

Chapter Five

HOW IT WORKS

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our directions. 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 way of life 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 follow directions.

At some of these you may balk. You may think you can find an easier, softer way. We doubt if you can. 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 you are dealing with alcohol - cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for you. But there is One who has all power - That One is God. You must find Him now!

Half measures will avail you nothing. You stand at the turning point. Throw yourself under His protection and care with complete abandon.

Now we think you can take it! Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as your Program of Recovery:

1. 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 and direction 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 willing that God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly, on our knees, asked Him to remove our shortcomings - holding nothing back.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make complete 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 contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual experience as the result of this course of action, we tried to carry this message to others, especially alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

You may exclaim, "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, have been designed to sell you three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That you are alcoholic and cannot manage your own life.
- (b) That probably no human power can relieve your alcoholism.
- (c) That God can and will.

If you are not convinced on these vital issues, you ought to re-read the book to this point or else throw it away!

If you are convinced, you are now at step three, which is that you make a decision to turn your will and your life over to God as you understand Him. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?

The first requirement is that you see 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 may be 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 wishes, 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.

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 some 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 trying 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?

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 preacher 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 their protestations, are not these people mostly concerned with themselves, their resentments, or their 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.

So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is almost the most extreme example that could be found 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 is no way of entirely getting rid of self without Him. You may have moral and philosophical convictions galore, but you can't live up to them even though you would like to. Neither can you reduce your self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on your own power. You must have God's help.

This is the how and why of it. First of all, quit playing God yourself. It doesn't work. Next, decide that hereafter in this drama of life, God is going to be your Director. He is the Principal; you are to be His agent. He is the Father, and you are His child. Get that simple relationship straight. Most good ideas are simple and this concept is to be the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which you will pass to freedom.

When you sincerely take such a position, all sorts of remarkable things follow. You have a new Employer. Being all powerful, He must necessarily provide what you need, if you keep close to Him and perform His work well. Established on such a footing you become less and less interested in yourself, your little plans and designs. More and more you become interested in seeing what you can contribute to life. As you feel new power flow in, as you enjoy peace of mind, as you discover you can face life successfully, as you become conscious of His presence, you begin to lose your fear of today, tomorrow, or the hereafter. You will have been reborn.

Get down upon your knees and say to your Maker, as you understand 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!" Think well before taking this step. Be sure you are ready; that you can at last abandon yourself utterly to Him.

It is very desirable that you make your decision with an understanding person. It may be your wife, your best friend, your spiritual adviser, but remember it is better to meet God alone than~ with one who might misunderstand. You must decide this for yourself. The wording of your decision is, of course, quite optional so long as you express the idea, voicing it without reservation. This decision is only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, will be felt at once.

Next we launch out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which you have never in all probability attempted. Though your decision is a vital and crucial step, it can have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in yourself which have been blocking you. Your liquor is but a symptom. Let's now get down to basic causes and conditions.

Therefore, you start upon a personal inventory. This is 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. Its 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.

We do exactly the same thing with our lives. We take stock honestly. First, we search out the flaws in our make-up which have caused our failure. Being convinced

that self, manifested in various ways, is what has defeated us, we consider its common manifestations.

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. List people, institutions or principles with whom you are angry. Ask yourself why you are angry. In most cases it will be found that your self-esteem, your pocketbook, your ambitions, your personal relationships, (including sex) are hurt or threatened. So you are sore. You are "burned up."

On your grudge list set opposite each name your injuries. Is it your self-esteem, your security, your ambitions, your personal, or your sex relations, which have been interfered with?

Be as definite as this example:

<u>I'm resentful at:</u>	<u>The Cause</u>	<u>Affects my:</u>
Mr. Brown (fear)	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
Mrs. Jones relation-	She's a nut-she snubbed me. She committed her husband for drinking.He's my friend.She's a gossip.	Personal ship.Self-esteem (fear)
My employer (fear)	Unreasonable - Unjust - Over- bearing - Threatens to fire me for drinking and padding my expense account.	Self-esteem Security
My wife relations-	Misunderstands and nags.Likes Brown. Wants house put in her name.	Pride - Personal and sex

Go on through the list back through your lifetime. Nothing counts but thoroughness and honesty. When you are finished consider it carefully. The first thing apparent to you is that this world and its people are often quite wrong. To conclude that others are wrong is as far as most of us ever get. The usual outcome is that people continue to wrong you and you stay sore. Sometimes it is remorse and then you are sore at yourself. But the more you fight and try to have your way, the worse matters get. Isn't that so? As in war, victors only seem to win. Your moments of triumph are short-lived.

It is plain that a way of 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 only hope is the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience, this business of resentment is infinitely grave. We find 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.

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

Turn back to your list, for it holds the key to your future. You must be prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. You will begin to see that the world and its people really dominate you. In your present state, the wrongdoing of others, fancied or real, has power to actually kill you. How shall you escape? You see that these resentments must be mastered, but how? You cannot wish them away any more than alcohol.

This is our course: realize at once that the people who wrong you are spiritually sick. Though you don't like their symptoms and the way these disturb you, they, like yourself, are sick, too. Ask God to help you show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that you would cheerfully grant a friend who has cancer. When a person next offends, say to yourself "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done."

Never argue. Never retaliate. You wouldn't treat sick people that way. If you do, you destroy your chance of being helpful. You cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show you how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one.

Take up your list again. Putting out of your mind the wrongs others have done, resolutely look for your own mistakes. Where have you been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation may not be entirely your fault, disregard the other person involved entirely. See where you have been to blame. This is your inventory, not the other man's. When you see your fault write it down on the list. See it before you in black and white. Admit your wrongs honestly and be willing to set these matters straight.

You will notice that the word fear is bracketed alongside the difficulties with Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, your employer, and your wife. This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It is an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence is shot through with it. It sets in motion trains of circumstances which bring us misfortune we feel we don't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing as a sin. It seems to cause more trouble.

Review your fears thoroughly. Put them on paper, even though you have no resentment in connection with them.

Ask yourself why you have them. Isn't it because self-reliance has failed you? 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.

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

You must never apologize to anyone for depending upon your Creator. You 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. Never apologize for God. Instead let Him demonstrate, through you, what He can do. Ask Him to remove your fear and direct your attention to what He would have you be. At once, you will commence to outgrow fear.

Now about sex. You can probably stand an overhauling there. We needed it. But above all, let's 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 procreation. 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?

Review your own conduct over the years past. Where have you been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom did you hurt? Did you unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where you were at fault, what should you have done instead? Get this all down on paper and look at it.

In this way you can shape a sane and sound ideal for your future sex life. Subject each relation to this test - is it selfish or not? Ask God to mould your ideals and help you to live up to them. Remember always that your sex powers are God-given, and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed.

Whatever your ideal may be, you must be willing to grow toward it. You must be willing to make amends where you have done harm, provided that you will not bring about still more harm in so doing. In other words, treat sex as you would any other problem. In meditation, ask God what you should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if you want it.

God alone can judge your sex situation. Counsel with persons is often desirable, but let God be the final judge. Remember that some people are as fanatical about sex as others are loose. Avoid hysterical thinking or advice.

Suppose you fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble. Does this mean you are going to get drunk? Some people will tell you so. If they do, it will be only a half-truth. It depends on you and your motive. If you are sorry for what you have done, and have the honest desire to let God take you to better things, you will be forgiven and will have learned your lesson. If you are

not sorry, and your conduct continues to harm others, you are quite sure to drink. We are not theorizing. These are facts out of our experience.

To sum up about sex: 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, throw yourself the harder into helping others. Think of their needs and work for them. This will take you out of yourself. It will quiet the imperious urge, when to yield would mean heartache.

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

In this book you read again and again that God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. We hope you are convinced now that He can remove the self-will that has blocked you off from Him. You have made your decision. You have made an inventory of the grosser handicaps you have. You have made a good beginning, for you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself. Are you willing to go on?