



# Courage to Change

Enhancing Lifelong Recovery and Personal Growth



*What is laid down, ordered, factual is never enough to embrace the whole truth; life always spills over the rim of the cup.*  
--Boris Pasternak

We like control. We want to know what to expect. We like to think we have things figured out and know the answers. But God cannot be contained by a human definition-- and life will not stay in place after we try to put it there.

When we go to work, we expect our routine to fit the normal pattern, but sometimes surprises await us. When we talk to our partner about an important topic, we expect a certain outcome-- but our partner is a separate person with a separate outlook. Something happens that throws us a curve ball. When we accept that life will spill over the rim, there is no need to add our anxiety to the situation. We already know that we cannot contain it, and we learn to go with the flow. We are not in charge of everything, and we never will be. We are not responsible to keep the world on track, only to deal as best as we can with what comes our way.

*Today, as life spills over the rim of the cup, I will strive to go with the flow.*

--From Wisdom to Know: More Meditations for Men

## Quick Links

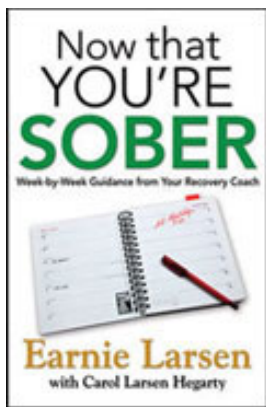
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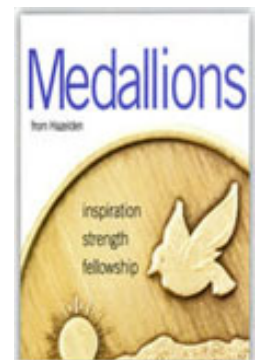
## Ask the Expert



**Question:** I am recently out of treatment, and I have family and financial responsibilities to take care of. I need to hit the ground running and make up for lost time. Is it really necessary to attend regular meetings and have regular contact with my sponsor?

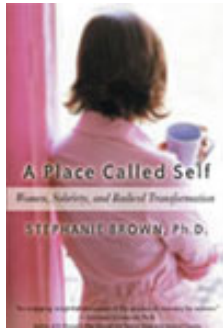
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## Medallions



## Meditations

## A Story of Hope



### A Place Called Self: Women, Sobriety, and Radical Transformation

Recovery is not a move from bad to good, but from false to real. This is the transformation. The point of surrender and new abstinence represents a letting go of the old self--a false self dominated by a façade of denial, hiding, and desperate attempts to be good and "hold it together." By accepting her loss of control, the woman in recovery opens the door to finding her real, authentic self, the woman she is underneath the layers of defense that have protected her--her false self--perhaps for her entire life. That doesn't mean her real self is "bad" or "good." These categories no longer apply. It is reality, being real, that now guides her rather than her efforts to be good or bad.

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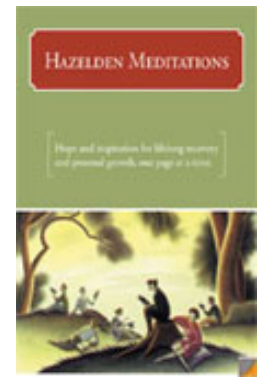
## Spiritual Reflection



### Cultivating Hope

In *Cultivating Hope*, spiritual leader and recovery expert Karen Casey reveals everyday ways that we can open our hearts and minds to the awesome power of hope. For each week of the year, she offers a guiding principle with an accompanying essay that can help you achieve inner peace.

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To purchase these and other products designed to enhance your recovery and personal growth, visit [hazelden.org/bookstore](http://hazelden.org/bookstore) or call 800-328-9000.

**Question: I am recently out of treatment, and I have family and financial responsibilities to take care of. I need to hit the ground running and make up for lost time. Is it really necessary to attend regular meetings and have regular contact with my sponsor?**

**Answer:** In the early AA literature, "doing what it takes" meant not only staying clean and sober, but also moving into the life of the Promises--which meant faithfully doing one's "daily disciplines." Each of those words is precious and powerful.

*Daily*, of course means every day. And in recovery, it doesn't take long before you realize that every day sometimes means every hour, or every half hour, or sometimes every ten seconds. It means as often as it takes. It means committed. It means all the way in. It means "all it takes is all there is."

*Disciplines* means those actions that must be taken whether you feel like it or not. Your program never asks, "How are you feeling?" It asks, "How are you doing?" Only *doing* is doing. "Thinking about" is not doing. "Planning for" is not doing. "Feeling" surely is not doing. *Only doing is doing.*

Early in recovery, lots of people groan when they hear such talk. It all seems so hard. Working a good program seems like such an effort. And it seems like it's going to take so long. *For the rest of my life?* Often, the spirit falters.

But program wisdom tells us that keeping on the path "for the rest of my life" can only happen one day at a time. When the rubber hits the highway, it means "just for today." You don't have to and should not look down the many years of the rest of your life. All you have to do is look at today. Just for today, am I willing to put my *sobriety first*? Am I willing to do what it takes *just for today*? Who knows about tomorrow? Tomorrow isn't here yet, and for all we know, it may never come. So the real question is, "Am I willing put sobriety first for just this minute, for this hour, for this day?"

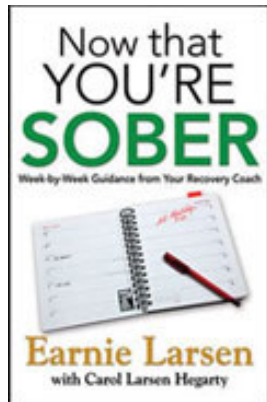
*Daily* means today. *Disciplines* means do it. It means act. It means put your muscles into motion. It means do the next right thing.

That's all. Not the next right thing for the next ten or twenty years. It means right here, right now, today. Are you willing to do the next right thing for the sake of the rewards you will gain by doing so?

**The rewards are not only real--they're better than anything you can imagine at the start of your recovery journey.**

*People become what they practice.* What once, at the start of recovery, may have seemed burdensome and difficult will become natural. Going to meetings becomes comfortable and enjoyable. Sponsors become dear friends. Honesty and gratitude become the air breathed by the soul. Humility becomes the heartbeat of the spirit. Service to others becomes a priority and a privilege. A life other than one built on the values of recovery becomes unthinkable. Your new life becomes the most precious thing you have to bequeath to the loved ones coming along behind you.

**Excerpted from *Now That You're Sober* by Earnie Larsen.**



[Now That You're Sober](#)

Week-by-Week Guidance from Your Recovery Coach  
Softcover, 288 pp.

Those who plug into a solid aftercare program are less likely to relapse. During the first, all-important year of sobriety, clients will have questions about relapse, sponsorship, spirituality, and building a support network. With clarity and insight, Earnie Larsen serves as a personal recovery coach, offering words of wisdom and inspiration and practical advice to help clients develop and effective aftercare plan in this portable aftercare program.

List price: \$14.95

Online price: \$13.45

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## **A Place Called Self: Women, Sobriety, and Radical Transformation**

Recovery is not a move from bad to good, but from false to real. This is the transformation. The point of surrender and new abstinence represents a letting go of the old self--a false self dominated by a façade of denial, hiding, and desperate attempts to be good and "hold it together." By accepting her loss of control, the woman in recovery opens the door to finding her real, authentic self, the woman she is underneath the layers of defense that have protected her--her false self--perhaps for her entire life. That doesn't mean her real self is "bad" or "good." These categories no longer apply. It is reality, being real, that now guides her rather than her efforts to be good or bad.

### ***Between the Ideal and Real***

Conflict for women goes way back. Society has set strict roles for women, roles that are set like bars in a cage around who they can be. While big changes have occurred during the last four decades, there is still a lot of pressure on women to live out certain roles. They are supposed to be deferential and passive and demure. Women are not supposed to have needs, wishes, or motives. Women are not supposed to exist, really except to care for others.

It's hard to know the real you when there is so much of you that's not supposed to exist. But the fact is that every woman has multiple parts--various needs, wishes, motives--and she often holds them in secret, from others as well as from herself. As a woman in recovery begins to know the real self, the parts she wasn't supposed to have, she feels conflict. A woman can end up feeling conflict about virtually anything.

### ***Fear of Negative Traits and Feelings***

As you grow in recovery, you become aware of things about yourself that you'd perhaps rather not know. Things like the fact that you have a nasty side to yourself. Selfishness. Greed. Envy. Anger. Hate. Never mind that these traits are normal and every human being has them. You feel especially lousy about them because you're a woman. A good woman isn't supposed to have these nasty traits. So it's a double whammy. These are things that come with being alive, and many people don't celebrate these

parts of themselves, but there's still less room for women to be angry and aggressive and selfish than there is for men. You try hard to get rid of these traits, these feelings, but you can't, and you feel conflicted.

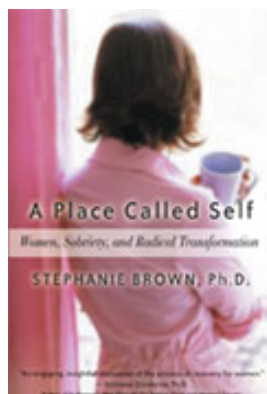
Many women confuse internal conflict with character defects, and they struggle in recovery to grasp the difference. Like conflict, character defects are normal and part of being human.

Character traits are the qualities of a personality, the ingredients of a self: who we are, what we feel, and what we value and believe in. Character traits may also be character defects when the trait habitually gets in the way of healthy growth. For example, say a woman has a character trait of using anger as a defense. She may intensify this character trait if she cannot recognize or accept that she feels conflicted. She may believe that she shouldn't feel any bad feelings, so she works hard to deny the reality that she does feel negatively. She may act out her "character defects" with herself and with others in an attempt to quiet or resolve her conflicts. So both the anger and the conflicts get worse. More intense, more unresolvable.

This can get confusing. A woman may very well recognize that she feels conflict, but she decides that the conflict she feels is itself a character defect, something she should work to eliminate. Instead of being able to accept the complexity within herself, she works harder to make the bad go away.

Remember the paradox? The path to wholeness is through accepting the divided parts of the self. Part of that is accepting that the negative parts of the self exist.

**Excerpted from *A Place Called Self: Women, Sobriety, and Radical Transformation* by Stephanie Brown, Ph.D.**



### [\*A Place Called Self\*](#)

Women, Sobriety, and Radical Transformation  
Softcover, 208 pp.

For many women, newfound sobriety--with its hard-won joys and accomplishments--is often a lonely and unsatisfying experience. Here, pioneering therapist Stephanie Brown, Ph.D., helps readers understand that leaving behind the numbing comfort of alcohol or other drugs means you must face yourself, perhaps for the first time. With personal stories and gentle guidance, Brown helps readers unravel painful truths and confusing feelings in the process of creating a new, true sense of self.

List price: \$13.95

Online price: \$12.55

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## **Cultivating Hope**

In *Cultivating Hope*, spiritual leader and recovery expert Karen Casey reveals everyday ways that we can open our hearts and minds to the awesome power of hope. For each week of the year, she offers a guiding principle with an accompanying essay that can help us achieve inner peace.

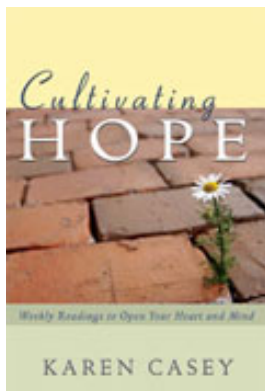
The idea of developing a more hopeful perspective on life is more plausible when we accept that we have the personal power, right now, to *make the choice* to be more hopeful. In other words, hope is not entirely elusive, and never is it unattainable. Perhaps it seems that way at times, particularly if we have been struggling in a dead-end job or a painful relationship that brings little joy or peace of mind. But we can change our circumstances, or how we feel within them--even while leaving the external circumstances unchanged--simply by deciding to change our minds. The power that comes from this very important exercise is always available to us.

We have all been in the company of others who see the bright side of every situation, no matter how difficult. Perhaps we admire the quality in them; sometimes we may envy it; and, depending on our frame of mind, we may even resent it. The lesson for us here is that what someone else can do, we can do, too. It's just possible that the person standing before us with the positive

perspective has been sent to us as a guide, as an example of another way to see the world as full of opportunities, where we may see problems. Remember, our messengers are everywhere. They will seek us out--we cannot hide from them.

This principle offers great comfort if we make the effort to understand it and practice it. We make many decisions daily and are constantly offered opportunities for making choices. Every meal we eat, every book we read, every idea we share, every plan we make with friends is based on an unconscious or a conscious decision. Making choices is second nature to us. Many of them are made with little thought, but they are choices nonetheless. Should I call a friend even though I am tired? Should I eat this dessert even though I'm on a diet? Seeing these "habits" as opportunities for the creation of hope in our lives is a simple step, actually, but it's one we have to be willing to take.

**Excerpted from *Cultivating Hope* by Karen Casey.**



[Cultivating Hope](#)

Weekly Readings to Open Your Heart and Mind  
Softcover, 208 pp.

In *Cultivating Hope*, spiritual leader and recovery expert Karen Casey reveals everyday ways that we can open our hearts and minds to the awesome power of hope. For each week of the year, she offers a guiding principle with an accompanying essay that can help each of us achieve inner peace. Themes include healing through the expression of love, gaining a fresh outlook by understanding our anger, and freeing ourselves of constraint by letting go of judgment.

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