

HOW TO IMPROVE THE TWELVE STEPS

Most everyone knows at least one person who attends a Twelve Step recovery meeting. Alcoholics Anonymous started first and was followed by Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Nicotine Anonymous, etc. The church also joined the movement with Overcomers Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery.

At a Twelve Step meeting alcoholics or addicts do not need to explain themselves but find compassion and understanding. Practical steps and catchy mottos make more sense to them than Bible verses or Sunday sermons. They can find people who relate to them instantly while pastors or fellow believers may feel unequipped to make a huge difference.

AA claims to have a million members in the United States with 60% of their new members arriving through court orders or mandates from an employer.

Twelve Step programs follow a medical model and refer to addictions as a disease. It is something you “have” rather than something you “do”. Addictions feel like a disease because they control an addict’s life. They don’t want to get drunk, get high, or give into that craving but they do it anyway. Without the Word of God, the medical model is the only other way to explain why people would allow themselves to be controlled by a substance or behavior.

Alcoholics Anonymous does call addictions a spiritual problem but they do not rely solely on a spiritual solution. Alcoholics or drug addicts believe they have caught a disease and will recover once they get treatment. Rehabs can become places where they go to get better. Treatment can be seen as something that is done to them rather than something they do about their addiction.

SIN IS A NOUN NOT JUST A VERB

The real problem is “sin” that alcoholics and addicts inherited from Adam. Sin feels like a disease because it is something that enslaves people. Not only is sin doing wrong things but also an evil force that overpowers a human life.

 *John 8:34*

I (Jesus) tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

 *Romans 7:20*

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Secular counselors think that calling an addict a sinner will cause them to get stuck in guilt and shame but if the truth were known, they are already stuck in guilt and shame. Without a solution for guilt, they try to make the addict feel better by looking for a person or life experience in the past to blame for the way they are today.

If sin isn’t the main problem then Jesus isn’t the main solution. Sinners want to be told they have a physical weakness that needs to be managed rather than a sinful lifestyle that needs to be exposed and repented of.

Sin is first of all a condition (noun) that requires a release. Your sinfulness is more than you can manage and will not go away without the power of God coming in contact with your life. Freedom from sin is a gift from God and part of the salvation package.

 *Romans 6:6*

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

God delivered you from both the penalty and the power of sin when you were born again. The door is unlocked and you are free to live a new life. All new believers have a new nature that results in a new desire to please God. However.....

SIN IS NOT FORGOTTEN

The presence of sin did not disappear when you became a child of God. You still have a human body with sinful appetites and you are still living in a sinful world that constantly tells you it will be worth it to disobey God.

Temptation is still something you will have to face and resist.

 *Romans 6:12*

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

 *Romans 6:13*

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Alcoholics and drug addicts are either unbelievers who are still a slave to sin or they are believers who voluntarily let sin reign in their body and fail to offer themselves to God as his instrument (branch).

THE GOAL IS FRUIT NOT SOBRIETY

Life with the Spirit did not begin in the New Testament. Enoch walked with God. David prayed that the Holy Spirit would not be taken from him. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was “with” God’s people during Old Testament times (John 14:17) and some of them (Balaam, Gideon, Samson, Saul, and others) were used by the Spirit to accomplish what God wanted done. The first time scripture uses the term “filled with the Spirit” was in Exodus 31:3 when Bezalel worked on the Tent of Meeting.

A big reason to stay sober is so you can enjoy your relationship with God.

Believers today can walk in the Spirit, be led by his promptings (Galatians 5), and spiritual fruit will follow. Being a fruitful believer is not accomplished by self-effort. You don’t add love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control to your “to do” list. Your part is to maintain a healthy relationship with

the source of the spiritual fruit.

 *John 15:5*

I (Christ) am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.

With Christ as the vine, his fruit will naturally begin to grow on the branches connected to him. He is the perfect partner in the relationship and your role is to maintain your communion and fellowship with him.

EXCHANGING YOUR IDOL FOR WHAT GOD OFFERS

If Christ is not your “vine” then something else will take his place. Addiction is just another word for idol worship. Worship is a response to whatever you believe is great and is taking care of you. Idols are things you worship because you can control them to give you what you want. But God is a father that gives good gifts to his children whenever and however he chooses. Idol worshippers don’t want an idol to rule over them but just want it to give them something (a good feeling, a better self image, a sense of power, more money, or an escape from unhappiness).

The prophets on Mount Carmel slashed themselves and did everything they could to get Baal to do what they wanted.

Not all sinners become alcoholics or drug addicts but all sinners will struggle with some type of idol worship. God does not compete with idols by promising to replace what you think they give with something better. Worshipping God is not an escape nor does it result in a thrill, rush, or sense of excitement. What God offers you is his love, acceptance, peace, power, presence, purpose, and plan.

HOW TO GENERATE WORSHIP FOR GOD

- Be disappointed with sin because of the damage it will do to you.
- Be impressed with who God is and what he is always doing.
- Be satisfied with what God offers and how he is blessing your life.

Idols become great when you fail to recognize who God is and what God does. Sinners worship their way into an addiction and must worship their way out of it. The attraction to the idol weakens as your understanding of God becomes greater. The idol becomes small when God becomes big.

THE REWARD FOR KNOWING JESUS IS JESUS

Jesus began his ministry with the announcement of a kingdom. God is a person you get to know not a program you join. A program can help you manage your addiction but God wants so much more from your life than just sobriety.

 *II Peter 1:3*

God’s divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness *through* our knowledge of him (Christ) who called us by his own glory and goodness.

The better you know Christ the more you will live a godly life. Don’t ask God to take away your cravings but ask him to help you see how his power and authority deserve to be surrendered to.

The Bible isn’t a textbook but an autobiography.

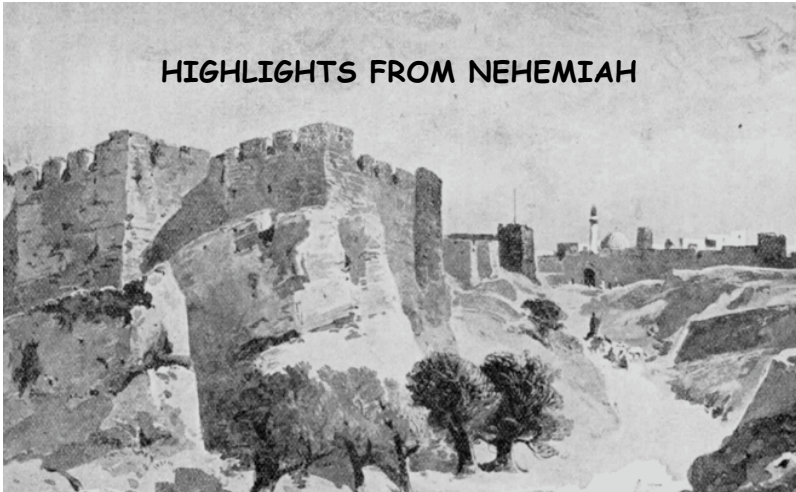
Step Three in the Twelve Steps ends with the phrase, “God as we understood him.” This was added so the organization would not be considered religious so for many Twelve Steppers God is not even involved in their life. Alcoholics Anonymous teaches that once an alcoholic then always an alcoholic but a believer should never allow sin to define who they are.

The A.A. model is no longer the primary program at the OC Probation’s drug treatment facility (Youth Guidance Center). Instead they have implemented Aggression Replacement Training that helps youth improve their social skills, moral reasoning, and pro-social behavior.

The message of this newsletter was inspired by the book “Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave” by Edward Welch (P&R Publishing). Thank you for taking the time to read it.

Chaplain Rick Johnson

HIGHLIGHTS FROM NEHEMIAH



In January I started a series of messages from the Book of Nehemiah and really enjoyed learning the truths contained in the story.

The City of Jerusalem was important to God so it was also important to Nehemiah even though he had never been there. He had probably grown up hearing stories about what God had done in the city and about the godly men and women who had lived there. The story begins with Nehemiah hearing that the Temple had been rebuilt and expecting to hear that the city was back to the way it used to be.

☞ *Your body can be one place but your heart can be in another.*

Nehemiah's high expectations were crushed when he heard that the city walls were still not rebuilt. Instead of staying emotional about the problem he took the first step everyone with a problem should take.....he prayed. He prayed for four months but the walls only took two months to rebuild.

☞ *Pray about things twice as long as it will take to do them.*

As a slave, Nehemiah was unable to get the king to do anything. All he could do was pray and wait to see how God was going to make a way. Many people need a person in a position of authority to make an important decision on their behalf but can do nothing to make it happen except pray.

☞ *Don't pray unless you are willing to be the answer to the prayer.*

When King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah what he wanted, he was able to communicate the need clearly because God gives wisdom as you pray. The king could have laughed at the idea of one man taking on such an enormous task. Instead he believed in him and released him from his responsibilities as a cupbearer.

☞ *God frees those who will use their freedom for something good.*

The people living in Jerusalem looked at the broken down walls and gates so much that they got used to them being that way. The city had been in disgrace and damaged for around 100 years. The problem had been around for so long that the people started believing it would never go away. However, even 100 year old problems can get solved.

☞ *Hang around people with faith and vision if you want to reach goals.*

Nehemiah divided up the wall into 35 sections and assigned people to work side by side. One horse can pull 2000 pounds but two horses (side by side) can pull 12,000. Several groups worked right in front of their own home. All God asks you to do is take care of what is right in front of you.

☞ *The world would be better if each man took care of his own home.*

As the work was nearing completion, the enemies of the city invited Nehemiah four times to take a break and meet with them. Each time he sent the message, "I am carrying on a great work and cannot go down." The best way to resist doing a good thing is to realize you are already doing a great thing. The best way to get someone to stop distracting or criticizing you is to just keep working.

☞ *Anything done for God is a great work.*

Shemaiah was hired to prophesy falsely about the danger that Nehemiah was in. Because Nehemiah didn't see himself as a man who runs from fear, he kept on working. The church will never get its work done if believers worry about all the evil and threats in the world.

☞ *False prophets can also publish website that spread fear.*

Once the walls were completed the entire city shut down for a day to hear God's law read. God's word was given a place of authority in the city and then the people were told to celebrate. The joy of the Lord was to be their strength. Celebrating who God is and what God does strengthens you. Those who party wake up the next morning sick and hung over.

☞ *Walls don't make a city safe. Safe people do.*