

MAY 2026



The Sobriety Gazette

A PUBLICATION OF THE MID-MISSISSIPPI INTERGROUP

Let's begin with a moment of silence for the alcoholics/addicts still suffering, followed by the Serenity Prayer... God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

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Tradition Five

Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Responsibility Statement

I am responsible... When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

The Fifth Step Prayer...

“GOD, I thank you from the bottom of my heart that I know you better. Help me become aware of anything I have omitted discussing with another person. Help me to do what is necessary to walk a free man at last. AMEN”

The Sobriety Gazette is a publication of the Mid-Mississippi Intergroup. The purpose of this publication is to improve communication between local AA groups, inform and encourage participation in service opportunities and events that promote sobriety. Opinions expressed do not necessarily indicate endorsement by the central office or Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

The A.A. Program - Spiritual But Never Religious

One of the most common misconceptions about Alcoholics Anonymous is that it is a religious organization. New members especially, confronted with A.A.'s emphasis on recovery from alcoholism by spiritual means, often translate "spiritual" as "religious" and shy away from meetings, avoiding what they perceive as a new and frightening set of beliefs. By the time they walk into their first meeting, many alcoholics have lost what faith they might once have possessed; others have tried religion to stop drinking and failed; still others simply want nothing to do with it. Yet with rare exceptions, once A.A. members achieve any length of sobriety, they have found a source of strength outside themselves — a Higher Power, by whatever name — and the stumbling block has disappeared.

A Program of Action

A.A.'s Twelve Steps, which constitute its program of recovery, are in no way a statement of belief; they simply describe what the founding members did to get sober and stay sober. They contain no new ideas: surrender, self-inventory, confession to someone outside ourselves, and some form of prayer and meditation are concepts found in spiritual movements throughout the world for thousands of years. What the Steps do is frame these principles for the suffering alcoholic — sick, frightened, defiant, and grimly determined not to be told what to do or think or believe.

The Steps offer a detailed plan of action: admit that alcohol has you beaten, clean up your own life, admit your faults and do whatever it takes to change them, maintain a relationship with whatever or whoever outside of yourself can help keep you sober, and work with other alcoholics.

God As We Understood Him

The basic principles of Alcoholics Anonymous were worked out in the late 1930s and early '40s, during what co-founder Bill W. often referred to as the Fellowship's period of "trial and error." The founding members had been using six steps borrowed from the Oxford Groups, where many of them started out. Bill felt that more specific instructions would be better, and in the course of writing A.A.'s basic text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, he expanded them to twelve. But he was dealing with a group of newly sober drunks, and not surprisingly his new version met with spirited opposition. Even though the founding members were in many ways a homogeneous bunch (white, middle-class, almost exclusively male, and primarily Christian in background), they represented the full spectrum of opinion and belief. Bill tells us in *Alcoholic Anonymous Comes of Age*, a history of the Fellowship's early years, that "the hot debate about the Twelve Steps and the book's content was doubled and redoubled. There were conservative, liberal, and radical viewpoints." (page 162) Some thought the book ought to be Christian; others could accept the word "God" but were opposed to any other theological proposition. And the atheists and agnostics wanted to delete all references to God and take a psychological approach.

Bill concludes: "We finally began to talk about the possibility of compromise. . . . In Step Two we decided to describe God as a 'Power greater than ourselves.' In Steps Three and Eleven we inserted the words 'God as we understood Him.' From Step Seven we deleted the words 'on our knees.' And, as a lead-in sentence to all the steps we wrote these words: 'Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery.' A.A.'s Twelve Steps were to be suggestions only." (ibid., page 167).

More than sixty years later, those crucial compromises, articulated after weeks of heated controversy, have made it possible for alcoholics of all faiths, or no faith at all, to embrace the A.A. program of recovery and find lasting sobriety.

What About This Spiritual Awakening Thing?

Nevertheless, the phrase "spiritual awakening," found in the Twelfth Step and throughout A.A. literature, remains daunting to many beginners. For some, it conjures up a dramatic "conversion" experience — not an appealing idea to an alcoholic just coming off a drunk. To others, beaten down by years of steady drinking, it seems completely out of reach. But for those who persevere, ongoing sobriety almost invariably brings the realization that — in some wonderful and unexpected way — they have indeed experienced a spiritual change.

Spirituality, A.A. style, is the result of action. Step Twelve begins, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps. . ." (italics added), and in the book *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (page 106), Bill W. describes what happens: "Maybe there are as many definitions of spiritual awakening as there are people who have had them. But certainly each genuine one has something in common with all the others. . . . When a man or woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone."





He has been granted a gift which amounts to a new state of consciousness and being. He has been set on a path which tells him he is really going somewhere, that life is not a dead end, not something to be endured or mastered. In a very real sense he has been transformed, because he has laid hold of a source of strength which, in one way or another, he had hitherto denied himself.”

Groups and Their Customs

If the Steps are the program of recovery, the A.A. group is where alcoholics learn to live the program and practice it “in all their affairs.” Virtually all group meetings in the U.S. and Canada begin with a reading of the A.A. Preamble, a brief description of what the Fellowship is and is not. Its last two sentences make it clear that A.A.’s purpose has nothing to do with religion: “A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.”

Group customs that appear to be religious sometimes discourage new people from coming back. Professionals who refer people to A.A. may help by advising them to attend a variety of meetings, especially in the first year of sobriety, and to find a home group where they are comfortable. According to A.A.’s Fourth Tradition, each group is autonomous, which means in practical terms that every group is unique, with a flavor all its own. Thus, even if a shaky alcoholic finds himself one night in a meeting where the members feel at home with traditional religious language, he or she can try again the next night and find a group where even the most doubting or cynical soul will fit right in.

Similarly, A.A. members generally deal with the question of a Higher Power by assuring new members that they are free to find their own. Men and women who shy away from what is known in A.A. vernacular as the “God bit” can still identify a much-needed source of support outside themselves. For some, it is their A.A. group; others eventually choose a traditional idea of God, while still others rely upon an entirely different concept of a higher power. To show the variety of spiritual searches in A.A. the booklet *Came to Believe* was published in 1973. It is a collection of the various spiritual experiences of a wide range of members, from adherents of traditional religion to atheists and agnostics, with all stops in between.

But Don’t A.A. Groups Use the Lord’s Prayer?

The practice of ending meetings with the Lord’s Prayer, once almost universal, is still common in many areas. Where it still exists, the leader normally asks attendees to join in only if they choose to. North American groups today have found a variety of ways to close their meetings. Use of the Lord’s Prayer is rare in Spanish groups in the U.S. and groups outside the United States. Many recite the Serenity Prayer or A.A.’s Responsibility Statement; others use some other informal prayer or phrasing, or simply a moment of silence. And whatever the specific wording, the group conscience makes the decision. Groups that continue to close with the Lord’s Prayer are following a custom established in the Fellowship’s earliest days, when many of the founding members found their support in meetings of the Oxford Groups. The practice of closing with the Lord’s Prayer very likely came directly from those meetings. At the time, there was no A.A. literature, and so the founders leaned heavily on Bible readings for inspiration and guidance. They probably closed with the Lord’s Prayer because, as Bill W. explained, “it did not put speakers to the task, embarrassing to many, of composing prayers of their own.” Meeting formats became more inclusive once A.A. began to spread throughout North America and then the rest of the world, and it became obvious that the program of recovery could cross all barriers of creed, race, and religion.

In *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*, the Rev. Samuel Shoemaker, one of the nonalcoholic friends who was instrumental in shaping the Fellowship in the very beginning, reflects on the founders’ fundamental decision not to define a set of beliefs. He says (pages 263-64): “A.A. has been supremely wise, I think, in emphasizing the reality of the experience, and acknowledging that it came from a higher Power than human, and leaving the interpretation part pretty much at that. . . . If A.A.’s had said more, some people would have wanted them to say a great deal more, and define God in a way acceptable and congenial to themselves. It would have taken only two or three groups like this, dissenting from one another, to wreck the whole business. . . . So they stuck to the inescapable experiences and told people to turn their wills and their lives over to the care of God as they understood Him. That left the theory and the theology. . . to the churches to which people belong. If they belonged to no church and could hold no consistent theory, then they had to give themselves to the God that they saw in other people. That’s not a bad way to set in motion the beginnings of a spiritual experience.”

By General Service Office, A Newsletter for Professionals, Fall 2003

John's Recovery: Step Five

AA Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

My Step 5: To maintain my commitment to honesty and humility I'll share my inventory with my sponsor.

I now had at my fingertips a vivid outline of my alcohol saturated life. It was not pretty. I now view Step 5 as the strongest indicator of how serious I was about getting sober. Some might view this step as a confession, maybe even a plea for salvation. Not me. Along with the first four steps, it completed the foundation upon which to build a durable recovery.

The word foundation gets a lot of metaphorical use and almost always the metaphor implies strength and long term viability. I was confident that was the type of foundation we had built. Yet to be determined was what form of recovery would rise from this base. I fully intended to win the competition with myself which I alluded to in last month's posting on Step 4, and I had a clear vision of what that victory would provide: without equivocation, I would come to the realization that alcohol induced powerlessness and unmanageability would be totally removed from my life. Admission would lead to elimination.

We were trending in a positive direction and moving towards what I can now describe as "self-leadership." Not a prideful leadership nor a leadership with the spotlight on self. A key variable in being an effective leader is to have enough humility to admit you don't know everything – admitting that you need help to get the job done – the polar opposite of the arrogant alcoholic I was trying to defeat.

A sense of faith based on fact was developing. The process was working. The printed word (all AA suggestions aren't loaded up with God), human based support, and a patient one-day-at-a-time attitude all strengthened my resolve. In the wake of four years of relapse fueled hopelessness, confidence was slowly building.

Thus far honesty had been the order of the day and I thought of it this way. If at this stage of my recovery I cannot share Step 5 honestly, I either have to go back to Step 1 and start over or find some way other than AA to find sobriety. I sure as hell had my fill of start-overs and any alternative to AA was nowhere in sight. Honesty was my best option. Transferring my inventory from thought to paper had required a measurable dose of humility; to share these personal flaws and the related negligences with another person will demand significantly more. I also need unreserved confidence in my sponsor. No problem there, he had earned it.

A fortunate few non-God thinkers like myself figure out a way to function within AA without ceding control over our lives to an unseen, unknown, unmet deity. My personal understanding of a power greater than self was working effectively and my sponsor was waiting patiently for me to set a date to share the content of my Step 4. Since one of the admissions in Step 5 is to God, let me explain how the term "higher power" and the phrase, "God as we understood him", ended up in the 12 steps.

I know this is old stuff to AA history gurus, but it's quite possible that all the 2,050 (as of Sep. 14, 2019) subscribers on AA Agnostics are not as informed about the history of AA as you are. Most people know that Bill Wilson wrote the Big Book. Less known is that Bill regularly solicited feedback from the early AA's in New York and from Dr. Bob and the early AA's in Akron and Cleveland, a collection of derelicts usually referred to as the original 100, although that number has been subjected to question. Regardless of the number, try to imagine a roomful of recently dried out alcoholics trying to act as proofreaders, editors, and literary critics. That may have been where the rule against cross talk originated. Some of the feedback was intense, some of it in support of reliance on a deity some of it opposed.

In the book, *Language of the Heart*, Bill shares a heated response because, "In one of the steps I had even suggested that the newcomer get down on his knees." (p. 201) The howling began immediately... "when this document was shown to our New York meeting, the protests were many and loud." (p. 201) Similar protests are noted in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age: A Brief History of AA*, where Wilson was told, "You've got too much God in these steps, you will scare people away" and then a comment still heard today, "Who wants all their shortcomings removed anyhow." (*AA Comes of Age*, p. 162) Clearly Bill was told by some of the early AA's that AA had no business advocating for theistic principles.



Further frustrating his quest for consensus was a group that was unabashedly Christian who thought the Big Book should be clearly based on Christian dogma, and urge the use of biblical scripture to remove any doubt. (AA Comes of Age, p.162) Ultimately Bill was given the power of final judgment on content and that's how we ended up with what I call the "Agnostic Loophole". The agnostic contingent... "finally convinced us that we must make it easier for people like themselves by using such terms as 'a higher power' or God as we understand him." Those expressions as we know so well today, have proved lifesavers for many an alcoholic." (Language of the Heart, (p. 201)

My reasoned approach to the first part of Step 5 was simple. If there is a supra-human entity known as God that is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, he, she, or it already knows what I have committed to paper and I have no control over what this theistic authority may conclude. To the best of my understanding any verdict from on high is still pending. What is not pending is my development of a faith based on fact. My involvement with these sober alcoholics in AA has provided impetus to a transformational process that has changed how I think and how I act. I now had a sense of necessity for conforming to some of the fundamental suggestions of AA: those that recommend the use of personal will and those that emphasize the need for personal improvement.

I never questioned the value of doing Step 5, but my sense of necessity didn't coincide with Wilson's. Even though I'll be sharing my inventory which had been compiled by me, I'm designated as the least important participant. Wilson makes that clear when early in the chapter, "Into Action", he says... "we usually find a solitary self-appraisal is insufficient." (Big Book, p. 72) He supports this position in later years when he wrote this in the 12 and 12... "what comes to us alone may be garbled by our own rationalization and wishful thinking." (12 and 12, p. 60) I had no problem accepting those observations; I had just done an honest inventory, and it was loaded with past prevarications, rationalizations, and denial.

I knew this was an honest effort. What I could not accept was what Wilson says is the intent of Step 5 and what the result of the step will be. The intent of the step ... "is to get a new relationship with our creator, and to discover the obstacles in our path." (Big Book, p. 72) Also unacceptable is his prediction of the end result. "We begin to feel the nearness of our creator." (Big Book, p.75) And, "We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe." (Big Book, p. 75) The inventory was the right thing to do – the AA way was to do it for the wrong reason designed to achieve the wrong outcome.

My sponsor, Louie C., was a mild mannered retiree who went to mass two or three times a week. As my sponsor he never brought up the topic of religion. He was a retired railroad engineer, the guy who drove the train. For decades he drank a quart of bourbon a day and never had a mishap. About a year after he got sober his train hit a pick-up truck and killed the driver. The guy had ignored the flashing lights and the striped gate. When the first sheriff's deputy arrived on the scene Louie asked for an immediate breathalyzer and arranged for a urine screen and a blood analysis. He knew his reputation as a drunk was still alive among the railroad community.

We both lived in rural Indiana and as I drove the 12 miles of county blacktop to his place; I was a bit apprehensive about how some of my "stuff" would be viewed by this gentle old man. My fourth step was comprised of standard alcoholic screw-ups, a mix of guilt by omission and some guilt by commission. No warrants out for my arrest; no concern about any statute of limitations. Going through the inventory line by line with Louie made it painfully clear that I had not been leading a rationally defensive lifestyle. Louie listened and Louie added value. Throughout the session he did an excellent job of asking questions which demanded more in depth clarification on my part, and he offered meaningful self-disclosure which helped move me forward on the issue of self-forgiveness. It took about two hours. We agreed we had done a good job of identifying "the nature" of several wrongs. Louie had already accepted my version of a higher power, so the first part of the step was considered done. He stated that he was satisfied that I had assumed ownership of my wrongs so part two was done. We both agreed that he was in fact a human being so part three was done.

I drove home quietly grateful that I was in the midst of people who understood the nature of my problem and the pain it created, people who knew there was a solution, knew I could find it, and who were willing to lend me the support needed to stay on course.

By John B.

Tradition Five Allows Me To Stay Sober

Tradition five in simple terms states our singleness of purpose. To carry the message which was freely given to us. Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose — that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

The main purpose of an AA group is to share experience, strength and hope to the still suffering alcoholic. In my own personal experience, I am very grateful that I heard the great message of recovery at my first home group meeting. I am convinced I would not have come back if all I heard was a constant share about drinking and not the solution. For that night I didn't just hear one message there was a unified message by ALL group members.

That was the key for me to keep coming back.... the message!

At my Homegroup, meetings are run like a well-oiled machine because the group understands the importance of Tradition 5, when a member shares they share for the alcoholic who still suffers not always solely the newcomer. Whenever I am asked to share, I always remember how I felt walking through the doors the very first time and how anxious, nervous I was and full of fear. When the meeting started I heard some amazing shares the message was loud and clear. So I always think of the nervous newcomer and hopefully try and carry a message of recovery to give them hope that there is a solution to their alcoholism.

Doing service and my home group has been an honour and another example of Tradition 5 in action. I absolutely loved the service position of "greeter", being the very first point of contact to the newcomer, a big smile and a handshake to help put them at ease. Even if I had a terrible day at work, where all things went wrong, I would simply "suit up and smile" regardless of how I felt. By the end of the service I would feel amazing, because I was thinking of others and not myself. My service position as secretary is a bit like a conductor at an orchestra to ensure-all the elements are running like clockwork. In the preamble we always have a moment's silence to remember Tradition 5. During the shares from the floor I will promptly ring the bell if discussion of "Problems other than alcoholism" are dwelled on. This is not helpful for the newcomer, they need to hear that "sobriety, freedom from alcohol through the teaching and practice of the twelve steps" is possible.

Tradition 5 allows me to stay sober, I wouldn't be able to maintain sobriety if I didn't give it away. How can I continue to work the Steps and the program of AA and NOT pass this amazing message on?

Rhi, Road to Recovery Group Plymouth

roadtorecoverygroup.org

Tradition Five Checklist

1. Am I willing to firmly explain to newcomers the limitations of AA help, even though they may get mad at me for not giving them a loan? Or dating advice? Or help with a job?
2. Have I ever imposed on any AA member for a special favor or consideration simply because I am a fellow alcoholic?
3. Am I willing to Twelfth-Step the next newcomer without regard to who or what is in it for me?
4. Do I help my group in every way to fulfill our primary purpose?
5. Do I remember that AA long-timers, too, can be alcoholics who still suffer? Do I try both to help them and to learn from them?
6. Does our group ever use money from the basket for dinners or events or for memorials for members who have passed on?

aagrapevine.org

Announcements

Want to be updated about AA Announcements, Events, and the Sobriety Gazette?

Contact midmissintergroup@gmail.com to get involved!

You can also contact the editor at nfillingane@gmail.com for comments or questions!

Your Trusted Servants

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Chair - | Sam C. |
| Treasurer - | Karen M. |
| Secretary - | Kurt J. |
| Corrections - | Daryl R. |
| Treatment - | Natalie F. |
| Intergroup Liaison - | Carrie T. |
| IT/WEB - | Bruce M. |
| Newsletter Editor - | Natalie F. |

Community Resources

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| NA - | mrscna.net |
| Al-Anon - | msafg.org |
| SLAA - | wsw.slaa@gmail.com |
| Ms. Dept. of Mental Health - | dmh.ms.gov |

Feel free to contact Mid Mississippi Intergroup if you have any questions!

Intergroup meets on the first Thursday of each month at 6:30 pm.
6481 Old Canton Rd.
Jackson, Mississippi
39211

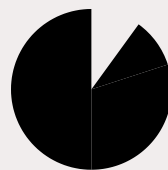
The Intergroup Central Office wants to extend a deep thanks to some of our long standing contributors and our excited welcome to others!

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|
| James S. | Susan L. | Henry A. |
| Al & Donna H. | Tommy L. | Kurt J. |
| Jeff W. | Hugh B. | Ed C. |
| Bruce M. | John R. | Andy D. |
| Will W. | Lawrence D. | Stacey K. |
| Anonymous 1 | Frank P. | David Mc. |

Recognition of \$1.00 per year for sobriety birthdays welcomed!

EXAMPLES OF GROUP CONTRIBUTIONS TO A.A. SERVICE ENTITIES

- Distribution of funds from groups that support service entities:



10% To District
10% To Area Committee
30% To G.S.O.
50% To Central Office/Intergroup

Yes! I Want to Be a Faithful Fiver

Date _____
Here is my contribution of \$ _____ for _____ Months
Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Home Group _____
Sobriety Date: Month _____ Date _____ Year _____

Shout out to these AA groups for contributions to our Book Fund over the last two years!

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Unlimited Traditions | Southgate Serenity |
| Primary Purpose | Quest |
| Serenity of Purpose | Way Out |

Faithful Fivers

Faithful Fivers are AA members who pledge at least five dollars each month to support their Central Office. This idea is catching on around the country. The plan came about when we remembered that many of us had spent far more than \$5.00 a month on alcohol during our drinking days.

As a Faithful Fiver, you support the effects of

Mis-Mississippi Intergroup: to carry the message of hope to still-suffering alcoholics.

To become a Faithful Fiver simply send monthly contributions to:

Central Office
Post Office Box 16228
Jackson, Mississippi 39236