

Patty E., Kirkland, WA – Friends of Bill and Lois W. – Prayers, Promises, Principles

10-6-2022

I don't know about the rest of you but I can distinctly remember being in a meeting and hearing the phrase "The principles we have set down are guides to progress" and wondering "what in the world are the principles?" Of course, I had heard over and over again "work the steps" but had no idea that spiritual principles were embodied in each individual step.

I have also heard in countless meetings stories from others indicating they were glad to hear the promises being read during the meeting and the promises being displayed on the walls in meeting halls, that had there not been any promises, they would have been less likely to have done the work. While I don't claim that as part of my story, I am grateful that the promises continue to come true in my life. I am also grateful to know that recovery comes with a list of musts and requirements.

I am the type of alcoholic who was raised in a very religious home, so prayer was nothing new to me when I arrived in AA. As a matter of fact, I was more aware of the spiritual malady in my life than any other aspect of my alcoholism. And while I was well aware of the Lord's Prayer, I had never heard of some of the other prayers we utilize in the program. I didn't know about the Serenity Prayer, the Prayer of St. Frances Assissi, the 3rd step prayer, the 7th step prayer. I remember reading one of the prayers when I was hospitalized for my alcoholism at the ripe age of 22 in the State Hospital in Austin, Texas. I felt embarrassed

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and ashamed that I had to read the prayer and wondered if it even counted since I was reading it and not reciting it. Sobriety has changed everything about my relationship to and with a Higher Power as well as my prayer life. I was sober nearly 20 years before I learned from my sponsor that anytime the literature states, "We asked," a prayer follows it.

It is really my pleasure to speak with you today on the Principles, Prayers and Promises of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. I do want to begin by saying that everything I share is strictly my opinion and founded on my experience, strength and hope.

I will begin by sharing with you that I am, of course, an alcoholic. My sobriety date is November 7, 1981, which means I celebrated my 40th sober anniversary on November 7, 2021. I am sponsored by Penny Pennington from Livermore, CA and have the pleasure of sponsoring other alcoholics in sobriety. I also want to share that my sobriety is contingent on the maintenance of my spiritual condition and is granted to me one day at a time. There are no fronts in Alcoholics Anonymous.

And finally, I want you to know that I treasure the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. In every way, it has formed me. It has taken a young woman who was broken and defeated and transformed me into a woman able to live in the world unafraid, to set and realize goals, to recognize when I have made a mistake, harmed someone or was just plain wrong about something and to make those errors right. It has given me the tools and God has given me the willingness to use them for a better life. I have a full life in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous

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but without the steps of this program, the literature, sponsorship, meetings, and a relationship with the God of my understanding, everything in my life would either disappear or cease to have meaning and value.

So, let's get started with Step 1. The only step we take perfectly. The principle associated with it is Acceptance. Acceptance doesn't mean approval it simply indicates the existence of a reality, that we are powerless over alcohol and our lives have become unmanageable. The requirement is "we have to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics." For me, this meant learning that even when I knew the next drink would remove every good thing from my life, I would choose the drink every time. I didn't know when I took my last drink that I had made that concession. This was something I learned as I looked back on my sobriety. Today, I believe that all change begins with acceptance.

Step 2—The step that invites us to come, to come to, and then to believe that, not in, a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. The principle is Faith. The Big Book states that "we had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves and that this is what the Big Book is all about, to enable us to find a Power greater than ourselves to solve our problems. The 12 and 12 offers different examples of believers, former believers, deniers. I was one of the bewildered ones who came in with a head full of God and a belly full of alcohol. Naming the roadblocks, sharing them with another alcoholic and eventually letting go of them in many cases by

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“acting as if” has resulted in me having a solid spiritual foundation and a fulfilling spiritual life.

Step 3—The step where we make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God. The principle is Surrender. Note that this is not the step where we turn things over, it is the decision where we begin the process by making the decision. The evidence of the decision is noticed in our actions of following the remaining steps. The third step prayer is so powerful. It offers us a way to offer ourselves to God and that in return, God builds with us in steps 1-8 and does with us in steps 9-12. And it does this, not so we will feel better about ourselves, although we will, it does this so we will better serve God, so that the victory of our sobriety run on God’s will, not our will, will bear witness to others who will be helped.

There are many promises associated with Step 3: that God comes to all who honestly seek God. That we become less and less interested in ourselves, plans and designs. That we enjoy peace of mind. That we can face life successfully, that we lose our fear of today onward, that we were reborn. That we are relieved of the bondage of self.

Step 4—the step where we write a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. The principle is honesty. The Big Book tells us that taking a commercial inventory is fact-finding and a fact-facing process, that it is an effort to discover the truth about the stock in trade. The same is true for us, this is not a step about judging ourselves, it is a step of gathering information for the purpose of sharing with another person, then examining our

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behavior in the presence of that individual and God, and then continuing with the rest of the steps. The requirement of Steps 4 and 5 is that we must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. The promise is that if we have completed this, we have made a good beginning and have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself.

Step 5—the step where we admit to God, to ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. The principle is courage. The promises: delight, we can look the world in the eye, can be alone at perfect peace and ease, that our fears fall from us, that we begin to feel the nearness of our Creator, that we begin to have a spiritual experience, that we feel like we are walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

The prayer associated with Step 5: We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know God better.

Step 6—the step where we “are entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.” The principle is willingness. The prayer is “we ask God to help us be willing” if we are clinging to something.

Step 7—the step where we “humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.” The principle is humility. The prayer says it all. It reminds us that God wants all of us, good and bad. It puts God in charge of what makes us who we are, and that although we are willing to have God remove our defects of character, God will be the judge of what stands in God’s way of our usefulness to

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God and our fellows. It offers us a way to ask for strength to do God's bidding.

Step 8—the step where we make a list of those whom we have harmed and became willing to make amends to them all. The principle is forgiveness. The forgiveness is for us and for those who have also harmed us. Without forgiveness, we are not able to move onto Step 9. The prayer associated with Step 8 enables us to ask God for help in showing others the same tolerance, pity and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. The prayer give us a reminder to ask God to save us from being angry, and that God's will be done. The promise is that God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every person.

Step 9—the step where we make direct amends to those we had harmed except when to do so would injure them or others. The principle is freedom. The prayer: we ask God how to handle each situation, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing. The promises are numerous: new freedom, new happiness, not regretting the past, comprehending serenity, knowing peace, seeing how our experience can benefit others, the disappearance of self-pity and uselessness, intuitively knowing how to handle situations, God doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. The overall promise, that they are being fulfilled among us, they will always materialize if we work for them.

Step 10—the step where we “continue to take personal inventory and WHEN we were wrong, promptly admitted it.” The principle

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is perseverance. The prayer: How can I best serve Thee—Thy will not mine be done.” The promises: we have ceased fighting anything or anyone; sanity will have returned; if tempted by alcohol, we will recoil from it as from a hot flame. We have a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. The prayer is a request for forgiveness and a question of next steps.

Step 11—the step where we “seek through prayer and meditation to NOT MAINTAIN but IMPROVE our conscious contact with God, praying only for the knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry it out.” The principle is patience. The prayers are numerous: that God will direct our thinking, that it will be divorced from self pity, dishonest or self seeking motives, for inspiration throughout the day, that we be shown all throughout the day what our next step is to be, that we be given whatever is needed to take care of such problems, freedom from self-will.

And not only do we pray, we pray in a specific way, “In all times of emotional disturbance, we can pause, ask for silence, and in the stillness simply pray, “God grant me the serenity.....”

Step 12—the step where we acknowledge having 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. The principle is charity/love. The requirement is that “we trust in God and clean house.” That our top motive is to always be helpful. The promises: that every man can get well by following the dictates of the Higher Power regardless of their

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situation; that provided we are spiritually fit, we can do all sorts of things alcoholics are not supposed to do.

From Keys to the Kingdom: There is no more aloneness, with that awful ache, so deep in the heart of every alcoholic that nothing, before, could ever reach it. That ache is gone and never need return again. Now there is a sense of belonging, of being wanted and needed and loved. In return for a bottle and a hangover, we have been given the Keys of the Kingdom.