

## Introduction to *The Good Shepherd Guide to the 12 Steps*

The earliest Christians were known as the followers of the Way. That is an ambiguous phrase because it means that they followed Jesus, who himself is the Way, as well as meaning that they followed a way of life as preached by Christ and his apostles. Exactly what is that way of life and how to live it out in communion with others is what our program is all about.

Upholding and continuing apostolic teaching is an integral part of the call that is upon the body of Christ, the Church. Because of the assault on the faith over the last century, orthodox believers have spent the greater part of their time and resources defending *what* we believe and *why* we believe it. In the process the typical Christian church has sorely neglected *how* we live out that faith on a day-to-day basis.

Here's what the Rev. Sam Shoemaker noted years ago in his article *Groups That Work: A Christian Program*.

*Take two men in a typical congregation. I asked one of them about trying to carry his faith to others, and he said it would take him a long time to learn enough to do such a thing. I said to him, "Would you please tell me what on earth you've been doing in this church for twenty years?" Another man said to me one day, "I have been coming to this church all my life and I still don't know what it's all about."*

*Now both these men said the Creed, and I think they believed it. They believed in the institution of the Church, supported it, came to it with considerable regularity. But no one could say that either of them had "got the program." For all their exposure to church services and church work, nothing had pulled the whole thing together, made it seem practical, and given them a working method of growing in the Christian life.*

*A working program is a technique, a set of spiritual habits one can adopt and pursue regularly to keep his spiritual life growing. When Jesus told Nicodemus, a churchgoing, religious man, that he needed a life so different from the one he had that it was like being born all over again, and that unless this happened he would not see the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus' first question was, "How ...?" He didn't ask "Why" and he didn't ask "What," he asked "How." The Church has, on the whole, given people more answers to "why" and to "what" than it has to "how." Yet the "how" is the practical method that gets us going and keeps us going.*

When you study Scripture you see how pale church life is now compared to what it was in the times of the apostles. And I don't just mean all the miracles, I mean in terms of conversion experiences (Titus 3:3-6; 1 Cor 6:9-11) and the quality of the relationships, to God and within the community of faith (Acts). Meeting in one another's houses every day for fellowship and communion. Confessing their sins, one to another. Pious Jews who were already tithing to the temple, selling off property to support the ministry of the apostles. A strong recognition by all that they were sinners redeemed by Christ. Praying with and for one another. Devoting themselves to learning as much as they could about the good news and to helping one another. And they were happy, joyous people. They loved what they were doing.

Inspired by their example, we seek to follow the principles for personal and communal living that we find revealed in Scripture among the earliest generations of Christians. It's not as though we're the only ones to try this. The Oxford Groups initially did this. In fact they described themselves as a "first century Christian community." From the Bible they distilled four absolutes for Christian living:

1. The sharing of our sins and temptations with another Christian life given to God.
2. Surrender our life past, present and future, into God's keeping and direction.
3. Restitution to all whom we have wronged directly or indirectly.
4. Listening for God's guidance and carrying it out.

AA, an outgrowth of the Oxford Group movement, with the coaching of The Rev. Sam Shoemaker, came up with the 12 steps based on the same Biblical principles. Shoemaker later wrote an article, *What the Church has to Learn from Alcoholics Anonymous*. That is worth reading. It explains in large measure what

motivates us to be doing what we are doing with this program. Also worth reading are *12 Steps to Power and Groups That Work: A "Christian Program"* by Sam Shoemaker.

Like Shoemaker, some of us recognize in AA groups a liveliness of the Holy Spirit at work usually missing from churches. [*Sorry to say, this is no longer so true as it once was. Many groups have been overtaken by New Agers, agnostics, and/or atheists. — FM+*] The fellowship of AA has a level of commitment and caring, forgiveness and compassion, dedication to action, good humor and real humility, transparency, accountability, and authenticity among its members, that we think should be evident in our church communities—and isn't. We want to have all of that in our church fellowship.

On the other hand, as Christians, we recognize the poverty of relationship that many AAs have in their relationship with God—what many of them call their “higher power”—because they do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Ironically, they may know him without knowing that they know him—much like the Greeks in Athens that Paul spoke to. They worshiped a God they did not know. So too, we hope eventually to be able to introduce AAs to the God they may have in their lives without really knowing him.

But first we must get our own house in order by establishing and continuing to cultivate a lively faith personally and communally. We find that by practicing the 12 Steps we come to know Jesus Christ in a profoundly personal way as our Savior\* (Steps 1-2), our Lord\*\* (Steps 3-11), and eventually, as our Friend\*\*\* (Step 12)—whereby we become his co-workers and are sent as he was sent, carrying the message to others. (\*Mt. 18:11; \*\*Mt. 28:18; \*\*\*Jn 15:15).

Here is how the Big Book (pp 58-60) of AA introduces the Steps. While the Big Book language is limited to *alcohol* and *alcoholic*, we use *addiction or chronic sin* and *addict or chronic sinner* in our presentation of the steps.

---

### **How it Works**

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it - then you are ready to take certain steps.

At some of these we balked. We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that we deal with alcohol - cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power- that One is God. May you find Him now!

Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

Step 1 - We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable

Step 2 - Came to believe that God, a Power greater than ourselves, could restore us to sanity.

- Step 3 - Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God
- Step 4 - Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves
- Step 5 - Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs
- Step 6 - Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character
- Step 7 - Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings
- Step 8 - Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all
- Step 9 - Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others
- Step 10 - Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it
- Step 11 - Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out
- Step 12 - Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs

Many of us exclaimed, "What an order! I can't go through with it." Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection. Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after make clear three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- (c) That God could and would if He were sought.

---

To do the steps requires two decisions.

"If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it - then you are ready to take certain steps."

"Willing to go to any length" is inspired by the language of Jesus Christ when he invites people to become his disciples.

Luke 9:23-25

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"*

Jesus says that you have to be willing to give up everything—deny self—family—the world—etc.—which itself echoes the ultimate commandment—to love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, *all* your mind, *all* your strength.

"If you have decided you want we have"— consider the promises found in the Big Book of AA (pp. 83-84), promises of the results you can expect if you follow the program of action:

*If we are painstaking about this phase of our development [Step 9], we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our*

*fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.*

*Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us - sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.*

This is how we have been blessed by God through this rule of life. Do you want what we have? — These blessings are yours if you want them. How willing are you? Are you really ready to surrender? Are you willing to go to any length? If “yes,” then you are ready to take these steps with us. The strength you will need to live them will come from God so long as you seek Him.

**Prayer before taking the steps on Page 59 of the Big Book:**

“We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.”

There are many examples of this kind of prayer in Scripture. Here is one of the more famous.

Psalm 31:1-2, 5

*In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Into your hands I commend my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.*

If we approach the Steps with the premise that our God is He who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, then we will find nothing in the 12 Steps that conflicts with Scripture. On the contrary, we find the very things the people of God are exhorted to do. Here are the actions that need to be taken:

- personally identifying with the problem of sin as described by Paul in Romans 7,
- a commitment to turn one's life and will over to the care of God,
- confession of sin,
- restitution and reconciliation,
- continually growing in one's relationship to God through prayer and personal devotions,
- sharing the good news and this spiritual way of life with others,
- and practicing its principles in all areas of one's life.

The 12 Steps are simply an orderly way to apply the scriptural principles Christians already espouse. The steps have a natural progression in them that can serve as an outline of discipleship that fits the unique needs of the addict or anyone who struggles with chronic sin, that is to say, everyone. ("If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8) If every Christian practiced these things on a consistent basis, they would grow tremendously—and so would the Church!