Chapter 5

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.

It's very rare for someone to completely commit to the A.A. program and still fail. People who do not recover are the ones who can't or won't follow this simple program. They are usually people who simply cannot be honest with themselves. We don't meet a lot of people like this, but they do exist. It is not their fault. They seem to have been born that way. But because they cannot be honest with themselves, they are unlikely to succeed in their recovery.

There are also people who suffer from emotional and mental disorders, and join A.A. to address their alcoholism. Many of them do recover if they are able to be honest along their journey.

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.

Many of the stories we share in this book describe experiences that we have had ourselves. We share stories about what we used to be like, what happened to us, and what our lives are like now. If you feel like we did and want to stop drinking, then you are ready to get started. You are ready to take these steps toward recovery.

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.

When we started, some of those first steps scared us. We thought we could find an easier way. But we could not. Since we know this now from our own experiences, we're asking you to be fearless and thorough from the start. Some of us tried to keep our old ideas, and they just held us back. Until we let go of those ideas, we were unable to make progress.

Remember that we deal with alcohol—cunning, baf-

fling, 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!

> Remember that we are dealing with a disease. Alcoholism is a confusing and powerful condition that is unlike anything else in the world. Alcohol is extremely complicated, tricky, and difficult. It seems to control and punish people who are addicted to it. Without help, beating alcoholism is too much for one person to handle. We all need guidance from God, support from a Higher Power. And we need to ask for that support with full and open hearts. We stand at a turning point. We ask for God's protection and care with all the honesty we have.

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:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

[The Twelve Steps are identical to the original in the main portion of the Plain Language Big Book]

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.

If this is your first time reading through these steps, they may seem difficult … or even impossible. Do not be discouraged. No one has ever followed these principles perfectly. We are not saints. We are simply people who are trying to grow, both spiritually and personally. These ideas are here to guide our progress. And our goal is spiritual progress, not 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.

In Chapter 4 we shared a description of alcoholics who do not believe in God. Combined with that, we believe the stories of our experiences as A.A. members all boil down to three simple ideas:

A. That we were alcoholics and could not manage our own lives.

B. That no human power could have stopped or changed our alcoholism.

C. That God could and would help us if we tried to find God.

Being convinced, *we were at Step Three,* which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Him. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?

The Twelve Steps were created so that we could help ourselves and others understand these three ideas—and then grow beyond them. We had already accepted our powerlessness over alcohol and already believed in a Higher Power. That meant *we were at Step Three* (deciding to turn our will and our lives over to God's guidance). But what did that mean? And how could we do it?

The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If

his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.

Stop playing God

The very first thing we needed to understand was this: that following our own self-centered plans would never work in the long run. Even if we had good intentions, we would eventually cause trouble for other people trying to live their own lives.

Since most people do whatever they want whenever they want, it can be hard to accept this change. The people around us usually believe they are completely in charge of their own lives. They think they control everything. They're like actors who want to run the whole show they're performing in. They try to arrange the spotlights and the scenery. They tell the other actors what to do to suit their own needs. They tell themselves that if people would just follow their directions, the show would be perfect. Everybody would be happy and life would be wonderful. And while they are trying their best to control all the parts and players, they may seem kind, patient, and generous. Other times they may seem mean, selfish,

and dishonest. Since they're human beings, they probably show a mix of these traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when try-ing to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?

What usually happens when people put themselves in charge of everything? The show doesn't go very well. Our controlling friends begin to think life is treating them unfairly. They become even more controlling in response. But even after making more changes, the play still disappoints them. They may see that these bad results are partially their own fault, but they believe other people are more to blame. They become angry, insulted, and self-pitying.

Things only get worse since *what they want* doesn't match up to *what they do*. People who run their lives in this way:

- Act kind to others, but only when it benefits them;
- Believe they can force themselves to be happy by controlling everything and every person in their lives;

- Make the people around them feel bullied, which causes those people to bully them back; and/or
- Create confusion instead of peace in their own lives, and in the lives of others.

Our actor is self-centered—ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays. He is like the retired business man who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; the minister who sighs over the sins of the twentieth century; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia

if the rest of the world would only behave; the outlaw safe cracker who thinks society has wronged him; and the alcoholic who has lost all and is locked up. Whatever our protestations, are not most of us concerned with ourselves, our resentments, or our self-pity?

These unfortunate people are driven by self-centeredness. They believe they know best about everything. They blame others for their troubles and struggles. If we're being truly honest, don't we all act like that sometimes? Don't we get all wrapped up with ourselves, our anger, or our self-pity?

Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt.

How selfishness hurts us

We in A.A. believe that selfishness is the root of our troubles. We allow fear and self-pity to rule our lives, and we end up hurting or angering the people around us. And they react to that. Sometimes they hurt us back. While that is happening we may not understand why they're doing it. But if we think carefully about how we've acted, we always seem to find the reason. We remember that we did something selfish first, and

that selfish action put us in a position to be hurt later on.

So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.

Basically, this means we are causing our own troubles. They come from ourselves, and are caused by our self-centeredness. Alcoholics are even more self-centered than most people, though we never seem to realize this. We alcoholics must work hard to get rid of this selfishness. Our Higher Power makes it possible for us to change this in ourselves. In fact, it may feel like there's no other way to make this change. We can't get rid of our self-centeredness by wishing or trying all by ourselves. We need God's help.

This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

It took some time to understand that we had to quit playing God. Doing that just wasn't working for us. We decided that in this drama called "life," God was going to be our director. God would be in charge. This decision changed everything for us.

Most good ideas are simple, and this one was simply beautiful. It became extremely important to our journey toward freedom.

When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.

> When we truly accepted that God was in charge, all sorts of amazing things began to happen for us. We felt a new sense of purpose. Everything we needed came to us, so long as we continued to trust in our Higher Power. We became less interested in ourselves. We stopped worrying about our little plans and schemes. Instead, we were interested in seeing how we could contribute to life and how we could help other people. We felt a new kind of power flow in. We enjoyed peace of mind, and we discovered we could face life successfully. As we became aware of God's presence in our lives, we stopped feeling afraid of both the present and the future. We felt like we had been reborn.

We were now at Step Three. Many of us said to our Maker, *as we understood Him:* "God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would

help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!'' We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him.

Committing to Step Three has a similar effect on many alcoholics. When we reach this Step, many of us choose to say this prayer: "God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!"

This means, "God, I offer myself to You—to partner with me and guide me as You think best. Take away the prison of self that I have lived in, so I can do as you think best more easily. Take away my difficulties, so that when I feel I have been released from them, I can share my transformation to help others accept Your Power, Your Love, and Your Way of life. May I do Your will always!"

We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our wife, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand. The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.

This prayer is a powerful one. Many A.A. members have found it helpful to take this spiritual step with an understanding person. This might be a spouse,

best friend, or spiritual adviser. But if someone like that isn't a part of your life, it is better to meet your Higher Power alone. Connecting with your Higher Power with someone who might misunderstand will be more difficult than doing it alone.

The wording of the prayer that you see here is just a suggestion. When you are ready to take Step Three yourself, you can choose other words that express the same idea, as long as you can say them with all of your heart. Saying words of dedication is only the beginning. But if you say them honestly and humbly, the power of your new understanding will fill you from head to toe.

Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning,

which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.

INVENTORY: Inventory is important to Step 4 in A.A., where it's described as a "searching and fearless moral inventory." This is a structured list that includes strengths and weaknesses, resentments, fears, and the hurt you've caused with your alcoholism.

Taking inventory and responsibility

After we'd committed to Step Three through prayer, we started a personal house cleaning. We knew that putting ourselves in God's hands was an important first step, but also knew it needed to be followed by action. Our change of heart wouldn't permanently improve our lives unless we also dealt with the beliefs and actions that were harming us. Drinking was just a symptom of a larger disease. We had to understand its causes and conditions.

Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. *This was Step Four.* A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret.

If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.

So we started our personal inventories—lists of all the things in our lives that held us back. *This was Step Four.* This step was inspired by the process of inventorying that businesses do: They count and write down every item that the business owns. A business that doesn't do this regularly doesn't understand itself, and may go broke. When people take inventory of a store or company, they find out the facts and face them. They are trying to discover the truth about the stock that is actually on the shelves. It helps business owners find damaged goods that can't be sold to customers, and to get rid of them immediately. If business owners want to be successful, they cannot fool themselves about what can be sold and what must be thrown away.

We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations.

This is also true for people. We need to understand ourselves. We need to know what's inside of us (on our shelves), and be willing to throw out damaged goods (harmful ideas and behaviors).

So we did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our personalities that caused our struggles. Since we already believed that selfishness was what had hurt us most, we began there. We thought long and

hard about the traits and actions related to selfishness.

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 been spiritually sick. When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically. In dealing with 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. So we were sore. We were "burned up."

We have come to believe that resentment is the worst offender. Resentment is feeling anger about being treated unfairly. It's the feeling of holding a grudge. It means staying angry at someone for a long period of time. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else. We alcoholics are not only mentally and physically ill, we are spiritually ill. And we think resentment is the source of many forms of spiritual disease. To fully recover we need to cure our spiritual illness. Better mental and physical health will follow.

On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with?

Dealing with resentment

We have discovered that the best way to deal with resentments is to write them down on paper. We did this ourselves by listing people, groups, or ideas at whom we were angry. Then we asked ourselves why we felt angry. In most cases, it turned out that we felt angry because our confidence, our bank accounts, our ambitions, or our personal relationships (including sexual relationships) were hurt or threatened. That made us feel upset. We felt like we had been wronged.

On our grudge lists, we wrote down names in one column. In the second column, we put down what the person did to make us angry. In the third column, we wrote what we felt was affected by this behavior. Was

it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal relationships, or our sexual relations?

We were usually as definite as this example:

I'm resentful at:	*The Cause*	*Affects my:*
Mr. Brown	His attention to my wife.	Sex relations. Self-esteem (fear)
	Told my wife of my mistress.	Sex relations. Self-esteem (fear)
	Brown may get my job at the office.	Security. Self-esteem (fear)
Mrs. Jones	She's a nut—she snubbed me. She committed her husband for drinking. He's my friend. She's a gossip.	Personal relationship. Self-esteem (fear)
My employer	Unreasonable—Unjust — Overbearing — Threatens to fire me for drinking and padding my expense account.	Self-esteem (fear) Security.
My wife	Misunderstands and nags. Likes Brown. Wants house put in her name.	Pride—Personal sex relations—Security (fear)

We were as detailed as possible, as you'll see in this example:

I am resentful at:	***My reason for feeling this way:***	***These feelings impact my:***

Mr. Brown	He pays too much attention to my wife and flirts with her. He told my wife about my mistress. Brown may take my job at the office.	Sex life Self-esteem (fear) Sex life Self-esteem (fear) Security Self-esteem (fear)
Mrs. Jones	She insulted me. She checked her husband into a hospital for drinking, and he's my friend. She's a gossip.	Personal relationship Self-esteem (fear)
My employer	She is unreasonable. She treats me unfairly. She doesn't trust me. She threatens to fire me for drinking. She threatens to fire me for adding personal costs to my work expense account.	Self-esteem (fear) Security
My wife	She misunderstands and nags me. She likes Mr. Brown. She wants to put her name on the mortgage for our house so she is officially one of its owners.	Pride Personal sex relations Security (fear)

We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were fin-

ished we considered it carefully. The first thing ap-

parent was that this world and its people were often quite wrong. To conclude that others were wrong was as far as most of us ever got. The usual outcome was that people continued to wrong us and we stayed sore. Sometimes it was remorse and then we were sore at ourselves. But the more we fought and tried to have our own way, the worse matters got. As in war, the victor only *seemed* to win. Our moments of triumph were short-lived.

As we went back through our lives to write these inventories, we focused on being both thorough and completely honest. When we were finished, we re-read the lists we'd written very carefully.

The first thing we noticed was that our lists were long. Clearly, we felt that the world and its people had treated us very badly. This was not a huge surprise. Most people spend their lives believing that others are wrong. They think that the world is unfair, and that nothing can be done about any of it. If they cling to this belief, people will continue to wrong them and they will continue to feel angry about it. Some of us try to find the source of our anger. When we do that, we realize we're actually feeling guilt or regret (instead of anger). Then we get angry at ourselves for being mistaken. But the more we fight and try to get our own way, *the worse things become*.

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 worth while. But with the alcoholic, whose hope is the maintenance and growth of a

spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We found that it is fatal. For when harboring such feelings 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.

A life full of resentment can only create unhappiness. It's a feeling that sucks up our time and energy, preventing us from focusing on more important things. And for alcoholics, resentment is even more serious. In fact, holding on to our grudges can be fatal. As alcoholics, allowing these angry feelings to continue makes us want to live alone and in darkness. We are hiding ourselves from the warm sunlight that we can find in spirituality. The craving for alcohol returns and we drink again. And for alcoholics, drinking leads to death.

If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. The grouch and the brainstorm were not for us. They may be the dubious luxury of normal men, but for alcoholics these things are poison.

If we wanted to live, we knew we had to be free of anger.

We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? We could not wish them away any more than alcohol.

So we turned back to our inventory list, believing it held the answers we needed. We decided to look at it

from a different angle. We began to see that the world and its people weren't treating us as badly as we'd thought. But we also saw that our strong feelings about the world and its people were controlling us. Our feelings of anger and resentment were shaping our lives. Since we were alcoholics, feeling huge amounts of anger and resentment was dangerous. How could we escape? We saw that our resentments needed to be dealt with, but how? We could not wish them away, just as we couldn't wish away our drinking.

This was our course: We realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick.

Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend. When a person offended we said to ourselves, "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done."

Eventually, we realized that the people who had wronged us might be spiritually sick, too. We might not like their symptoms or the way they treated us, but accepting they were ill helped us to feel less angry at them. We asked God to help us show them the same compassion and patience that we would show to sick friends. When a person was rude or selfish, we said to ourselves, "This is a sick person. How can I be helpful to them? God, please help me not feel angry at this person."

We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't 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.

We stopped ourselves from arguing or fighting back when we felt someone hurt us. After all, we wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we did, we would destroy our chance of being helpful! We cannot be helpful to all people, but with the help of our Higher Power we can learn to be kind to everyone we meet.

Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other man's. When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight.

SELF-SEEKING: Acting in a way that puts our own self-centered needs first.

Then we returned to our inventory list again. Instead of looking for the wrongs others had done to us, we looked for our own mistakes. When were we selfish, self-seeking, dishonest, and afraid? Sometimes we found items on the list where we shared the blame with other people. When this happened, we tried to focus on how we had been wrong in those situations. Where were we to blame? What was our mistake? This inventory was ours, not the other person's. When we could understand and describe our faults, we listed them. We wrote them down in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and felt willing to make them right.

Notice that the word "fear" is bracketed alongside the difficulties with Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, the employer, and the wife. This short word somehow touches 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, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes

we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble.

Fear hides everywhere

If you look back at our example list, you'll see that the word "fear" sits in parentheses next to the complaints about Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, the employer, and the wife. As we did our own inventories, we saw that this one word somehow touched every aspect of our lives. It was like an evil and destructive thread that wove its way through the fabric of our existence. So often, our fears were the real cause of our resentments. Fear caused events in our lives that created pain we felt we didn't deserve. But had we really set the ball rolling ourselves? Could we admit to ourselves that our fears had caused that trouble in the first place?

We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. Wasn't it because self-reliance failed us? Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough. Some of us once had great self-confidence, but it didn't fully solve the fear problem, or any other. When it made us cocky, it was worse.

We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even if they weren't connected to feelings of resentment. We asked ourselves why we had these fears. Wasn't it because we believed we could do everything and know everything, and then found out we were wrong? Wasn't it because we couldn't accept that we needed help? Some of us had felt very

confident at times, but our confidence never took away our fears. When it made us cocky, it was worse.

Perhaps there is a better way—we think so. For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust infinite God rather than our finite selves. We are in the world to play the role He assigns. Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity.

If we wanted to continue recovering, we needed to find a better way to deal with our fears. And we found it in trusting and relying on a Higher Power. We learned to trust God rather than trying to understand, manage, and do everything in our lives alone. And by putting that trust in God, we are able to get through our darkest, most difficult, and most fearful times.

We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let Him demonstrate, through us, what He can do. We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.

And we are not ashamed of relying on God, or of needing God. We know that our faith and trust isn't a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength. Faith is a kind of courage, just as trusting a Higher Power is a kind of courage. And when we ask God to remove our fears and help us focus on better, more important things,

we can begin to outgrow our fears.

Now about sex. Many of us needed an overhauling there. But above all, we tried to be sensible on this question. It's so easy to get way off the track. Here we find human opinions running to extremes—absurd extremes, perhaps. One set of voices cry that sex is a lust of our lower nature, a base necessity of procrea-

tion. Then we have the voices who cry for sex and more sex; who bewail the institution of marriage; who think that most of the troubles of the race are traceable to sex causes. They think we do not have enough of it, or that it isn't the right kind. They see its significance everywhere. One school would allow man no flavor for his fare and the other would have us all on a straight pepper diet. We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone's sex conduct. We all have sex problems. We'd hardly be human if we didn't. What can we do about them?

How to inventory your sex life

Now let's talk about sex. It seems to us that there are two strong opinions about sex, and most people have either one or the other.

Some people say that sex is part of our "lower" nature, but that it needs to be done sometimes to keep humanity alive. They are judgmental about sex.

Other people say that sex is wonderful and that people should be allowed to have as much of it as they want, with whomever they want. This second group of people tends to believe sex is part of everything that human beings do, from art to science to religion. They see it everywhere and in everything.

A.A. would like to stay out of this argument between two strong opinions. We do not want to judge anyone's sex life. We all have sex problems. We wouldn't be human if we didn't. What can we do about them?

We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.

In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test—was it selfish or not? We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed.

To answer this question for ourselves, we reviewed our own actions over the years. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we make anyone feel jealous, suspicious, or bitter? If we were to blame, what could we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.

Then we tried to imagine a smart and fair way to run our sex lives in the future. We looked at each sexual relationship and asked, "Did I act selfishly here, or not?" We asked God to help us create some ideals. Ideals are values and behaviors that we could work toward. We wanted ideals for our sex lives, and help living up to them. We remembered that sex is natural, which means it is basically good. That means we shouldn't be greedy about it or feel disgusted by it.

Whatever our ideal turns out to be, we must be willing to grow toward it. We must be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. In

other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. In meditation, we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it.

> When you consider these questions and think about your own ideals, make sure you are willing to work toward them. Just like everything in A.A., making changes in your sex life takes work and effort. It means being willing to make amends whenever you're wrong (as long as you don't cause more harm by doing so). In other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. We ask God what we should do, and the right answer comes if we want it.

God alone can judge our sex situation. Counsel with

persons is often desirable, but we let God be the final judge. We realize that some people are as fanatical about sex as others are loose. We avoid hysterical thinking or advice.

Suppose we fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble? Does this mean we are going to get drunk? Some people tell us so. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and on our motives. If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson. If we are not sorry, and our conduct continues to harm others, we are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

What happens if we fail to live up to one of our ideals about sex and relationships? Does this mean we will get drunk to punish ourselves? Some people say yes. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and on our feelings. If we are sorry and truly want our Higher Power to point us toward better things, we know that we can be forgiven. We will learn the lesson, and move on. If we are not sorry and our choices continue to harm other people, we will drink. There's no "maybe" about it. These are facts that we have learned directly from our own experiences.

To sum up about sex: We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing. If sex is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others. We think of their needs and work for them. This takes us out of ourselves. It quiets the imperious urge, when to yield

would mean heartache.

When it comes to the sex lives of alcoholics, we recommend focusing on creating ideals with God's help and then using them to guide you. Whenever a situation comes up and you aren't sure what to do, your ideals will give you a clear answer. They will help you know how to do the right thing. They will keep you sane and strong. If your relationships are messy and difficult, working on them directly might not help you. In this case, you can focus your energy on helping other people. Think about their needs and work for them. Doing this takes you out of yourself and allows you to pay attention to other things. It might even help you avoid a heartache.

If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments. We have begun to comprehend their futility and their fatality. We have commenced to see their terrible destructiveness. We have begun to learn tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people. We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can.

Faith helps us when we cannot help ourselves

If you are thorough about your personal inventory, you will write a very long list. You will name and think about your resentments. When you're done, you'll start to see how pointless and dangerous—even deadly—your resentments are. You have begun to learn tolerance, patience, and good will toward all

people. (This includes your enemies, since you now think of them as sick people who need and deserve your help.) You have listed the people you have hurt, and you are willing to straighten out the past if you can.

In this book you read again and again that faith did

for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that God can remove whatever self-will has blocked you off from Him. If you have already made a decision, and an inventory of your grosser handicaps, you have made a good beginning. That being so you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself.

In this book you will read again and again that faith helped us when we couldn't help ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that a Higher Power can remove whatever barriers kept you from finding your faith in the past. If you have already made a decision and an inventory of your mistakes, you have taken important steps. You have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself. You are on your way toward a better and brighter life already.