

# **HOW TO GET TO KNOW GOD**

**Exercises for Doubters in Crisis**

**by Diana M.**

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## DEDICATION

Thank you, Lord, for Joy--the world's greatest sponsor--and for all the contributors to this book who have enriched it and my life beyond measure.

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## EXERCISE ONE

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### ***SURRENDER TO A HAPPY MEMORY***

*Choose an occasion in your life--no matter how short or how long ago it happened--when you were very happy. Give yourself to the memory of that event four or five times a day for about five minutes each time. Think of that happiness as God giving you a glimpse of Himself.*

In the book of Alcoholics Anonymous, there is a passage that reads: "... for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured by calamity, by pomp, by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there."

When my sponsor in the 12-step AA program read me that passage, I realized that I had never connected a feeling of joy with a god.

I did recall that when I was about 11 years old, I saw the Walt Disney movie *The Lady and the Tramp*. I remember when I came out of the theater I looked up at a star-filled sky and thought that I was happy, truly happy, and that everything was going to be all right in my life.

Halfway through the next day, however, as the reality of my family life re-asserted itself, that feeling disappeared. I don't think I experienced much happiness like that one until my first drink or two of alcohol many years later, which supplied a similar feeling of euphoria and eventually became my god.

As I did this first exercise with my sponsor, Joy (whose name

could not have been more appropriate), I was able to retrieve that one moment of real joy in my childhood. I could tell immediately that my sense of fulfillment, well-being and serenity at the time was truth and that my alcoholic “highs” were illusions. I thought: “If this feeling is not God, it ought to be.”

What kind of experience should you pick? Choose one that is healthy and promotes life. It certainly does not have to be something from childhood. I have heard people describe a first taste of blue cheese, hugging a tree at a sanitarium, watching animals play in the park, and hearing Beethoven’s music for the first time. Keep it simple and honest. Don’t try to trick yourself. The point is that it is an experience of real joy and that it belongs only to you.

What if you cannot remember one happy memory in your entire lifetime? Think again. I promise you that it is there. God makes sure of that, for He promises everyone the opportunity to experience His love.

After you have picked your happy memory, then decide some times during the day when you can surrender yourself to it. Some people think of their joyful incident when they wake up, others when they shower, drive, take a coffee break, during TV commercials, doing the dishes or other household chores. You can recall this joy anytime: when you are happy or sad, peaceful or angry, jovial or in grief, fearful or strong, on top of the world or immersed in problems.

Gwen started this exercise while she was up to her ears in problems. Her sexually abused, alcoholic, 16-year-old daughter had come to live with her and her husband, who themselves had just gotten clean and sober in the previous few months. Gwen chose the memory of the time she had found out that she was pregnant with this daughter:

I remember walking out of the doctor's office and feeling as if my feet were not touching the ground. Nothing else seemed to matter. There were no problems, everything was pure happiness and joy. When I recalled this incident the first time I did this exercise, I got this big grin on my face--even though it was sixteen years later. No matter how many times I thought about this memory, a smile was always the very first thing that would happen.

I tried this exercise the very first night you asked me to do it. I was lying in bed, feeling very tired. I asked the Spirit to take me back and give me the same feelings that I had when I first discovered I was pregnant. Before I was finished asking, I was overwhelmed by that same feeling of joy. It only lasted for about thirty seconds, but it was there and it was real.

It gave me a real sense of peace to know that I could still bring that happiness back whenever I wanted it. I did that exercise many times that first week. Usually I did it at night, in bed. I tried it one time when I was upset, and the same feeling came. It wasn't as strong as the other times, but I did have a sense of peace that wasn't there before I asked for that remembrance.

Pete holds a job during the day, but he also plays piano almost every night. Because his life is so busy, his experience with recalling joy is a concentrated one:

Picking the happiest time of my life was easy. It was my senior year at college. I had left a large, out-of-state university and returned to a smaller college where things were more focused and--happily--where the woman I loved lived.

When I returned, I was really feeling good about myself. I believed that I was doing something right, that I was putting some direction in my life. I was working hard and being productive academically. I also had the satisfaction of being in love, and I married that woman the next year. Because I was still in college, I did not have a lot of responsibility outside of class work, nor did I have to think much about

what life was going to demand of me.

I also had the feeling that God was a part of my life, even though I didn't treat Him any differently than I do now.

When you asked me to recall this period in my life, I did so perhaps five times a day. Maybe it wasn't even two minutes at a time, but I wanted to be sure that I was isolating the right experience and could retrieve it at will.

The joy that you rediscover by doing this exercise is the first step in discovering God. By repeating the exercise over and over, you can create an opening through which God can reveal Himself to you. This connection between God and joy is especially fortunate in times of crisis, when the pursuit of happiness seems so distant and unreachable.

## Checklist

Describe your favorite happy memory. Check each time that you recall it each day for one week and try to connect the feeling it evokes with the reality and presence of God. By the end of the week, you should be able to retrieve the feeling of joy at any time.

My personal memory of happiness (be as specific as possible):

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**Day1: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

**Day2: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

**Day3: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

**Day4: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

**Day5: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

**Day6: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

**Day7: ....** 1. \_\_ 2. \_\_ 3. \_\_ 4. \_\_ 5. \_\_

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## EXERCISE SIX

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### *FEEL GOD IN NATURE*

*Get in touch with nature. Feel the wind in your face, lie in the sun, walk through some leaves, look at the stars, listen to raindrops on the window, bite into a really good apple. When you touch nature, you are touching God.*

No one could have been further from experiencing God in nature than I was in the last year of my addictions. I was far past “sophistication” and well on my way to being a jaded and hard woman. My husband, Charles, left me the year before I entered AA, perhaps because he couldn’t take it anymore but more likely because he had no hope that I would ever get better.

I felt trapped and didn’t want the responsibility of house, family and career. I wanted to appear to be a very strong, independent woman, while in reality I was a frightened child who had a passive-aggressive relationship with both my husband and my mother. My addictions were my attempt to discover who I was in my own way--rather than by following anyone else’s prescription, no matter how helpful it might have been. For that reason, I was glad that Charles was gone from my life for the last year of my drinking and drugging.

A typical day for me at that time would start by my taking some prescription “speed” when I first got up, calming down with some Valium, and then going to a three-martini lunch. I had a drug pusher working in the same office, and

toward late afternoon he would bring a joint or some hash for us to share. Another friend, a musician and cocaine addict, would occasionally give me some coke to snort in the late evening, which enabled me to drink some more. Once in a while, through the rum-induced mists, I would ask one “friend” or another, “Do you think I have a problem?” Of course, I only asked those as smashed or stoned as I was. They always confirmed that I was the most solid and normal person they knew!

During this period, I did not even know there was an out-of-doors. My experience of getting to know God through the majestic beauty and power of nature did not come until I entered a twelve step program and finally decided to put away forever the empty thrills of the “am-I-having-fun-yet” existence of the addict.

One day, after Charles had returned home and we were going to give our marriage another try, he suggested that we take a hiking outing. I didn’t want to go, but I called my sponsor Joy and she said “Why not give the hike a whirl? Ask God to go with you too. Let Him show you His creation through His eyes. Feel God in nature. Ask Him what He loves to look at.” We prayed.

Charles and I stopped at a little mountain hotel for breakfast. It overlooked a field of mountain grass and flowers. I thought to myself, “All the colors and varieties of plants, each working perfectly to sustain it’s own life. How did He do that?” I was filled with the wonder of a child. “So this is what God likes to look at,” I said to Charles.

I hiked ten miles that day. I saw two waterfalls tumbling over each with the foam of the energy forming little rainbows. A green hummingbird stopped a few inches from my face as if God were saying, “Hello,” through him. I don’t know if I realized that I was feeling God at that time, but later on I did.

Sometimes I felt shaky and disoriented, but the new, sober me made the journey joyfully. It taught me another powerful lesson: God loves me enough to let me pay the consequences for my addictions, but He never deserts me. He is always right there, and even in the worst of circumstances, withdrawal, can draw you to Himself and His love and joy.

From her childhood on, Lynne had always known and experienced God in nature. Like me, however, her addiction had broken her sensitivity to nature. This Nature Exercise helped Lynne restore her feelings of closeness with God:

The greatest time of happiness in my life was my mid-teen years--fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. I was a camp counselor on the Menominee River in northern Wisconsin and was having a wonderful time taking seventh grade girls up and down the river. I have always been most comfortable outdoors--the streams, the rapids, the pine trees, the stars in a very black sky, the smell of wood smoke, portaging and carrying canoes from lake to lake, even killing the mosquitoes.

I can still feel the great calm of being and belonging there. We were all part of a scene that had been created by God. We had campfires every night and it was church to me. The fires that we made were like candles in a cathedral. It was a really happy time.

Lynne's discouragement and hopelessness over her addictions completely disappeared within the first couple of weeks of doing this exercise. God's gentle persuasion, His meeting us at our level, worked more quickly for Lynne than anyone I have ever sponsored. She began to devour any experience of nature that would bring her closer to the prize--an intimate, personal relationship with God.

Morgan, one of my interviewees, grew up on a farm and from earliest childhood associated God with nature.

I used to go out in the summertime when the alfalfa hay was still green. It wasn't ready to mow. It was about two feet tall, and I used to lie in it and watch the bugs crawl around. There are all kinds of experiences like that on a farm.

We had gone to an auction one time and had bought two lambs--Punch and Judy. When Judy got pregnant, the first offspring she had were twins. I loved their tiny, wobbly little legs and their long tails and cute faces. We bottle fed them because with twins the mother didn't have enough milk. We would bring out the old-fashioned type of Coke bottles and put little nipples on them and give them formula--just like you do for a baby. I felt that God was right there with us.

Father Buck was also trained in nuclear physics.

Here is what he told me about getting to know God through His physical laws of nature:

I was always very interested in physical sciences and in the nature of the world and the universe-- why and how fast things fell, what the stars were doing up there, why the moon shone. As a youngster, I meditated on those questions, either by myself or with friends. When kids sleep out in the backyard in the summertime and spend long hours looking at the sky and talking, the power and presence of God seem very natural.

We used to ask questions like "Is this planet we live on just one small atom in somebody's great, huge world that we are part of?" or "Do animals have the equivalent of our soul?" Then the answers were unknown and there was a mystery to them. Science has taught me, however, that God brings a certain order to the universe and that everything is the way it should be. There is no doubt in my mind that He is a benevolent God and that He loves me and wants very good things for me. I just don't remember when I didn't know God through nature.

So here is the Nature Exercise. Do it as often as you wish, for there is no limit to God's creation. If you seek God there, you will feel Him as He enjoys it with you.

## Checklist

Each time you feel God in nature, put a check mark next to the place or event. As the feeling grows stronger and stronger, make bigger and bigger check marks. When you are finished with the page, ask yourself if you now have a better idea of what God is like and what God likes.

### Experience of God:

Sun	
Flowers	
Wind	
Water	
Rain	
Snow	
Storms	
Mountains	
Deserts	
Animals	
Moon and Stars	
Trees and Forests	



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Have these exercises made a difference in your life? Please let us know. Contact us at:

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