

The Alcoholic's

**Twelve  
Steps  
Into  
Life**

Brochure from 1978

Not Official AA material

The editors of this tract are members of the Bishop's Advisory Commission on Alcoholism, the Diocese of Chicago. The meditations of the Twelve Steps are the personal reflections of a colleague who chooses to remain anonymous. All of the contributors of prayers are advocates of the A.A. movement. Each has been touched by the disease of alcoholism—mostly by the illness or deaths of loved ones. Some have had to struggle with it themselves.

The Rev. David M. Moss, Ph.D. is the Chairman of Chicago's Commission on Alcoholism and a member of the Clinical Staff of The Center for Religion and Psychotherapy of Chicago. He is also a Chaplain at Northwestern University, author of many publications in the field of pastoral care and serves on the editorial board of *The Journal of Religion and Health*.

The Rev. Robert W. Carlson, D. Min. is Director of Field Education and Professor of Ministry at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. Like Dr. Moss, he has served as a parish priest and has been active in alcohol education for several years. He was formally the Director of The Pastoral Counseling Center of Annapolis.

## INTRODUCTION

The most recent statistics on alcohol consumption show that Episcopalians have a larger percent of drinkers than any other denomination. Tragically, many of these people become alcoholic. You may know such a person. You may even be caught in an alcoholic situation at this moment. If so, you know the frustration of "preaching" to or being nagged about drinking. In either instance, natural reactions seem to make things worse rather than better.

Ever since one of our priests, Samuel Shoemaker, helped to design the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, many have realized their spiritual value and release from a hell of self-destruction. Many have also valued the experience of A.A.: that it frequently takes an alcoholic, not just to know one, but to help one. This is a unique value of the following meditations.

They are meditations growing out of years of commitment to the A.A. program. They are meant not only for alcoholics themselves, but for those who work or live with them, and those who love them. The spiritual program upon which these steps depend is a "Rule of Life," a disciplined way of *living* followed by many religious groups. One need not be an Episcopalian, or a member of any denomination for that matter, to meet God through them. God is available to all who earnestly seek sobriety and the reality of renewed life.

However, if you are not ready to change, set this tract aside. Save it for a time when you feel an urgency, an intense concern for yourself or that friend drinking a path into hell. Then pick it up. The invitation will still be there, and the A.A. Steps *will* provide a direction for change—a rebirth in twelve profound ways.

D.M.M.  
R.W.C.

**I. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol . . . that our lives had become unmanageable.**

*Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee, Oh Lord*

Beginnings are difficult for all of us. This beginning, a first step towards a new and changed life, is no different, no easier than any other. For us as alcoholics, for all who relate to alcoholics, it may be the most difficult beginning we shall ever make. As the first step towards new life, this is a beginning we shall make each day for the rest of our lives. We have made a lot of beginnings which turned out to be false starts. We meant what we said each time we promised to stop drinking. Yet somehow we have not been able to control our drinking or our lives.

Life has been drinking and binges, hangovers and blackouts of the past; a blotted-out present and a frightening future. We are panic stricken with the awareness that we cannot quit—the fears and the terrors of the addiction that we have kept hidden from ourselves, but not from others. Life has a fear *further* than death.

Taking this first step, beginning to face up to the fact that everyone but us knows that our lives have become unmanageable and that we are powerless over alcohol, requires healing and a change in our lives. This change, however frightening, however awful, is not nearly as lonely as our fantasies have made it. We do not have to go through this life and this change alone.

Despite these promises of healing and new life—God's gift of salvation to us—we who are "blind," go on saying we can see the "light." We stumble along crippled and sick, saying we can walk and are well. We are unwilling to do the ONE thing that we *can* do to help ourselves, and that is to say we are ready for help.

Why? There are a lot of reasons, most of them rationalizations to avoid the real reasons. We



want things to be “perfect”—and we want to make them perfect—to play God to ourselves and others, to be in extraordinary control. The maneuvers we use to stay collected or to give others the illusion that we are “in control” fool only us. We need to be in control to keep others from getting close, and we do this so we don’t have to control ourselves. It seems so much easier to control others this way. We put them off with our incessant conversations and questions. Either we idolize others or are prejudiced against them. These feelings are actually control strategies which give us the feeling of being independent, perfect and powerful. Underneath we may not consciously feel good about being in control but we are able to avoid that feeling dis-ease.

This new beginning means we will have to give up some of these fantasies and illusions, that we will have to start being who we really are. It means we will have to learn to be human, real. We will have responsibility for ourselves and our lives, with God in control, and with gifts and friends whom we love and accept, not use for our own selfish concerns. We won’t have to fit into social stereotypes anymore, and that includes drinking and the behavior that goes with it. We can be real, vulnerable, mistaken, and dependable. We can be ourselves.

Still we hesitate even when things have been so bad and we have a promise that they can be good again. We are afraid because that first step requires not only a change, but a *risk*, and we are people who are afraid of being afraid. We do not risk at all. We are alone. We dare not trust: others, ourselves or God. Even when the door is open for new life, we are afraid to step through it. We are unable to ask for help because this time we might be answered. The task of sobriety seems so great, when underneath we sense our inadequacy to deal with it. We can even find an excuse like that.

Today—beginning with today and only for to-

day—we take this first step to sobriety. For some of us, who wish to surrender to a new way of living, to “die” to ourselves, the time is *now* and today is God’s. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives.

*Almighty God, help me. Now, only You can. I am in the power of that “fallen angel,” cunning and baffling, who today goes under the name of Alcohol. Deliver me, Lord, from this power. Give me the humility that I may acknowledge my arrogance in feeling so secure in You that I could not fall into such disease. Renew your Spirit within me that I may proclaim your greatness in the land of living. All of which I ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Rev. Phyllis Edwards



## II. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

*Yea, Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, You Are With Me*

We need to and we can come to a belief in a power greater than ourselves; we who have gone astray, we who have set up so many blocks to our own restoration and growth in Your divine providence. But how do we continue to restore our relationships with God and others that we have so badly abused?

In one sense we do not, and in another sense we do—as only we can. We do not *do* anything to restore the relationship with God because the relationship is still there just as it always has been, a gift of love freely given and always unearned. We only need to accept this gift. It is so hard sometimes but if we do—and receive it fully—we will find that God is with us and always has been. We were never alone in the valley of the shadow of death where we walked or rather staggered for so long.

Our coming to this belief is also a gift which we sometimes hear called “grace.” The power for life is always within us, literally! What we need to do now is turn the light back on. Sometimes the only way we can talk about belief is in terms of how much we doubt. But the emptiness which we feel is the same vastness which can be filled, *not* with alcohol any longer, but with new life.

The funny thing is that when we are drinking we don't even doubt. We are so sure that what we are doing is perfectly “normal,” “typical” and “just right.” It is only when we begin to doubt that we can begin to believe. Until we give up our certainty and begin to doubt what we call “sanity,” we cannot affirm reality, meaningful relationships with others and with God. This will indeed be a change for us because our reality and our meaning in the past have been contained in

a bottle. Our relationships with others are made in the milieu of alcohol. Our God has been alcohol.

When we have begun to face up to this, then what? We are *changing*. We are doing things differently. This change does not involve a return to life as it once was before we drank. We cannot go back to that life, for it is actually death. We are no longer children (if we ever were). Our change is into the future which frightens us and overwhelms us. Yet there is a way to cope with this fear, this change into the future. This step is a slow pace, however: only one at a time, day by day. We have *this* one day in our life to find out what faith and belief and doubt are all about. We have *today* to trust and accept help, the care of God and others. In doing so we become able to care for ourselves and see ourselves as worth caring for. Not in the way we have pretended to be caring: an indulgent, smothering emotion we called "love;" an emotional strategy which isolated us and reinforced our god-like image of ourselves. We have learned to empathize and care for people because we have accepted a power greater than ourselves who cares for us—enough to wait patiently for us to come back to Him.

Care, perhaps more than anything else, restores us to sanity, and a real and meaningful life with others. Care cures and heals. We *can* become whole, loving, real people, open and accepting of others and ourselves. We are able to share the gifts we have been given while recognizing our strengths and weaknesses. Those who are honest with themselves and others, honest about love and feelings, the authentic meaning of words and living will find the solace they seek. Once we have been restored to health, we cannot put it away or save it, for such growth spreads and belongs to all of God's creation.



*Lord, I do not know what is real or an illusion. I have lost clarity in the blindness of my drinking. The lies I have told, the fantasies I have created are a world I have controlled to exist. Show me your creation, your light and your truth. Help me to be aware of your grace so that I may be restored through Your Son our redeemer. Amen.*

The Rev. Nancy Platt



### **III. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.**

*For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory*

This decision, so difficult for all of us, is not the first step on our way to sobriety for good reason. We need to confess, admit that our life needs changing, and find hope that it can be changed before we can do anything about making a decision to change our life. This in itself is new for us. We used to make decisions, even those upon which our life or the lives of others depended before we ever had to struggle with the responsibility or data with which we made the decision. We were very good at jumping to conclusions, and not good at dealing with other facts including the facts about drinking.

Now that we have come to the point where we want to make this decision, we recognize our situation and begin to hope that life has meaning for us. We dimly see possibilities and the options that are available to others. They *can* be available for us, as well. For some of us, those who really have had it with the life of drunkenness and self-hate, these possibilities may sound like salvation. If we do not recognize the reality of our situation, if we do not have the hope which the first two steps offer us, the turning of our will to God leaves us in ambivalence, feeling anger and hostility which infects and distorts the message of salvation.

The words which are probably the most difficult for us to comprehend in this message of the third step are the words "care" and "God as we understood Him." They are words which we have heard, but not experienced; actions which we have mimicked, but in which we have never really participated.

When we talk about "care," we talk about care not only for others, but for ourselves. The latter is more difficult for us because we rarely see ourselves as worth caring for, even by God. The chances are we aren't sure what care is anyway. Care is sharing with others, both the "goods" of life and the "bads," the joy and the sorrow. Care is concern that another is free to act responsibly, to experience his own life according to his/her own needs and being. Care is reverence for another just the way that person is, not the way he should or ought to be. Care frees people and us to be friends, lovers, persons, and family.

How we experience being cared for has a good deal to do with how we understand God. The steps that we follow to sobriety and new life tell us a great deal about how God cares, and how others understand God. We can meet him here if we are willing to give up the stereotypes and myopic view we have had of God in the past. We've probably seen God as punishing, abandoning, and ruling, without any thought for us as we are. We have covered our feelings of helplessness and rejection with a facade so that we can deal with a capricious God. We have lived in the illusion that we could do it better alone. Yet in all these things we have only shown how little we understand God and how we have mixed Him up with past authority figures until we do not see Him at all.

The twelve steps show us a God who is constant, with power to make new, who is able to direct our lives if we will let Him do so. He is ready to forgive and receive us, open to love and worthy of trust. We can see Him often in those around us, and most important to us, we never have to be alone again, not even in the changes we are now going through. The last thing that we understand about God, His constant pressure, assures us that when we are most frightened of the changes we face, we now have someone who can help us accept and deal with this

change one day at a time. He abides with us in and through change, and though we may not always recognize his creation as changing, certainly we can see one change in which His work is good, and that is the change now taking place in our lives. Having experienced Him in this change, we can find the faith and courage to wait for Him in the future changes of this process to sobriety and serenity.

*O God, for the source of strength to do that which I cannot do alone, I now give thanks. Strengthen my decision to turn my will and my life over to your call. Help me to hear and recognize the call and the Caller more clearly. Fill my emptiness with faith in You, and help me faithfully to recognize and join others responding in faith. Help me to remember that You alone are the judge, and help me not judge or fear the judgment of others. Grant that this step and those to follow will raise me into the new life. Amen.*

The Rt. Rev. John M. Allin



#### **IV. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves**

##### *And The Truth Shall Make You Free*

One speaker at an AA meeting, while talking about this step said that he went so far in making an inventory, that he recalled a rock that he threw at a friend when he was six. Although he agreed that this was a far fetched example of making an inventory, he pointed out to us that this incident, like others in his inventory, could tell him something about himself. These were not only isolated events which had caused pain to himself and others, but events which had a common theme or several themes. Among them was how he and we react and respond to different situations, to different relationships, and even how we cope with problems, or fail to cope, and what patterns we use again and again to survive or to destroy ourselves. First and foremost, however, these incidents can only tell us about ourselves if we are honest. Being honest with ourselves and others requires courage. Being honest with ourselves means we must act as though our lives depended on it, for, in fact, they do.

The first step towards this honesty is remembering some things we would rather not remember, like the facts of our drinking. We don't like to admit, even now, there are some things we cannot control. We don't like to remember that whatever the quantity, one drink was, is and will be too much for us. We cannot continue to garnish our lives, and our pasts with olives of fantasy and lemon twists of foolishness. Only by remembering what we do and how we do it can we begin to gain awareness and insight into our lives and our actions.

In the beginning of our inventory many of us make lists which we review and revise. The facts of the past are a diary of a life "existed in," not *lived* in. The facts belong to us. We need to



claim them as *our* past before we can build a new future.

Remembering may be a problem for us because the feelings that were tied to the memories, the anger, the hate, the self-centered love, have been blotted out for so long with alcohol. When we sit down to make the inventory, these feelings have the chance to reassert themselves and we have the chance to feel guilty, or ashamed again, too. When we make the inventory we may need to think a bit about forgiveness. I place forgiveness here because it is given already. What follows now is amendment of life, and that is what we are working towards in our inventory. We discover a past which is uniquely ours. We *are* special in that sense. Although the emphasis seems to be on the negative aspects of the past, an inventory must include the positive, the good gifts of the past, too, for it is the good gifts that are the building stones for our present and future. We need a real perspective, an honest view of ourselves. Our inventory includes the things which are fulfilling as well as those which are emptying, the promised as well as the broken life, the fun and humor we have forgotten or distorted as well as the sadness. Our experience of being alive again gives us strength to face our past, all of it, and gain a new understanding of ourselves as broken persons with a hope of healing and wholeness which is real and present to us. We no longer need live in a life of fantasy and illusion.

*Lord, there are many things I value because someone I loved or respected gave them to me. You gave me my body; help me, therefore, to treasure it as your gift. Let this thought prevent me from taking into that body anything which will harm it or destroy it. In this way, enable me to show my respect, my thanks, and my love for you, my God. Amen.*

The Rev. Charles L. Wood

## V. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

### *And Forgive Us Our Trespasses*

Most of us would secretly like to make this admission to God, and forget the part that talks about anything which sounds like all our stereotypes of confession. Yet telling another person the exact nature of our wrongs does one other very important thing for us beside being direct with ourselves. It requires us to trust in another, and to form an authentic relationship with that person. In the past, this is something we have found very hard to do.

Bonhoeffer, a pastor who was in another kind of prison—a prison different than alcohol—said, “he who is alone with his sin is utterly alone.” We know that loneliness all too well. For those of us who have been imprisoned in the dilemma of alcoholism, this step moves us even further from our old ways of thinking and behaving. We can no longer continue our self-imposed isolation, our God-like thinking and aspirations, when we are required to seek the help of another and experience his or her acceptance as we would God’s.

This painful scrutiny with another asks one more thing of us besides honesty and a new relationship. It requires *courage* and *risk*, gifts we may not have thought we ever really had or actually needed for growth. Courage and risk are built in to this step. We get a chance to practice them here because they are qualities we will need in the future. For now it is enough that we share old faults which we would rather not even write down, that we risk our past to the compassion of another whom we know has had similar experiences of going astray and being found and brought back safely.

In risking ourselves we discover what others who follow this program already know with a certainty, that acceptance and love come through

this sharing with another. We no longer are alone. These friendships are those which we can in no way ever earn. They are gifts given by those to whom God has already given life as he now gives it to us. The relationships which we perhaps took for granted acquire new depths and new meaning when we realize that those who listen to us do so not out of any desire to control or manipulate or use us. They share our painful past with us. They love us because they were first cared for and loved.

We take another risk when we admit our wrongs to another. We get to know ourselves better as we get to know more readily the person we have been. We gain affirmation of ourselves from God and from those who hear our confessions. We gain new self-esteem and have a sense of being valued perhaps for the first time in our lives. That can be a risk because it is so different from the past ways we have thought about ourselves.

We are offered the gifts of love and care by another in their silence. That may be new for us, too. There are no distractions to minimize what we share in that silence. There is hospitality and an open door to God and to someone who gives qualified time and presence to us. This most valuable gift is free.

*God: You know better than anyone else what has been going on, and you have stuck by me. I want to rejoin the world of family, friends and those with whom I work. I want to be at one with everyone I can. Keep me from projecting on them my feelings of guilt, shame and poor self-image. Your ability, God, to see worth in all people keeps me wanting to live up to that. Please continue to believe in me as I believe and hope in you. Amen.*

The Rev. Rollin J. Fairbanks

## **VI. We're entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

*When I was a Child, I Thought As a Child,  
Now I Put Away Childish Things*

When we say that we are "ready," prepared to have these defects removed, we are talking about giving up something which we once possessed and valued. These defects were behavior and viewpoints which we used as defenses against feelings of helplessness and intimacy. Most of all, however, we used these defects as defenses against anyone who tried to cajole, bribe, manipulate or force us to give up alcohol.

The defects we once valued, the lifestyle which was part of our drinking, now has no place in our lives. We are not only giving up childish things, we are giving up old values and meanings. We are not just drying out, we are asking to be sober. The things we valued, friendships made in bars which dissolved in the bleakness of our hangovers, bottled-up feelings which we repressed until we could not label them, a world which revolved around us, are part of the defects which we wish removed. Surrender does involve giving up these defects, but acknowledging them in the light of sobriety shows us that they are no real loss, and we need not mourn them.

We are asking to make our new beginning more permanent, and so the defenses and defects which isolated us must be given away. We can examine them one-by-one honestly and learn new ways of being persons with integrity and life. We know all these defects by name. We can lump them under "alcoholism" if we like, but we can also recognize them readily when we name them "dishonesty," "self-hate," "blaming," "pride," "selfishness," "greed," and other destructive terms. Then the grasping, demanding lifestyle that leads us only to death is past. By recognizing and giv-

ing up these defects which enslaved us, we are free.

The request that we are making of God puts our lives in perspective. Our relationship to him is one of real friendship, of real love, of creation to Creator. Our request is in essence a desire for new life, and a plea for help which we could not have made before. We have *longed* for help, but those defects kept getting in the way of our *asking* for help or receiving it.

Our willingness to surrender these defects is the result of our discovery that we cannot, do not, need to control everything around us. We have also discovered that we do need God and friends, empathy, care and love. With these gifts we can fill the dead, empty gaps left by the defects we wish to have removed. We are given all that we need and ask for to replace what we are giving up.

*Heavenly Father, you made me and you know me better than I know myself. I have grieved you by my misuse of your gifts of my body, my mind and my spirit. I am sorry. But I know through Christ that where I truly confess my need, your help is ever present. Upheld by the power of your love for me, I beseech you now to remove from me all those defects of will and character which have separated me from you and from my friends and loved ones. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.*

Dr. Cynthia Wedel





## **VII. Humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.**

*Who Shall Not Receive the Kingdom of God as a Little Child . . . .*

Lack of humility is probably one of the most difficult shortcomings we are asking to have removed, and so most of us will stumble a bit with this step. Perhaps the most important part of being humble for us is what it means in our relationships to ourselves and others, including God.

Not long ago a group of people were struggling with the idea of humility. They were also struggling with sobriety. Some had already grasped the idea of what humility is and could put it into action. Others had looked it up in a dictionary and were tossing out definitions for the group to consider. "Truth," "teachability," "self-awareness," "honesty," "limitations" were all part of the discussions. Then we talked about examples of humility, how it worked in practice.

Humility requires courage and grace. Humility depends upon taking the risk of being loved with all our faults. Humility permits growth and maturity. Humility also requires that we listen, thereby providing a space for others to be themselves, to share their awareness, their view of life with us. Humility requires first and foremost the strength to say "I made a mistake, and I was wrong." Then humility demands that we do not wallow in our errors, but pick ourselves up and start again.

The difficulty with being humble is that it also means we must be responsible, for our lives and our behavior. We haven't taken much responsibility in the past, and though we might like to shove the responsibility for our sobriety off on God, that is one more shortcoming we need removed. This program as a whole requires the responsible sharing of our lives with others.

God asks us to help with His work, too.

Humbly, we need to remember that we did not begin it. He did. We are the creation, not the creator, and we are willing to live a little more in the mystery which is life because now we know, and understand our relationship to God.

Humility is the willingness to accept the mysteries of life, and not rationalize everything as we defended our drinking habits. We can say "I don't know," and freely learn from others. Living one day at a time is exactly that acceptance of life's mystery that the future and the past do not belong to us. This, too, is a lesson in humility. We have a responsibility for today, to live up to our potential, to use our gifts for others as well as ourselves. In the past we might have used others and their gifts, now in humility we cannot treat people as objects any more. We have a responsibility to help them become, as we would become, fulfilled human persons. Humility enables us to accept this task with joy.

*Our Father, lift us from the burdens of our past. Over and over again we have failed to match performance with aspiration. Untie these hands that they may serve you. So often they have been bound and limited only to answering the needs of our own pain and insecurity. Free us by your love. Help us to be your friend. Increase our strength, according to Your all-powerful and loving will in Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Rt. Rev. David E. Richards



**VIII. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**

*And, Now, Oh God, Mindful Of The Love*

The setting down of a list of persons we have harmed, not objects or gifts we have misused, but people, is difficult because we are forced to focus on our past relationships. Intimacy, loving, caring, are hard for us even now. Our fears from the past, our memories and feelings still cloud our meetings with others.

The willingness to make amends to them, is as important as the act itself. In some instances, as we know well, the willingness may be all we can do, the desire all that we have. We need humility here, too, lest we imagine that our desire to make amends will automatically make everything right, or that we will be greeted with open arms by all we have harmed just because we wish it so. We need humility to help us see that we cannot undo the past or turn time back. The amends can be made now or in the future if there is the opportunity, but for the most part the making of amends involves behaving differently, rather than a lot of talk about how sorry we are.

There are two persons whom we likely have forgotten to add to our list. The first is ourselves. We need to be on that list, too. The person we might have been, the gifts we were given and have squandered, the life we were endowed with, is gone. It can never be replaced. We can, however, make amends to ourselves, the same way we make them to others. If we are reluctant to do so perhaps it is because we may not see ourselves as worthy of anything but harm. Then we need to go back to humility. We are neither all that bad, or all that good. We are simply mistaken persons who have been given a second chance. The second chance for us is the acting out of salvation, and what it means to receive

new life. Now we can behave differently towards ourselves as well as others in the future. There will be the opportunity, we hope, for amends to ourselves. We might consider welcoming ourselves back with all the openness and love and forgiveness which we desire to accord to others. If we cannot begin by forgiving ourselves, how can we expect to make amends to others?

There is someone else who belongs on the list, and that is God. However we understand God, we recognize that we have a relationship with Him that has been broken, largely by our behavior. Unlike others we have harmed, God has never gone away, however far we have gone. We can take the risk of returning to our relationship with God, of making amends to Him, with the certainty that we will be welcomed back. If we begin with Him, we learn and pass on our experience of making amends with Him to others. We can learn much about patience and kindness and love and courage from Him; virtues we haven't thought much about or encountered recently. When we become willing to make amends, we learn from others how our lives and theirs can be amended, can become whole again.

*Christ, help me to see myself as I am. Help me to know that I never injure myself alone. Every wound I inflict on myself leads me to wound others, especially those who are near and dear to me. Show their faces to me, one by one. Let me look each face in the eye. I will write down their names lest I forget. I will make a list of all whom I have harmed. One at a time, as I harmed them one at a time. Christ, give me strength and will to make amends where this is possible, and to undo the harm I have done. Give me the strength to do this honestly, without excuses. Enter into my weakness with your strength, and make me strong in this resolve. Amen.*

The Rev. Chad Walsh, Ph.D.

**IX. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

*He Asked Life of You and You Gave It to Him*

The norm for making amends is usually the statement "I'm sorry." It is a placating statement, one which demeans the identity of the person who says it without really telling anyone what he/she is feeling. Neither the person who says it nor the person who hears it is accorded the dignity of forgiveness, or has risked anything in the transaction. It's a controlling statement of a sort. "I'm sorry" is socially acceptable, and leaves both parties without recourse. Once said, what else can be expected? These words are said to everybody "to make everything o.k."—from spilt milk to libel. It says more about us and our sense of inadequacy as persons than it does about our behavior which has harmed others. "I'm sorry" does not take much responsibility for the actions of the person who offers it as amends.

How much more difficult to say "I made a mistake;" and say precisely what you think and feel that mistake to be. These words draw into present reality ourselves, and our actions. We claim responsibility for what we have done. That is hard to do, and yet the core of this step involves acceptance of our behavior, and the consequences of that behavior in our relationships with others. In the past, when we drank, it was all so easy to blame what happened on booze, or her, or him, or God, particularly, God. He couldn't get a word in edgewise in His own defense. Perhaps we might begin our making amends with *Him*, and to those whom *He* loves, those whom we did not love as *He* does.

The 12th step gives us the chance to make it up to ourselves, to give our lives in service to others. It is more risky to have to make direct amends to those who were friends, or family, and in some instances, still are. Those who still are



have stood by us in this crisis and are having their own struggles with changing and growing. We still need to make amends to them. Perhaps part of these amends might be our being more sensitive and understanding to their needs for healing. We can't undo the past in any way. We can approximate the changes we need to make now by looking at the past and trying to do things differently now and in the future.

There are those to whom we will make amends, with whom our admission will strengthen or re-establish an old relationship, and there are those who may not wish to risk another meeting with us. In all cases we need to recognize that only God has the power to reconcile and heal. We only put it into action with our desire and attempts to make amends. There are those relationships which will mend best in silence, in listening to one another with care, in letting those we have harmed do the talking, and letting us learn from them what humility and patience means for them and their lives.

In making these amends, whatever the risk appears to be to us, we have another opportunity to turn our situation and our lives over to God, to let his power work in and through us. We need to recognize, too, that God does not just care for them or for us, but for all.

*Heavenly Father, we have taken inventory of ourselves and seek to make amends to those we have hurt during our episodes of destructive drinking. Alcoholism has scared those who have been closest to us and many others as well. Since we know there are damaged relationships that cannot be changed, enable us to identify the changes we can make. Help us to repair personal affronts except when more injury might occur. We ask you to strengthen us in this step, that we may be infused with greater life, to the honor of Your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Rt. Rev. Quintin E. Primo, Jr.

**X. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.**

*Let the Words of my Mouth and the Meditation of my Heart be Acceptable in thy Sight*

The idea of continuing to take personal inventory keeps us from using the steps once, and then forgetting about them. It keeps us humble and in touch with the fact that we still will and do make mistakes as we work towards sobriety. For us sobriety will always be part of a process, one day at a time, one step at a time, rather than a state of being we can put on or off.

For us the prompt admission we have made a mistake is the way we deal with our guilt, the feelings of inadequacy which used to hang over us. Because we choose to live one day at a time, we can wrap up our unfinished business each day. We can learn from our mistakes. We no longer have to trouble ourselves with the half-remembered behavior of our "night out."

This step takes us still further from the self-centered fantasies that we can do it perfectly, that we can control and manipulate right and wrong, good or bad. We learn how to control ourselves when we reflect on our behavior in our inventories. We are promised in this step the hope of doing things differently the next time. We are not promised "peace without a price," without struggle or effort. There are many times when we will stumble on the same behavior we have been working on for weeks, and we need to forgive ourselves as others can forgive us.

This step is, in a sense, a step for beginners. Each of us begins our inventory with the attitude that we are living a life which needs re-evaluation today. The hostility, an honest exchange with a friend, the care of another AA member, are all part of a process by which we grow. Inventories include not just the "bads", but "goods," too.

In this process of growth, when we make an

inventory, we are doing more for ourselves than making a list. We are getting a real assessment of who we are and of our movement away from the self-indulgent rebellion with which we drank and lived. We are taking more and more responsibility for what we do as persons. A slip cannot be blamed on the boss or that party. We know what we did, and with a little reflection, our inventory can tell us why we acted that way.

An inventory is a response to life as it *really* is, not the way we say it is in a drunken haze, or the way we wish it would be. Setting things down on paper has a remarkable way of drawing cold reality into an incident which we would rather not remember. In the AA program we have begun to say "yes" to life, and the inventory can help us keep this positive outlook. We need to use it honestly to learn about ourselves and about our relationships with others. As we take time to reflect upon our inventory, we become more sensitive and aware of life around us. It slows us down a bit and helps us become more involved in what happens to us. We need that. We won't need to live life as fast any more. We probably will be living longer and we certainly will be living more fully and serenely now.

*Enable me to be honest, Lord. As you know, Jesus, I need especially to be honest with myself. Help me to take personal inventory without telling any self-serving lies. I need to look at myself exactly as I am, knowing this is the way you see me. I stand naked before you, Lord. There can be nothing phony or deceitful between you and me. You know me through and through. You give me your acceptance, support and love. Enable me to admit promptly to you, Lord, and others when I have been wrong. When I am weak, Jesus, grant me your strength. When I am anxious and afraid, Jesus, fill me with your courage. Thank you. Thank you! Amen.*

The Rev. Malcolm Boyd

**XI. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God . . . . praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.**

*To Whom all Hearts are Open, All Desires Known And From Whom No Secrets Are Hidden*

At an AA meeting last night, a priest spoke who was a recovered alcoholic. He kept using the term "immersion" to describe his renewal and his commitment to the program. It seemed appropriate that he used a word often connected with Baptism and a new commitment to life in a community. It is in our commitment to the Twelve Steps that we share in the fellowship of AA. And it is in that community, that fellowship, that we begin to understand our relationship to God and to others.

Our relationship to God is sustained mainly through prayer and meditation. Prayer is the way we communicate with God, but more than that it is the way He communicates with us. Childish prayer consists wholly in our asking or telling God what we want Him to do. Even in adult prayer we often do not take the time to listen, to make use of the silence in which God speaks. When we still our hearts and our restless minds, and only then, can we make a space for God to come into our lives. Sometimes we do not or cannot do that because basically we do not *want* to hear what His will is for us. We are still going to have problems trusting God. We may qualify our prayers, or hope that magic and manipulation will help us hear only what we want to hear. We may follow this step because we believe that if we do this, God will love us. The fact is, He loves us any way, and since we've come this far with Him, we ought to recognize His love by now.

I saw a happy man last night, a man who, despite the fact that he is a minister, had just experienced his faith come alive. He had trusted,

he had believed, and God has answered him in new and exciting ways. Another man present said that he had asked God for the gift of faith, but he hadn't received it. After the meeting someone said to him "You know, you wanted the gift of faith and you've been working the program for four years. You have what you've asked for." He had never really stopped to listen to God's answer to him.

This step doesn't demand perfection, only progress! To some, prayer comes easily. Others can only manage the "Our Father" at the end of the meeting. That, like Baptism, is a beginning, and sufficient for today. Prayer is work, and yet is the sort of work that eludes us when we try hardest to take hold of it. Just as a healthy life requires some sort of relaxation in it, so prayer is healthiest when we let go and let God take hold of us. It is He who gives us the power and inspiration to prayer. Letting Him control this part of our lives and direct us in prayer, as we take the responsibility for being available for prayer, will result in new and wonderful insights to strengthen our lives.

With God in prayer we can be our real selves, our weakest selves. There is no facade with Him. As our relationship with Him grows in prayer, we experience His acceptance of us as we are, imperfect, human, and beloved. God as we understand Him has created this way for us to follow to sobriety, to wholeness and to Him.

*Lord God our Creator, we kneel before you in humble acknowledgment that because you made us, you love us, and because you love us, you put into us certain gifts, abilities and qualities. We know that you want us to give these gifts back to you so that you can bless them and use them for the building of your way of life on earth. Thank you for giving us this second chance to give all that we have and are to you for your use.*

Mrs. Samuel M. Shoemaker

**XII. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

*Go in Peace to Love and Serve*

Love is only love when it is given away. We all know that. We tried to possess love and people often enough and have watched the relationship turn sour, leaving us alone again. This 12th step gives us a chance to care for others, and to receive care from ourselves as we need it.

The spiritual awakening is a dawn in our lives. For some it comes quickly and steadily. For most it comes slowly, with new insights, new depths of meaning and awareness. This beginning is always new and vital, an awakening which cannot be seized or possessed. Yet it is the stable core of our sobriety, the core of a life which is our most valuable gift, we manifest in the stories we tell and the way we live. Without it we are hollow shells, dry, but not sober. Still unable to find the fulfillment which awaits us in this spiritual awakening, we play Judas to our relationships and betray our group. It is a gift we are given and only need to receive, opening ourselves to the possibilities of life, new relationships with God.

In sharing this message with others it is important for us to consider what it is we want to pass on. For us the message is good news of real freedom and an open door to fellowship and life. It is our own personal miracle which we experience in our day-to-day healing as we follow the Twelve Steps.

We share this message not only in what we say to others at meetings but in the compassion with which we care for others. We need to do more than *talk* about a life which is honest and humble. If we have reached the 12th step, and have not really worked the others, we will not find sufficient power and strength to sustain us for long.

In a crisis, a disappointment or frustration, when we need a secure framework, we may indeed find that our house has been built on sand, and we stand in danger of being washed away again. We come to an end and a beginning with the Twelfth Step, the end of the program for today and a good beginning for a sober tomorrow. The personal door out of our private hell is open and we can walk through, supported by the many people who have passed this way before us. We will have the chance to help others through ourselves. We hold the key and the responsibility to carry the message to those who still suffer. This can be our mission if we choose to accept it. It is a message of simplicity and truth which works with honesty and courage, a message of possibilities with the certainty of being given one's own personal miracle.

*Gracious Lord, you have brought new hope to our lives. You have led us out of fear into faith. With you we have come out of darkness into light. Keep us in the warmth of your steadfast goodness. When the clouds of doubt form again, help us to know that your love remains ever present to our world. And give us grace and courage to continue to share with others the renewing power of your life in us. We ask this in Jesus' Name, who died and rose again that we might begin to become like him. Amen.*

The Very Rev. Frederick H. Borsch



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