

HERE'S HOW

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Finding Faith and Putting It Into Practice



Jennifer's Story

I had a tough time with "faith" for at least the first half of my life, probably longer. I was raised Catholic, went through the sacraments up until Confirmation, when I could choose whether or not I went to church. I chose not to. Right around the time of my Confirmation my best friend died of cancer. Any faith that I had was thrown to the dogs on that one. What kind of God would take away such a great kid? Not any God that I believed in.

Then I found alcohol. This worked as a higher power for awhile. Until I needed another god to answer those foxhole prayers, like: "if you get me out of this I swear I'll never do it again," or "if you help me feel better I'll never drink that much again." But I couldn't keep my promises, so I couldn't very well believe in the god I prayed to or I'd be damned, literally.

Then I got sober. By this time, I was a complete mess with no spiritual life to speak of. Other sober people told me I needed to believe in some kind of higher power to stay sober, and I had no idea what they were talking about. They said it could be anything, even a doorknob, and that made no sense to me at all. I knew I had made a complete mess of my life up until this point by trying to run it myself, but letting a doorknob run things didn't seem like a move in the right direction. Thus began my quest for spirituality.

I didn't know it at the time, but looking back I can see that I went about it all wrong. Instead of working the steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which in the end promise a spiritual experience, I started exploring religions to try to acquire this spirituality I sought. The one I remember the most about is the journey I took into Native American spirituality. I feel funny even saying that, since what my search really amounted to was going on camping trips with a bunch of people who were about as far from "native" as I am, wearing feathers in their hair and medicine bags around their neck, listening to someone who called himself a shaman, and trying so desperately to believe like they said they did. But I just couldn't hack it. Their

chants didn't take away the pain of the bee stings I got on the campout, and their behavior didn't jive with what I perceived to be spiritual leaders. So I was on my own again.

Meanwhile, I stumbled through the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. The God thing nibbled away at the back of my mind. I believed there was something, but I didn't know what. I really felt like I needed a strong definition of God to have a relationship with God. Then I met a girl named Sam. She was in a treatment center where I attended an AA meeting. She looked right at me and said "My own mother gave me heroin from the time I was 9 years old. What kind of God would let that happen?" I took a deep breath and thought about it for a moment. "Look," I said, "all I know is that I proved to myself over and over again that I could not stay sober for 24 hours and have any kind of peace and serenity in my life. Now I've been sober for several years, and I have some peace and serenity. The only thing I can come up with is that a higher power has made that all happen for me."

I don't know if that answered her question, but it sure answered mine. This was the beginning of my spiritual journey. When I stopped trying to define God and just believed God, things got a little easier. I put some effort into working the 12 steps and living life as a sober person, and as a result of that developed a relationship with God that I am comfortable with. I don't have a picture of him or her in my head, and I don't even ascribe a gender to it. I just know that I have been tremendously blessed on my journey, and I believe in whoever laid that blessing upon me. For today, in my life, God just is.

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A Step Two Story

Kris F.

Looking back over my time in Alcoholics Anonymous, I am remembering a day when I was new in the program. I was floundering around in my apartment frantically wondering if all these crazy thoughts would ever leave me alone. (As I have often heard in AA meetings, the committee in my head was off and running.) I could not stop the insanity by myself.

Well, I did stop for a moment and realized that my apartment faced a church steeple. Looking out at that steeple, I folded my hands and started to pray. Asking God (who I choose to call my higher power), "Please, please, please help me." (Within a few moments, I received sanity, peace, calmness, and silence. A tremendous relief!)

I knew I was doing the right thing, and I knew Step Two had taken place in me. God had helped me 100%. I believe in my heart, if I had not been sincere and honest during my praying, I'd still be miserable. AA is truly a gift from God.

It's taken me a couple of 24 hours to say I've come to love all 12 steps. I cannot live without them.

Remember I am Not God!

Dan O'C

When I was drinking for 30 years I was living in an artificial world of seriously distorted views between drunks, as well as when drunk. The main ingredient of this phony world was my own view that I could manage and control my life and that I knew what was best for all others.

I did not even think of praying to know God's will and for the power to carry that out and/or to accept whatever His will might be for me. Rather I attempted to tell Him what my will was and that He should carry that out for me regarding careers, relationships, money, sex, etc. If it were real important I would attempt to make deals with God to get what I wanted. It did not work.

I became so frequently frustrated and was so very unhappy most of the time, especially towards the end of my drinking years. I was not getting what I wanted, everything was somebody else's fault, and I was mad at most people most of the time. It was constant misery, I would have been just as happy to have death end it all.

Ultimately, heat from my spouse caused me to seek a solution, so I called AA. I started to go to meetings and the compulsion to drink was lifted. This happened so fast I began to believe I did it, and ended up drinking again in a matter of months. Almost immediately, I was just as unhappy again so I ended up going back to try again. Thank God the compulsion was lifted

again, but the unhappiness and misery remained.

After losing my dream career, losing my house (I lost my family years earlier), and filing for bankruptcy, I finally attempted to practice the AA program seriously, especially the 3rd Step.

Amazingly, the unhappiness began to go away almost in direct proportion to the extent that I incorporated the 3rd Step into my life everyday. I was motivated by the proverbial "hit on the head by a 2 x 4," which in my case was the loss of my dream career, my house and heat from my spouse. Having nowhere else to go, I finally turned to God seriously. It was undeniably clear that I was not running the show and that I was not in charge. The more often and seriously I tried to do God's will, not my own, the better my life went. The more I accepted His will the more comfortable and content I was. Today I am better off spiritually, emotionally and financially than I was before AA. Life has meaning and value again. Trying to take direction from God in all things rather than give direction to God is the most important thing I have ever learned.

I recently celebrated my 25th AA anniversary. While I have bad days and what seem like bad things happen to me, I have a new way of life better than anything I ever knew before AA. Even the bad things, when I look backward, almost always turn out to be blessings in disguise. It sounds too good to be true, but my experience proves to me that the more I let God run the show, the better things go.

Hiding Beer Cans

Eric S.

I didn't really start drinking until college. There were times when I had a couple of drinks in high school; it was more for the thrill of doing something illegal, and being "cool" back then. When I got to college, I stayed away from alcohol my first semester, because I was afraid of flunking out. Pretty soon thereafter, I really started catching up with the drinking being done on campus. I began an accelerated program. I didn't notice it at first, but I did get a lot drunker more quickly than my friends. Moderation was not my middle name.

One night, I got drunk and ran in front of some cars, and somebody called the police. The residential advisor at my dorm, the police, and the university health center "invited" me to take a series of counseling sessions. At one point, the psychologist asked me if I'd ever heard of AA; I believe I actually laughed at him. I wasn't even 21 yet, and didn't live under a bridge, so I couldn't understand what he was talking about. I wasn't going to let him rain on my parade...

After that incident, I seemed to be able to control my drinking more, although I did manage to have a lot of hangovers.

Honestly, it was a lot of fun for a time, until I got to the point when I started to have increasingly longer blackouts. People would avoid me sometimes, and I had no idea why. A few times, I would start at one place, like a bar, and end up at a party. I would "wake up" or snap out of the blackout, and have no idea how I got there. It was like an old VHS tape that had part of the movie missing. Still, I didn't realize that this was a problem. This issue followed me wherever I went.

I managed to do fairly well in college despite all of that, but my life was in a holding pattern; everybody else was interviewing for jobs, and I was still hanging out in bars and going to parties. I moved back in with my parents to save money, I told myself, and always had a series of little part-time jobs, and no focus. My mom, especially, would ask me uncomfortable questions about how much I was drinking. I made it a habit to keep at least an extra six pack of beer around, so I could replace it in the fridge to hide how much I'd drunk already. I also kept the empty beer cans in a plastic bag to hide them. Of course, my parents knew what was going on all the time; I was the only one that was deceived. I learned later on that my mom had been going to Al-Anon meetings. I would find literature about alcoholism lying around the house, but I thought it was for some sick people my mom knew; it couldn't be there for me!

It became more comfortable to sit by myself in my room, drink alone, and listen to music. I would tell myself it was cheaper, safer, and better than going out, and that it wasn't a problem to drink by myself. I became more isolated. Eventually, I got sick of my situation, and went on to graduate school, becoming possibly one of the worst law students ever. Instead of studying constitutional law, I'd go to keg parties with undergraduates, or all-night dance clubs and rock concerts. My grades suffered, and soon, I dropped out of school, before I got kicked out. I went to my first AA meeting while in school, but ran away as fast as I could. I moved back home, and had several unpleasant drinking experiences, including getting arrested, kicked out of bars, and arguing with my parents. I ended up living in my parents' basement for a while, drinking whiskey by myself. It was back to hiding beer cans and bottles again.

I moved to a new city in order to make a fresh start; to my great surprise, I brought my drinking habit with me. It started off with a few beers, but ended up with mixed drinks and vodka most nights of the week. I had a hard time showing up to work on time, and when I was there, I was often hung over, grouchy, or absent-minded. At one job, I called in sick for days at a time, because I ended up in the emergency room with alcohol poisoning. I eventually spent a couple of weeks at several rehab clinics, and went to some AA meetings. The first time, I didn't do what the people in AA said, i.e. get a sponsor, and go to meetings. I relapsed pretty quickly.

WE NEED YOUR STORIES!

Tell us about "what it was like, what happened and what it is like now." In upcoming issues, Here's How will publish your 500-800 word stories about:

We Are Not a Glum Lot

Balance in and out of AA

The Steps

Living Our Dreams In Sobriety

AA Humor/ Jokes

Or send us stories on any topic sobriety related!

e-mail: hereshow@chicagoAA.org

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The circumstances of my hospital stays kept getting worse, until I ended up in a psychiatric facility, the kind with the hospital-green walls and bars on the windows. A Dr. there scared me when he told me I was headed down a very dark path, and I could end up homeless or dead. After that visit, I started going to meetings, got a sponsor, and worked the steps of AA. I began to do volunteer work; it wasn't a lot at first, only setting up chairs, but I liked the structure, and the feeling that I was helping out.

As I went to meetings, I began to get better. The cravings for alcohol really lightened up after some time, and my outlook on life was more positive. My relations with other people, from coworkers to family, got better, and I actually started to pay bills on time. It took time to straighten out the mess I'd made of my relationships and finances, but things did get much better over time.

For the last several years, I've managed to stay as close to the program as possible, and it's helped me out tremendously. I actually have held down a good job, have a girlfriend, and get invited to family events. Life is actually a lot better for me now; it's much richer and fulfilling than my former life of lurking by myself in bars, or hiding in the basement drinking beer. I show up for life now, and it's much more rewarding that way.

Resentments

There is an old story about a scorpion and a frog that applies to my AA Program. It seems that a scorpion, unable to swim, wished to cross a river. So he approached a frog and asked to be carried across. "Never," said the frog, "You'll sting me." "No, indeed," argued the scorpion. "I'd only drown if I did that." "Okay," said the frog, and Mr. Scorpion climbed on the frog's back. In the middle of the river - zing! - the scorpion stung. As they were both going down, the frog asked, "Why did you do that?" "It's just my nature," replied the scorpion.

I cherish this little fable because it applies to my own nature, my tendency towards resentments. I know they can destroy me as surely as the scorpion's nature destroyed him. But I keep telling myself that I don't have to be destroyed, for I have AA and my Higher Power on my side.

During my time in AA, I have swung between deep, bitter resentments, and complete freedom from them. Like summer showers, resentments are unheralded and violent, and about all I have been able to do is be aware and prepare against them. Somehow, through the Program and the help of my Higher Power, I have been fortunate in avoiding the first drink, which was once my only solution - or excuse.

But the last person I ever expected help from was the one I resented. I do not need a reason for resenting; any slight will do. I had felt so slighted and so resentful against this member that I

was completely thrown off balance when she did me a small but very considerate kindness. And my resentment vanished. I couldn't get over this for days, this healing of a sore that had long festered. In thinking about it, I decided that it would be good to try to do some little kindness for someone every day.

So I tried it. I didn't aim for anything stupendous or even unusual but just for some simple little act: a visit to an aged or lonely neighbor; a phone call to a member I didn't know very well; an extra bit of consideration for the wife; a sack of tomatoes or a few flowers from my garden for someone. Sometimes, in the rush of daily life, it is difficult to find a kindness to do. But when that happens, I recall that the mind cannot entertain more than one thought at a time. So I can at least try to entertain a kindly thought or say a little prayer for someone. Instead of thinking, "What's in it for me?," I am thinking of what I can contribute to someone else's happiness.

As it turns out, this little practice is extending further than I anticipated. For as I take my nightly inventory, regardless of the disappointments or failures of the day, there is a bright spot - that bit of kindness - to let me close my eyes in peace. I don't have to be the scorpion any longer.

How Does It Work?

In Memory of Robin W
1/1/1930 - 6/16/2010

Don't take a drink - one day at a time
Get your ass to one of those dam 'ole meetings
Say one word - Help - in the morning
Two words - Thank You - at night
And I don't care, if you just had a day - fed-ex'ed straight from the pit of hell
Where everything turned to - you know what
Tonight - When your head hits the pillow, and you have not had a drink or any other mood or mind altering substance
You'd better say - Thank you
Whether you want to believe it - or not
Accept it - or not
At that moment - with your head laying on the pillow, mind and mood altering substance free...

YOU ARE A MIRACLE!
A WINNER!
A LIVING BREATHING POWER OF EXAMPLE!

and No one - NO ONE!
NO ONE!
CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM YOU - Except you

Odes To Sobriety

Watching Him Work

Michelle D.

Today your life was saved again, all because you called a friend.
When we first met, you followed me out of the meeting that day, there was no doubt.
We were put together like a puzzle with glue, and the events that lay ahead, only He knew.
It was God who said "Get her number" that day, because He knew I'd help you pray.
As the weeks went by we talked on the phone, and as bad as you felt, I said "You're never alone."
The day soon came when that wasn't enough. Without many meetings, it must have been tough.
The next thing I knew this cunning disease, made you fall hard right to your knees.
You prayed and called me, but your will was too great. Within an hour you were back with your mate.
It took hold of you tight, that day once again. It kept telling you it was your only friend.
Needless to say it lied to you! Then you felt to drink was all you could do.
You wanted to relieve the pain inside, so you got into your car and went for a drive.
Consciously knowing you'd find your friend, hoping this pain would come to an end.
The next time you called me it was too late. Your car was gone, but you still had your date...with
your friend that still said "forget your car and stay here with me,"
Just drink some more and you'll be free.
Your calls came to me a few more times, and I heard your speech and breathing decline.
When I heard your voice over the phone, you cried and said you felt so alone.
I felt so helpless and all I could do, was say that I would pray with you.
I tried to keep you on the phone, but as I made clear suggestions, you changed your tone.
You knew where my thoughts were going that night, but you continued to struggle and fight the fight.
To quit right then and start anew, seemed impossible right then for you.
So you hung up again and played with your mate, as he told you this was simply your fate.
The morning again came and I couldn't reach you, so I prayed and cried, that's all I could do.
I didn't have your last name or even your address; I just prayed and let God do the rest.
The last time my phone finally rang, I heard your weary voice and my heart nearly sang.
I was with a friend in her car and we prayed you didn't live far.
We finally made out your address from your speech, and I knew in my heart you were now within reach.
We sped to your house that cold morning day, and as we drove we continued to pray.
I could only imagine how we'd find you inside, and I knew too, it would hurt your pride.
Your car was gone and garage open wide, but one thing's for sure, you had God on your side!
What we saw inside was a wake-up call, broken glass, empty bottles – disaster wall to wall.
And there you lay on the couch so frail, your eyes filled with fear, and your face was so pale.
You reached out to me, held me tight as you cried.
I told you I loved you more than your friend that again had lied!
As we called 911 you held me tight, and I told you it was time to give up the fight.
I'm writing this poem to give to you, and explain that we did what we had to do.
As the paramedics and ambulance finally arrived, we all thanked God that you had survived.
As they lifted you up and started to go, you said "please don't leave me, please don't go."
We followed you there and I went to your room. I saw your face was filled with doom.
For now you knew as you lay in that bed, you'd have to face all of that dread.
You were scared and you knew it might be the end,
of your love affair with the liar you often called friend.
I think you felt better when you saw I was there, that someone loved you and cared.
Well dear friend, I'm glad to say, I do not regret that day.
God grabbed me and used me that day on the phone, and I'll say once again, we're never alone!

He graced you with another chance that day, all because you reached out and prayed.
Congratulations, you made it and you're on your way!
But I beg you to NEVER forget that day!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

With all my love and support, through God, our only answer.

THE JOURNEY

By Tom M.

There is a place where I long to be, Where you can be you and I can be me,
This is a land of peace and joy, That I used to dream of as a boy,

A hell of a journey this life of mine, So filled with drugs and whiskey and wine,
Good at one time they finally turned bad, Now only serving to cover the sad,

By the time I was twenty I looked wasted and old,
I abandoned my youth so it died and turned cold,
By the time I was thirty I was that close to death,
On many occasions so near my last breath,

That detour cost much it sure wasn't free, It was killing my soul – that which is me,
Many reached out time and again, I can't remember, was it a hundred or ten,

Only when finally I gave up the fight, Did the door crack open and let in some light,
Then hope appeared and I began to get strong,
But it wouldn't take much for things to go wrong,

The door opened further and light flooded in, And faith appeared where once it had been,
It washed over me like a fresh falling snow, And now I knew where I had to go,

With faith by my side, not alone as before, I took that leap and walked through the door,
This journey has given few tears and much joy, Making me feel again like a boy,

Today I have friends to help point the way, And today I listen to what they say,
I no longer wallow, sulk and react, Today I believe I'm on the right track,

First hope, then faith, now the pleasure of giving, I at long last have that feeling of living,
Where once I was dying now I'm alive, And what do you know I started to thrive,

As life reveals many joys and travails, I feel, with abandon, the wind in my sails,
I'm pointed forward and upward at last, No longer lost and caught up in the past,

I really have won that most cherished prize, And now I finally realize,
That what I have won in this lotto of life, Won't be money, fame and absence of strife,

What it will be has forever been free, And lo and behold it's right inside me,
What was it, this thing that I just couldn't see, You see all I wanted was just to have me,

When I get to that place where I aspire to be, Where
you can be you and I can be me,
I will finally be healthy, happy and whole, At last being at one with my very own soul.

The Coffee Break

Inside jokes...

---A husband and wife who were both AA members decided to attend an out-of-state AA convention together. They ran into problems with travel arrangements due to their work schedules, so the husband booked a flight a day earlier than his wife.

When he arrived he found that the hotel had Internet access, so decided to send his wife an email. Inadvertently he typed in the wrong address and his e-mail ended up being sent to a woman whose husband had died a few days before.

Here is what the widow read:

Subject : I've Arrived
Date: December 6, 2009

My dearest sweetheart--

You're probably surprised to hear from me. They have computers here, so we can send e-mails to our loved ones.

I've just arrived and have been checked in. I've seen that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. You are the scheduled speaker at the evening meeting. Looking forward to seeing you then!

Hope your trip is as uneventful as mine..

---A State trooper pulls a car over for speeding. As the officer approaches the window, he notices several bowling pins on the seat next to the driver. "What are those for?" The man tells the trooper that he is a juggler on his way to a circus job and asks if he'd like a demonstration.

The officer says ok, so the man steps out of the car with the bowling pins. On the side of the road, as the trooper watches, the man tosses the pins into the air and juggles them expertly.

At the same time, an AA member and his wife drive past. They notice the juggler with the State trooper on the roadside. The man turns to his wife and says, "I'm sure glad I got sober when I did. Look at what they make you do for the sobriety test now!"

---This guy buys an old bottle at a yard sale. Upon polishing the bottle, a magical genie suddenly appears. The genie exclaims, "Thanks for letting me out of the bottle, I've been in there for a long time. I'll grant you one wish."

"I've always wanted to go to Hawaii, but I'm afraid to fly and I get sea sick, so build me a road."

"That's too hard, got any other ideas?" replied the genie.

"OK," replied the guy, "I can't control my drinking once I have the first drink and if I stop I can't stay stopped. I want to be able to drink like a normal person."

The genie replies, "Two lanes or four?"

Questions Corner

Q. Who wrote Chapter 8 of the Big Book, "To Wives"?

A. Bill was the author of the 'To Wives' chapter. It is commonly thought that Lois wrote it. But, as Pass It On describes (page 200), Lois said, "Bill wrote it, and I was mad." She added, "I wasn't so much mad as hurt. I still don't know why Bill wrote it. I've never really gotten into it - why he insisted upon writing it. I said to him, 'Well, do you want me to write it?' And he said no, he thought it should be in the same style as the rest of the book."

Do you have a question you'd like answered? Send it to us and we will post the answer in an upcoming addition of Here's How.

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