

MINISTERING TO THE RECOVERING ALCOHOLIC: UNDERSTANDING
ALCOHOLICS ANYNOMOUS AND MAKING SOUL-SAVING CONNECTIONS

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Abstract

“Hark! The voice of Jesus crying, ‘Who will go and work today?’ Fields are ripe and harvest waiting; Who will bear the sheaves away?” These are a few of the words found in a Hymn titled “Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying.” This is a popular hymn in Lutheran circles. It is the kind of hymn that gets Christians excited about sharing the light of the Gospel in a world so shrouded in darkness. But whenever we sing this hymn it is important to think, “Are there any ripe fields that we are ignoring?” Those who are recovering from addiction to alcohol are the sin-sick souls that Jesus has such a passion for, and often they are a ripe harvest field that is neglected. This paper explores the history and theology of Alcoholics Anonymous and discusses practical and God-pleasing ways to connect with the millions of people who attend their meetings every day.

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Literature Review

This literature review will not discuss every source used. Many of the sources were consulted simply for facts, and many other sources were face-to-face discussions or interviews. However, there were several books which provided an invaluable historical background on Alcoholics Anonymous and its founder Bill Wilson. There were also several sources which showed the theological ideas that are deeply rooted in nearly every aspect of Alcoholics Anonymous, and are observed by its participants.

Alcoholics Anonymous, Third Edition, is what might be called the handbook of Alcoholics Anonymous. It contains the story of Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. Along with that it has a summary of the theology of Alcoholics Anonymous, which will be addressed in great detail later in this paper. The second half of the book contains inspiring stories from those who have found sobriety after years of addiction because of Alcoholics Anonymous. This book proves the theology of Alcoholics Anonymous is not Christian, rather it is a theology that could be described as agnostic at best.

Changed Lives: The Story of Alcoholics Anonymous gave a well-written and in-depth view into the life of Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson. The book carefully maps out his upbringing and his early fall into alcoholism and his struggle to find sobriety. This source showed that Alcoholics Anonymous' vague religion runs deep, all the way back to its founder.

The Interview was an excellent resource. It offered many details about the life of Bill Wilson, and it also showed in detail how he thought about God and what he thought was necessary to understand about God in order to achieve and maintain sobriety.

One Day at a Time in Al-Anon was an invaluable resource. Much of the discussion in an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting is surrounded on the text of this book, or books very similar to it. This book helps the reader to become familiar with terminology used in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. This resource shows the pervasive attitude of "do, do, do."

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions provides an in-depth look at the twelve steps of recovery. These steps often use vague religious terminology, yet are not Christian, and this book proves that.

This paper used many other sources. Those sources were primarily used for gathering background information and understanding the psychological functioning of an alcoholic. In addition to this, several people were interviewed about their recovery from alcohol thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous and the peace they found through the Gospel of Jesus taught by the church.

Introduction

*Hark! The voice of Jesus crying,
"Who will go and work today?"
Fields are ripe and harvest waiting;
Who will bear the sheaves away?"
Loud and long the Master calleth;
Rich reward he offers thee.
Who will answer gladly saying,
"Here am I send me send me?"*

*If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus;
You can say he died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked
With the Judgment's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children
To the Savior's waiting arms.*

Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal,
Hymn 573 verses 1,2

Lutherans *love* this hymn. I remember just a few weeks ago my church was celebrating a mission festival, and it seemed only reasonable that we sang this hymn. When the organist began to play the familiar tune you could see the members of the congregation perk up. Everyone sat up straight and began to sing with all their might. The sound of their voices nearly lifted the roof off the beautiful small country church. The people were excited to praise Jesus and excited about mission work.

But as I sang with God's people about how ripe the fields are, how ready they are for the harvest; as I sang with all my might about how we can lead the little children to the

Savior's waiting arms, I thought to myself, "Do we really believe this?" Do we wake up in the morning and pop out of bed like a farmer who has fields full of bountiful fruit just waiting to be harvested? Do we work tirelessly like a farmer who knows that someday and someday soon it will be too late to do any harvesting? Sadly, the answer to this question is often no. The Devil tricks churches into thinking that there is simply no harvest field around them. And while there are situations where this true, shrinking towns or towns that already have four WELS churches within them, this is very rarely true. Jesus says in Luke 10:2, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." And Jesus' words have not become less true, the fields are more connected and more populated than ever!

The problem is that oftentimes we define ripe fields in a way that best suits us. When a brand new subdivision is built, that's a ripe harvest field! When a new corporation builds a massive warehouse in our city, that's a ripe harvest field! When there is a major university in our town, that is a ripe harvest field! And while those are indeed ripe harvest fields, are there any fields that we are neglecting? From what kind of ripe fields did Jesus harvest? Was it the fields of respected teachers or of wealthy landowners? Did Jesus share his message just with wise young scholars? No, Jesus harvested from a field that most would describe as being filled with rotten fruit. Jesus spent time with people who were down in the dumps. He saw them as a field just as valuable as any other. Jesus said in Mark 2:17, "It is not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick." It is indeed the sick that need the gospel, it is the prostitute who drowns her guilt with alcohol, it is the man who spends every evening at the bar and every night with a new woman, it is the kid who steals money from his parents to buy his next drink, it is these people that need the gospel. Though this field may be messy and intimidating it is a field that cannot and must not be ignored. The field of the sick and addicted meant enough to Jesus that he spent many of his nights eating with them and sharing the gospel. It is of this field that Jesus says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

Now I don't think most Christians would say, "People who struggle with addiction don't deserve to hear about Jesus!" But our actions tell a different story. We are quick to make connections with new businesses, but hesitant to make connections with Alcoholics

Anonymous groups, halfway houses, and rehabilitation units in hospitals. Why is that? We know they need the gospel! Is it because of our laziness or because of our sinful nature? Perhaps sometimes those are the reasons, but I think what is far more likely is that we simply feel unequipped. We don't know where to begin! What kind of connection can and should be made? What should be avoided as churches establish relationships with groups like Alcoholics Anonymous? What needs does Alcoholics Anonymous leave unfulfilled? How can we fill those needs? Should the church have a special curriculum for those recovering from addiction to alcohol? These are the questions that swirl through the mind of a pastor as he starts thinking about reaching out to an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Which is why this type of witnessing may seem a little more intimidating than canvassing a new neighborhood filled with happily married couples with 2.5 children. This thesis will explore and answer questions and concerns that may hinder a pastor or lay leader from forming connections with local Alcoholics Anonymous groups.

One final note before we jump into the content of this paper. You may be wondering, "Why is the topic of creating healthy relationships with Alcoholics Anonymous and recovering alcoholics so important, or worth my time and consideration?" There are two important reasons. One, and perhaps the most important reason, is that God tells us that considering these matters is worth our time and effort. Recall Jesus' words in Matthew 25 when he tells us that whenever we help the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit the prisoner, we are doing those things for him. Jesus wants us to actively seek the sick and hurting, he wants us to throw the life preserver of the gospel to those who are drowning in sin. The second reason this topic is worth our time and consideration is because the problem is so prevalent. It does not matter where you live in the country: north, south, east or west; it doesn't matter whether you live in a wealthy part of the city or are surrounded by government-subsidized housing; it doesn't matter if your congregation is made up of primarily retired folks or young families: you will be surrounded by alcoholics. According to a study published in June of 2015 by the Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry, nearly 15% of Americans have struggled with an alcohol use-disorder in the past year alone and 30% of people have

struggled with an alcohol use-disorder during their lifetime.¹ And according to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 1 in 12 Americans are addicted to alcohol.² If you stop to let those statistics sink in for just a moment, you will see the prevalence and urgency of reaching out to the community of those struggling with alcohol addiction. I can think of no other sin that so deeply and profoundly touches the lives of so many people, or a sin and sickness that drives so many to their knees. Let's discuss practical ways the church can make connections with groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, therefore connecting with those who struggle with an addiction to alcohol, and how we can use the gospel to bring the sick to their heavenly doctor.

A Brief History of Alcoholics Anonymous

Many pastors are very hesitant to make any sort of official connection with Alcoholics Anonymous because of the organizations' vague religiosity. Alcoholics Anonymous members are quick to admit that they are completely powerless. They cannot with their own power or will resist or cure their disease. They have seen their powerlessness in their past failure, and have realized that they must rely on "god." Now when pressed to say what they mean by "god," they will squirm a little bit. They refer to god as "god as I understand him," or just with the vague term of "higher power." Alcoholics Anonymous does not claim to be a Christian group, so why is it that they are so quick to throw around the word "god," and why is this terminology such a prevalent part in everything they do from their meetings to their 12 steps of recovery? To find the answer to this question and to explain why we must be cautious in our connections, it is essential that we take a look at the roots of Alcoholics Anonymous.

There was a man named William Wilson, but he went by Bill. Bill was an educated businessman who was quick with a joke and a smile. He came from a relatively rocky childhood. His parents were quick to abandon their failing businesses as well as their children. When Bill and his sister were still young his father left for a business trip

¹ Bridget F Grant, "Epidemiology of DSM-5 Alcohol Abuse Disorder: Results From the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions," *Journal of the American Medical Association: Psychiatry* 72, no. 8 (2015): 757-766.

² "Facts About Alcohol," ncadd.org, July 25, 2015. <https://www.ncadd.org/about-addiction/alcohol/facts-about-alcohol> (accessed November 10, 2016).

and did not come back for nine years. Bill's mother was not far behind. She abandoned her children to pursue a degree in medicine. This left it up to Bill's maternal grandparents, Fayette Griffith and Ella Griffith, to take care of him and his sister. Despite Bill's unsteady and ever-changing home life, he was what you might call "a natural." Bill was gifted at pretty much anything he tried. He was a football and baseball star at his high school, even becoming the captain of both varsity teams, he was a gifted violinist, he was even a gifted student, receiving high marks on his studies.³ However, things went downhill for Bill during the end of his high school career. He lost his first love due to complications during surgery.⁴ This loss devastated and shocked him, and he began to spiral into depression. After high school the depression worsened and was now accompanied by severe anxiety.

Despite Bill's sorrow of the loss of his first love, he found new love in a woman named Lois Burnham. Lois came from a good family that was loving and supportive of their relationship. Soon after they were married, World War I began. Bill joined the military and become an officer, being stationed in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Living in a new city far away from everything and everyone he knew was difficult for Bill. Despite his success he struggled with feelings of inadequacy that stemmed back to the childhood abandonment he faced when both of his parents left his life. He found it very difficult to connect with people in his new home. His job with the military would force him to attend parties and social gatherings in which he felt uncomfortable and out of place. Every day was a struggle for Bill. It was during this time that he had his first drink, and that first drink changed everything. For the first time in his life Bill felt free. When he attended parties he no longer felt uncomfortable or inadequate! In the book *Changed Lives: The Story of Alcoholics Anonymous* by Dennis C. Morreim, he describes the euphoria that Bill Wilson felt after his first drink,

His shyness quickly vanished. No longer was he trying to break into groups, groups of people were now forming around him! Unbelievable!

³ Dennis C. Morreim, *Changed Lives: The Story of Alcoholics Anonymous* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991, 34.

⁴ "Pass It On": *The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1984, 35.

The world around him had changed so rapidly he began to laugh. He couldn't stop laughing. This was a miracle. There was no other word to describe it. Bill looked at the people near him. He no longer felt inferior to any of them. These were his friends! They liked him and he liked them. All his life he had lived in bondage to inadequacy and fear. Now, for the first time ever, he was free! ⁵

After this first, and in Bill's mind, life altering drink, Bill was hooked. After World War I ended, Bill and his wife moved to New York City. Bill lived with his mother and father-in-law while he attended law school and worked as a railroad clerk. However, due to Bill's drinking he was fired from the railroad. It was then that Bill began to work on Wall Street. While working on Wall Street Bill proved himself to be naturally savvy about the stock market. In a very short period of time Bill became a wealthy man. He finished law school, just barely, due to drinking, but decided he did not want to give up his Wall Street success to pursue a career in law. However, like what happened so often in Bill's life, the happiness was short-lived. The stock market crashed in 1929 and Bill lost everything. At first he was not discouraged. He was dedicated to earning the money back, but the great depression did not allow for that. After many failed attempts to renew his success Bill turned back to his old friend, alcohol. But this marks a shift in his drinking; no longer was Bill drinking to loosen up and have fun, no longer was he drinking during parties or social gatherings, no longer was he drinking to give himself courage for a big speech. No, he was drinking to forget, to forget the success he once had, to forget about losing it all, to forget about how he could do nothing to earn it back.

Bill drank so heavily that he was no longer able to hold down a job for more than a few weeks. He again lived with his in-laws and relied on his wife to bring home the income from her job at Macy's, an income which he drank away.⁶ Bill's drinking problem had become evident. So evident, in fact, that even his extended family was becoming worried. His brother-in-law, Dr. Leonard Strong, was a medical doctor who told Bill that he could fix his drinking problem. He told Bill that the problem was simply a matter of willpower, and if Bill simply tried harder, his compulsion to drink would go away. Dr. Strong also gave Bill an assortment of vitamins to help him with his recovery and

⁵ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 35.

⁶ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 37

willpower.⁷ Despite the vitamins and pep talks, Bill continued to drink as much as ever. Dr. Strong was not the only medical professional in Bill's life that was concerned about him. His father-in-law, Dr. Clark Burnham, was also very concerned with Bill's drinking. He saw that Bill did not desire to drink, knowing the consequences full well, yet Bill still drank. Though Dr. Burnham was deeply concerned about the health and well-being of his son-in-law, he was hesitant to get involved out of respect for his daughter's marriage, so as opposed to working with Bill himself, he would refer him to other qualified medical professionals. One such professional was a man named Dr. William Duncan Silkworth.⁸

Dr. Silkworth was a revolutionary thinker on the subject of alcohol addiction. During the early nineteen-hundreds most people thought that alcoholism happened to those that are weak willed, unintelligent, or ungodly. Silkworth realized the problem was far deeper than any of these things. He called alcoholism an illness. He described it as an illness that caused a person to both be allergic to alcohol, yet have a deep and nearly irresistible desire to consume the very thing they are allergic to. But Dr. Silkworth said that this illness was not hopeless, Bill could recover. In order to recover, Bill had to accept two things. One, Bill was allergic to alcohol. Two, he had an overwhelming compulsion to ingest the very substance to which he was allergic. When Bill heard the doctor's diagnosis and the two things he needed to accept for recovery, he was overjoyed! Finally, Bill had hope and he knew what he needed to understand to successfully kick his drinking habit! Bill spent a few days sobering up at Dr. Silkworth's office, then left, promising himself, his wife, and the good doctor, that he would never touch another drop.

When he returned home, his wife couldn't contain her joy about her husband's new sobriety and his commitment to stay that way. She made him his favorite meal and decorated the house with flowers. They talked openly and happily, and it truly felt like a fresh start. Bill had a new lease on life! All of this makes it hard to believe that just two weeks after Bill's fresh start, he began drinking again. At first his drinking was occasional, but it didn't take long before he was drinking every day again, and drinking heavily. Bill went back to Dr. Silkworth, he sobered up and left the office, determined that *this* time he wouldn't repeat the same mistake, he would stay sober! But sure enough, one

⁷ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 37

⁸ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 37

month, maybe two months, perhaps even six months later, he would begin to drink again. This cycle happened three times, and after the third, Dr. Silkworth told Bill that his case was hopeless. Dr. Silkworth told Lois that she had three options for dealing with her husband, “Have Bill locked up, watch him go insane, or let him die.”⁹

Lois dragged her drunk husband home, and there he sat. He barely slept, rarely changed his clothes or showered, and drank all day every day. One morning he received a phone call from an old friend named Ebby Thatcher. Thatcher was one friend of Bill’s that could out drink him any time they went out. Despite Bill’s checkered past and struggle with addiction to alcohol, *Ebby* was viewed as a bad influence on Bill. Ebby’s drinking had progressed to the point that he was even committed to an insane asylum for his drinking.¹⁰ Ebby asked if he could come over and visit Bill. Bill gladly invited his old friend over, happy that he would no longer be alone in his misery. Bill prepared for Ebby’s visit by mixing up a pitcher of his favorite cocktail, and waited excitedly for his friend to come.¹¹

Bill didn’t have to wait long; soon he heard Ebby’s knock at his door. As soon as he let his friend into his house Bill immediately saw that there was something different about Ebby, but he could not put his finger on it. After a few minutes of casual conversation Bill poured himself a large drink from the pitcher. He took a sip and offered Ebby a drink. When Ebby turned down the free drink from his gracious host, Bill was shocked. He had never seen Ebby say no to a drink. Seeing the shock on Bill’s face, Ebby explained to Bill that he was no longer drinking. He was sober and had been for many months. This news was perhaps more shocking to Bill than Ebby refusing a drink. He knew that Ebby, like himself, had tried to quit many times, but his sobriety only ever lasted a few days, or maybe a few weeks, but never this long. When Bill asked him how he was able to get sober and stay sober, Ebby gave a reason that made his jaw hit the floor. Ebby said he had found God. Bill was taken aback for two reasons. The first reason was that Ebby had led a wild life drinking and partying in a way that was anything but pious and holy, and the second reason was that Bill thought that “god” was for those who

⁹ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 39

¹⁰ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 40

¹¹ Bill Wilson, “My Name is Bill W.” [Filmed 1964]. YouTube video, 1:00:14. Posted [March 2014.] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRbajfy0DBY&t=1686s>.

were intellectually inferior. God was for superstitious simple people, not for educated businessmen or men of Wall Street.

Ebby and Bill enjoyed a nice afternoon of conversation, then Ebby went home. While Bill did enjoy visiting with his friend, he felt a profound sense of sadness and hopelessness. From his conversation with Ebby, Bill came to the conclusion that a person must believe in God to become and stay sober. This idea was so troubling to Bill because he knew that he was too intellectual to ever believe in some all-powerful being who had control over his life. Bill's hopelessness led to heavy drinking over the next few days. He drank so heavily, in fact, that he found himself back in the hospital under the care of a disappointed Dr. Silkworth. As he lay there out of money, with no job, with a broken-hearted wife, and a disappointed doctor, he thought back to his conversation with his dear friend Ebby, and did something he had not done in a very long time. He lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed a brief prayer, "If there is a God, show yourself!" According to Bill, this is what happened immediately after saying those words:

And then came the miracle, the great central experience of my life, the room lit up with a blinding glare of bright white light, I was seized with an ecstasy I had never known. It was as if I was standing on a mountain top where a great clean wind was blowing. I thought to myself that this is not air, this is spirit! This is the God of the preachers. How long I remained in this state I just cannot say and again I have no words to describe what it was like. At length I found myself on my bed but I was in a new world... a great peace fell over me, and there I lay and reveled in this new and loving conscientiousness.¹²

After this profound experience Bill's first thought was, "Have I lost my mind?" He called out to Dr. Silkworth, who ran a battery of tests, and concluded that Bill was not hallucinating or having a mental breakdown, rather the experience was real. This experience, the realization that there was a God and "No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are still all right. Things are all right with god and his world," left Bill a changed man.¹³ He quit drinking completely, and this time for good. He joined a group called The Oxford Group. This group was a support group for alcoholics started by an American Lutheran minister. The Christian faith was a cornerstone of this group, along with the idea

¹² Wilson, "My Name is Bill W." [video file].

¹³ Morreim, *Changed Lives*, 46.

that selfishness was the main cause of alcoholism. The group taught that in order to have freedom from alcoholism the person must submit themselves to God and his plans, admitting that they had no say in their life and that was a good thing.

Bill became the proud leader of one of these small groups. Bill had come to a very important realization. He had spent his entire adult life trying to be free from alcohol. He had literally tried everything. He visited countless doctors and tried everything from vitamins to willpower, and nothing worked. He traveled the world, visiting doctors in Europe, he had read books about addiction and tried meditation, and while he might remain sober for a few days, weeks, or maybe even months, he would always find his way to back to the bottle. However, now things were different. Bill was sober, and had been for months! What changed in Bill's life that allowed this attempt at sobriety to finally stick? He had had a profound religious experience; he had an experience that proved that God existed. So naturally, Bill came to the conclusion that a profound and specific religious experience was required to find and maintain sobriety.

As Bill volunteered as an Oxford Group leader he was initially met with a lot of failure. In his own words, his results were "absolutely nil," not a single person who joined his group remained sober for more than a brief period of time.¹⁴ This was baffling, shocking, and deeply discouraging. What had gone wrong? Bill discovered that the problem was he was looking for too specific of a spiritual awakening. He was insisting that the members of his group needed to have an experience exactly like, or at least very much like his own. When people did not have the same experience, the same spiritual awakening that Bill had, they would feel hopeless and discouraged and ultimately give up on attending the meetings. So Bill adjusted his format, still viewing "god" as an essential part of recovery, but how one viewed God or experienced him personally became irrelevant.

It is this idea that has so profoundly shaped Alcoholics Anonymous. This thought, or perhaps theology, still shapes nearly every aspect of their recovery program. The terminology has shifted slightly since those early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, but the ideas and sentiment have not changed at all.

¹⁴ Wilson, "My Name is Bill W." [video file].

After several years of working with the Oxford Group, Bill and another man from the group named Dr. Bob Smith created a new group for recovering alcoholics. That new group was called Alcoholics Anonymous. They created this new group in order to cut ties with organized religion. The Catholic Church had an issue with the growing popularity of the ever-growing Oxford Group organization. As a result they ordered that members of the Catholic Church cut ties with the recovery group. This was very difficult for many of the members, who feared relapse and its many consequences, but they did it out of respect for the Catholic Church. Bill and Dr. Bob began a group that did not promote any faith, rather just promoted the idea of a higher power who can help you with your drinking problem.

From its first meeting in 1935 where three recovering alcoholics met in the den of a house, Alcoholics Anonymous has spread like wildfire. As of January of 2016 there are nearly 118,000 groups that meet weekly and nearly 2.1 million active members.¹⁵

Looking at the history of Alcoholics Anonymous and its founder makes it clear where they get their terminology and the nonreligious emphasis on the necessity of “god.” Alcoholics Anonymous teaches people that they are powerless to fight their crippling addiction to alcohol and they need “god” to help them, but they do not teach or promote God as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures.

What Does an Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting Look Like?

Alcoholics Anonymous meets all over the country, even all over the world, and has hundreds of thousands of group leaders, but despite this there is a great deal of uniformity from meeting to meeting. This is very appealing to alcoholics. If a man or woman goes out of town on vacation or on a business trip and they find themselves feeling the temptation to drink, they can find an Alcoholics Anonymous group in whatever city they are visiting. When they attend the meeting they know exactly what to expect. This consistency makes it easy to discuss in accurate detail what generally happens at each meeting.

¹⁵ General Service Office, “Estimates of A.A. Groups and Members as of January 1, 2016.” *Alcoholics Anonymous.org*, April 2016, http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/smf-53_en.pdf.

It is important to understand what goes on in these meetings for a couple of reasons. One, *if* we are going to recommend that members who struggle with alcohol addiction attend these meetings, we need to know what they are discussing and learning about. Even if a pastor decides not to recommend Alcoholics Anonymous, it is likely that they will have members who already attend these meetings, so it is important to understand what the members are being exposed to. Two, if a church is striving to make connections with Alcoholics Anonymous groups in their local communities, as a matter of respect it is important to understand the terminology this group uses. Finally, it is important to know the ins and outs of the meetings so that leaders of the church can identify the spiritual gaps that need to be filled, and there are many spiritual gaps to be filled.

There are two types of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings; open and closed. Closed meetings are for alcoholics exclusively. Only those who have struggled with alcohol are allowed to attend. Open meetings are for everyone; family, friends, or people who are just curious to see what the meetings are all about. While I served as a vicar in Katy, Texas, there was a member of my church who invited me to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. He told me that in my ministry I would be encountering a large number of alcoholics. He said the meeting was open to the public and would be very welcoming. I accepted his invitation and attended. I introduced myself when I arrived at the meeting and explained that a member of my church had invited me to attend and observe. The members of the group were welcoming and kind. After a few minutes of pleasant casual conversation the meeting began. The meeting started with something called the *Serenity Prayer*, “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.”¹⁶ After the prayer the floor was open for discussion about the prayer. Did the prayer bring up any memories of things that had happened in the past week? Did the prayer bring to mind anything that alcohol had been suppressing? Whenever somebody would speak they would begin with, “Hi, my name is ‘John Smith’ and I am an alcoholic.”

¹⁶ Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon* (Saddle Brook, New Jersey: American Book-Stratford Press, 1973), 376.

After this discussion surrounding the “prayer” they would have a reading from a book called “One Day at a Time in Al-Anon.” This is a book that is put out by “Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.” The book could perhaps be called a secular devotional. There is a page dedicated to every day of the year. Each day has a paragraph or two written by recovering alcoholics who are members of Alcoholics Anonymous.¹⁷ The paragraphs contain strategies, experiences, or things the recovering alcoholic had learned during the different stages of sobriety. After the encouraging paragraph comes a section titled “Today’s Reminder.” This section of the reading is a reminder to the reader to never stop striving to improve. It serves to reassure the person, but also to stir them on to action. Here is a sample of one of the daily reminders found in the reading:

As I look back over this year, I will consider calming my actions and attitudes, just as though I was evaluating the progress of someone else. I will not make it an occasion for guilt or regret. I will blame no one else for anything that happened, for I have learned in Al-Anon that I am not a judge of others. This day, and the days to come will be filled with opportunities to make more of myself.¹⁸

After the reminder of the day comes one final meditative thought. This final thought sometimes takes the form of a prayer, a quote from a book, a poem, and even a Bible passage. The final thought ushers in a time of quiet reflection. After the silence, the floor is reopened for discussion on everything that has been read. Does anything stick out to you? How does it relate to you and your life or your struggle for sobriety? Members of the meeting are invited to share personal stories. Oftentimes if they found a reading of

¹⁷ The following is an example of said devotional taken from *One Day at a Time in Al-Anon*, page 360.

“It is often suggested in Al-Anon that we examine our motives. It isn’t easy to ask “Why did I do that?” And conscientiously track the fault to its source. Did I really mean to let those resentful words escape from me—did I intend to hurt? Or was I giving vent to the pressure of a deeper discomfort: guilt, inadequacy, or fear? When I looked closely at my reasons did I believe that what I said or did was justified?”

We may justify our actions, but often we only rationalize, or side step the truth. As we dig down deep to uncover our motives, we discover how painful it is to admit, even to ourselves, that we are wrong. Al-Anon places a high value on self-honesty; facing up to our faults is the first step toward overcoming them.

Today’s Reminder:

I am on the way to achieving maturity when I can cheerfully accept the fact that I am not always right. Then new truths can penetrate and open my mind to the helpful influences all around me.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but God pondereth the hearts. (Proverbs)”

¹⁸ Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 336.

something particularly helpful in their struggle, they will bring that reading and share with the group.

From there the meeting moves on to a discussion about how they are progressing through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. They will discuss steps they are struggling with or stuck on. This is a time when being gathered together as a group can be quite beneficial. People who are on the first few steps or struggling to complete the final steps can hear from people who have already completed all the steps. They can speak to people who have endured the struggle and come out better off on the other side. This portion of the meeting is a fantastic opportunity to build up a sense of community. Here are the twelve steps the community of recovering alcoholics discuss:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. 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.¹⁹

At first glance some of these twelve steps can cause a conservative Christian to cringe, but it is important to recognize what merit these steps have. While they in no way share saving faith or talk about God as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures, they are

¹⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1976), 59.

a good stepping stone to those conversations. Alcoholics Anonymous' goal is not to bring people to salvation, rather their goal is to help those who struggle with alcohol get honest with both themselves and those around them. By doing so the alcoholic may stop making excuses and start tackling the real issue: drinking. It is not the job of a recovery group to share the gospel, it is the job of the church, and Alcoholics Anonymous can be the springboard for that church. Alcoholics Anonymous gets millions of people saying, "I am powerless! I need a higher power! I need a God to remove my utterly obvious defects!" The natural knowledge of the law and life experience has shown them that they are utterly powerless, they have failed, and their way is not working. What a perfect time for the church to step in and hold out the gospel.

Hundreds of thousands of men and women go to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings every day seeking help. They have a problem that they cannot solve. They need to talk to someone who has faced the issues that they are facing. They need to talk to someone who has hit rock bottom and can look them in the eye and say, "I was where you are right now, and I am no longer there, there is hope that you can defeat this addiction." The need to hear these words is a very specific need. It is not a need that a pastor can necessarily fulfill by himself. He cannot look at the man or woman struggling with alcoholism and say, "I know how you feel, I know your fear and heartbreak, I understand your urges." This is how Alcoholics Anonymous can help a person in a unique way. It gathers like-minded men and women who encourage each other as they strive for health.

While the specific need of having someone who can commiserate is met in Alcoholics Anonymous, certain needs are not. People who have been so beaten up by alcoholism that they attend an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting generally know that they are unable to control drinking. They have seen how the bottle has driven away family and friends, they see how it has cost them jobs and promotions, they see how it has embarrassed them, whether with a DUI or a night in prison. They do not enter the meeting thinking, "Hey, my power is good enough. I'm strong and resilient enough to solve my own problems." And because they enter the meeting feeling beaten down, the reading, discussions, and twelve steps often just affirm what they already know all too well. The daily reading says, "Try harder!" The "Today's Reminder" says you're doing better but, "try harder!" And the twelve steps say, "in the past you could do it, now believe in a god

and try harder!” Now this might motivate, but it is a fragile motivation. This is a time when a pastor is more equipped than any recovering alcoholic or any group of supportive friends. He is equipped to look across his desk at the recovering alcoholic who has not touched a bottle for some time, yet feels nervous and scared. He is equipped to say to them, “I see that you are making a fantastic effort to live better. You are trying with all your might to put things into the hand of a higher power. Let me tell you about that higher power, and the effort he made for *you!*”

This section, and the entirety of this paper, does not strive to discover how effective attending Alcoholics anonymous meetings can be. This is a figure that is hard to nail down, and is ultimately irrelevant for the purposes of this thesis, which are to prove that it is beneficial and possible to make connections with local Alcoholics Anonymous groups, therefore connecting with those who are both physically and spiritually sick.

Creating Boundaries with Alcoholics Anonymous While Making Healthy Connections

Alcoholics Anonymous helps people overcome a terrible disease and sinful behavior. They see people suffering and they desire to help them. People who organize Alcoholics Anonymous meetings do not do so to make themselves rich, they do not do so to bring glory to themselves; their work is oftentimes anonymous. They see people suffering from something they can understand and desire to help them. Due to the loving and helpful nature of Alcoholics Anonymous, it is not uncommon for men and women to seek out a meeting place at a church. Churches are often seen as a community center of sorts, and often enough that is what they have become. So what should be said to the Alcoholics Anonymous leader that asked to have a meeting in your church? What do you say to this person, and why? In order to be best prepared for this situation it is essential to carefully evaluate the religious undertones and practices of Alcoholics Anonymous. Early in this paper it was discussed that Alcoholics Anonymous does have ties to “god” and even use Christian terminology. The roots of the terminology were addressed, but now let’s address the specific religious undertones of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Alcoholics Anonymous does not shy away from speaking about God, in fact they pride themselves on just that. In the self-published book by Bill Wilson, aptly titled

“Alcoholics Anonymous,” he talks about the theological views in a chapter titled “We Agnostics.” Being in Alcoholics Anonymous is not about being a Christian, it is about simply believing that there is a power higher than yourself. If somebody desires to be in Alcoholics Anonymous but is a staunch atheist or agnostic, they do not need to be discouraged. Recall the spiritual roots of Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson when his friend Ebby told him that he needed to “find religion.”²⁰ He was discouraged because he believed himself to be too intelligent, too scientific to ever believe in a god. But as Bill discovered, and as anyone entering Alcoholics Anonymous *must* discover, their way of thinking and living is not working. It is necessary to discover and live by the power of a god. On this matter, Alcoholics Anonymous says this:

If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how much we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could will these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn't there. Our human resources, as marshaled by the will, were not sufficient; they failed utterly. The lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a *Power greater than ourselves*. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?²¹

Alcoholics Anonymous answers that question by saying “god” must give the power. They say that for many people God is a silly notion from their childhood, something from the past that they have pushed into the recesses of their mind, and that is okay. The narrow-minded Judeo-Christian church’s God is not and cannot be the only option. This is how Alcoholics Anonymous views God: “To us, the Realm of the Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men.”²² Having a relationship with God is utterly essential to success in the Alcoholics Anonymous community, but how to develop, cultivate and understand that relationship is very loosely defined.

²⁰ Wilson, “My Name is Bill W.” [video file].

²¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 44.

²² *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 46.

When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to affect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was.²³

According to the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, if the simple knowledge of the fact that flying solo has led to a fiery, alcohol-induced crash is not enough for a new member of *Alcoholics Anonymous* to admit and seek a higher power, then reason should motivate them. After all, modern America is a place of reason. However, Bill Wilson points out in this book that people accept things as fact every day, even if they may not see what they believe. Bill talks about electricity. Sure people see it in light bulbs or in their appliances functioning, but do people actually see how it gets there? Bill says we do not, yet we still believe it exists. Just because something is not completely understood or understood in the same way by everyone does not mean that that thinking is not real or valid. Bill continues by stating that the assumption that human beings are the pinnacle of all that is or ever was or ever will be is foolish and vain. Finally, if for no other reason, one should believe in a higher power because doing so has proven to be beneficial for countless generations. “Faiths have given purpose and direction to millions... when we might have observed that many spiritually-minded persons of all races, colors, and creeds were demonstrating a degree of stability, happiness, and usefulness which we should have sought ourselves.”²⁴ Those recovering from alcohol addiction need to open up their minds! They have spent too long looking at other religious people and criticizing them because of the ideas and notions of a few bad people! Bill puts it this way, “We talked of intolerance, while we were intolerant ourselves. We missed the reality and the beauty of the forest because we were diverted by the ugliness of some of its trees.”²⁵

In the words that Bill penned for *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and the book they use to this day, he shares another story for those who don’t believe in God. He says that

²³ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 47.

²⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 50.

²⁵ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 50.

throughout history many people who have been scientifically certain about things have been proven wrong. When Columbus set out on his voyage there were many who were absolutely certain that he and his crew would plummet off the edge of the earth. Those people were certain, and science had proven that the earth was flat. Those naysayers were utterly wrong. There were those who with careful science and mathematics determined that it would be impossible for human beings to ever fly. They determined, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that no matter what contraption might be made, there was no way that continuous flight could be achieved. They were proven wrong and continue to be proven more and more wrong every day. Bill urges new Alcoholics Anonymous members to remember that just because science thinks or claims that something is impossible, that doesn't make it true.

Many of Bill's words in this chapter of "Alcoholics Anonymous" read almost like a work of Christian apologetics. He says that man is arrogant to think that he is only accountable to himself, and that he can figure everything out. He says that if a person were to just look into the sky on a dark, cloud free night he would have to acknowledge that the beauty was not just some random accident. In the Alcoholics Anonymous textbook it even goes as far as to say that every man, woman, and child knows deep down within themselves that there is a god. Sure, maybe it's been buried by hardship or strife, but that knowledge is there!²⁶ However, the conclusion that Alcoholics Anonymous comes to falls short. They see faith as little more than a guide; a guide that differs from person to person. This final quote shows how unchristian Alcoholics Anonymous really is.

Whether we agree with a particular approach or conception [of god] seems to make little difference. Experience has taught us that these are matters about which, for our purpose, we need not be worried. They are questions for each individual to settle for himself.²⁷

God is not a mystery. He's not an obscure spirit who will fix all of your problems because you admit that he, in some form, might exist. No, God is far better than that; he reveals himself clearly for all to see. He is the one and only God. There are no other

²⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 55.

²⁷ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 50.

options. Isaiah 43:10,11 says:

You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. *Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.* I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior.

The idea of there being another power or many vague powers that are different but equal is laughable to a God who says that he is incomparable.²⁸ The Bible teaches that there is only one God, and that God does not share the spotlight with anyone. He says, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” (Exodus 20:5) Christ is the focus in the entirety of the Scriptures. Christ is not a wishing well. He does not promise to help you escape addiction, he does not promise wealth or health, he does not promise earthly happiness. However, Jesus promises something far better in the pages of Scripture. He promises an eternity free from addiction, illness, poverty, and sadness. But Jesus makes it clear that it is *only* through him that these things come. “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6) That is what God is all about. He is not simply a sense of direction, he isn’t just something we throw prayers at if the going gets tough, and he is not one of many. He is everything, and he gives the most precious gifts. He is clear, specific, and understandable!

Back to the original question: what should a pastor or church leader say if someone asks to hold Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in your church? The short answer is, yes, but with stipulations. While Alcoholics Anonymous would not claim to be, and is not, a religious organization, there are certainly religious undertones to their practices. However the leaders of Alcoholics Anonymous are very receptive to new hosts, and it is a

²⁸ This section of Scripture shows how fickle it is to suppose anything is even comparable to God. Isaiah 46:5-11 “To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? ⁶ Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. ⁷ They lift it to their shoulders and carry it; they set it up in its place, and there it stands. From that spot it cannot move. Though one cries out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save him from his troubles. ⁸ Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. ⁹ Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. ¹¹ From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do. To whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?”

realistic and evangelically minded possibility that they will be open to pastors or lay leaders hosting Alcoholics Anonymous meetings under the pretenses that they will be led in a way that reflects Biblical doctrine.

Why are these connections so important? Why is it worth our time to dissect the teachings of Alcoholics Anonymous? This is like asking why the sick need a doctor. As was addressed earlier in this paper, alcohol addiction is no small issue. It affects countless people. It tears families apart and it destroys lives. The sin of addiction is unique. There are many sinful struggles that affect people, but the effects aren't very profound. If a man has a habit of lying, sure he might get into trouble, or people might lose their trust in him. If a woman struggles with laziness, she might have trouble at work or depend on others too much. If a person struggles with arrogance, maybe they will lose friends or live in denial. However, it is easy to live with all these sins and maintain a relatively normal life. These sins really just affect one or two aspects of life. However, addiction is all-encompassing. If a man is addicted to alcohol it affects his wife and children profoundly. He is an absentee father and an unsupportive husband. His drinking affects his work; he struggles to meet deadlines, and has trouble focusing in meetings. It affects his social life; he earns a reputation as the friend who always gets a little out of hand. It affects his finances, he finds himself in debt whether it is from repeated DUIs, loss of employment, or just spending too much on alcohol. Now all of these things are not true of all alcoholics, but there is something truly pervasive about alcoholism. It makes every aspect of life more difficult. And generally, the person who attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings knows that they are defeated. They are under no impression that they are doing just fine. They have been defeated by their sin. If a pastor were to talk to the person who struggles with the sin of being lazy, lying, or being arrogant, it would be easy for that person to say, "So what? I'm just a little lazy, or I lie sometimes, or I am occasionally arrogant; what is the big deal? It doesn't really hurt others, and to be honest I don't feel that bad." Whereas, if a pastor were to confront a recovering alcoholic about their sin, they would simply say, "I know I struggle with this, I know I have a problem." Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are rooms full of people who say, "I am overcome and overwhelmed with my addiction to alcohol, I need help. I have tried myself and now I'm throwing in the towel and looking outside myself for help." That is why it is unbelievably

important to foster connections with local Alcoholics Anonymous groups. They are a group of men and women looking for a higher power. And the church is the only place they can find out about the real and only higher power that is God. They are begging for the gospel, and if those pleas go unheeded it is the loss of a tremendous opportunity, and potentially the loss of many souls. Recall the hymn verses that started this paper. Recall the last time you sang them with all your might. Recall them, and do not ignore an obviously ripe harvest field.

When a pastor begins his ministry, there are certain places that he visits right away. He visits these places to make important connections. It would be wise for the pastor to go to the local hospital and introduce himself and leave business cards in case one of his members is there, or if someone is searching for a pastor when they are sick. He should go to the offices of local mental health professionals, just in case he encounters situations that require their expertise as he offers pastoral counseling. He would be wise to visit a local funeral home and introduce himself, because he will be using their services during his ministry. Perhaps it would be wise to talk to someone from the local chamber of commerce to find out about local events and ways in which the church might become involved. However, there is one connection that is often neglected. When Jesus would enter a new town he wouldn't first go to the doctors and to the community officials. No, he would go to those who were hopelessly sick in their sin. Now, I'm not suggesting that we should cross all of those other places off of our "first stop list." I am stating that it is essential to connect with those who so need the gospel, and I am encouraging the Christian to go even to those places that may make them feel uncomfortable.

How can you find out where your local Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are taking place? If you have access to the internet, locating the meetings can be done with great ease. Alcoholics Anonymous have a link that takes you to a page where you can click on the state you live in, then the city, and finally the meeting options in your desired state.²⁹ If you live in or near a city of a few hundred thousand people or so, there will probably be several meetings at several different times in several locations. For example, the city of Milwaukee has 31 different meeting times and locations.

After finding a couple of meetings in the desired location, go a few minutes before

²⁹ "Find Local A.A.," *Alcoholics Anonymous*. http://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/find-local-aa

the time the meeting is scheduled to start. Find the leader of the meeting and ask them if the meeting is open or closed. A closed meeting is only for those who struggle with an addiction to alcohol; an open meeting is for anyone. If the meeting is open, stay and attend the meeting. You will be asked to introduce yourself, which is a perfect opportunity to say, “Hey I’m Pastor _____, I work at the church down the road and I just wanted to connect with my community, and you’re part of my community! If any of you ever need anything or just need someone to talk to, I’m here for you!” Spend time with the meeting leader after the meeting if you can. Get to know him or her. Get to know their religious background. Find out about their church. Encourage them to visit your church, or if the members of the meeting have spiritual questions, let the leader know he can send them your way. It would also be wise to invite them to something your church offers specifically for the recovering alcoholic. Create a Bible class for those who believe in a “higher power,” but want to know more about this power. Later in this paper I will talk about the curriculum for a Bible class such as this.

A Testimonial to the Importance of the Connection and Focus

Pastor Nathan Buege, the pastor at Victory of the Lamb in Katy, Texas. Had a member named Mike who was an active participant and leader in the local Alcoholics Anonymous group. Pastor Buege went out of his way to make a connection with the group. He went to several meetings and talked openly with Mike about the group. He often encouraged Mike to invite anyone and everyone to Bible Information Class. And that was all Mike needed to hear! He went out and started encouraging people to come attend Bible Information class immediately. He would go to people before and after their Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and say, “Hey, you know what helped me when I first stopped drinking? Attending church, that’s what helped. My pastor has this class called Bible 101. It teaches you all about the basics of God and the Bible. It’s not any sort of commitment, just an interesting class! In fact, my pastor has one of those classes going on right now. I’m sure he’d love it if you’d come!” With these simple words, Mike planted a seed. And Mike was more than just talk. He would not just suggest that his struggling buddies go to the class, no, he would join them every time. It didn’t matter that he had already taken it, it didn’t matter that he knew a lot of the material by heart. Mike would

go, and if the person he invited showed up, Mike would greet them with a hearty handshake and a smile. He would keep the atmosphere relaxed and fun by cracking jokes. No matter who the person was, he would make them relaxed and comfortable. His presence made sure that the class was not just educational, but also fun. The visitor never felt intimidated or like they were behind. After that, Mike would walk out to the parking lot with the person he had invited and he would light up a cigar and ask them what they thought about the class, what was good or interesting, what was not so good, or what confused them. This was a powerful connection. Mike's outgoing demeanor made it easier for Pastor and other people to connect with the visitor and make the visitor feel at home and comfortable right away.

This paper has devoted a great deal of time talking about the history of Alcoholics Anonymous, the importance of making connections with them, and where to find those connections. The subject matter affects real people and has proven results. People who were once struggling with alcoholism have found sobriety with Alcoholics Anonymous and peace through Christ. And that peace was found because of easy connections made with Alcoholics Anonymous groups.

One of those precious connections was made with a man named Jim. Jim had struggled with alcoholism for many years when he made his way to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. In Jim's own words, he was at an all time low. With the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, Jim became sober. Though it was a difficult road, and it still is, Jim has now been sober for over 20 years. Jim sees Alcoholics Anonymous as an important part of his life, and that is why he still attends two meetings every week. Though he has not had a sip of alcohol in 20 years, he knows just how important it is to meet with and both give and receive support from somebody who knows what it is like to struggle with alcohol firsthand. It was at one of his many meetings that Jim met Mike. Mike invited Jim to take Bible 101 at his church. Jim was a little hesitant at first, but decided to give it a try. Soon after, I met Jim and we began to take the class Bible 101, which is simply a standard Bible information class. Before we began class, I asked Jim about his religious background, and he told me that as a child he had been a faithful churchgoer, but in his teenage years he stopped attending. When he was a young adult he tried to start attending church again, but he was met with so much disapproval about being

absent for so long that he decided it was not worth attending anymore. This led to nearly 30 years of being unchurched.

Jim went through Bible 101, then Bible 201, then Bible 301. He was absolutely ravenous for God's Word. When we got to the section about the great exchange, something changed in Jim. I drew on the board a picture of a ladder, a picture of a scale, and a picture of a tall stick man looking down at a short stick man.³⁰ I explained that oftentimes we think that being Christian is about climbing a ladder. Though we may slip, we just have to keep climbing and get as high as we possibly can before we die. Perhaps we find ourselves doing the balancing act; sure I may do something bad, but if I do something good then it all evens out. Maybe we do the comparison game, where we convince ourselves that while we are sinful, there are people *way* worse than us. Those are the people who go to hell. But God makes it clear that we need to be perfect.³¹ And no matter how hard we try at these approaches they will never be the perfection that God demands. If we slip up even once then the consequence is eternal damnation.³² We cannot solve this problem. We cannot be perfect. That is why Jesus came to earth. That is why Jesus died. Jesus died to give us the perfection God demands. So now we no longer fear what God demands, no, we have perfection through Christ, and we have it right now!³³

When we finished this lesson Jim had a look of amazement in eyes, and shaking his head he said, "I've been doing that my entire life. I've been trying to climb the ladder, balance the scale, and compare myself to others. But now I get it! I don't need to do that, because Christ has made me perfect in God's eyes already." Soon after finishing Bible 301 Jim joined the church and has been a faithful member ever since. He comes to worship every Sunday and takes the Lord's Supper every time it is offered. Recently I asked Jim some questions in regards to this thesis. Jim's responses illustrate so clearly the many points made throughout this paper, therefore the entirety of the interview is included in this section:

1.) What did your recovery program (AA) do to help you become sober?

³⁰ David J. Valleskey, *God's Great Exchange* WELS Evangelism, 1995, 19.

³¹ Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

³² Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

³³ 2 Corinthians 2:4 If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely.

Well, as I always say, nobody goes to AA when it is sunny and 70 degrees outside. You go to AA because your life is so bad that you are willing to make a change. I have found the best motivator is pain. The program offers hope and support, as well as a step-by-step process to follow with the help of a sponsor. Find someone who has what you want and ask them to help you. In my case, financially I was OK, but mentally and spiritually I was bankrupt. The program is simple: don't drink and go to meetings. What they don't tell you is after you get your head dried out, the real work begins.

- 2.) What does your recovery program (AA) do to help you maintain sobriety?
As you may know, nobody gets cured! But with God's help you maintain your sobriety on a daily basis. I am glad to say that I just passed 20 years in September. I still try to hit 2 meetings a week. The difference is while I no longer struggle with drinking, I am trying to become less self-centered. A better husband, father, friend, business partner. Alcohol is not the real problem which we all think it is. I have a thinking problem, and I used alcohol to deal. This is not a good long term solution, but unfortunately it does seem to work in the short run.
- 3.) What needs does your recovery program (AA) fulfill in your daily life?
Part of the program is the 12 steps, which are a suggestion of a way of recovery. We have no formal rule, nor do you need to follow the suggestion, which is pure genius, because alcoholics do not like to be told what to do. But I will tell you that without following the suggestion you have a slim chance in hell to make it. This lets the alcoholic come to this decision himself to give up self-will in order to save his whole life. They suggest you pray in the morning for strength, and be thankful at night.
- 4.) When you first began your recovery, did you feel as if any of your personal needs were not fulfilled by your recovery program?
I would say NO, only because at this point I was very confused. This is a gentle program but it is really a complete change in life. You need to be fed with an eyedropper, not a fire hose.

If you go to church-

- 5.) Does your relationship with Jesus help you in recovery? If so, how?
My relationship with Jesus has helped me tremendously. The program starts off discussing God as you understand him. I can't speak for everyone, but most come to AA with little or no ties to the Lord. I always believed, but never went to church after confirmation. I saw the church as a place for the weak. So like I mentioned earlier, when you come to AA God is touched on very lightly as to not scare anybody from the gift till they see the benefit for themselves. I was one of those guys who wanted nothing to do with God in recovery. This is where the miracles start to happen. As time goes by God does not seem like such a bad idea. As a matter of fact I have not drank for a year, which could only be done by turning the problem over to a power greater than ourselves. To this day Jim does not know how to stop drinking, and I don't care, nor do I need to worry about it. If I could have stopped drinking and solved my problems without going to AA I would never have gone. I could not, I tried everything. And when I would quit for a little while, maybe a week, a month, I was miserable. I was left with me, and no way to deal with it.

- 6.) Does your church fill any gaps that were missing in your recovery program? What gaps did it fill?

Absolutely! At this point in my life I am getting more out of church than my meeting. When I got sober, life got tough. I have dealt with way more struggles in sobriety than when I was drinking. People think you get sober and life gets better. For some it does, but God never promised an easy life to anyone. The only thing he promised is it won't be more than you can handle. My AA meetings have been great to offer suggestions of a better way of life but now I am very much looking to strengthen my spirituality at this point. I have become complacent in life and with the passing of my mother, who always encouraged me to go back to church, I thought it was time. So I mentioned this at a meeting and Mike Young came the next week with a flyer for Bible 101. I thought, "You've got to be kidding." So I went and it was one of the best things I have done. I wish I came earlier, but it is a double-edged sword in that I believe that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. I believe for me the time is right to receive the full impact of God's grace.

- 7.) What doubts or worries did you have when you first came in contact with your church?

You know, it is hard to put into words, but I felt so out of place when I first walked in. I guess it is intimidating. I had some bad experiences as a kid with everyone making it a big deal when I showed up. So I just stopped going. I think as a child I was very insecure and self-conscious and did not like any attention of that kind. Both you and pastor are very approachable, but it was new, and new can be scary.

- 8.) What advice would you give to a pastor who wants to make a connection with recovering addicts in his community?

Let them know you are there. The more knowledge you have about how we function will help you also. The one big thing that you can't control is NO one understands the alcoholic like another alcoholic. That is just the way it works and why AA is so successful. I think you know it is about attraction. That is why when I went through Bible 101 and truly for the first time understood God's love and plan for us, I was hooked.

There are a couple of things that are especially noteworthy in Jim's answers. He pointed out that there are needs that the recovering alcoholic has that the church cannot fulfill. There is something powerful about talking to someone who has had the same struggles with alcohol, someone who knows the urges and the self-destructive desires. It is also important for someone who has been recovered for quite some time to attend the meetings, not only to maintain his sobriety, but also to encourage those who have just begun their journey in Alcoholics Anonymous. It is also important to note that Jim made it very clear that Alcoholics anonymous is not a cure-all. Every day is still a struggle and while the frequent meetings may help in the struggle, they do not give peace, just

motivation and someone to be accountable to. While these are good things, something is still lacking, and Jim found that something in church. He even stated that he gets more out of church now than he does from his meetings! One final thing to point out is Jim's answer to the last question. He says, "The more knowledge you have about how we [alcoholics] function will help you." Saturate yourself with knowledge about how alcoholics function. Talk about the meetings they attend, ask them about what they love about their meetings, ask them about the best part of sobriety. Get to know them, their struggle, and their recovery. When you show that you care, you make a precious connection.

Curriculum for Recovering Alcoholics

So you've made the connections with the Alcoholics Anonymous groups in your community. You have made it clear to many in Alcoholics Anonymous that you are there for them if they are struggling or want to talk about their relationship with God. You were well received, and people from those meetings start to show up at church. Now what?

There are several resources put out by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod that can be very helpful in answering this question. One such resource is Conquerors Through Christ. This is a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod organization that focuses primarily on helping Christians overcome their addiction to pornography, however, their material can be incredibly helpful when dealing with someone who is trying to escape any kind of addiction.

One specific tool that this organization puts out is a chart titled "Getting Out of the Cycle of Sin." It was adapted by Pastor and Christian therapist Alan Siggelkow from a chart titled "Breaking the Cycle," which was originally created by Paul Mavrogeorge. "Getting Out of the Cycle of Sin" can be found on the Conquerors Through Christ website, where the chart is laid out as if the sin being addressed was addiction to pornography, but the chart and process can be effectively applied to someone seeking help and counsel in their efforts to stay away from alcohol. A description of how this chart can be used with an alcoholic seeking counsel follows:

The first step suggested by this chart is to use something called the Repentance Model, which is specific guidance intended to bring a person to repentance. The first component of the Model is to speak God's law. Show the person who is struggling with

their sobriety that God makes it very clear in his Word that drunkenness is a sin. A few passages to choose from include 1 Peter 4:3, "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Proverbs 20:1, "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise." The way this step is applied will vary from case to case. A man who has realized drinking is wrong and has been sober for 25 years may not need this point stated as strongly as a man who has been sober for three weeks and is strongly considering returning to the bottle. After the law has done its work, confession and contrition will follow. Lord willing, the person will see that what they did in the past because of their addiction is wrong, and feel great sorrow for the pain they caused their family and for the sin they committed against God. The sorrow they feel, however, should be quickly replaced with the pure and true joy the gospel brings. You can assure them, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that all those sins and offenses have been forgiven. Share comforting passages like Psalm 103:12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us," or 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

The next step is simple. Ask the person in your office, "Do you believe that Jesus loves you and has forgiven all your sins?" Once they answer this question, take the time to assure them that they are completely forgiven by God. The final step of the Repentance Model is referred to on the chart as "Fruits of Repentance." The person who has come to your office has admitted they sinned, repented and been forgiven. The next step is a change in action so that they do not continually fall back into the same sin. A change in action is absolutely essential in the life of a Christian. As Paul puts in Romans 6:1,2, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" It is important to assure the alcoholic that God is on their side and that God is their ally as they change their sinful ways. "Fruits of Repentance" leads perfectly to the discussion that will take place regarding the rest of the areas on the chart. What will motivate them as we discuss tough topics or difficult changes in their life? The fact that the changes are not

arbitrary, rather they are done as fruits of repentance out of a deep gratitude for what Christ has done.

After the repentance model has been completed, the next thing on the “Getting out of the Cycle of Sin” chart is the discussion of outcome. Some outcomes are positive, while some are negative. Ask the person what positive outcomes come about from alcoholism. Some positives might be that they feel less stressed, they are more comfortable at parties, or are perhaps better able to relax once they've had a drink. The point of this discussion is not to emphasize the pros of drinking, rather, it is to find other God-pleasing ways to achieve the things they turn to alcohol for. This is a time to explore how the alcoholic can relieve their stress, feel more comfortable around peers, or relax, without relying on alcohol. After finding healthy solutions to their problems, it is important to talk about the negative outcomes of their addiction to alcohol. Things like job loss, loss of trust, or loss of family. This discussion can lead naturally into further discussion of law and gospel, because alcoholism harbors unavoidable earthly consequences, yet this sin is completely forgiven.

The next step suggested in the chart is to talk about “Acting Out.” Discuss what is going on in the alcoholic's mind when they reach for the bottle. This is an important thing to discuss, because it may give some insights on where intervention needs to happen. This discussion will reveal when the person's mindset needs to change. It is at this step that the Repentance Model can be used yet again. Remind them of *why* they need to nip their urges in the bud, and most importantly their need to focus on the gospel. This is a step in which it might be wise to discuss having an accountability partner. If the person you are talking to has come from your connections with Alcoholics Anonymous, it is likely they will already have an accountability partner called a sponsor. This is a valuable resource you can encourage them to use, but perhaps it would be wise to have another *Christian* accountability partner; perhaps someone in your congregation who has gifts in this area.

The next step on this chart is discussing triggers. What triggers this alcoholic to pick up the bottle and begin drinking? While discussing this area it is important to consider the intervention strategies discussed above. When the recovering alcoholic faces those triggers, what can they do to stop or ignore their urges? This will undoubtedly be a struggle, and at this step it is important to remind them that while the struggle is difficult,

God is on their side, and God is their helper. Offer practical ways to keep the alcoholic's eyes focused on their Savior. Perhaps post-it notes with Bible passages placed in strategic areas, or a playlist of hymns that focus on what Christ has done for them. It can be helpful to talk about past *successes* in resisting alcohol. What did they do? Why did it work? How can they implement this success in day-to-day life?

The next step is to talk about lifestyle issues. What can the alcoholic do in every day to keep from falling back into the cycle of sin? In this step, it is important to talk about their spiritual health as well as physical. Encourage them to establish a Bible reading plan and to make worshiping every Sunday a habit. Doing this will help them grow closer to their God and assure them of Christ's love for them. Addictions are often induced or fueled by other lifestyle choices. Therefore, it is important to discuss several categories to discover and perhaps tweak certain daily habits. The categories to consider are hungry, exercise, angry, lonely, tired and heart healthy with God. A helpful acronym for these steps is H.E.A.L.T.H. If all these categories are considered and dealt with, it will naturally lead to many of the triggers being eliminated.

The final step in the "Getting Out of the Cycle of Sin" chart is discussing past influences. In this step, it is important to discuss childhood or past trauma that may have contributed to their becoming an alcoholic. Did they have parents who abused alcohol? Have they experienced some abuse that leads them to self medicating? Exploring and addressing these issues is often out of a pastor's area of expertise. It is wise and most beneficial to recommend that the recovering alcoholic sees a professional Christian counselor. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod has experienced and trained counselors at Christian Family Solutions. This organization offers services and counseling, and even has many counselors who specialize specifically in helping recovering alcoholics.

The application of the "Getting Out of the Cycle of Sin" chart is a general overview of where to begin when a recovering alcoholic comes to you for spiritual help. Its application and steps need be tweaked according to a case-by-case situation. A person who has been sober for many years because they know that their alcoholism is wrong or sinful probably does not need as heavy a dose of the law as someone who has relapsed several times and is coming to their pastor after being sober for three weeks. Also, some

of the people who are approaching you because of your Alcoholics Anonymous connections might have already worked with a counselor on overcoming childhood traumas. However, even if the recovering alcoholic does not need Christian Family Solutions for counseling, they could certainly make use of their amazing resources specifically geared to recovering alcoholics who participate in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Christian Family Solutions has put out several devotional booklets that follow the 12 steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous program. One such devotional booklet is called “Walking in His Paths in Recovery 2.” This devotional is beautifully and effectively put together. Each step is laid out with the wording that is used by Alcoholics Anonymous, and then underneath is a section titled “We Understand This to Mean” in which the love and peace of the gospel is applied to the step. Here is an example of how this looks.

Step 1: Admission

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (and other drugs)—that our lives had become unmanageable.

We understand this to mean: We admit our need for God’s gift of salvation, that we are powerless over alcohol and other dependencies of our lives and that our lives are sinful and at times unmanageable.³⁴

After each Christian explanation of the Alcoholics Anonymous steps, there are 3 brief devotions. The devotions consist of a bible reading, a devotional thought, and a prayer. This is followed by a page on which the devotion reader can write points they would like to ponder. At the end of the book there are a few more helpful resources, including a simplified version of the Christianized 12 steps and prayers that those struggling with sobriety might use. Further examples of the format of this devotional are included in Appendix B.

Another helpful resource published by Christian Family Resources is a small devotional called “Twelve-Step Meditations.” This booklet outlines each one of the twelve steps and has a devotional thought for each day. A sample of this resource can be seen in Appendix C.

One more helpful resource published by Christian Family Resources is a Bible study series called “Set Free Through Christ.” This Bible study follows the twelve steps of

³⁴ Manthey, Elsa, ed. *Walking His Paths in Recovery 2: Twelve-Step Devotions for Christians in Recovery*. (Germantown, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Inc., 2011), 9.

Alcoholics Anonymous. With each step it applies God's Word and asks a series of questions that challenges the participant to consider and apply the Scriptures to their life in recovery. There are twelve lessons in the series, each is easy to navigate, and contains an amount of material that can be covered in under an hour. An example of these materials can be found in Appendix D.

God has blessed the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod with many men and women who are dedicated to helping and counseling those who are struggling with alcohol addiction. They have put together many useful resources that work hand-in-hand with a recovering alcoholic who is receiving help through Alcoholics Anonymous. These resources are valuable and effective, and can guide a pastor as he explores ways to help alcoholics in his congregation and connect with Alcoholics Anonymous.

Conclusion

*If you cannot be a watchman,
Standing high on Zion's wall,
Pointing out the path to heaven,
Offering life and peace to all,
With your prayers and with your offerings
You can do what God demands;
You can be like faithful Aaron,
Holding up the prophet's hands.*

*Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the multitudes are dying,
And the master calls for you.
Take the task he gives you gladly;
Let his work your pleasure be.
Answer quickly when he calleth,
"here am I send me, send me!"*

Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal,
Hymn 573, verses 4,5

A Christian loves souls. It does not matter who that soul belongs to. When we see someone hurting, our heart goes out to them. Alcoholics Anonymous members are oftentimes suffering under a burden of doubt, sadness, and addiction. Even the member of Alcoholics Anonymous who has been sober for years still suffers with uncertainty. They have overcome their addiction with alcohol, and perhaps that has led to repaired

relationships, a renewed work ethic, and financial stability, but even with all those things, there is still a hole, still a profound need for something that is missing. It is a hole for which we have a patch, and the patch is the gospel.

You might be thinking to yourself, I am never going to be in a position to minister to alcoholics. It simply is not part of my ministry or part of my life as a Christian. Perhaps you will never have the opportunity to share Jesus with the recovering alcoholic or with an Alcoholics Anonymous group, but do what the hymn verse above suggests. Pray that the Lord equip people with the gifts and with the heart to reach out to the sick who so desperately need their heavenly doctor. Pray that the gospel gives those who suffer the long sought after peace they desire so profoundly. Finally, seriously consider the words of this paper. Alcoholism is an unbelievably pervasive sin that affects so many people. Make repeated and intentional connections with groups like Alcoholics Anonymous so that you can offer the gospel to those who so desperately need it. Heed the words of the last verse of the hymn. “Let none hear you idly saying there is nothing I can do, while the multitudes are dying and the master calls for you.”³⁵ Listen to Jesus’ call and harvest the ripe fields.

³⁵ Christian Worship: Hymn 573

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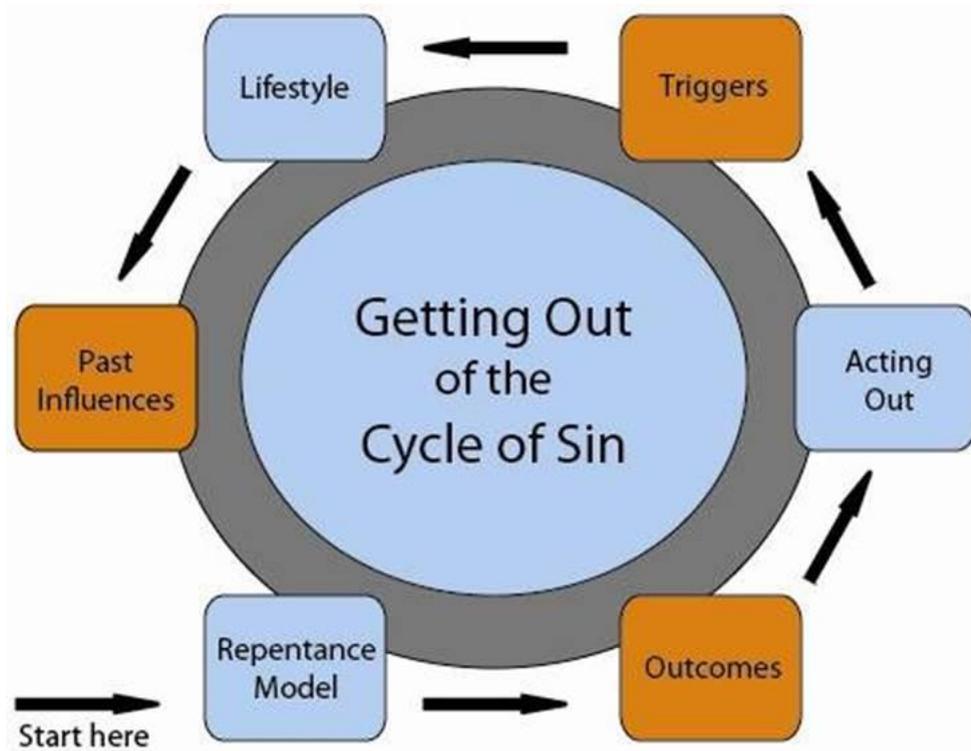
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Appendix A



Appendix B

Step 1: Admission

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol (and other drugs)—that our lives had become unmanageable.

We understand this to mean:

We admit our need for God's gift of salvation, that we are powerless over alcohol and other dependencies of our lives and that our lives are sinful and at times unmanageable.

Appendix B



Bible Reading: *The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

—Psalm 34:17-18

Devotion 1: Are you at the very beginning point of admitting the power that alcohol/drugs have over you, yet living in the lie that says, “Someday, maybe in a few months, I can use again and control it”? Or are you still saying, “I can stop if I want to!” Or have you reached the point of admitting, “I am an addict! I’m not perfect! I continue to make mistakes! My life is unmanageable! I am brokenhearted!”

God does not reject you when you admit your sins. He hears you when your emotions are raw and words are hard to say. He sees your stubbornness, pride, and need for control. He sees you at times feeling sorry for yourself. Yet God reaches out to you in whatever state you are in. He is close to the brokenhearted. He desires our salvation. He will restore us.

Admitting is hard to do because it makes us vulnerable. Each of us has to look at our REAL self and see our imperfections, mistakes, and arrogance. Letting others see us for what we are is hard to do.

Yet in this broken state we have reached (1) an honest place where lies cannot live, (2) a calmness so we need no longer hide, and (3) an honesty so we can begin to trust. Although our spirit is crushed, the Lord through his Word assures us, “I am with you.” In our broken state God will begin our healing, our restoration, and yes, he is our salvation.

As Christ has reached out and accepted us, may we reach out and accept others.

Prayer: Dear Father, how grateful I am that you are close by me. I admit I am not what I should be, or even what I could be. Thank you for helping me so that I am not what I used to be. Help me reach out to others with your comfort and strength. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

STEP ONE — ACCEPTANCE

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

Thanks for taking me for what I am! I am a human being! I'm an alcoholic and a drug addict! I'm not perfect, far from it! I still make mistakes! But still you want me! Still You accept me! That's neat! That's love! That's care! That's You!

And what about me? Sometimes I'm stubborn and short-sighted! Sometimes I'm proud, arrogant and grandiose! Sometimes I want to feel sorry for myself and sit in my "pity bag" and all the time I'm powerless. But You still accept me because of your love for me in Christ.

Help me accept me! Help me to know myself as you know me!

Help me accept everyone else; — my wife, my husband, my children, my parents, my brothers, my sisters, my boss, my co-workers!

Help me not to make greater demands of others than I do of myself!

Lord, may those I love be free, even of me and my foolish ideas of what they should or could be!

Today Lord, I'm not what I should be! I'm not even what I could be! But, thank you, I'm not what I used to be!

Appendix D

FIRST STEP BIBLE STUDY

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable."

Goals:

To admit that our alcohol/drug use has caused major problems in our lives.

To admit to powerlessness over our use of alcohol/drugs.

To identify unmanageability in our lives.

The Lesson:

"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants,

'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and

Appendix D

kill. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:11-24)

Discussion Questions:

What were the son's unwise choices? His sinful ones?

What brought him back to his senses?

What was his motivation for returning to his father?

What are some of the problems that have resulted from your drinking?

How have you tried to correct these problems?

If these problems still persist in your life, what keeps you from taking them home to your Father for help?

Our Heavenly Father is there, waiting for us to return to him. Through the faith the Holy Spirit works in us, we can go to our Father who can and will repair the damage we have done in our lives.

Prayer:

Father, show me the way back home. Sometimes I feel so lost and alone. Help me to see the truth about my drinking. Give me your assurance of help and guidance. Amen.