

Chapter Six INTO ACTION

Having made your personal inventory, what shall you do about it? You have been trying to get a new attitude, a new relationship with your Creator, and to discover the obstacles in your path. You have admitted certain defects; you have ascertained in a rough way what the trouble is; you have put your finger on the weak items in your personal inventory. Now these are about to be case~out. This requires action on your part, which, when completed, will mean that you have admitted to God, to yourself, and to another human being, the exact nature of your defects. This brings us to the fifth step in the Program of Recovery mentioned in the preceding chapter.

This is perhaps difficult - especially discussing your defects with another person. You think you have done well enough in admitting these things to yourself, perhaps. We doubt that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient. We strenuously urge you to go much further. But you will be more reconciled to discussing yourself with another person if we offer good reasons why you should do so. The best reason first: if you skip this vital step, you may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. The answer is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only thought they had lost their egoism and fear; they only thought they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else all their life story.

More than most people, the alcoholic leads a double life. He is very much the actor. To the outer world he presents his stage character. This is the one he likes his fellows to see. He wants to enjoy a certain reputation, but knows in his heart he doesn't deserve it.

The inconsistency is made worse by the things he does on his sprees. Coming to his senses, he is revolted at certain episodes he vaguely remembers. These memories are a nightmare. He trembles to think someone might have observed him. As fast as he can, he pushes these memories far inside himself. He hopes they will never see the light of day. He is under constant fear and tension - that makes for more drinking.

Psychologists agree with us. Members of our group have spent thousands of dollars for examinations by psychologists and psychiatrists. We know but few instances where we have given these doctors a fair break. We have seldom told them the whole truth. Unwilling to be honest with these sympathetic men, we were honest with no one else. Small wonder the medical profession has a low opinion of alcoholics and their chance for recovery!

You must be entirely honest with somebody if you expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, you are going to think well before you choose the person or persons with whom to take this intimate and confidential step. If you belong to a religious denomination which requires confession, you must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it. Though you have no religious connection, you may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion. You will often find such a person quick to see and understand your problem. Of course, we sometimes encounter ministers who do not understand alcoholics.

If you cannot, or would rather not do this, search your acquaintance for a close-mouthed, understanding

friend. Perhaps your doctor or your psychologist will be the person. It may be one of your own family, but you should not disclose anything to your wife or your parents which will hurt them and make them unhappy. You have no right to save your own skin at another person's expense. Such parts of your story you should tell to someone who will understand, yet be unaffected. The rule is you must be hard on yourself, but always considerate of others.

Notwithstanding the great necessity for discussing yourself with someone, it may be that you are so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, you may postpone this step, only, however, if you hold yourself in complete readiness to go through with it at the first opportunity. We say this because we are very anxious that you talk to the right person. It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what you are driving at; that he will not try to change your plan. But don't use this as a mere excuse to postpone.

When you decide who is to hear your story, waste no time. Have a written inventory. Be prepared for a long talk. Explain to your partner what you are about to do, and why you have to do it. He should realize that you are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached in this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by your confidence.

Pocket your pride and go to it! Illumine every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once you have taken this step, withholding nothing, you will be delighted. You can look the world in the eye. You can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Your fears will fall from you. You will begin to feel the nearness of your Creator. You may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now you will begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will come strongly. You will know you are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.

Return home and find a place where you can be quiet for an hour. Carefully review what you have done. Thank God from the bottom of your heart that you know Him better. Take this book down from your shelf and turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully read the first five proposals and ask if you have omitted anything, for you are building an arch through which you will walk a free man at last. Is your part of the work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have you skimmed on the cement you have put into the foundation? Have you tried to make mortar without sand?

If you can answer to your satisfaction, look at step six. We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. Are you now perfectly willing to let God remove from you all the things which you have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all - every one? If you yet cling to something you will not let go, ask God to help you be willing.

When you are ready, say something like this: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.~ You have then completed step seven.

Now you need more action without which you will find that "Faith without works is dead." Look at steps eight and nine. You have a list of all persons you have harmed and to whom you are willing to make complete amends. You made it when you took inventory. You subjected yourself to a drastic self-appraisal. Now you are to go out to your fellows and repair the damage you did in the past. You are to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of your effort to live on self-will and run the show yourself. If you haven't the will to do this, ask until it comes. Remember you agreed at the beginningyou would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol.

You probably still have some misgivings. We can help you dispel them. As you look over the list of business acquaintances and friends you have hurt, you will feel diffident about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us reassure you. To some people you need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on your first approach. You might prejudice them. At the moment you are trying to put your own life in order. But this is not an end in itself. Your real purpose is to fit yourself to be of maximum service to God and the people about you. It is seldom wise to approach an individual, who still smarts from your injustice to him, and announce that you have given your life to God. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay yourself open to being branded a fanatic or a religious bore? You may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But he is sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. He is going to be more interested in your demonstration of good will than in your talk of spiritual discoveries.

Don't use this advice as an excuse for shying away from the subject of God. When it will serve any good purpose, you should be willing to announce your convictions with tact and common sense. The question of how to approach the man you have hated will arise. It may be he has done you more harm than you have done him and, though you may have acquired a better attitude toward him, you are still not too keen about admitting your faults. Nevertheless, with a person you dislike, we advise you to take the bit in your teeth. He is an ideal subject upon which to practice your new principles. Remember that he, like yourself, is sick spiritually. Go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit. Be sure to confess your former ill feeling and express your regret of it.

Under no condition should you criticize such a person or be drawn into an argument with him. Simply tell him that you realize you will never get over drinking until

you have done your utmost to straighten out the past. You are there to sweep off your side of the street, realizing that nothing worth while can be accomplished until you do so. Never try to tell him what he should do. Don't discuss his faults. Stick to your own. If your manner is calm, frank, and open, you will be gratified with the result.

In nine cases out of ten the unexpected happens. Sometimes the man you are calling upon admits his own fault; so feuds of years' standing melt away in an hour. Rarely will you fail to make satisfactory progress. Your former enemies will sometimes praise what you are doing and wish you well. Occasionally, they will cancel a debt, or otherwise offer assistance. It should not matter, however, if someone does throw you out of his office. You have made your demonstration, done your part. It's water over the dam.

Most alcoholics owe money. Do not dodge your creditors. Tell them what you are trying to do. Make no bones about your drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether you think so or not. Never be afraid of disclosing your alcoholism on the theory it may cause you financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise you. Arrange the best deal you can and let these people know you are sorry your drinking has made you slow to pay. You must lose your fear of creditors no matter how far you have to go, for you are liable to drink if you are afraid to face them.

Perhaps you have committed a criminal offense which might land you in jail if known to the authorities. You may be short in your accounts and can't make good. You have already admitted this in confidence to another person, but you are sure you would be imprisoned or lose your job if it were known. Maybe it's only a petty offence such as padding your expense account. Most of us have done that sort of thing. Maybe you have divorced your wife. You have remarried but haven't kept up the

alimony to number one. She is indignant about it, and has a warrant out for your arrest. That's a common form of trouble too.

Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Remind yourself that you have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience. Ask that you be given the strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequence to you. You may lose your position or reputation, or face jail, but you are willing. You have to be. You must not shrink at anything.

Usually, however, other people are involved. Therefore, you are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save himself from the alcoholic pit. A man we know had remarried. Because of resentment and drinking, he had not paid alimony to his first wife. She was furious. She went to court and got an order for his arrest. He had commenced our way of life, had secured a position, and was getting his head above water. It would have been impressive heroics if he had walked up to the Judge and said, "Here I am."

We thought he ought to be willing to do that if necessary, but if he were in jail, he could provide nothing for either family. We suggested he write his first wife admitting his faults and asking forgiveness. He did, and also sent a small amount of money. He told her what he would try to do in the future. He said he was perfectly willing to go to jail if she insisted. Of course she did not, and the whole situation has long since been adjusted.

If taking drastic action is going to implicate other people, they should be consulted. Use every means to avoid wide-spread damage. You cannot shrink, however, from the final step if that is clearly indicated. If,

after seeking advice, consulting others involved, and asking God to guide you, there appears no other just and honorable solution than the most drastic one, you must take your medicine. Trust that the eventual outcome will be right.

This brings to mind a story about one of our friends. While drinking, he accepted a sum of money from a bitterly-hated business rival, giving him no receipt for it. He subsequently denied having taken the money and used the incident as a basis for discrediting the man. He thus used his own wrong-doing as a means of destroying the reputation of another. In fact, his rival was ruined.

He felt he had done a wrong he could not possibly make right. If he opened that old affair, he was sure it would destroy the reputation of his partner, disgrace his family and take away his own means of livelihood. What right had he to involve those dependent upon him? How could he possibly make a public statement exonerating his rival?

He finally came to the conclusion that it was better to take those risks than to stand before his Creator guilty of such ruinous slander. He saw that he had to place the outcome in God's hands or he would soon start drinking again, and all would be lost anyhow. He attended church for the first time in many years. After the sermon, he quietly got up and made an explanation. His action met widespread approval, and today he is one of the most trusted citizens of his town. This all happened three years ago.

The chances are that you have serious domestic troubles. We are perhaps mixed up with women in a fashion you wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a wife gets worn out, resentful, and

uncommunicative. How could she be anything else? The husband begins to feel lonely, sorry for himself. He commences to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. You may be having a secret and exciting affair with "the girl who understands me." In fairness we must say that she may understand, but what are you going to do about a thing like that? A man so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if he is married to a loyal and courageous girl who has literally gone through hell for him.

Whatever the situation, you usually have to do something about it. If you are sure your wife does not know, should you tell her? Not always, we think. If she knows in a general way that you have been wild, should you tell her in detail? Undoubtedly you should admit your fault. Your wife may insist on knowing all the particulars. She will want to know who the woman is and where she is. We feel you ought to say to her that you have no right to involve another person. You are sorry for what you have done, and God willing, it shall not be repeated. More than that you cannot do; you have no right to go further. Though there may be justifiable exceptions, and though we wish to lay down no rule of any sort, we have often found this the best course to take.

Our design for living is not a one-way street. It is as good for the wife as for the husband. If you can forget, so can she. It is better, however, that you do not needless~ name a person upon whom she can vent her natural jealousy.

There are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. Perhaps yours is one of them. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be you will both decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let by-gones be by-gones. Each of you might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind. Keep it always in sight that you deal

with that most terrible human emotion - jealousy. Good generalship may decide that you and your wife attack the problem on the flank, rather than risk face-to-face combat. You have to decide about that alone with your Creator.

Should you have no such complication, there is still plenty you should do at home. Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he needs to keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the patience mothers and wives have had with alcoholics. Had this not been so, many of us would have no homes today, would perhaps be dead.

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. You must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that you are sorry won't fill the bill at all. You ought to sit down with your family and frankly analyze your past as you now see it, being very careful not to criticize them. Never mind their defects. They may be glaring, but the chances are that your own actions are partly responsible. So clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that your Creator show you the way of patience, tolerance kindness and love.

The spiritual life is not a theory. You have to live it. Unless your family expresses a desire to live upon

spiritual principles, however, we think you ought to leave them alone. You should not talk incessantly about spiritual matters to them. They will change in time. Your practice will convince them more than your words. Remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone.

There may be some wrongs you can never fully right. Don't worry about them if you can honestly say to yourself that you would right them if you could. Some people you cannot see - send them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases. But don't delay if it can be avoided. Be sensible, tactful, and considerate. Be humble without being servile or scraping. As one of God's people you are to stand on your feet; don't crawl on your belly before anyone.

If you are painstaking about this phase of your development, you will be amazed before you are half through. You are going to know a new freedom and happiness. You will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. You will comprehend the word serenity and know peace. No matter how far down the scale you have gone, you will see how your experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. You will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in your fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Your whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave you. You will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle you. You will suddenly realize that God is doing for you what you could not do for yourself.

You say these are extravagant promises. They are not. They are being fulfilled among us - sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will materialize in you if you work for them.

This thought brings us to step ten, which suggests you continue to take personal inventory and continue to set any new mistakes right as you go along. You vigorously commenced this way of life as you cleaned up your past. You have entered the world of Spirit. Your next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for your life time. Continue to watch yourself for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, ask God at once to remove them. Discuss them with someone immediately. Make amends quickly if you have harmed anyone. Then resolutely turn your thoughts to someone you can help. Love and tolerance of others is your code.

And you have ceased fighting anything or anyone - even alcohol. For by this time your sanity will have returned. You will seldom be interested in liquor. If tempted, you will recoil from it as you would from a hot flame. You will react sanely and normally. You will find this has happened automatically. You will see that your new attitude toward liquor has been given you without any thought or effort on your part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. You are not fighting it, neither are you avoiding temptation. You feel as though you had been placed in a position of neutrality. You feel safe and protected. You have not even sworn off. Instead, the problem has been removed. It does not exist for you. You are neither cocky, nor are you afraid. That is our experience. That is how we react so long as we keep in fit spiritual condition.

It is easy to let up on the spiritual program of action and rest on your laurels. You are headed for trouble if you do, for alcohol is a subtle foe. We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve. Every day is a day when you have to carry the vision of God's will into all of your activities. "How can I best serve Thee - Thy will (not mine) be done." These are thoughts which must go with you constantly. You

can exercise your will power along this line all you wish. It is the proper use of the will.

Much has already been said about receiving strength, inspiration, and direction from Him who has all knowledge and power. If you have carefully followed directions, you have begun to sense the flow of His Spirit into you. To some extent you have become God-conscious. You have begun to develop this vital sixth sense. But you must go further and that means more action.

Step eleven suggests prayer and meditation. Don't be shy on this matter of prayer. Better men than we are using it constantly. It works, if you have the proper attitude and work at it. It would be easy to be vague about this matter. Yet, we believe we can give you some definite and valuable suggestions.

When you awake tomorrow morning, look back over the day before. Were you resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do you owe an apology? Have you kept something to yourself which should be discussed with another person at once? Were you kind and loving toward all? What could you have done better? Were you thinking of yourself most of the time? Or were you thinking of what you could do for others, of what you could pack into the stream of life? After you have faced yesterday, ask God's forgiveness for any wrong. Ask to be shown what to do. Thus you keep clean as you live each day.

Next, think about the twenty-four hours ahead. Consider your plans for the day. Before you begin, ask God to guide your thinking. Especially ask that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives. Then go ahead and use your common sense. There is nothing hard or mysterious about this. God gave you brains to use. Clear your thinking of wrong motives. Your thought life will be placed on a much higher plane.

In thinking through your day you may face indecision. You may not be able to determine which course to take. Here you ask God for inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision. Relax and take it easy. Don't struggle. Ask God's help. You will be surprised how the right answers come after you have practiced a few days. What used to be the hunch or the occasional inspiration becomes a working part of your mind. Being still inexperienced and just making your contact with God, it is not probable that you are going to be divinely inspired all the time. That would be a large piece of conceit, for which you might pay in all sorts of absurd actions and ideas. Nevertheless you will find that your thinking will, as time passes, be more and more on the plane of inspiration and guidance. You will come to rely upon it. This is not weird or silly. Most psychologists pronounce these methods sound.

You might conclude the period of meditation with a prayer that you be shown all through the day what your next step is to be, that He give you whatever you need to take care of every situation. Ask especially for freedom from self-will. Be careful to make no request for yourself only. You may ask for yourself, however, if others will be helped. Never pray for your own selfish ends. People waste a lot of time doing that, and it doesn't work. You can easily see why.

If circumstances warrant, ask your wife or a friend to join you in morning meditation. If you belong to a religious denomination which requires a definite morning devotion, be sure to attend to that also. If you are not a member of a religious body, you might select and memorize a few set prayers which emphasize the principles we have been discussing. There are many helpful books also. If you do not know of any, ask your priest, minister, or rabbi, for suggestions. Be quick to see where religious people are right. Make use of what they offer.

As you go through the day, pause when agitated or doubtful. Be still and ask for the right thought or action. It will come. Remind yourself you are no longer running the show. Humbly say to yourself many times each day "Thy will be done." You will be in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. You will become much more efficient. You will not tire easily, for you will not be burning up energy foolishly as you did when trying to arrange life to suit yourself.

It works - it really does. Try it.

We alcoholics are undisciplined~ . So let God discipline you in the simple way we have just outlined.

But this is not all. There is action and more action. "Faith without works is dead." What works? We shall treat them in the next chapter which is entirely devoted to step twelve.