

When Do You Want to Get Well?

"I wonder how many alcoholics upon finding out they had a deadly ailment and a doctor had a cure would sit in the doctor's waiting room 90 times in 90 days (or for a year or more) and wait for the medicine to be administered to them. I also wonder how many alcoholics do the same thing concerning our 12 Steps; they go to 90 meetings in 90 days hoping to have a spiritual awakening without taking the Steps." - Archie M.

I have been scolded a few times (by fellow AA's) because of the fact that I sometimes share at meetings about how the Steps are meant to be worked immediately and quickly. I've been told that this "theory" will "harm" newcomers (having only a few days, a few weeks, or a few months) who could not possibly be "ready" to do the work yet. Then I'm usually told that these new members should just go to meetings for a while and eventually they'll "know" when they are ready to get into the Program. In the early days of AA, when a new person showed up to their first meeting and asked about when they were going to get into working the Steps, established members usually asked them, "When do you want to get well? If you want to get well now, we'll be working the Steps now. If you DON'T want to get well now, I guess you can put off the Steps, but by doing so you're probably going to drink." I do not agree that we first get our life together and then turn to God. I believe that we turn to God and then, AND ONLY THEN, do we begin to get our life together. That's exactly what the Steps are all about. As a matter of fact, Bill Wilson got into the Steps after a few days, Dr. Bob got into the Steps after one day, and Bill Dotson (AA #3) also got into the Steps after a few days. These were the first three members of AA and none of them ever drank again. But for me the bottom line is, what does the AA Program and the AA literature have to say about it? Since it says, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path," then what does the PATH say? The following is a list of timeframes found in the Big Book, and is the basis for my experience and the experience of those I've worked with. Page and paragraph numbers are from the new Fourth edition.

Page xxvi:4 - "Though we work out our solution on the spiritual as well as an altruistic plane, we favor hospitalization for the alcoholic who is very jittery or befogged. More often than not, it is imperative that a man's brain be cleared before he is approached, as he has then a better chance of understanding and accepting what we have to offer." (So it says we need to be detoxed off of alcohol first, which usually takes two or three days but in extreme cases takes four or five days, before getting into the work. See also page xxvii:7.)

Page xxvii:5 - "Many years ago one of the leading contributors to this book (Bill Wilson) came under our care in this hospital and while here he acquired some ideas which he put into practical application AT ONCE." (In about three days Bill was into working almost all of what later became the AA program. See also page 13.)

Page xxvii:7 - "Of course an alcoholic ought to be freed from his physical craving for liquor, and this often requires a definite hospital procedure, before psychological measures (like the Steps) can be of maximum benefit." (For psychological measures to benefit us we need to be applying them. So again, it's saying we need to be detoxed off of alcohol first, which usually takes two or three days but in extreme cases takes five or six days, before getting into the Steps. See also page xxvi:4.)

Page 9 - "The door opened and he stood there, fresh-skinned and glowing. There was something about his eyes. He was inexplicably different. What had happened?"

"I pushed a drink across the table. He refused it. Disappointed but curious, I wondered what had got into the fellow. He wasn't himself.

"Come, what's all this about?" I queried.

"He looked straight at me. Simply, but smilingly, he said, 'I've got religion.'

"I was aghast. So that was it last summer an alcoholic crackpot; now, I suspected, a little cracked about religion. He had that starry-eyed look. Yes, the old boy was on fire all right. But bless his heart, let him rant! Besides, my gin would last longer than his preaching.

"But he did no ranting. In a matter of fact way he told how two men had appeared in court, persuading the judge to suspend his commitment. They had told of a simple religious idea and a practical program of action. That was two months ago and the result was self-evident. It worked!

"He had come to pass his experience along to me - if I cared to have it. I was shocked, but interested. Certainly I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless." (So we don't have to wait very long to start doing Twelfth Step work, all that's required first is that we have worked most of the 12 Steps.)

Pages 13 thru 15 - "At the hospital I (Bill Wilson) was separated from alcohol for the last time (Bill was admitted to Towns Hospital at 2:30PM on December 11, 1934. Bill was 39 years old.). Treatment seemed wise, for I showed signs of delirium tremens. There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then I understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself UNRESERVEDLY under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost (Bill takes what later became Step Three. He reached the conclusions of Step One on page 8:1 and Step Two on 12:4). I RUTHLESSLY faced my sins (what later became Step Four) and became willing to have my new-found Friend (God) take them away, root and branch (what later became Steps Six and Seven). I have not had a drink since.

My schoolmate (Ebby Thacher) visited me, and I FULLY acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies (what later became Step Five). We made a list of people I had hurt or toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong (what later became Step Eight). NEVER was I to be critical of them. I was to right ALL such matters to the UTMOST of my ability (what later became Step Nine).

I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense (these two lines refer to what later became Step Ten). I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking ONLY for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me. NEVER was I to pray for myself, except as my requests bore on my usefulness to others (what later became Step Eleven).

Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure. My friend promised when these things were done I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator; that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered ALL my problems (what later became the first two parts of Step Twelve). Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things, were the ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS.

Simple, but not easy; a price HAD to be paid. It meant DESTRUCTION of self-centeredness. I MUST turn in ALL things to the Father of Light who presides over us all.

These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I FULLY accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never know. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound.

For a moment I was alarmed, and called my friend, the doctor (Dr. Silkworth), to ask if I were still sane. He listened in wonder as I talked.

Finally he shook his head saying, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way you were." The good doctor now sees many men who have such experiences. He knows that they are real.

While I lay in the hospital the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others.

My friend had emphasized the ABSOLUTE NECESSITY of demonstrating these principles in ALL my affairs. Particularly was it IMPERATIVE to work with others as he had worked with me (what later became the last part of Step Twelve). Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! FOR IF AN ALCOHOLIC FAILED TO PERFECT AND ENLARGE HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE THROUGH WORK AND SELF-SACRIFICE FOR OTHERS, HE COULD NOT SURVIVE THE CERTAIN TRIALS AND LOW SPOTS AHEAD. If he did not work, he would SURELY drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die. Then faith would be dead indeed. With us it is just like that." (So two or three days after Bill is admitted into the hospital on December 11th he has a spiritual experience AS THE RESULT of working almost all the Steps immediately and quickly in a few days. He THEN talks with his doctor about what happened to him on December 14th and is released from the hospital on the afternoon of December 18th).

Page 58:2 - "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." (I'd like to suggest that they are talking about TWELVE certain steps and you'll soon see why. Some say that we stay within the first three Steps for a year when you first get to AA, but please notice what it says next about Step Three on pages 63:4 - 64:0.)

Page 63:4 - "NEXT we launch 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 (which is the Third Step 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." (So it's saying that this Third Step decision is important but will have LITTLE PERMANENT EFFECT unless we IMMEDIATELY follow it up with an INTENSELY ACTIVE EFFORT to work Steps Four through Nine, because where we face these things that block us from turning our will and our lives over to God is in Steps Four, Five, and Six; and where we get rid of what blocks us from turning our will and lives over is in Steps Seven, Eight, and Nine. So the way we turn our will and lives over to the care of God as we understand Him is by IMMEDIATELY and STRENUOUSLY working AT LEAST the six middle Step s.)

Page 72:2 - "We will be more reconciled to discussing ourselves with another person (doing a Fifth Step) when we see good reasons why we should do so. The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we 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. We think the reason 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 (Fifth Step)." (It's talking about NEWCOMERS working ALL of the Steps.)

Page 74:2 - "Notwithstanding the GREAT NECESSITY for discussing ourselves with someone (doing a Fifth Step), it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, ONLY, however, if we hold ourselves in COMPLETE readiness to go through with it at the FIRST opportunity." (See also page 75:1.)

Page 75:1 - "When we decide who is to hear our story (our Fifth Step), WE WASTE NO TIME." (So after we write our three Fourth Step inventories of resentment, fear, and harms; it says we IMMEDIATELY share our Fifth Step.)

Page 75:3 - "Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for AN HOUR, carefully reviewing what we have done." (It's saying that IMMEDIATELY following our Fifth Step, we spend ONE HOUR of undisturbed and uninterrupted quiet time, seeing if the foundation we have built with our first five Steps is done honestly and to the best of our ability. Then see page 76:1.)

Page 76:1 - "If we can answer to our satisfaction (the questions we ask ourselves IMMEDIATELY following our Fifth Step in the previous paragraph), we THEN look at Step Six. We have emphasized willingness as being indispensable. ARE WE NOW READY to let God remove from us ALL the things which we have admitted are objectionable (in our Fourth and Fifth Steps)? Can He NOW take them ALL - everyone? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing." (So Six immediately follows the hour we took after Five. So Five and Six are both done on the same day.)

Page 76:2 - "WHEN READY (which answers one of the questions of Step Six), we 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.' We have then completed Step Seven." (In Step Six, we were asked if we were NOW ready. If we are, we then do Step Seven. If there are SOME defects we are NOT willing to go to God with, we pray for the willingness to ask God to help us with them, but go on to Step Seven with the defects we ARE willing to ask God to help us with. Either way, Step Five, Six, and Seven are all done on the same day. Steps Three and Seven are then a daily striving and prayer, practiced for the rest of our lives.)

Page 76:3 - "NOW we need more action, without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." Let's look at Steps Eight and Nine. We have a list of ALL persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal. NOW we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the beginning we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol." (NOW is mentioned twice in this paragraph, and even says, "NOW we go out". So Steps Five through Nine are ALL done together (in rapid succession), according to the directions in the Big Book. If there are a few amends we are NOT willing to make, we pray for the willingness but proceed with the amends we ARE willing to make.)

Page 83:3 - "Some people cannot be seen - we send them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases (in doing Step 9). But we DON'T DELAY IF IT CAN BE AVOIDED."

Page 84:2 - "This thought (the thought of the Ninth Step promises ALWAYS materializing IF we work for them) brings us to Step Ten, which suggests we CONTINUE to take personal inventory and CONTINUE to set right ANY new mistakes AS WE GO ALONG (so the Tenth Step is NOT done just at night but should be done MOMENT BY MOMENT, AS WE GO ALONG throughout the day). We VIGOROUSLY commenced THIS way of living (the Steps Ten and Eleven "way of living") AS WE CLEANED UP THE PAST (we begin to clean up the past in Step Nine.)." (So Ten and Eleven begin to be worked as soon as we start making amends.) "...It should continue for a LIFETIME (So we never stop working Step Ten)."

Page 95:1 - "Sometimes a new man is anxious to proceed (in the Big Book's Original Manuscript, this word was replaced with, "make a decision and discuss his affairs") at once, and you may be tempted to let him do so. This is sometimes a mistake (they are only talking about the first visit here). If he has trouble later, he is likely to say you rushed him." (So it's saying that on the FIRST visit we shouldn't get the new person into the Steps yet, but please see 96:2 to see what it says about the SECOND visit.)

Page 96:2 - Suppose now you are making your second visit to a (new) man. He has read this volume (the Big Book) and says he is prepared to go through with the Twelve Steps of the program of recovery. HAVING HAD THE EXPERIENCE YOURSELF, you can give him MUCH practical advice. Let him know you are available if he wishes to make a decision (Step Three) and tell his story (Steps Four and Five), but do not insist upon it if he prefers to consult someone else.

Page 156:3 - But life was not easy for the two friends (Bill Wilson & Dr. Bob). Plenty of difficulties presented themselves. Both saw that they MUST keep SPIRITUALLY active. One day they called up the head nurse of a local hospital. They explained their need and inquired if she had a first class alcoholic prospect.

She replied, "Yes, we've got a corker (Bill Dotson, whose sober date is June 26, 1935). He's just beaten up a couple of nurses. Goes off his head completely when he's drinking. But he's a grand chap when he's sober, though he's been in here eight times in the last six months. Understand he was once a well-known lawyer in town, but just now we've got him strapped down tight."

Here was a prospect all right but, by the description, none too promising. The use of SPIRITUAL principles in such case was not so well understood as it is now. But one of the friends said, "Put him in a private room. We'll be down."

Two days later, a future fellow of Alcoholics Anonymous stared glassily at the strangers beside his bed. "Who are you fellows, and why this private room? I was always in a ward before."

Said one of the visitors, "We're giving you a treatment for alcoholism."

Hopelessness was written large on the man's face as he replied, "Oh, but that's no use. Nothing would fix me. I'm a goner. The last three times, I got drunk on the way home from here. I'm afraid to go out the door. I can't understand it." (Part of Bill D.'s First Step conclusion, and please notice the Twelfth Step work over the next few paragraphs.)

For an hour, the two friends told him about their drinking experiences. Over and over, he would say: "That's me. That's me. I drink like that."

The man in the bed was told of the acute poisoning from which he suffered, how it deteriorates the body of an alcoholic and warps his mind. There was much talk about the mental state preceding the first drink.

"Yes, that's me," said the sick man, "the very image. You fellows know your stuff all right, but I don't see what good it'll do. You fellows are somebody. I was once, but I'm a nobody now. From what you tell me, I know more than ever I can't stop (more of Bill D.'s First Step conclusion)." At this both the visitors burst into a laugh. Said the future Fellow Anonymous: "Damn little to laugh about that I can see."

The two friends spoke of their SPIRITUAL experience and told him about the COURSE OF ACTION they carried out.

He interrupted: "I used to be strong for the church, but that won't fix it. I've prayed to God on hangover mornings and sworn that I'd never touch another drop but by nine o'clock I'd be boiled as an owl."

Next day found the prospect more receptive. He had been thinking it over. "Maybe you're right," he said. "God ought to be able to do anything (Bill D.'s Second Step conclusion)." Then he added, "He sure didn't do much for me when I was trying to fight this booze racket alone."

ON THE THIRD DAY the lawyer gave his life to the care and direction of his Creator (Bill D.'s Step Three decision), and said he was perfectly willing to do ANYTHING necessary (Steps Four through Twelve). His wife came, scarcely daring to be hopeful, though she thought she saw something different about her husband already. He had begun to have a spiritual experience.

That afternoon he put on his clothes and walked from the hospital a free man. He entered a political campaign, making speeches, frequenting men's gathering places of all sorts, often staying up all night. He lost the race by only a narrow margin. But he had found God and in finding God had found himself. That was in June, 1935. He never drank again. He too, has become a respected and useful member of his community. He has helped other men recover, and is a power in the church from which he was long

absent. (So Bill Dotson, or AA #3, got right into the Steps within a few days, as was the practice in early AA.)

Page 262:6 - The day before I was due to go back to Chicago (this is during the summer of 1937), a Wednesday and Dr. Bob's day off, he had me down to the office and we spent THREE OR FOUR HOURS formally going through the Six Step program (which later became AA's Twelve Step program) as it was at that time. The six steps were: 1. Complete deflation (which later became Step 1). 2. Dependence and guidance from a Higher Power (which later became Steps 2,3,6,7 & 11). 3. Moral inventory (which later became Steps 4 & 10). 4. Confession (which later became Step 5). 5. Restitution (which later became Steps 8 & 9). 6. Continued work with other alcoholics (which later became Step 12). Dr. Bob led me through ALL of these steps. At the moral inventory (Steps 4 & 5), he brought up some of my bad personality traits or character defects, such as selfishness, conceit, jealousy, carelessness, intolerance, ill-temper, sarcasm and resentments. We went over these at great length and then he finally asked me if I wanted these defects of character removed (Step 6). When I said yes, we both knelt at his desk and prayed, each of us asking to have these defects taken away (Step 7). This picture is still vivid. If I live to be a hundred, it will always stand out in my mind. It was very impressive and I wish that every A.A. could have the benefit of this type of sponsorship today. Dr. Bob ALWAYS emphasized the religious angle VERY STRONGLY, and I think it helped. I know it helped me. Dr. Bob then led me through the restitution step, in which I made a list of ALL of the persons I had harmed (Step 8), and worked out ways and means of slowly making restitution (Step 9). (So again, most of the Steps being worked in one day.)

Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, page 101 - "Dorothy S.M. recalled the 1937 meetings..."The newcomers surrendered in the presence of all those other people." After the surrender, many of the steps - involving inventory, admission of character defects, and making restitution - were taken within a matter of days."

Barefoot Bill