

Let it Begin with Me

Why let it begin with me? Service is a vital step in learning. Once a person fully understands the concept of learning by helping others, he or she begins to grow personally and as a leader. Our self-esteem grows as we reach out to help others. We become confident in ourselves and our abilities as we practice and develop new hidden talents.

Gratitude in Action

Some time ago I received from the World Service Office an informal photo of Lois W., cofounder of our program. When I want to get a clearer perspective on Al-Anon's origins and its place in my life, I look at my picture of Lois.

What I see in this woman's image is gratitude in action. I see Lois as an image of the many Al-Anon members from whom I have received the peace of this program—regular folks from all walks of life, people with no special credentials, degrees certificates, titles, or privileges.

Each of them has done or said something from which I've gained a measure of serenity, courage, or wisdom. Each of them has striven to pass on a sense of a spiritual awakening with the same open-handed generosity extended to them. Each of them has helped me by acting on the thought that service is gratitude in action.

Lois' photo reminds me that I have much for which to give thanks and that I have an opportunity to give thanks in a very concrete way. Any and every service that I perform in Al-Anon holds an opportunity for me to acknowledge my gratitude and to practice the same generosity of spirit that I have so much appreciated in others.

The picture of Lois also provides me with reassurance. Lois had the common touch, she wore no halo, she achieved serenity through no special rigorous plan. She was guided by the same fallible human sense of inner light or Higher Power available to each of us, and she was satisfied with this condition. I feel reassured that today I can practice gratitude in action to the best of my ability and that in doing so I can hope to experience more of the sense of confident expectation I believe I see in Lois. When I practice gratitude, I give the proper thanks for all of the guidance I have received, and I try to cultivate the honesty, openness, and willingness that enable me to continue to receive it.

My picture of Lois also reminds me of a simple truth that I often overlook: Our program exists only because of the thousands of members like Lois who have been willing to serve others. Al-Anon is literally comprised of service: Without it, there would be no fellowship. Because no meeting takes place without it, service must be acknowledged as one of the cornerstones of Al-Anon, I am benefiting from a long and continuous line of service extending back as far as Lois.

Isaac Newton said of his life and work that, if he had seen so far, it was "by standing on the shoulders of giants.: Perhaps we in this program should adapt his reflection and acknowledge that, if in Al-Anon we have seen so far, it is because we have all stood on the shoulders of those who have prepared the way for us.

Participating in service has clearly demonstrated to me some of the day-to-day reality of recovery in Al-Anon stretching back over the last half-century; it has given me a sense that there is lasting hope in the world and that I can make a difference in preserving and imparting a continuing sense of positive achievement.

I see in my picture of Lois the presence of an inner light that she seems ready, willing, and able to share.

"When I Got Busy, I Got Better"; "Gratitude in Action" pg 33-5

1. Most success stories in Al-Anon service begin with the positive encouragement of someone else who is already involved in service.

Many Voices One Journey pg 123

How did someone encourage me in my Al-Anon service? How did I pass that encouragement on to someone else?

2. “We know from experience that people do not recover in isolation, and that no service work is effective if done alone.” Executive Director Ric B.

Many Voices One Journey pg 323

How have I reached out for help in service? What was that experience like?

3. “Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console...to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive...” Instead of questioning what life is giving us, perhaps we might profit more by asking what we ourselves can give.

Courage to Change pg 188

Prayer in action is love, love in action is service.

Mother Teresa

How have my actions today been of service to others?

4. As we nurture our groups, we nurture and empower ourselves.

Courage to Change pg 251

How has my group nurtured and empowered me?

5. Recovery in Al-Anon is all about reaching out for help, and service is no exception. By asking for help in service, we again move toward healthy relationships and away from the outdated thinking that tells us we have to do everything on our own. No one has to do it alone. Al-Anon is a team effort, working for a shared spiritual purpose.

Discovering Choices pg 244

Describe the types of healthy relationships you have experienced in service?

6. I realized that being in service made me feel obligated to maintain my own personal growth in the program, and I benefit from that obligation. The same defects that cause trouble in our homes show up in our dealings with others, so service in Al-Anon is another arena in which to discover those defects. Surrounded by the love and acceptance of my Al-Anon family, I could begin to flower—to let God untangle the qualities He had given me from their distortions.

In All Our Affairs pg 132

How has being surrounded by love and acceptance of my Al-Anon family helped me grow when my defects of character show up while dealing with others?

7. I learned through Al-Anon service that part of being self-supporting in a relationship meant addressing problems and resolving conflict. I began to ask myself how I could honestly sponsor someone else if I couldn't resolve conflicts I had with my own Sponsor. When the next problem with my Sponsor arose, I prepared myself by praying, taking an inventory, reasoning it out with another member, and then addressing the conflict with my Sponsor.

It wasn't easy or pleasant at first; as our literature says, it takes courage to change. I think it shocked both of us the first time I yelled at her. The doormat was doing the shouting! Later I discovered that we were overheard, when several Al-Anon "sisters" congratulated me. Our sponsorship relationship had changed; we had become equals. I was no longer willing to let another human being be my Higher Power.

Through sponsorship I have learned that we are all human, and anyone can at times show the part of themselves that is "the good, the bad, and the ugly," as my second Sponsor's husband would say. I appreciate that we had a relationship that didn't only show her good qualities, but also the not-so-good qualities, as that allowed me the freedom to show her who I really was, too. I appreciate the mutual respect, as well as the mutual responsibility and accountability, I am grateful for her words of encouragement—"You can do that"—whenever I encountered something new, and her letting go as I moved away from the social benefits of her sponsorship to grow in new and different ways.

Through my experiences of having, as well as being, a Sponsor, I have also learned that no matter what is happening in my life; the God I discovered in Al-Anon can be trusted to be there with me when I ask Him.

Many Voices One Journey pg 272-3

What tools have I learned from Al-Anon service that help me resolve conflicts within my personal relationships?

8. Today I like to think that I get to take an active part in the growth of Al-Anon through service. I'm not doing Al-Anon a favor; Al-Anon is doing me one. It actually thrills me to remember that. I'm allowed to take part! You let me!

Listening, hearing, thinking, and reading about a spiritual awakening are fine, but if I really want this gift, there is something I can do about it: I can get involved.

Courage to Change pg 336

How has being involved in service brought about a spiritual awakening in my life?

9. There is no better way to keep our spiritual benefits than by giving them away with love, free of expectations, and with no strings attached."

Courage to Change pg 266

What spiritual benefits have I experienced by giving to others with love?

10. The more I give of myself and the more generously I open my heart and my mind to others, the more growth I will experience as I deal with my problems. I learn in Al-Anon never to measure my *giving* against my *getting*; the very giving provides my reward.

"The giver is only a channel for the gifts he has received from God. He cannot hoard or withhold them without blocking the channel."

One Day at a Time pg 288

In this fellowship, I am but a channel for Gods loving help.

One Day at a Time pg 304

How has my heart and mind been opened as a result of my giving?

11. Today, as we continue to practice all we have learned, we care for ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually far better than we had ever thought possible. Part of that self-caring involves understanding that love is not lessened when given away. In fact, the more love we offer, the more love we will find within ourselves. Thus, whenever we truly give of ourselves, almost magically we find that there is more of our *selves* to give.

Ironically, the only real way to keep the riches we receive is to give them away. By taking advantage of these opportunities to practice unconditional love, we make love an ongoing part of our lives and we learn that by giving, we always receive.

How Al-Anon Works pg 100-1

Have I ever out given my Higher Power or have I ever given more than I have received through service in Al-Anon?

12. Albert Schweitzer said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

When I Got Busy, I Got Better pg36-7

How happy am I? How does service allowed me to I obtain that happiness?

13. The magic of Al-Anon service lies in benefits that we cannot anticipate before we've actually done any service. Those of us involved in service are grateful because it boosts our self-confidence and self-esteem—which some of us experience as an unanticipated miracle. That's why many of us look back at our early service work and consider it as a gift from our Higher Power.

Discovering Choices pg 244

In what ways has the magic of service boosted my self-confidence and self-esteem?

I've heard it said that we can do no great things, only little things with great heart. When I set out Al-Anon literature, type a telephone list, or simply welcome a newcomer standing alone after a meeting, I do a little thing with great heart. When I act on behalf of what I care about, I strengthen my ability to care. I reach out with the thankful realization that I am doing what others have done for me in the past—and with the confident expectation that, as I give to the world, the world will give to me.

When I Got Busy, I Got Better pg 23

Describe what it is like to give little things with a great heart?

14. Nowhere is the spirit of Al-Anon service more clearly articulated than in the prayer on the back of the *Just for Today* bookmark:

"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

"O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

How Al-Anon Works pg 101

How has my Higher Power used me as an instrument of peace?

**Let It Begin with Me
When anyone anywhere reaches out for help
Let the hand of Al-Anon and Alateen
Always be there and
Let it begin with me**