

Courage, Hope, and Promises

AA Retreat Talk

Intro: We hear lots of **5th Steps at St. Paul**. John, in his mid 20s, came to tell me his story. He was raised in Pittsburgh. Parents were well off. Started **drinking and drugging** as a young teenager and was able to hide it. Went away to boarding schools. Parents were divorced. Little supervision. **Auto accident** while high on drugs and alcohol and was lucky to survive. He recovered his health but continued as before. He was a **danger to himself** and others. He went to college a few years. **Life was a big party**. In and out of rehab, went to occasional meetings but nothing sunk in. As I heard all this, I grieved for John and his family. How many lives did he mess up?

But one day he had an "AHA!" moment. Sitting on the porch he felt a **soft breeze, warm embrace. He started to sob like a baby. Something was happening in him** – something was changing. He was sorry for all the grief he caused people. Some of you guys know what that is like. I told John that was a **touch of God**.

I The road back from serious addiction is long and slow for most people. So many regrets. So many resentments and amends to do. One issue is the need to drop friends that are using. Need to **find a reason for living**. Need to find the way to be a **real man, and not a wimp**.

A Getting sober is a **big step** to finding **purpose in life**. Your head clears up. Some **dignity** restored. Things get normal. But it takes lots of **courage** to move forward.

1 "God grant me the **serenity** to accept the things I cannot change, **courage** to change the things I can, and **wisdom** to know the difference." Reinhold Niebuhr

2 A few thoughts on **courage**. Sobriety does not change the circumstances of our lives. There are trials that do not disappear all of a sudden.

Relationships that were damaged don't automatically heal. **Self-love and self-forgiveness** take a lot of work.

B The thing is we are changing all the time. If we are **working the Steps** and have come to **trust God**, we now have **an ally** and not a make believe ghost out in space.

1 You have crossed that bridge and you are **building that relationship on** solid ground.

That's why you are here this weekend.

II When you step out in **courage** to change the things you can change, you notice improvements in your life. You **get along** with people better. You are more **pleased** with yourself. You **appreciate people** better. You are grateful for the fellowship of **AA & NA**.

A What we are saying is that **Hope** builds up in you. You can expect to be happy living a "**normal life**", that there is happiness without using and abusing. Wow.

1 One of the **great tools** you have is the **Big Book**. It is a book filled with Hope.

B The **Twelve Steps are a life line to sobriety**. They are God's gift to his people.

1 Lots of wisdom in the Big Book and the 12 Steps. Check out **chapter 6 on "The Promises."** They are impressive.

II "**The Promises.**" These read like a **heavenly wish list** of things that will make us happy. All of them are based on solid truth. The promises fill us with **hope** that things will continue to improve.

A **"We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness."**

Some of you can think back to dark days of using. Down and out. But now you can see a change in yourself.

1 One of the best decisions was to knock out alcohol and drugs. You are not dependent upon them any longer. **You are free.**

2. You realize that **happiness** is something from **within you**. We need to be content about ourselves. **Serenity** is now attainable. E.g. a man said **he lost the desire to drink** while on retreat at St. Paul. Healing from God.

B **"That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will leave us."** We realize that we are not the only ones that suffer loss and defeat. We can get up and try again.

1 We find the way to **forgive ourselves** – let go of **guilt and shame**.

2 Instead of self-pity we grow **in self-esteem, self-love**. We can trust God more.

C **"We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves."**

1 We start to hear the **inner voice of God** better. **Prayer** becomes more sincere, more soothing, more personal.

2 We respond to **good inspirations** that come to us. E.g. think of someone else not ourselves. Working the Steps brings us closer to God.

III We **Christians** have a big Book which we call **the Bible**. It is a compendium of smaller books which tell us **about God and his work among his people**.

A This Big Book is a book of promises found in Old and New Testaments. **Faith is staking our lives on the promises of God.**

1 The **Bible is God's love letters** to his people. By turning to God and praying more faithfully, we discover again God loves us and has plans for us.

B **Jer. 29:** "I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your **welfare**, not your woe! plans to give you **a future full of hope.**" If we are running away from God, how can he reveal his plans to us? God keeps promises.

1 So we pray to know God's plans, his will for us that fills us with hope.

C **Psalm 23** reminds us that "**the Lord is my Shepherd...**You guide me along the right path for the sake of your name. Even though I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm for you are at my side; your rod and your staff give me courage." Welcome these Promises.

1 Psalm 27 invites us to trust in the Lord with all our heart.

D **Rom. 8:28** "For those who love God, **all things work together unto good** according to God's purpose." God writes straight with crooked lines. God can take the suffering and tragedies of our lives and bring good out of them. It happened with Jesus...

E Jesus makes many promises. **John 15.** "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. **You are my friends** if you do what I command you."

1 "I am **with you always** until the end of time." **Mt. 28:16**

2. The ultimate promise is **eternal life.** "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day." John 6:56

Closing

We have come together this weekend to spend some **prime time with God** and our friends. Jesus said, "Where **2 or 3 gather in my name**, I am there in your midst." In this holy place we have found courage and hope to continue the journey as bravely as we can.

May God fill you with an abundance of his serenity and joy as you return to family and friends. God bless you.