

Counseling the Alcoholic

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by Larry G. Zwiig

“My name is Bob and I am an alcoholic.” To hear those words come from someone sitting next to you, someone you have come to like and even respect, is somewhat of a shock to the system, even when you are prepared to hear them. Sadly, a shock it shouldn't be, when you consider the fact that, as of 1985, 12.1 million people, here in the United States, have one or more of the symptoms of alcoholism and that those words, “My name is _____ and I am an alcoholic” and the admission that they bring, are the beginning and the only way there seems to be for a person to arrest the disease. That is what this paper is all about:

First—Alcohol and Alcoholism—What is alcohol? How does it work and what does it do to the body? What is alcoholism? Are we dealing with just another sin, a disease, something hereditary or what is this? How wide spread is it and how much can we expect it to affect us?

Second—Programs for Cure, Including Alcoholics Anonymous—What programs are there? Are they programs we can use? What, if anything, can we learn from them? What about the theology involved?

Third and finally—Ministering to the Alcoholic—How does one go about it? What can we and what can't we do? What do we need to know before we attempt such ministry? These and possibly a few other things will be presented, including copies, at the end of the paper, of several things you might find both interesting and useful.

This paper may end up appearing a bit short. There are two reasons for that. The first is that this is not meant to be a definitive paper on the subject. The second is that I do not claim to be an expert on alcoholism. In some ways alcoholism is similar to the Bible, the more you read about it and the more you study it, the better you understand how little you really know (if it can be considered a comfort, no one else seems to really know much either) and how much there is to learn. I feel that the most benefit to be derived from the paper may be from the discussion of it, and I want to be sure there is plenty of time left for that.

Alcohol and Alcoholism

Alcohol is a clear, colorless liquid. Its chemical formula is C_2H_5OH . That puts it in the field of carbohydrates. When taken into the body through the mouth, it passes through the walls of the stomach and intestine into the blood stream rather quickly, and in the liver is changed into acetaldehyde, then into acetic acid which in turn is used as heat or energy but cannot be stored for future use. One ounce of alcohol passing through this process gives the body about 170 calories out of a potential 200 calories in one ounce of alcohol. The body simply uses it as any other potential food, but alcohol is completely deficient in vitamins, minerals and protein.

Ethyl alcohol is the same substance and has the same effect in the body, whether taken in the form of beer, wine or distilled spirits. Beer is about 4-1/2% alcohol. One 12 ounce bottle has about 1/2 ounce of alcohol. Wine is about 13% alcohol but is often sold with alcohol added to bring it up to 20%. (Four ounces of unfortified and 2-1/2 ounces of fortified wine will each contain 1/2 ounce of alcohol). Distilled spirits are usually 40-50% alcohol (80-100 proof). One ounce of whiskey, if 100 proof, contains 1/2 ounce of

alcohol. Alcohol is the common ingredient of beer, wine and whiskey and it makes no difference to the body how it arrives in the blood stream.

Alcohol, an *anesthetic*, is a double first cousin of ether and has a similar chemical formula. If a sufficient quantity of alcohol or ether enters the blood stream, sleep is induced. As each is removed from the blood stream, consciousness returns. The liver removes 90% of the alcohol in a human body at a fairly constant rate—in an average sized person about 3/4 ounce of (80 proof) whiskey per hour. Only 10% is removed by the breath and kidneys.

Intoxication is the degree of anesthesia attained by consuming alcohol faster than the liver can transform it. The higher the percentage of alcohol in the blood stream, the greater the degree of intoxication. For an average person of 150 pounds, one ounce of alcohol (about two drinks) in the blood stream produces a change of feelings, the beginning of relaxation. With 4 or 5 drinks, the blood level reaches 0.1% alcohol, with a pronounced change in emotions and feelings, and some impairment of the mental and physical efficiency. Six or eight drinks (3 ounces of alcohol) bring the blood level up to 0.15%, currently the gauge of legal intoxication. At this point there is gross malfunction of mental and physical coordination. This condition is reached if 1/2 pint of whiskey or 8 beers are drunk within an hour or two.---The time required for the average person to eliminate just 1/2 pint is ten (10) hours; complete elimination of alcohol after “passing out” ordinarily takes a good 24 hours.”ⁱ

If you consider that last sentence for just a minute, you come to realize that anyone who drinks heavily on a daily basis may in fact *never* be totally sober and therefore never truly be himself or herself.

So much for alcohol and its effect. It is not a matter of pride but for most people a matter of fact that some or all of the effects of alcohol mentioned above have been experienced personally. The big question is “Why does one person become an alcoholic while the next person is simply a heavy or occasional drinker”? That is the biggest question in the study of alcoholism—a question for which to this very day no one has found an answer. Observation indicates that there may be something hereditary, something in the genes that makes one person more susceptible to alcoholism than another.

“There is evidence to indicate that families where there is extreme opposition to drinking or excessive drinking on the part of both parents become seed beds for producing future alcoholics in their children. Moderate abstaining and the moderate drinking families produce fewer alcoholics.”ⁱⁱ

Beyond this there is not really much that can be said with any degree of authority. Ethyl alcohol is a drug and to some people it is highly addictive.

That last statement immediately raises the question regarding whether alcoholism is a sickness or sin. As a first step in answering the question, we quote *The Shepherd under Christ*: “Drunkenness, however, is sin. Scripture has numerous proscriptions against drunkenness (e.g., Pr. 23:29-35; Is. 5:11; Eph. 5:18; Ga. 5:21). All drunkenness is sin, whether of the occasional reveler, of the problem drinker, or of the alcoholic. It is an abuse of the body which was redeemed by Christ and is a temple of the Holy Ghost. It is poor stewardship of God’s blessings. It frequently does injury to or endangers other persons. According to Scripture, drunkenness is morally reprehensible. To ignore this is to ignore what

Scripture says of it. At the same time, the alcoholic is a sick person, psychologically and possibly physically. He cannot control his consumption of alcohol. Some believe that his biochemistry is such that once he begins drinking he cannot stop. To call an alcoholic sick does not, however, eliminate his responsibility to God for the sinfulness of his excessive drinking.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Almost everything written in the past forty years would agree with this answer to the question of “sin or sickness.”

“Alcoholism is a complex disease which is, in effect, a constellation of diseases, a genus and not a species.—Repeated excessive use of alcohol indicates the existence of the illness, not its cause. Effective counseling on alcoholism begins with an understanding of the illness, and acceptance of the alcoholic as a sick person.—drunkenness is immoral and sinful, for it is a momentary mutilation of the human mind. It is temporary destruction of this priceless gift of God. Intelligence, reason, memory and judgment are impaired with a few drinks and inhibitions severely curtailed.”^{iv}

“Alcoholism is a three-fold illness - involving the body, mind and spirit. --- An alcoholic cannot be cured of his disease so that he can drink normally again. But his illness can be arrested.”^v

“Alcoholism is a ‘total sickness.’ The alcoholic is often physically sick,—he is also emotionally, mentally, and socially sick. But as we try to understand the alcoholic within our Christian faith, we see him as a person who is also spiritually sick.”^{vi}

It is easy for us as Christian pastors to see the *sin* part of the alcoholic’s problem because we can see the fruit that is born from the sin. The sickness part of the alcoholic’s problem is not always that easy for us to see, or maybe more honestly, to accept. The reason for saying that alcoholism is a sickness is the fact that ethyl alcohol is addictive. No matter how much the alcoholic insists that he can stop drinking “if I want to” and no matter how much you or I or some member of his family might feel that he ought to be able to stop drinking, i.e., “if he were a man” or “if he really loved us,” once he takes that first drink he cannot do otherwise but to drink more—and more—and more. That is addiction, and addiction is sickness. As mentioned in the quote from *The Shepherd under Christ*, that does not remove the sin involved, which was using alcohol as an excuse or a way out of whatever, but when the use of alcohol becomes alcoholism, the main problem in the individual’s life becomes the addiction to alcohol, a disease. Those who try to treat alcoholism as only a disease have very little success, and those who attempt to treat it as “sin only” have very little success, if any. Every organization or type of treatment one reads about that has any amount of success in dealing with alcoholics approaches it as both a disease and sin.

Just how serious the problem is can be seen by considering some statistics. As noted above, in 1985, 12.1 million people in the U. S. had one or more of the symptoms of alcoholism. There are 98, 000 deaths in the U. S. annually that can be directly contributed to the abuse of alcohol. One of every three problems within families in the U. S. are due to the abuse of alcohol, and it is estimated that the “problem drinker” cost the nation \$111.7 billion in the year 1983. 65 of every 100 persons will have an automobile accident during their lifetime that is due to alcohol abuse. Alcohol is the number one cause of highway deaths among people ages 15 to 24. Alcoholics Anonymous has 1300 meetings per week in Houston alone, and figures from as far back as the 1940s to the present date indicate that Alcoholics Anonymous serves only about 10

percent of the alcoholics in this country. That last figure may or may not be correct due to the fact that A.A., does not dwell on records but rather on helping the alcoholic. What makes these statistics even more startling is that unless arrested, alcoholism invariably ends in premature death.

The Answer to Alcoholism—A.A.?

One problem in dealing with alcoholism is the perception on the part of the average person, both as to the use of alcohol and in regard to the alcoholic. Pastor Greg Gibbons quotes the following, which illustrates the point. The quote goes a long way back into history, to the end of Prohibition, and is the supposed reply of a candidate asked about “whiskey.”

“If, when you say whiskey, you mean the devil’s brew, the poison scourge, the bloody monster that defiles innocence, dethrones reason, creates misery and despair, yes, it literally takes the bread out of the mouth of babes; if you mean that vile drink that topples the Christian man and woman from the pinnacles of gracious, righteous living into the bottomless pit of shame and despair, helplessness and hopelessness - then, sir, I am against it with every fibre of my body.

“But if, when you say whiskey, you mean the oil of conversation, the philosophic drink that is consumed when good fellows get together, which puts a song in their hearts, laughter on their lips and a smile of contentment in their eyes; if you mean Christmas cheer; if you mean that stimulating drink which puts the spring in an old man’s step on a frosty morning; if you mean that drink which permits a man to magnify his joys and happiness and to forget, if only for a moment, life’s tragedies and sorrows; if you mean that drink which pours into our Treasury untold millions with which to provide tender care for our little crippled children, our aged and infirm, and to build schools, hospitals and roads - then, sir, I am for it with all of my heart.”^{vii}

To put it in more modern terms,

“Consider the paradox involved. While a majority of the American public openly participate in drinking as a social custom; in fact, in many instances as a ‘status symbol,’ and young people grow into adult life as participants, there are some individuals - one in 15 - for whom alcohol becomes a poison. Their physical systems after a time cannot oxidize the effects of ethyl alcohol - a drug - and they essentially become addicts. These unfortunates, instead of being considered as sick people, are contemptuously treated as social outcasts.”^{viii}

The big problem, then, in dealing with alcoholism is the matter of attitude—the attitude of the general public toward the alcoholic and, we might add, the attitude of the alcoholic toward himself. The fact that so many of us still in this “enlightened age” look at the alcoholic as being weak and degenerate helps neither us nor the alcoholic. The alcoholic does not need pity nor does he need to be made to feel guilty. “Alcoholics have an abounding guilt, real and neurotic.”^{ix} Guilt is a good part of the reason for his drinking. Being looked upon as something and somebody who is less than what he ought to be compounds that guilt and results in more drinking. Alcohol relaxes and soothes the hurt.

“Men drink alcohol because it stimulates and relaxes simultaneously. Although ethyl alcohol is popularly considered a stimulant, actually it is a sedative. It creates a feeling of self confidence, while it soothes, calms and gives poise.”^x

What is visible to you and me is not poise but it feels like poise to the alcoholic, and that's what is important—how he feels.

Anxiety is another reason for the alcoholic to drink. All of us experience anxieties at times. The alcoholic's answer to anxiety is alcohol.

“It appears that prior to drinking, the anxiety is severe, nameless, and often unexplainable. After the drunk, this kind of anxiety is gone. It is replaced by the anxiety of physical pain, guilt, remorse, and self-hatred. Such anxiety he can explain and tolerate more easily than the other. He feels he has it coming, and it also comes some time after the immediate relief from alcohol. Thus he unconsciously learns to evade the gnawing, vague anxiety of his unresolved estrangement.”^{x1}

That quote helps us to understand two things. The first is how he deals with the “hangover.” The second is the reason for the anxiety. The anxiety can be caused either by guilt or estrangement. Sometimes the estrangement is due to the guilt and other times it is more basic and one could even say theological.

The alcoholic is really no different from any of the rest of us. His basic problem is that he is a sinner. Man was created to live in a perfect loving and trusting relationship with God and with his fellow man. That can be seen in Jesus' summary of the law, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In the Fall, man became estranged from these relationships for which he was created. The problem now is that we no longer have the desire nor the capacity to be just the created ones, in other words to be fully human in our relationships with God, ourselves or with others. The problem is not that we are *too* human but that we are not human enough. That is the temptation that Satan used on Eve, “‘You will not surely die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.’” What man wants to be since the Fall is *God*. We are not satisfied with being the created ones.

“Man now, by nature, is incapable of letting God be God. He is unable and unwilling to be the created person, the truly dependent person, in relationship to the Creator Person—unable and unwilling to love, trust, and obey God above everyone and everything. Egocentric, hostile, and defiant towards God, the created person perceives himself as the Omnipotent One—the Person.

“In this condition man perceives himself at the center of life and feels that people and all of life ought to be just the way he thinks they ought to be, particularly in relationship to himself. Together with this, he will not let himself really become aware of and fully accept his own imperfections as a fallen human. This reality will frequently be disguised by apparent feelings of inferiority while he harbors the deep inner feeling that if there is imperfection within him, he ought to be able to overcome his imperfection and become perfect. He is in the contradiction of trying to avoid his imperfection by denial or by blaming others for it (as did both Adam and Eve) and yet living with the feeling that being imperfect, he—if only he, but surely he—ought to be able to be perfect.”^{xii}

The point is that since man is not satisfied with being less than God, he cannot be satisfied with being man either. This is the cause for that estrangement mentioned above. The alcoholic feels that no one loves him, God or anyone else. He feels that he is not what he ought to be and that he ought to be able to correct that himself. In this he is no different, basically, from the rest of us.

“In reality there is still that in each of us which will not and cannot fully let God be God, that which prevents us from loving and trusting Him ‘with all our heart,’ that which

crucifies Him anew each day. Each of us is a ‘chief of sinners’ in God’s sight. There is no other kind. No person is less sinful or more sinful than another. If an alcoholic were not an alcoholic, he would be just as sinful a person. Those of us who are not alcoholic are just as sinful as we would be if we were alcoholic. We are all in need of God’s grace. And there are no degrees of need for grace. John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, and the adulteress woman needed the same grace for the same basic sinfulness. When we realize and truly accept this truth, we see that the alcoholic is not someone unlike ourselves but our brother in sinfulness and need. He is one of us. Our relationship with him ceases to be marred by moralism.”^{xiii}

The other thing there is to deal with is our estrangement from ourselves and one another because of the lack of perfect love. The “omnipotent egocentric Ego” (Ego with the capital E refers to this “God complex” we all have) expresses itself in various ways—hostility, pride, selfishness, dishonesty, insecurity, mistrust, indifference and self-pity. Such things are painful for all of us, and we often try to cover them up or escape with various defense mechanisms, such as rationalization, excuses, putting the blame on someone else, hiding in a group, becoming so terribly busy or simply not facing reality and living in a dream world. For the alcoholic, alcohol is the answer. It gives him that *warm, accepted, superior, God-like* feeling. And so he drinks. And when the hangover comes, the guilt that comes with it is understandable for him. This he deserves for drinking. And for the real alcoholic, the way to get rid of this pain is to drink some more. Alcohol becomes not only an answer to his mental and spiritual problems, it soon becomes an absolute need physically.

Obviously the real need is God. God in Christ accepts us in spite of all this. In Christ there is forgiveness for all this. In Christ, as Paul said, we are not strangers and foreigners but members of God’s household, in fact, very sons and daughters of God through faith. The Church, in Christ, has the answer. In the Church the alcoholic, like every other sinner should find a loving, understanding, accepting, responsible fellowship. The Church, as is often said, is to be a haven for sinners, not a _____ for saints.

The problem is that the Church, due to the fact that it is made up of sinful human beings, often sends out distorted images of who a Christian is—and what a Christian is like. These distorted images tend to chase many a sinner, and especially the alcoholic, away. Examples:

We tend to emphasize “sins” instead of sin. For instance, we find it easier to preach against adultery or theft than to give warning concerning the basic nature of sin—covetousness—basic lovelessness, pride and egocentricity. The alcoholic feels we will preach against the sin of alcoholism rather than the basic sinfulness of man. Christians are portrayed as always being “strong in the Lord.”—The alcoholic only feels more guilt because of his weakness. Christ is our victorious Lord, and a Christian is *always* joyful, hopeful and victorious.—The believer feels even more guilty about his real doubt and grief. Christians love one another even as Christ loved them.—The believer feels guilt about his feelings of hostility and lack of love.

The point to all of this is simply that, in effect, all too often we seem to say “if you are really Christians you won’t do—this or that.” “Unless the fellowship of saints, which is simply the fellowship of believers, can truly be the fellowship of sinners—of the imperfect—it will not know the glory of being the fellowship of the redeemed here and now.—Together with the words ‘you shall not’ there must be within the fellowship the words ‘nevertheless you will.’”^{xiv} That honesty and understanding we must have to be of help.

The point is simply that we have to be careful what images we project to the rest of the world. If by the images we project we are saying to the world “if you want to be one of us, you must be perfect,” we do not have much to offer them except guilt, frustration and pain. I recognize and fully believe that not one of us intends to do that, nor do our people, and yet it happens. The alcoholic and his feelings of lack of love, guilt and estrangement, which he feels he cannot bring to us, are proof of that fact. In passing, I might say, from my experience with people on the street, that those same distorted images tend to cause a great many people to shy away from the church. You may say that those are just excuses. In some cases that may be correct, but in a great many it is not an excuse, it’s fact.

Another problem in dealing with alcoholism is that most of us would like to find and treat the cause. Logically that seems to make sense. In practice it does not. Back in the 30s and 40s, when attempts to work with alcoholics really began in this country, one of the popular ideas was *Insight-oriented Therapy*, revolving around “weak ego” problems. The end result was *notorious failure*. Sometimes, along with alcoholism, the alcoholic can have deep-seated psychological problems. Those do need to be dealt with, but that has to be done after the alcoholism itself has been brought under control. Alcoholism is a learned behavior—it makes the alcoholic comfortable and accepted. What is necessary is *behavior modification*. That is the process used by Alcoholics Anonymous. A. A. has had more success by far than any other organization or any other method. Its basic premise is that the alcoholic must come to the point where he wants to stop drinking. He must either fall off or be pushed off the hill of “familiar behavior.” He must, so to speak, hit bottom. When that has happened, and he wants help, he can learn and be helped to learn new behaviors that provide comfort, familiarity and new habits.

This is the same basic approach and program used by anyone and everyone that I have found has had success in dealing with alcoholics. This is true of the Hazelden Foundation or Group, a recognized authority on alcoholism and its treatment in Center City, Minnesota. It is the approach used by the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. It is the approach used by the University of Texas, Hermann Hospital, APT—Alcohol Problem Treatment—in Houston. It is interesting that in every successful program that I have read about or heard about, part of that program is participation in an A. A. group or the formation of a group that uses the same philosophy and almost the same *Twelve Steps*. A call to the Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service verified the fact that the *Alcohol Awareness Groups* conducted by the congregations of our synod in the Milwaukee area have somewhat rewritten the twelve steps but they have twelve steps and otherwise use the same approach and follow the same philosophy.

We have been alluding to Alcoholics Anonymous and their approach. If you have not acquainted yourselves with their materials, I would highly recommend that you do so. I cannot direct your conscience nor can anyone else as to whether or not you send your members to Alcoholics Anonymous, but since A. A. is recognized worldwide by everyone, including the medical profession, as having the best success in working with alcoholics, I think it behooves each of us to read their materials. Their approach can be summarized by the following:

1. *The alcoholic, to be helped, must admit his helplessness.*—He must, either on his own or through a created crisis, come to the realization that he has “lost control” and is powerless to deal with his drinking on his own. From here on, life becomes “one day at a time.” This is evidenced in their _____ booklet, where at the end of each day’s meditation they say, “God keep me sober another day.”
2. *Belief in a higher power.* Since the alcoholic admits he is powerless, there must be power from another source in order for him to remain sober another day. A. A. knows

- no creed and requires only a belief in a higher power. A. A. says that very rarely does an alcoholic succeed in maintaining sobriety without submitting to and believing in a higher power. Many alcoholics have become Christians through A.A. In order to remain sober, he must now turn his life over to God who has the power to help him live each day without alcohol and in a loving and peaceful relationship with himself and other people.
3. *Self Inventory and Catharsis.* Once the alcoholic has admitted his loss of control and turned himself over to the higher power, he must take an inventory of himself and his relationship both with his God and other people. This is painful but without complete honesty regarding this self-inventory he will not succeed in maintaining sobriety. Anger, hatred, envy—all of these are the things that cause the alcoholic to drink. Unless he cleanses himself of these, he will have feelings and emotions which can be drowned only in the bottle. In addition to the self-inventory, wherever possible, he should admit to those whom he has wronged the exact nature of his wrongs and make amends. This self-inventory, admitting wrongs and making amends (catharsis) must be an ongoing thing.
 4. *Through Prayer and Meditation Improve One's Contact with God.*—Since the alcoholic admits his helplessness to deal with alcohol and the rest of his life, and has turned his life over to God, it makes sense that he attempt to grow closer to that God and in maintaining his contact with Him. Each morning the alcoholic is to set aside some time to meditate, to take inventory of his life, to plan his day and to ask God to help him with his plans and to stay sober. A. A. states that one of the signs of regression is the failure to take this time for meditation. Consciously or unconsciously the alcoholic who skips meditation does not want to be honest with himself or his God because neither would like what is about to happen.

Obviously, we as conservative Lutheran pastors have some problems with the A.A. program. We might point to a number of things but in fact all our problems center on one thing—that “higher power.” A.A.’s “higher power” is obviously not the God of the Bible. The history of A.A. points to the fact that this was a very heated issue in the beginning. “Higher power” was finally adopted in order to make sure that everyone, regardless of creed, would feel comfortable coming to A. A. What do we do about it? Can we in good conscience send our people to A.A.? As I said before, I am not about to bind your conscience one way or another. If you are fortunate enough to be in a place like Milwaukee, where we have a large number of congregations and therefore a large number of members, which also means a fairly large group of people affected by alcoholism, you can probably start an *Alcoholic Awareness Program*, or at least be able to send your member to a sister congregation which has such a program. As stated before, the congregations in Milwaukee have rewritten *The 12 Steps* and used the same philosophy as A. A.

When you are in a situation such as most of us are in, you must weigh the benefits of the program against the dangers. It is possible, in my mind, for a pastor who has a good relationship with a member affected by alcoholism to recommend that he attend A.A. meetings and after he has done so and is on the path to recovery, to sit down with him and make sure that he recognizes that his higher power is the Savior God and that his relationship, his help, his forgiveness and his wholeness is found in Him. In talking with the people at Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, I was interested to find that they are giving the same advice. They even said that, although it is not the official position of the Seminary, several of the professors

there have taken this position. Personally, I guess I would like to be squeaky clean, no less than any of the rest of you, but I think that this is one of those places where our first concern has to be for the alcoholic and his immediate help. The fact seems to be that no one understands an alcoholic like an alcoholic and therefore no one can help an alcoholic like another alcoholic. Since you and I are not alcoholics, we simply cannot understand his particular feelings and problems and until he has stopped drinking, we can minister to him best by helping him get into a program like A.A.

That obviously brings us to the last part of this paper—Our Ministry to the Alcoholic. As we indicated before, the most important factor in our ministering to the alcoholic is our own attitude. Alcoholics are like children in that they are not easily fooled. They can spot a fraud faster than a church member can spot a stewardship sermon.

“Primary is ‘who we are,’ how we perceive ourselves and the person who is the alcoholic on the emotional and spiritual levels of our being.”^{xv}

“Sincerity and honesty are essential in dealing with alcoholics. It is better for a minister who finds that alcoholics anger or disgust him to accept this and not attempt to counsel them but, rather to learn how and where to refer them.”^{xvi}

“The minister’s own attitude is inevitably shaped by the experience and conditioning of his own life. When discussing the use of alcohol, ministers often exhibit greater prejudice and hostility than in discussing race or religion.”^{xvii}

Ministering to the alcoholic, then, requires that we go into it with an open mind, a mind free of prejudices toward alcoholism. If we have those prejudices, our approach is going to be judgmental and moralistic.

“The alcoholic doesn’t need moralizing. He doesn’t need lecturing. He doesn’t need someone trying to manipulate him into a certain way of thinking, believing, and behaving. He doesn’t need someone feeling sorry for him. He doesn’t need someone pampering him. He doesn’t need someone overprotecting him.

He does need someone in the society who understands alcoholism. He does need someone who understands how he feels and cares about him and his feelings. He does need someone who can communicate that there is hope and help.”^{xviii}

What the alcoholic really needs is the grace of God. If he can come to understand God’s love for him and the fact that he doesn’t have to be perfect to have that love, he can also accept God’s forgiveness. You and I know that love of God. Paul says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” The question is whether or not he sees that love in us, whether that’s the “image” he sees in us. That depends on how we look at ourselves.

“They are in need of the grace of God, but they are not in need of more of the grace of God than the rest of us. Anyone who has this awareness of reality within himself has the most basic requirement toward effective counseling with alcoholics. If this is present, alcoholics will sense it, and if it isn’t present, they will sense that too.”^{xix}

How does one reach that goal of sensitivity—that honesty that says you’re sinner, I’m a sinner and can stop there. The answer is to look at yourself, and do what the alcoholic has to do under Step #4 in the A. A. program, “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” John Keller, in *Ministering to Alcoholics*, reminds us that there are many addicts in this world

besides alcoholics. Among them are success addicts, food addicts, pleasure addicts and then, of course, work addicts or “workaholics.” That one we all recognize and so does Keller. He paints the picture of the pastor dealing with an alcoholic and his addiction. It’s that time of year and he preaches a beautiful Mother’s Day sermon about the family being a gift of God. The problem is his family very seldom sees him. When his wife thinks to herself, “If he really wanted to be here, he could be,” his answer is, “I am doing this for the Lord’s sake, and this is a sacrifice we have to make.” Gentlemen, even the alcoholic can’t come up with a better rationalization than that! That well might sound vaguely familiar though, huh? When we can look at ourselves and see that kind of problem and recognize it as being just as sinful as the alcoholic’s problem, then we’re ready to help him.

That sounds pretty basic to all our work as Christian pastors, doesn’t it? And it should be. Again, my personal experience with people on the street points to the fact that the same thing is necessary there if there is to be any chance of them “changing their behavior pattern” and joining us on Sunday. That grace, to be able to look at ourselves honestly and see our own sinfulness plainly, can not only make us able to work with the alcoholic but it can change our whole ministry.

“By his entire attitude and his preaching, the minister can help establish a climate which is conducive to shame and concealment of the illness, or, on the other hand, can help create understanding and initiate an open attack upon the disease rather than upon the alcoholic.—Furthermore, gaining a true understanding of alcoholism can also have a profound effect upon the preaching area of the minister’s life.”^{xx}

So much for attitude. We take it for granted we will all work on that. If our attitude is such that the alcoholic will actually communicate with us and let us minister to him, what is there that we can and cannot do?

First some basic things. Number one, don’t spend time with an alcoholic when he is drunk. When someone who is an alcoholic calls in the middle of the night, suggest to him that he go home and get some sleep and you will be glad to talk to him tomorrow. You can do absolutely nothing to help the person at that point. Second, don’t try to take an alcoholic’s bottle away from him. “Nothing can be done to help anybody who is not doing his utmost to help himself.”^{xxi} Third, don’t let the family or anyone else manipulate you into punishing the alcoholic. It is easy to let this happen when you have a wife and children who are literally going without food and clothing because the husband spends all his money in the tavern, and that wife and children are looking to you for help. As we said before, guilt he doesn’t need. Of that he has plenty.

Several other things are also basic but a bit more complex. The first is don’t let yourself be used by the alcoholic.—An alcoholic has two potent weapons that he tends to use on anyone who tries to help him. Number one is to make the other person angry, and to arouse disgust or criticism. If you become angry or irritated when dealing with him, you are defeated the moment that anger appears because you have confirmed in his mind both his self-hatred and the fact that he is hated by others, and you have increased his guilt, which is just another reason to drink. The second technique the alcoholic employs is that of putting the horse collar of his anxiety around your neck and getting you to pull the whole load. You can be manipulated into fulfilling his dependency needs and doing things which, if he is truly to maintain sobriety, he must do himself.

The second is don’t get caught long term. The alcoholic, if he is to be successful in staying sober, has to learn to stand on his own two feet. If he is “following the program,” he is going to have to make it on his own. That doesn’t mean you can’t be there to help, but he is the

one who has to do it. Remember, you're not the one with this particular problem, he is. He is the one who has to deal with it.

The things you can do can be divided pretty much the same way. The basic things are, Number one, remember to deal with the basic problem first—the man's drinking.

The reasons for his drinking, the guilt, the financial problem it is causing, and all the rest can come later. Number one is the fact that he has to recognize his loss of control over alcohol and get help to stop drinking. Sometimes that means just opening a line of communication and talking to him about his use of alcohol in a very non-judgmental way to find out where he thinks he is in his drinking. In other cases the person may already have decided that he has a problem. Then it's just a matter of sending him to the right place to get help.

Number two is, remember your role. "The therapist (or the pastor) inevitably acts as the *depriving* person. To try to avoid this role is silly, misleading, and a very poor example.—The therapist must not sidestep his depriving role; instead he must freely acknowledge it and let the therapy begin right there."^{xxii} Just as honesty is necessary for the alcoholic, so it is necessary for us in dealing with him.

The other things that we can do are not so basic. The first is to be *judgmental—non-moralistic* in our dealings with him. What that means is that we deal with the man and his problem very matter of factly. He has a problem with alcohol. That's fact. We accept that fact. That's the judgmental part. Being judgmental is acceptable as long as at the same time you are not moralistic. If you are moralistic in your judgments, you not only recognize the fact, but you *pass* judgement on the fact. "The non-moralistic, non-rejecting judgmental attitude as the elements of understanding and acceptance, and moves in the direction of helping a person to greater self-awareness and greater honesty about himself and his condition, and his responsibility. It is basic in the process of confrontation."^{xxiii}

That concept isn't as difficult as it might sound. If you think it through, you will recognize the fact that this is the way that Jesus dealt with people. Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, even Peter, all were dealt with in exactly this fashion. Jesus always made sure they knew that He knew. He knew, but He never gave them the feeling that he passed judgement on them. When He looked at them He saw not what they had been but what they had the potential of being, if only they knew His love for them. And that He was going to give them the chance to do.

Being judgmental, non-rejecting includes something else that is very difficult but has to be done if our work with the alcoholic is to meet with success. He is going to have to be allowed to hit bottom, if that is what it takes for *him* to face the problem.

"He also needs someone who is free to let him go—who can love him enough to completely let him go to the bottom, like unto the love of the father in the story of the prodigal son. He does need someone who is free to let the problem prove itself to him. He does need someone who is free to let him experience the inner pain and natural results of his drinking without imposing other pain upon him. He does need someone who can let the problem be his problem and at the same time seek to motivate him to responsible action."^{xxiv}

"It is not cruelty, but rather a manifestation of compassion, to suffer with an alcoholic by allowing all the consequences of the drinking to take their full measure of pain. Only when the family [and the pastor] is able to do this is an alcoholic likely to begin his recovery."^{xxv}

This “allowing to crash” is what Jesus allowed Peter to do. He had warned him often and pointedly, but Peter didn’t get the message. So, Jesus had to let the situation run its course. After cursing and swearing, denying that he knew Jesus, Peter hit bottom. He wept. He now had a full realization of how weak he really was and how much he needed the strength and forgiveness that Jesus wanted to give him. Up to this point, Peter could fool himself but he couldn’t fool Jesus. At the point where he sat outside the High Priest’s house and wept, he wasn’t kidding anyone any more, least of all himself. It would be with trembling heart and a feeling of true unworthiness, but also true joy, that he would hear Jesus say, “Peter, feed my sheep—Peter, feed my lambs.”

The alcoholic needs that same kind of love, that same kind of sacrifice. This may be the hardest part of helping an alcoholic both for the family and for you, the pastor. But if you all love him, you’ll let it happen.

I thank you for the opportunity to study for and present this paper. It has given me an opportunity to learn a great deal, not only about alcoholism and alcoholics, but also about myself, my attitudes and the images I project to those around me. As mentioned before in the paper, much of what is necessary to really help an alcoholic is also necessary in most of the rest of our work. The necessity to be honest with ourselves about ourselves, to truly love people even though we may not love what they do, the necessity to be judgmental, non-moralistic, to be honest and factual with people about their sins and yet not pass judgement on them is as important in talking to someone at the door of their house about hearing God’s word as it is in dealing with an alcoholic. The old adage taught to us in homiletics class states it well, “Preach first to yourself and then to your people.”

There are some things after the end of the paper that might prove of value to you, such as the *12 Steps of the Milwaukee area Alcohol Awareness Program*.

One thing you might have noted is that throughout the paper and the quotes used, the alcoholic is always referred to as “he.” The majority of alcoholics still are male, but there is also a large number of women who have problems with alcohol. “He” is used because it’s the simplest way to do it.

One thing that I have not touched in this paper is ministering to the family. Often this is the most important ministry that can be carried out in the case of an alcoholic at home. There may be only one alcoholic, but every person in that home suffers wounds that will stay with them for life. Almost without exception they are as sick if not sicker than the alcoholic. I did not deal with this because it is a whole subject unto itself, and I feel it’s a subject that needs to be covered in a separate paper. And I hope it’s done soon. Thank you again for the opportunity of presenting this paper.

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Since the purpose of the Alcoholism Awareness Program is to provide Scriptural, spiritual support to the alcoholic and his family, these passages from God's word may be used by them in their struggle against alcoholism.

- 1) We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Focusing on the idea of being “powerless” and in seeming “hopelessness”.

Isaiah 5:11, 12b “Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine. (12b) they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of his hands.

Proverbs 23:29-35 “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has bloodshot eyes? (30) Those who linger over wine, who sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! (32) In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. (34) You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. (35) ‘They hit me,’ you will say, ‘but I’m not hurt! They beat me, but I don’t feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?’”

Psalms 116:3 “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.”

Romans 7:18-19 “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

- 2) Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Focusing on the idea that “*there is a God, the Triune God, that can help us.*”

Psalms 50:15 “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

St. Luke 1:37 “Nothing is impossible with God.”

Psalms 46:1-2 “God is our refuge and strength an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.”

Psalms 121:2 “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.”

Isaiah 40:28-29 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

- 3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.

Focusing on the idea of turning ourselves and our troubles over to the Lord.

Psalms 116:3-5 “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me: I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord, ‘O Lord, save me!’ The Lord is gracious and righteous, our God is full of compassion.”

Joshua 24:15 “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Jeremiah 31:18 “You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God. (King James Version—“Turn me, and I shall be turned)

Psalm 130:1,2,5,6 “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice, let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in His word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning.

- 4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Focusing on the idea of “recognizing our own unworthiness” through self-examination.

Romans 7:18-19 “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

Daniel 9:5-6a “We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets.

Job 40:4 “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth!”

Psalm 38:3 Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin.

Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

- 5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Focusing on the idea of confessing our sins to God, ourself and others.

St. Luke 15:21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

II Samuel 12:13 “Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin, you are not going to die.’”

Psalm 51:3-4 “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.”

Psalm 32:5 “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’...and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

II Samuel 24:10 “David was conscience-stricken...and he said to the Lord, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’”

I John 1:8 “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Matthew 5:23-24 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

- 6) We’re entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Focusing on the idea of *being ready* to have God remove these defects.

Romans 7:24 “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

St. Luke 18:13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ (I tell you that this man...went home justified before God.)”

Psalm 32:5a “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.

- 7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

a) *Focusing* on the idea of *asking God to remove* these defects.

Psalm 51:vs. 2, 7, 10 “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin...Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean, wash me, and I will be whiter than snow...Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalms 19:12-13 “Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless and innocent of great transgressions.

- b) *Focusing* on the truth of being assured or confident of the Lord’s cleansing through Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of a living faith. Let the promises from God, found in His Word, supply strength for tomorrow. *He does and will supply a restoration to sanity!*

I Corinthians 5:9-11 “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor drunkards nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Isaiah 44:22 “(God is speaking) I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

II Timothy 9:18 “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”

Isaiah 43:25 “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgression, for my own sake, and remember your sins no more.

I John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Psalms 32:1-2 “Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him.”

I John 1:7 “The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies (cleanses) us from every sin.”

Zechariah 3:4 “The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.’”

- 8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, became willing to make amends to them all.

Focusing on the idea of *being willing* to make amends.

St. Luke 19:2-10 “A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus: he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see Jesus, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately, I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’”

St. Luke 15:18 & 21 “I will set out and go back to my Father and say to him: ‘Father I have sinned...’ The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

- 9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Focusing on *making amends*.

St. Luke 19:2-10 (see passage above)

St. Luke 3:8 “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.”

10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

Focusing on continuing to take personal inventory.

I John 1:8-10 “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

Ephesians 5:15-20 “Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. (18) Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery, instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II Corinthians 13:5 “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.”

11) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.

ⁱ “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 3-4.

ⁱⁱ “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 36.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Shepherd under Christ*, Page 24.

^{iv} “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Pages 1, 2, and 37.

^v “Arresting Alcoholism,” Page 4.

^{vi} “*Ministering to Alcoholics*,” Page 11.

^{vii} “The Pastor and the Alcoholic,” Page 1.

^{viii} “Arresting Alcoholism,” Page 6.

^{ix} “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 9.

^x “Arresting Alcoholism,” Page 12.

^{xi} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 12.

^{xii} “Ministering to Alcoholics,” Page 4 and 5.

^{xiii} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 13.

^{xiv} *Administering to Alcoholics*, Page 16 and 17.

^{xv} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 69.

^{xvi} “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 12 and 2.

^{xvii} “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 12 and 2.

^{xviii} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 69.

^{xix} *Ibid.*, Page 67 and 68.

^{xx} “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 3.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, Page 21.

^{xxii} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 73.

^{xxiii} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 77.

^{xxiv} *Ministering to Alcoholics*, Page 69.

^{xxv} “Alcoholism, a Guide for the Clergy,” Page 24.