships.

And making amends — direct, ongoing amends through changed behavior — to the people harmed by your addiction.

This list is not optional. It is not a menu where you choose your favorites and skip the items you don't enjoy. It is the architecture of recovery, and removing load-bearing walls because they're inconvenient is how structures collapse.

Father Martin was fond of pointing out that you don't negotiate with a disease. You don't tell heart disease that you'll exercise three days a week but eat whatever you want the other four. You don't tell diabetes that insulin is only necessary when you feel like taking it.

Addiction is a chronic, progressive, potentially fatal disease, and it requires a comprehensive, ongoing, rigorous response. That response is the work.

The good news — and Father Martin always came back to the good news — is that the work works. It does not work because it is pleasant. It does not work because it is easy. It does not work because you feel motivated every time you do it.

It works because it is the right response to the reality of your disease, and reality doesn't care about your feelings.

Every meeting attended, every honest conversation had, every amends made, every prayer offered, every day of sobriety maintained through deliberate action rather than white-knuckled avoidance — these are the bricks that build the wall between you and the nightmare.

They are the evidence that you are not just sober but recovering. They are the proof that the nightmare is over not because it ended on its own, but because you are actively, daily, choosing to keep it over.

The opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is engagement — with life, with other people, with your own growth, with the daily practice of becoming someone you can respect.

Father Martin knew that sobriety without engagement is just a dry drunk — a person who has removed the substance but not replaced it with anything meaningful, and who is therefore either miserable or approaching relapse.

The work of recovery is the engagement. It is the active, ongoing, sometimes joyful, sometimes grinding, always necessary process of building a life that has enough meaning, connection, and purpose that the nightmare loses its gravitational pull.

Do the work. The nightmare is over. But only if you do the work.

Reflection Questions

1. Be brutally honest: what recovery work are you currently doing, and what work are you avoiding, skipping, or doing halfheartedly? Name specific actions in both categories.

2. What rationalizations does your addicted brain offer for not doing the work? ("You don't need meetings." "You already know this." "You're different.") Can you hear the nightmare whispering through these excuses?

3. Father Martin says recovery is an action word — it lives in what you do, not what you intend. What actions have you taken this week that directly support your recovery?

4. Where is the gap between your intention and your action in recovery? What do you know you should be doing that you are not doing?

5. If recovery work is the wall between you and the nightmare, how thick is your wall right now? What actions would make it stronger? What missing bricks need to be laid?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Recovery as Action — Not Intention

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

1. I understand that recovery requires consistent daily action, not just the desire to be sober
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have a concrete, specific daily recovery routine that I follow regardless of how I feel
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I attend meetings, therapy, or recovery support consistently — not only when I feel like it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am working with a sponsor, mentor, or recovery guide who holds me accountable to action
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I do not confuse thinking about recovery with actually doing recovery work
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have taken specific actions this week that directly support my sobriety — I can name them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I push through resistance and do recovery work even on days when motivation is low
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I understand that my willingness to work is what separates sustained recovery from repeated relapse

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Recovery Action Audit

Recovery Is an Action Word — So Audit the Verbs

Four Registers, and Only One of Them Counts

There is a vocabulary problem in recovery and it is worth naming precisely. People report four different things and treat them as one. I KNOW about it — understanding, reading, insight. I FEEL about it — remorse, hope, determination, dread. I INTEND to — the plan, the resolution, the this-is-the-year. And I DID — an action, on a date, that another person could have witnessed. The first three are genuine and they are not recovery; they are what recovery feels like from inside when it has not started. Father Martin said recovery is an action word for exactly this reason. This audit separates the four registers across six domains, and the only column that counts is the last one.

My Own Program

Whatever your recovery actually consists of — meetings, counseling, steps, a group, a routine.

WHAT I KNOW, FEEL AND INTEND

Write it all here, in one place, so that the next box cannot borrow from it.

WHAT I DID

Last thirty days only. Actions with dates. If another person could not have witnessed it, it does not go here. "Thought about it a lot" belongs in the box above.

How wide is the gap between the two boxes? (1 = they match, 5 = everything is in the first box)

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

THE NEXT VERB — one action in this domain, with a date and, where it involves someone, a name. Not the whole solution. The next single thing.

The People I Damaged

Repair is the domain where knowing and intending are most abundant and doing is most scarce.

WHAT I KNOW, FEEL AND INTEND

Write it all here, in one place, so that the next box cannot borrow from it.

WHAT I DID

Last thirty days only. Actions with dates. If another person could not have witnessed it, it does not go here. "Thought about it a lot" belongs in the box above.

How wide is the gap between the two boxes? (1 = they match, 5 = everything is in the first box)

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

THE NEXT VERB — one action in this domain, with a date and, where it involves someone, a name. Not the whole solution. The next single thing.

My Health

The appointment, the test, the dentist, the thing you have been meaning to have looked at.

WHAT I KNOW, FEEL AND INTEND

Write it all here, in one place, so that the next box cannot borrow from it.

WHAT I DID

Last thirty days only. Actions with dates. If another person could not have witnessed it, it does not go here. "Thought about it a lot" belongs in the box above.

How wide is the gap between the two boxes? (1 = they match, 5 = everything is in the first box)

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

THE NEXT VERB — one action in this domain, with a date and, where it involves someone, a name. Not the whole solution. The next single thing.

Work and Purpose

What you are building, or the honest admission that you are not building anything yet.

WHAT I KNOW, FEEL AND INTEND

Write it all here, in one place, so that the next box cannot borrow from it.

WHAT I DID

Last thirty days only. Actions with dates. If another person could not have witnessed it, it does not go here. "Thought about it a lot" belongs in the box above.

How wide is the gap between the two boxes? (1 = they match, 5 = everything is in the first box)

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

THE NEXT VERB — one action in this domain, with a date and, where it involves someone, a name. Not the whole solution. The next single thing.

What I Owe

Debts, arrears, obligations, paperwork. The domain most likely to be answered with a feeling rather than an action.

WHAT I KNOW, FEEL AND INTEND

Write it all here, in one place, so that the next box cannot borrow from it.

WHAT I DID

Last thirty days only. Actions with dates. If another person could not have witnessed it, it does not go here. "Thought about it a lot" belongs in the box above.

How wide is the gap between the two boxes? (1 = they match, 5 = everything is in the first box)

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

THE NEXT VERB — one action in this domain, with a date and, where it involves someone, a name. Not the whole solution. The next single thing.

Being Useful to Someone

Service in the broadest sense — anything done for another person that costs you something.

WHAT I KNOW, FEEL AND INTEND

Write it all here, in one place, so that the next box cannot borrow from it.

WHAT I DID

Last thirty days only. Actions with dates. If another person could not have witnessed it, it does not go here. "Thought about it a lot" belongs in the box above.

How wide is the gap between the two boxes? (1 = they match, 5 = everything is in the first box)

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

THE NEXT VERB — one action in this domain, with a date and, where it involves someone, a name. Not the whole solution. The next single thing.

Reading the Two Columns

1. Which domain has the widest gap? And note whether it is also the one you talk about most — talking about a domain and acting in it are often inversely related.

2. Which domain has the narrowest gap? Something is working there. What is it — a person involved, a fixed appointment, an external deadline, a smaller scale? Whatever it is, it is transferable.

3. Read your six "know, feel and intend" boxes together. If sincerity were the active ingredient, you would already be finished. Say what that tells you about what the missing ingredient actually is.

4. Was any domain's action box genuinely empty? An empty box is not a failure of character; it usually means the first step was too large to start. What is the smallest possible version of a first action there — small enough to do today?

5. Look at your six "next verb" answers. How many name a date and a person? Rewrite the ones that do not, now.

6. Choose the two you will actually do in the next fourteen days and tell someone which two. Two. The audit produces six next verbs and a person who attempts six completes none.

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily Awakening Practice

Seven Mornings of Noticing That It Is Actually Over

Why This Has to Be Practiced

The strangest thing about a nightmare ending is how quickly it stops being noticeable. Within months, waking without dread becomes simply how mornings are, and the contrast — which was the whole of the relief at the beginning — disappears into the ordinary. That matters more than it sounds, because the contrast is also the argument. A person who can feel the difference between this morning and the mornings of three years ago is carrying a piece of evidence the disease cannot easily talk them out of. Seven days of deliberate noticing. Write it the same day, in the morning and again at night, in one or two sentences. This is the shortest exercise in the module and the one most likely to still be running in a year.

Day 1**MORNING**

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

Day 2**MORNING**

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

Day 3

MORNING

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

Day 4

MORNING

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

Day 5

MORNING

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

Day 6

MORNING

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

Day 7

MORNING

How was waking up today, compared with the mornings of your worst period? (1 = no different, 5 = a different life)

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

ONE THING THAT IS DIFFERENT THIS MORNING — something concrete and small. Not gratitude in general. What is physically, factually different about today compared with then.

WHAT TODAY ASKS OF ME — one thing. Recovery is an action word, and the morning is where the verb gets chosen.

EVENING

How did the day go? (1 = hard, 5 = good)

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

ONE THING I DID TODAY THAT THE OLD VERSION COULD NOT HAVE — kept an appointment, finished something, said a true thing, was present for someone, remembered the whole day.

ANYTHING FROM THE OLD LIFE THAT SHOWED UP TODAY — a thought, a person, a pull, a habit. Note it without judgment; noticing is the whole task.

The Week, Read Back

Read all seven days before answering. The point of writing it down was to have something to read that is not your memory of the week.

1. Read your seven "one thing that is different" entries in a row. That list is the answer to the question this module's title asks. What does it add up to?

2. Compare your morning ratings with your evening ratings. Which end of the day is currently harder for you? That is where the next piece of structure goes.

3. Look at your seven "the old version could not have" entries. Which one would have been least believable to you three years ago?

4. What showed up from the old life this week, and how often? Note the pattern rather than the incidents — which day, which hour, after what.

5. Was there a morning where the difference was hard to find? Say what was going on. The mornings where nothing seems different are worth understanding, because they are the ones where the evidence is thinnest.

6. This practice takes about four minutes a day. Will you keep it running, and in what form — written, spoken to someone, one line in a notebook? Decide now, and name the date you will read a month of it back.

YOUR EXERCISE

The Life You Are Building

Vision and Blueprint — Both Words Matter

Two Halves, and Neither Works Alone

This module opened by mapping what active addiction actually was, and it closes by asking what replaces it — because a recovery defined entirely by what is absent is a life organized around a

hole, and holes get filled. But the exercise asks for two different things and it is worth knowing which is which. The vision is a description of the life, written in the present tense, and it is allowed to be larger than today. The blueprint is the next brick: one small, dated, verifiable action per room. Vision without blueprint is the thing everyone has at ninety days and nobody has at nine months. Blueprint without vision is a maintenance schedule for a building nobody wants to live in. Every room below sends you back to an exercise — go and read what you wrote there, rather than reconstructing it now.

The Person

FROM EXERCISES 1 AND 5

THE VISION — Describe the person you are becoming, in the present tense, in three or four sentences. Build it from your Sanity Checkpoint evidence rather than from hope — the faculties that have come back are what this person is actually made of.

How much of this room actually exists today? (1 = it is only a description, 5 = I am living in it)

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

THE NEXT BRICK — What is one thing that person does that you do not yet do reliably? Name it, and name the week you start.

The People

FROM EXERCISES 2 AND 3

THE VISION — Who is in this life, and what are those relationships like when they are working? Include the ones being repaired and be honest about which repairs are not yours to complete alone.

How much of this room actually exists today? (1 = it is only a description, 5 = I am living in it)

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

THE NEXT BRICK — Which single relationship gets your attention this month — and is it a conversation, a repayment, a consistency, or simply not using the old tactic on them?

The Days

FROM EXERCISES 4 AND 6

THE VISION — Describe an ordinary Wednesday in the life you are building. Not a good day — an ordinary one, hour by rough hour, including the unassigned time.

How much of this room actually exists today? (1 = it is only a description, 5 = I am living in it)

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

THE NEXT BRICK — Which structural element are you building first, and what is the small version of it that survives a bad week?

The Work

FROM EXERCISE 7

THE VISION — What are you building, making, earning, or being useful at? If there is no answer yet, write that honestly — an admitted blank is a better foundation than a borrowed ambition.

How much of this room actually exists today? (1 = it is only a description, 5 = I am living in it)

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

THE NEXT BRICK — What is the next verb here, with a date on it? The smallest real step, not the plan.

What Guards It

FROM EXERCISE 8

THE VISION — Every life needs something that holds when it is under pressure. What protects this one — which people, which arrangements, which things stay standing when a week goes wrong?

How much of this room actually exists today? (1 = it is only a description, 5 = I am living in it)

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

THE NEXT BRICK — Which of your chaos sources is least defended, and what is the one arrangement that would change that?

What Keeps It Visible

FROM EXERCISE 9

THE VISION — The daily practice that keeps the difference between then and now in front of you, so that the evidence does not fade into the ordinary.

How much of this room actually exists today? (1 = it is only a description, 5 = I am living in it)

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

THE NEXT BRICK — What form will it take, on which days, and what will make you keep it running past the third week?

Reading the Blueprint

1. Count your six bricks. How many name a date, and how many name a person? Rewrite the ones that name neither — those are visions that have wandered into the wrong column.

2. Look at your six "how much exists" ratings. Which room is furthest from being built? And is that where your six bricks are pointed, or are they clustered in the rooms that were already easiest?

3. Pick TWO bricks for the next thirty days. Two. Six is how a blueprint becomes a document nobody opens again.

4. Who reads this? Name the person and the day you will show them. Then name what you want from them — to hold you to it, to help with one room, or simply to know what you are building.

5. Go back to Exercise 1 and read your six "what is different now" answers. Set them beside this blueprint. That is the distance already traveled and the distance still to go, on one page. What does seeing both at once tell you?

6. Set the date you will read this again. Then set a second one a year out. A year is long enough that the version of you who opens it will be able to tell whether any of it happened.

The Closing Statement

The module is called Your Nightmare Is Over. You began by writing what the nightmare actually was. Finish by writing what is here instead — in your own words, with your own specifics, in sentences you would be willing to say out loud.

Write it: "What is over is _____. What is here instead is _____. The life I am building has _____ in it, and the next thing I am doing about it is _____, by _____. _____ knows."

In your own words...

Last question. If a person at the beginning of this — the version of you in Exercise 1 — could read one paragraph from where you are now, what would you want them to know?
