

## **In Celebration of Recovery**

God, I offer myself to thee to build with me and to do with me what thou will.

Relieve me of the bondage of self so that I may better do thy will.

Take away my difficulties that victory over them may bear witness,

To those I would help of the power, thy love, and thy way of life.

May I do thy will always. (*Third Step Prayer*)

Good morning, I am Cyndi and I'm an alcoholic. By the grace of God and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have been sober for 17 years. As a member of AA I have a right to my anonymity but today I choose to exercise my right to share this private information with you.

First I want to welcome the members of AA and GA that are here this morning. You are so much a part of St. Nicholas and it sometimes makes me a little sad that we don't usually get to see you on Sunday mornings. I'm very blessed that I come to services here as well as take in a meeting from time to time. Today we are having "Recovery Sunday" to formally thank you for being part of our church community, and to thank you especially for all the things you do for St. Nicholas. We love you, we bless you, we ask God to bless you, and to guide you to your highest good.

I had given great consideration to simply telling my story of alcoholism but after writing it out, I realized that that's not really relevant to anyone here but me. If you would like to know about addiction, let me suggest a few, very powerful movies. When I was a little girl of about 12, my father made me and my siblings watch "The Man with the Golden Arm" starring Frank Sinatra. It's the story of a heroin addict. I think Dad thought that if we saw how bad addiction was, we wouldn't go out and use heroin. I am happy to report that to the best of my knowledge, none of us ever did. "The Lost Weekend" with Ray Milland and "The Days of Wine and Roses" with Jack Lemmon and Lee Remick are two movies about the tragedy of alcoholism. More recent movies on the subject are "Barfly" with Micky Rourke and Faye Dunaway, "Twenty-eight days" with Sandra Bullock, and

my very favorite “Clean and Sober” with Michael Keaton. Pick out a scene from any one of them, and I can relate to it on some level. If not, it’s likely that I know someone who can. Please don’t watch any of these and think “It’s only a movie”. No, they pretty accurately depict the struggle that many of us have with alcohol, drugs and recovery.

The question I want to talk about is: “Just how does God heal?”

If you went to a faith healer, or wanted to become one, you might have to learn several steps in order to tap into God’s healing power and grace.

These steps may include:

1. **Relax:** The first step to healing is relaxation. The body is "forgotten" in order to permit the mind to center upon God and His great power.
2. **Be Cleansed:** The whole person, including the conscious and subconscious mind, must be purified so that God’s healing power can course through the seeker.
3. **Seek Clarification of God’s Will:** Ask God what precisely is needed for healing to occur. In response, God will make His will clear.
4. **Expect Healing:** This means that you actually believe that God has heard the prayer and will answer it. The posture is active faith; half faith will not do.

That’s right, I found this list on the Internet.

My personal recovery didn’t include any of this, and just so you know, I’ve heard a lot of people’s stories and none included this type of faith healing. No laying on of hands, no “Praise God” instant miracle, nothing at all like that. Don’t get me wrong, generally in an alcoholic’s life there are plenty of people praying. If not for the healing of the disease, then for their own personal safety, as I did when I was a little girl. And yes, miracles do occur every day. Just not like you’d think.

The miracle in my life was a tad subtler. I have never had much luck with summoning God to heal anyone, or to perform party tricks. My God works in mysterious ways and in His own time. He got me sober by first allowing me to run my life and the universe as I

saw fit. The bible calls that free will. Slowly but surely I became sick and tired and miserable and wanted nothing better than to be gone from this earth. I didn't have the guts to kill myself, but I wished myself dead. When I was finally in enough pain, God in effect, hit me over the head with a baseball bat and said "Now that I have your attention, why don't you try it My way."

What actually happened was that God simply sent a friend of mine, who called me an alcoholic. There it was, the whole truth that was so deep inside me that I couldn't see. I was instantly devastated. Have you ever lived through a paradigm shift? Well I have. There were several other alcoholics in my family when I was growing up, and so I had a belief that I would a) NEVER become an alcoholic and b) that if the impossible did happen, I would go straight to AA. I was stuck, I had to go.

In my opinion, RECOVERY is God's third greatest gift to us after LOVE and LIFE. I see RECOVERY as God's way of teaching us how He wants us to live. I also believe that RECOVERY is available not only to alcoholics and drug addicts, but to all of us who suffer in any way.

As you may know, there are twelve steps that many of us use as a program of recovery. Those twelve steps, are a practical guide to help us to learn and follow spiritual principals. You can find the principles listed differently but I look at them like this.

Step 1. We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable. The spiritual principle is **Honesty**. For the first time in my life I had a clear example of what it meant to be truly honest with myself. It was such a clear message that someone else knew something about me that I could not admit even to myself.

Step 2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. The spiritual principle is **Hope**. First I came (to AA), then I came to (got dry), then I came to believe. This process taught me hope.

Step 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. The spiritual principles here are **Faith and Surrender**. It's interesting to me that faith can be a decision.

Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. The spiritual principle is **Courage**, and if you've ever tried to do this..., well anything you might do searching and fearlessly requires courage.

Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. There are two spiritual principals that can be learned by this step; they are **Integrity and Forgiveness**. Forgiveness was especially interesting to me because when I admitted to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs the last thing I expected was forgiveness.

Step 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. The spiritual principle is **Willingness**.

Step 7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings. The spiritual principle is **Humility**.

Step 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. **Brotherly Love** is the spiritual principle in becoming willing to make amends.

Step 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. The spiritual principle in making amends is **Justice** and the exception in this step teaches **Self-Discipline**.

Step 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. The spiritual principle here is **Vigilance**.

Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. The principal we learn with step 11 is **Spiritual Awareness**, or as I prefer to think of it “**Relationship with my Creator.**”

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. The last spiritual principle is **Service**. On any list of the principles that I’ve seen, they all only agree on one thing and that is that the 12<sup>th</sup> step reflects the spiritual principle of Service.

**I can’t say which step reflects it, but I believe collectively they have taught me the spiritual principle of Gratitude.**

I got sober because God called me to change my life. The way I see it is God said “Cyndi, if you want to have a life, I will give it to you. Your part of the bargain is simply this: Do not pick up a drink or drug. Everything else I’ll teach you along the way.”

Because of my own journey in RECOVERY, I believe that God heals us with his Divine Love. I believe that God calls all of us to surrender our lives to His will every day. And I believe that by reflecting and acting upon these spiritual principles we can be sure that we are, in fact, doing God’s will.