SLAA HOW Format
Step and Sponsorship Readings

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DEFINING YOUR BOTTOM LINES (First 7 days)

Q6 - Is It Love or Love Addiction?

This Isn't Love – It Could Be A Fix by John Bradshaw

Until very recent years we never heard anything about addictive relationships. To be wildly, helplessly in love was considered a desirable thing, not a hang-up. If we weren't crazy in love ourselves, we were jealous of those who were. Song lyrics have always celebrated the condition "My Man", "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered", "Mad About the Boy" - these are just a few of the golden oldies that immediately come to mind. I have come to realise that some kinds of love are not necessarily to be envied, and some romantic attachments can amount to nothing less than addiction.

How can you tell an addictive relationship from a healthy one? There are lots of ways, but one reliable tip-off is that in an addictive relationship your focus is entirely on the beloved. You see him or her coming into your life like a god, a saviour. You objectify this beloved, almost as if they were a balm to be applied topically. "I love him because he makes me feel wonderful" is one expression of an addictive love.

In a healthy situation the two parties bring their whole selves to the relationship, and a whole wealth of feelings, good and bad, flows from the exchange. But if you're crazy about somebody purely because of how they make you feel, then it would seem pretty obvious that you're using this person to alter your moods.

People use alcohol and drugs for the same reason. I've had several clients who turned out to be relationship addicts. One, in particular, was in the depths of despair when she began counselling with me, and a significant source of her distress was that she wasn't in a relationship. After a period of time she came in one day literally dancing on air "I've just met the most wonderful man," she told me. Her mood had entirely changed, and soon after, as the romance flourished, she felt so ecstatic that she discontinued counselling. It was apparent to me that she had got her fix, and because she was feeling no pain she concluded that she didn't need me anymore. I learned what happened only later, when she returned to me after the end of the affair.

Her romance had been intensely sexual — indeed, like most addictive relationships, it was intense in all respects and delivered a lot of immediate gratification. There was no period of causal relating, of developing intimacy and gathering mutual strength, rather, the relationship was at a peak of dramatic excitement from the very beginning, and the excitement and galloping intensity never abated.

As the relationship progressed and difficulties turned up, my client stopped talking to her friends about the man she was in love with, because her friends failed to give her the supportive and encouraging feedback she wanted. When she complained to them about how he was treating her — sometimes being present and loving, sometimes withdrawing and keeping distant — they advised her to take a stand or to drop him. She didn't want to hear this kind of advice. She wanted to hear her friends assure her that this man loved her the way she wanted to be loved, even though there was little evidence of it. Her friends, she decided, simply didn't understand how wonderful and desirable he was.

She had endowed the relationship with a quality of magic. In her mind it was made in heaven, "meant to be," and it was her job to nurture it, tend it, maintain it. Her thinking went like this: "Because of the magic, I don't have to change myself, I don't have to grow. Now that I'm in this relationship, everything is going to be all right. My personality disorders will pass away, my idiosyncrasies and neurotic traits will be consumed by love." But, of course, as we know, healthy relationships are rooted in reality, not in the clouds.

Invariably they involve a commitment of each to each, a dedication to giving each other time and attention, to doing the hard work of communication. Healthy relationships demand of us that we have our own lives somewhat in order and that we know who we are. In a healthy relationship I am responsible for my own vulnerability. I do not make my partner responsible for it. Over the course of a year my client's beloved consistently proclaimed his love for her but increasingly distanced himself, using excuses that began to sound, suspiciously, very much like lies. There were long silences when he didn't call at all, and in her growing anxiety and dread she was afraid to leave messages on his answering machine. Surely, she thought, he knows how much it hurt her to wait and wait for calls from him that he could easily make. Could he really love her as much as he said and yet consciously leave her in such anguish? When the pain was great enough, she at last confronted him, broke up with him, and returned to therapy. She had had enough. Though sad, she felt better dealing with the truth about herself and the relationship than when she was living all the lies she could manage.

Addictive relationships are always – and incorrigibly – dishonest. They are predicated on fantasy and unreality. They are characterised by each person's showing only the best side, keeping secret the thing most ashamed of. This stems from the fear that if you know my real character defects you couldn't love me and would go away from me, thus taking away the wonderful feeling. A common pattern I've found in addictive relationships is that intense conflict is generated because of secrets kept and lies told. And periods of intense conflict are punctuated by mind blowing sex, which further deludes each partner into believing that the relationship is something of value.

In my opinion, no addiction is harder to break than the addiction to another person. The grief and pain that result are often excruciating and point to the wounds of fear and loneliness that brought the person to the relationship in the first place. But recovery, however hard-won through therapy and 12-step programs, brings immeasurable dividends in personal freedom, clarity of the mind, and a liberating selfhood that is its own unceasing reward.

Other articles are available at **recoveryresources.wix.com/slaa**

STEPS 1-6

Readings for these 30 Step 1-3 questions and the 99 slip questions and questions for Steps 4-6 are all drawn from the SLAA Basic Text, the AA Big Book and the AA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. All sponsees should have a copy of these recommended readings. Readings from these resources are not included in this guide. Books are available from meetings or online. The best place to buy the SLAA basic text is at a meeting, since Intergroup buys these in bulk and offers a subsidy to keep the price at A$20.

» https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/read-the-big-book-and-twelve-steps-and-twelve-traditions

Buy the Amazon Kindle edition here:

» https://www.amazon.com.au/Sex-Love-Addicts-Augustine-Fellowship-ebook/dp/B00KF2SIWA

The ebook may also be available on other platforms such as Apple Books.

The AA book "As Bill Sees It" is also available as an Amazon kindle edition:

» https://www.amazon.com.au/Bill-Sees-World-Services-Inc-ebook/dp/B00QKLHN2Q

The AA book "Came to Believe" is available as an Amazon kindle edition:

» https://www.amazon.com.au/Came-Believe-Alcoholics-World-Service-ebook/dp/B00KUFP6IQ

STEP SEVEN

Q1. Read "As Bill Sees It" sections 22, 61, 75. How has working the Twelve Steps helped me work through fear?

22 Fear as a Stepping-stone - The chief activator of our defects has been self-centred fear—primarily fear that we would lose something we already possessed or would fail to get something we demanded. Living upon a basis of unsatisfied demands, we were in a state of continual disturbance and frustration. Therefore, no peace was to be had unless we could find a means of reducing these demands. «» For all its usual destructiveness, we have found that fear can be the starting point for better things. Fear can be a steppingstone to prudence and to a decent respect for others. It can point the path to justice, as well as to hate. And the more we have of respect and justice, the more we shall begin to find the love which can suffer much, and yet be freely given. So fear need not always be destructive, because the lessons of its consequences can lead us to positive values.

61 Resolving Fear - Fear somehow touched about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we often set the ball rolling ourselves? «» The problem of resolving fear has two aspects. We shall have to try for all the freedom from fear that is possible for us to attain. Then we shall need to find both the courage and the grace to deal constructively with whatever fears remain.

75 Losing Financial Fears - When a job still looked like a mere means of getting money rather than an opportunity for service, when the acquisition of money for financial independence looked more important than a right dependence upon God, we were the victims of unreasonable fears. And these were fears which would make a serene and useful existence, at any financial level, quite impossible. «» But as time passed we found that with the help of the Twelve Steps we could lose those fears, no matter what our material prospects were. We could cheerfully perform humble labour without worrying about tomorrow. If our circumstances happened to be good, we no longer dreaded a change for the worse, for we had learned that these troubles could be turned into great values, for ourselves and for others.

Q3. Read from "As Bill Sees It" Page 139 'Basis of all Humility', and page 212, "Faith and Action". Discuss and reflect on the act of: humbly asking God to remove defects; having faith that is vital, accompanied by self-sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action.

139 Basis of All Humility - For just so long as we were convinced that we could live exclusively by our own individual strength and intelligence, for just that long was a working faith in a Higher Power impossible. This was true even when we believed that God existed. We could actually have earnest religious beliefs which remained barren because we were still trying to play God ourselves. As long as we placed self-reliance first, a genuine reliance upon a Higher Power was out of the question. That basic ingredient of all humility, a desire to seek and do God's will, was missing.

212 Faith and Action - Your prospect's religious education and training may be far superior to yours. In that case, he is going to wonder how you can add anything to what he already knows. But he will be curious to learn why his convictions have not worked and why yours seem to work so well. He may be an example of the truth that faith alone is insufficient. To be vital, faith must be accompanied by self-sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action. Admit that he probably knows more about religion than you do, but remind him that, however deep his faith and knowledge, these qualities could not have served him very well, or he would not be asking your help. «» Dr Bob did not need me for his spiritual instruction. He had already had more of that than I. What he did need, when we first met, was the deflation at depth and the understanding that only one drunk can give to another. What I needed was the humility of self-forgetfulness and the kinship with another human being of my own kind.

Q4. The mental hygiene and spiritual housecleaning we have started in our inventories and continued in Step Five reach their climax in Step Seven. Read pages 48, 103, 136, 196, 281, 327 in "As Bill Sees It". Are you ready to fully subject your will to God? Do you wish to surrender to Him all your moral imperfections?

48 Live Serenely - When a drunk has a terrific hangover because he drank heavily yesterday, he cannot live well today. But there is another kind of hangover which we all experience whether we are drinking or not. That is the emotional hangover, the direct result of yesterday's and sometimes today's excesses of negative emotion — anger, fear, jealousy, and the like. If we would live serenely today and tomorrow, we certainly need to eliminate these hangovers. This doesn't mean we need to wander morbidly around in the past. It requires an admission and correction of errors—now.

103 Principle Before Expediency - Most of us thought good character was desirable. Obviously, good character was something one needed to get on with the business of being self-satisfied. With a proper display of honesty and morality, we'd stand a better chance of getting what we really wanted. But whenever we had to choose between character and comfort, character-building was lost in the dust of our chase after what we thought was happiness. Seldom did we look at character-building as something desirable in itself. We never thought of making honesty, tolerance, and true love of man and God the daily basis of living. «» How to translate a right mental conviction into a right emotional result, and so into easy, happy, and good living, is the problem of life itself.

136 Giving Up Defects - Looking at those defects we are unwilling to give up, we ought to erase the hard and fast lines that we have drawn. Perhaps in some cases we shall say, "This I cannot give up yet..." But we should not say to ourselves, "This I will never give up!" The moment we say, "No, never!" our minds close against the grace of God. Such rebellion may be fatal. Instead, we should abandon limited objectives and begin to move toward God's will for us.

196 Antidote for Fear - When our failings generate fear, we then have soul-sickness. This sickness, in turn, generates still more character defects. Unreasonable fear that our instincts will not be satisfied drives us to covet the possessions of others, to lust for sex and power, to become angry when our instinctive demands are threatened, to be envious when the ambitions of others seem to be realized while ours are not. We eat, drink, and grab for more of everything than we need, fearing we shall never have enough. And, with genuine alarm at the prospect of work, we stay lazy. We loaf and procrastinate, or at best work grudgingly and under half steam. These fears are the termites that ceaselessly devour the foundations of whatever sort of life we try to build. «» As faith grows, so does inner security. The vast underlying fear of nothingness commences to subside. We of AA find that our basic antidote for fear is a spiritual awakening.

281 Ourselves as Individuals - There is only one sure test of all spiritual experiences: "By their fruits, ye shall know them." This is why I think we should question no one's transformation—whether it be sudden or gradual. Nor should we demand anyone's special type for ourselves, because experience suggests that we are apt to receive whatever may be the most useful for our own needs. «» Human beings are never quite alike, so each of us, when making an inventory, will need to determine what his individual character defects are. Having found the shoes that fit, he ought to step into them and walk with new confidence that he is at last on the right track.

327 Three Choices - The immediate object of our quest is sobriety — freedom from alcohol and from all its baleful consequences. Without this freedom, we have nothing at all. Paradoxically, though, we can achieve no liberation from the alcohol obsession until we become willing to deal with those character defects which have landed us in that helpless condition. In this freedom quest, we are always given three choices. A rebellious refusal to work upon our glaring defects can be an almost certain ticket to destruction. Or, perhaps for a time, we can stay sober with a minimum of self-improvement and settle ourselves into a comfortable but often dangerous mediocrity. Or, finally, we can continuously try hard for those sterling qualities that can add up to fineness of spirit and action—true and lasting freedom under God.

STEP EIGHT

Q1 Read, "No Man is an Island", page 118 in the AA publication "Came To Believe". Why is it necessary to "make a list of all persons you have harmed and become willing to make amends" before you can start relating harmoniously to God and to other people?

"No one is an island"

I was spiritually bankrupt long before AA entered my life and long before alcoholism took over like a parasite under my skin. I had nothing, no faith at all to cling to. I had no faith in man, because along with my drinking I had lost faith in myself. I trusted no one, for others were but a mere reflection of my own self, and I could not trust me.

I got sober in AA, and, like a miracle, the warm flood of reality I had feared for so long flowed over me, and I was no longer afraid. I began to wonder why. Along with sobriety, something new had come into my life. I began to have concern for others. This word concern, along with its sister consideration, was an alien thing to me. I had believed myself capable of falling in love. I had thought myself a loving mother; but these emotions, I now perceive, had been reflections of my own self-interest. Nothing penetrated beyond me. I began in early sobriety, to feel compassion for other drunks, then for my children, then for my ex-husband. This compassion, a feeling accompanied later by love, opened up the door to a huge fortress within me which had been forever locked.

Now this was the strange thing; I was not, in sobriety, returning to my former state. I was not resuming a "well" state which I had left when I began to drink alcoholically. I was becoming, as I had heard it put once, "weller than well." In probing (via the Fourth Step) into my own personality, I found a new substance inside me. It had never been there before, even in childhood. Either a stone or an empty hole had been where it should have grown. Now something was taking root. I began to feel for others, to be able, for very brief moments, to put myself in their shoes. New worlds opened up. I began to understand the world about me. I was not the centre of the universe. (What a calamity it seemed to discover that!) I was part of a gigantic, wonderful mystery. I could not probe it with a childlike curiosity. I am still circling about it. I shall never, nor shall any of us, discover the secrets of lives and deaths, as something spiritual beyond our understanding.

I began to watch my children. They were small, important people. I realised I had never treated them while I was drinking as anything more than little machines I had created, as if I had erected part of a Meccano set and been proud of it. I saw them begin to blossom as my treatment of them changed. I reached out a hand to help someone, sometimes even only by listening, and I felt a strange contentment at being able to help - an incredible discovery for me!

I learned my own version of what spirituality is. It does not mean I have to be like the saints who claimed to have direct advice and visions from God. It means I have to be concerned with others: through this alone can I receive the grace of God, my Higher Power, for, in the words of John Donne, so long before AA, "No man is an island." I began to feel a safety in my new spiritual feelings, until I was shaken up one night by an AA friend who said, "All right, so you can apply the Third Step and a spiritual belief in God to your personal life, but how can you accept the terrible calamities which happen around us every day?"

I was faced again, perilously, with the questions of my religious but non-spiritual childhood - how can I accept a belief in a God who allows such monstrous crimes against man as the black scenes at Buchenwald, Dachau, and Hiroshima? I began to think frighteningly of death and suffering, not my own, but all humanity's. I began to question my new beliefs too much - I began to panic. I began to read beyond AA's literature for answers.

Fortunately for me, before I had read too much about the subject of spiritual beliefs (an area which was only leading me to confusion), I realised I was asking for too much, too soon. Wisely, I left the philosophy books to minds more capable than mine. I could not risk further mental confusion. I returned to the teachings of AA, which had already saved me from a life of torment.

STEP NINE

Q3. Read in "As Bill Sees It" pages 39, 58, 153. How have righteous indignation and resentment wreaked havoc in your life? How do you handle anger today?

39 Dealing with Resentments - Resentment is the Number One offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have also been spiritually ill. When our spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with our resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions, or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry. In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships (including sex) were hurt or threatened. «» "The most heated bit of letter-writing can be a wonderful safety valve—providing the wastebasket is somewhere nearby."

58 Righteous Indignation - "The positive value of righteous indignation is theoretical— especially for alcoholics. It leaves every one of us open to the rationalization that we may be as angry as we like provided we can claim to be righteous about it." «» When we harboured grudges and planned revenge for defeats, we were really beating ourselves with the club of anger we had intended to use on others. We learned that if we were seriously disturbed, our very first need was to quiet that disturbance, regardless of who or what we thought caused it.

153 Without Anger - Suppose AA falls under sharp public attack or heavy ridicule, having little or no justification in fact. Our best defence in these situations would be no defence whatever — namely, complete silence at the public level. If in good humour we let unreasonable critics alone, they are apt to subside the more quickly. If their attacks persist and it is plain that they are misinformed, it may be wise to communicate with them privately in a temperate and informative way. If, however, a given criticism of AA is partly or wholly justified, it may be well to acknowledge this privately to the critics, together with our thanks. But under no conditions should we exhibit anger or any punitive intent. «» What we must recognize is that we exult in some of our defects. Self-righteous anger can be very enjoyable. In a perverse way we can actually take satisfaction from the fact that many people annoy us; it brings a comfortable feeling of superiority.

Q4. Read in "As Bill Sees It", pages 179 and 286. Discuss and reflect on the idea that nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and pen. How have you used this to avoid conflict?

179 Coping with Anger - Few people have been more victimized by resentments than have we alcoholics. A burst of temper could spoil a day, and a well-nursed grudge could make us miserably ineffective. Nor were we ever skilful in separating justified from unjustified anger. As we saw it, our wrath was always justified. Anger, that occasional luxury of more balanced people, could keep us on an emotional jag indefinitely. These "dry benders" often led straight to the bottle. «» Nothing pays off like restraint of tongue and pen. We must avoid quick-tempered criticism, furious power-driven argument, sulking, and silent scorn. These are emotional booby traps baited with pride and vengefulness. When we are tempted by the bait, we should train ourselves to step back and think. We can neither think nor act to good purpose until the habit of self-restraint has become automatic.

286 Mastering Resentments - We began to see that the world and its people had really dominated us. Under that unhappy condition, the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill us, because we could be driven back to drink through resentment. We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away. This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. So we asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. Today, we avoid retaliation or argument. We cannot treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

STEP TEN

Q3. Read page 233 in "As Bill Sees It". Draw up a two-column balance sheet for the day. On one side write the things you've done right for example, good intentions, good thoughts and good acts. On the other write the things you feel you could have improved upon.

233 Everyday Living - The AA emphasis on personal inventory is heavy because a great many of us have never really acquired the habit of accurate self-appraisal. Once this healthy practice has become a habit, it will prove so interesting and profitable that the time it takes won't be missed. For these minutes and often hours spent in self-examination are bound to make all the other hours of our day better and happier. At length, our inventories become a necessity of everyday living, rather than something unusual or set apart.

STEP ELEVEN

Q2. Read from "As Bill Sees It" pages 93,108,127, 189, and 243. Discuss and reflect on how taking time daily to set myself apart with God improves my conscious contact with Him and changes my life.

93 Atmosphere of Grace - Those of us who have come to make regular use of prayer would no more do without it than we would refuse air, food, or sunshine. And for the same reason. When we refuse air, light, or food, the body suffers. And when we turn away from meditation and prayer, we likewise deprive our minds, our emotions, and our intuitions of vitally needed support. As the body can fail its purpose for lack of nourishment, so can the soul. We all need the light of God's reality, the nourishment of His strength, and the atmosphere of His grace. To an amazing extent the facts of AA life confirm this ageless truth.

108 Learn in Quiet - In 1941, a news clipping was called to our attention by a New York member. In an obituary notice from a local paper, there appeared these words: "God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Never had we seen so much AA in so few words. With amazing speed the Serenity Prayer came into general use. «» In meditation, debate has no place. We rest quietly with the thoughts or prayers of spiritually centred people who understand, so that we may experience and learn. This is the state of being that so often discovers and deepens a conscious contact with God.

127 Persistence in Prayer - We often tend to slight serious meditation and prayer as something not really necessary. To be sure, we feel it is something that might help us to meet an occasional emergency, but at first many of us are apt to regard it as a somewhat mysterious skill of clergymen, from which we may hope to get a second-hand benefit. «» In AA we have found that the actual good results of prayer are beyond question. They are matters of knowledge and experience. All those who have persisted have found strength not ordinarily their own. They have found wisdom beyond their usual capability. And they have increasingly found a peace of mind which can stand firm in the face of difficult circumstances.

189 Experimenters - We agnostics liked AA all right and were quick to say that it had done miracles. But we recoiled from meditation and prayer as obstinately as the scientist who refused to perform a certain experiment lest it prove his pet theory wrong. When we finally did experiment, and unexpected results followed, we felt different; in fact, we knew different; and so we were sold on meditation and prayer. And that, we have found, can happen to anybody who tries. It has been well said that "Almost the only scoffers at prayer are those who never tried it enough."

243 Morning Thoughts - On awakening, let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity and from dishonest or self-seeking motives. Free of these, we can employ our mental faculties with assurance, for God gave us brains to use. Our thought-life will be on a higher plane when our thinking begins to be cleared of wrong motives. If we have to determine which of two courses to take, we ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought, or a decision. Then we relax and take it easy, and we are often surprised how the right answers come after we have tried this for a

while. We usually conclude our meditation with a prayer that we be shown all through the day what our next step is to be, asking especially for freedom from damaging self-will.

Q4 Read "As Bill Sees It" pages 33, 117, 101, and 331. Step Eleven is for mental efficiency, for spiritual strength and for physical endurance. What does this mean to you?

33 Foundation for Life - We discover that we receive guidance for our lives to just about the extent that we stop making demands upon God to give it to us on order and on our terms. «» In praying, we ask simply that throughout the day God place in us the best understanding of His will that we can have for that day, and that we be given the grace by which we may carry it out. «» There is a direct linkage among self-examination, meditation, and prayer. Taken separately, these practices can bring much relief and benefit. But when they are logically related and interwoven, the result is an unshakable foundation for life.

117 The Sense of Belonging - Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of belonging that comes to us. We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and purposeless. The moment we catch even a glimpse of God's will, the moment we begin to see truth, justice, and love as the real and eternal things in life, we are no longer deeply disturbed by all the seeming evidence to the contrary that surrounds us in purely human affairs. We know that God lovingly watches over us. We know that when we turn to Him, all will be well with us, here and hereafter.

101 "The Spiritual Angle" - How often do we sit in AA meetings and hear the speaker declare, "But I haven't yet got the spiritual angle." Prior to this statement, he has described a miracle of transformation which has occurred in him—not only his release from alcohol, but a complete change in his whole attitude toward life and the living of it. It is apparent to everyone else present that he has received a great gift, and that this gift is all but of proportion to anything that may be expected from simple AA participation. So we in the audience smile and say to ourselves, "Well, that guy is just reeking with the spiritual angle—except that he doesn't seem to know it yet!"

331 The Great Fact - We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the great fact for us.
To the Newcomer:
Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the road of happy destiny.
May God bless you and keep you—until then. (AA Big Book, 164)

Q6 Read "As Bill Sees It" pages 270 and 172. How do you apply the principle that your recovery depends upon God?

270 Honesty and Recovery - In taking an inventory, a member might consider questions such as these:

How did my selfish pursuit of the sex relation damage other people and me? What people were hurt, and how badly? Just how did I react at the time? Did I burn with guilt? Or did I insist that I was the pursued and not the pursuer, and thus absolve myself?

How have I reacted to frustration in sexual matters? When denied, did I become vengeful or depressed? Did I take it out on other people? If there was rejection or coldness at home, did I use this as a reason for promiscuity? «» Let no alcoholic say he cannot recover unless he has his family back. His recovery is not dependent upon people. It is dependent upon his relationship with God, however he may define Him.

172 This Matter of Honesty - Only God can fully know what absolute honesty is. Therefore, each of us has to conceive what this great ideal may be—to the best of our ability. Fallible as we all are, and will be in this life, it would be presumption to suppose that we could ever really achieve absolute honesty. The best we can do is

to strive for a better quality of honesty. Sometimes we need to place love ahead of indiscriminate 'factual honesty.' We cannot, under the guise of 'perfect honesty,' cruelly and unnecessarily hurt others. Always one must ask, 'What is the best and most loving thing I can do?' (Letter, 1966)

Q7 Read pages 202 and 250 in "As Bill Sees It". Discuss the importance of spending daily quiet time alone with your Higher Power. How do you do this in your life on a daily basis?

202 The Hour of Decision - Not all large decisions can be well made by simply listing the pros and cons of a given situation, helpful and necessary as this process is. We cannot always depend on what seems to us to be logical. When there is doubt about our logic, we wait upon God and listen for the voice of intuition. If, in meditation, that voice is persistent enough, we may well gain sufficient confidence to act upon that, rather than upon logic. If, after an exercise of these two disciplines, we are still uncertain, then we should ask for further guidance and, when possible, defer important decisions for a time. By then, with more knowledge of our situation, logic and intuition may well agree upon a right course. But if the decision must be now, let us not evade it through fear. Right or wrong, we can always profit from the experience. (Letter, 1966)

250 Prayer Under Pressure - Whenever I find myself under acute tensions, I lengthen my daily walks and slowly repeat our Serenity Prayer in rhythm to my steps and breathing. If I feel that my pain has in part been occasioned by others, I try to repeat, "God grant me the serenity to love their best, and never fear their worst." This benign healing process of repetition, sometimes necessary to persist with for days, has seldom failed to restore me to at least a workable emotional balance and perspective.

Q8 Read page 264 in "As Bill Sees It". Discuss and reflect on the idea that we shall locate our trouble in our misunderstanding or neglect of Step Eleven, prayer, meditation and the guidance of God.

264 The Step That Keeps Us Growing - Sometimes, when friends tell us how well we are doing, we know better inside. We know we aren't doing well enough. We still can't handle life, as life is. There must be a serious flaw somewhere in our spiritual practice and development. What, then, is it?

The chances are better than even that we shall locate our trouble in our misunderstanding or neglect of AA's Step Eleven—prayer, meditation, and the guidance of God. The other Steps can keep most of us sober and somehow functioning. But Step Eleven can keep us growing, if we try hard and work at it continually.

STEP TWELVE

Q3. Read pages 196 and 263 in "As Bill Sees It". Reflect on and discuss the idea that the basic antidote for fear is a spiritual awakening.

196 Antidote for Fear - When our failings generate fear, we then have soul-sickness. This sickness, in turn, generates still more character defects. Unreasonable fear that our instincts will not be satisfied drives us to covet the possessions of others, to lust for sex and power, to become angry when our instinctive demands are threatened, to be envious when the ambitions of others seem to be realized while ours are not. We eat, drink, and grab for more of everything than we need, fearing we shall never have enough. And, with genuine alarm at the prospect of work, we stay lazy. We loaf and procrastinate, or at best work grudgingly and under half steam. These fears are the termites that ceaselessly devour the foundations of whatever sort of life we try to build. «» As faith grows, so does inner security. The vast underlying fear of nothingness commences to subside. We of AA find that our basic antidote for fear is a spiritual awakening.

263 Fear and Faith - The achievement of freedom from fear is a lifetime undertaking, one that can never be wholly completed. When under heavy attack, acute illness, or in other conditions of serious insecurity, we shall all react to this emotion—well or badly, as the case may be. Only the self-deceived will claim perfect freedom from fear. «» We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up. Sometimes we had to search persistently, but He was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us.

Q6. Read in "As Bill Sees It" pages 3, 5 and 163. Write on how working the program has brought joy to your life.

3 Pain and Progress - "Years ago I used to commiserate with all people who suffered. Now I commiserate only with those who suffer in ignorance, who do not understand the purpose and ultimate utility of pain." «» Someone once remarked that pain is the touchstone of spiritual progress. How heartily we AA's can agree with him, for we know that the pains of alcoholism had to come before sobriety, and emotional turmoil before serenity. «» "Believe more deeply. Hold your face up to the Light, even though for the moment you do not see."

5 Maintenance and Growth - It is plain that a life which includes deep resentment leads only to futility and unhappiness. To the precise extent that we permit these, do we squander the hours that might have been worthwhile. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of harbouring resentment is infinitely grave. For then we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die. If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the sudden rage were not for us. Anger is the dubious luxury of normal men, but for us alcoholics it is poison.

163 Release and Joy - Who can render an account of all the miseries that once were ours, and who can estimate the release and joy that the later years have brought to us? Who can possibly tell the vast consequences of what God's work through AA has already set in motion? And who can penetrate the deeper mystery of our wholesale deliverance from slavery, a bondage to a most hopeless and fatal obsession which for centuries possessed the minds and bodies of men and women like ourselves? «» We think cheerfulness and laughter make for usefulness. Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered and have helped others to recover. What greater cause could there be for rejoicing than this?

Q7 Read in the AA publication "Came to Believe" pages 46,47 and 48, "The Belief will Come" and in "As Bill Sees It" page 331. Discuss what needs to be done to be most effective in helping those who still suffer.

"THE BELIEF WILL COME"

In the beginning, I rejected any part of the AA program that referred to God in any manner. I even remained silent when they closed the meetings with the Lord's Prayer. (I didn't know the words, anyhow.)

Looking back, I don't think I was an agnostic, nor do I think I was an atheist. But I do know this: I couldn't accept any of "the God bit," nor did I want to come to believe or have any spiritual awakening.

After all, I had come to AA to get sober, and what did all this truck have to do with that?

Even with all my stupid arrogance, you still loved me, held out your hand of friendship, and, I'm sure, used cautious wisdom in trying to reach me with the program. But I could hear only what I wanted to hear.

I remained dry for a number of years, and then, as you may already have guessed, I drank again. It was inevitable. I had accepted only those parts of the program that fitted into my life without effort on my part. I was still the self-centred egotist I had always been, still full of all my old hatreds, selfishness, and disbelief—just as lacking in maturity as I had been when I first arrived at AA.

This time, when I came to in the hospital, I had absolutely no hope. After all, you had told me that AA was the last hope for the alcoholic, and I had failed—there was nothing else. At this very point, my sister chose to send me a clipping from a Sunday-school paper. No letter, just the clipping: "Pray with disbelief; but pray with sincerity; and the belief will come."

Pray? How could I pray? I didn't know how to pray. Still, I was ready to go to any lengths to get my sobriety and some semblance of a normal life. I guess I just gave up. I stopped fighting. I accepted that which I did not really believe, much less understand.

I started praying, not in any formal way. I just talked to God or, rather, cried out, "Dear God, help me. I'm a drunk." I had nowhere left to turn, except to this God I did not know.

I don't recall any immediate, dramatic change in my life. I do recall telling my wife how hopeless it all seemed. At her suggestion, I began rereading the Big Book and the Twelve Steps, and now I found in these much that I had never found before. I didn't reject any of it. I accepted it just as it was written. Nor did I read anything into it that wasn't there.

Again, nothing changed overnight. But, as time has passed, I have acquired a blind and, yes, childlike faith that, by accepting a God I don't understand and the program of AA just as it is written, I can maintain my sobriety one day at a time. If I am to have more than this, it will come as time goes by, just as other good things have come.

I no longer find it necessary, as I did for years, to prove my disbelief in God by my every thought and deed. Nor do I find it necessary to prove myself to others. No—the only accounting and the only proving I have to do is to myself and to God, as I understand Him (or don't understand Him). I'm sure that I shall err from time to time, but I must learn to forgive myself, as God has forgiven me for my past.

I think I have had a spiritual awakening, as undramatic as it may have been, and that it will go on and on as long as I continue to practice this program in my daily affairs. To me, there is no "spiritual side" to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous; the entire program is spiritual.

In my view, some of the evidences of a spiritual awakening are: maturity; an end to habitual hatred; the ability to love and to be loved in return; the ability to believe, even without understanding, that Something lets the sun rise in the morning and set at night, makes the leaves come out in the spring and drop off in the fall, and gives the birds song. Why not let this Something be God?

331 The Great Fact - We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the great fact for us.
To the Newcomer:
Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the road of happy destiny.
May God bless you and keep you—until then. (AA Big Book, 164)