

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 32, NO. 8 AUG 2008

Promises, Promises

I love the so-called promises in the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 83 and continues at the top of page 84 of the Big Book. I frequently quote one or another of them. I often mention them in an AA qualification.

That's why I was pleased recently to receive a scroll containing "The Promises," inscribed in beautiful calligraphy, as a souvenir of an AA dinner I attended. And then, as I admired the scroll, it set me to thinking. We are certainly hearing more about "The Promises" these days. I've seen them printed in AA newsletters and bulletins and AA convention programs. I've heard members ask, "Why doesn't AA offer 'The Promises' as a wall plaque like the Steps and the Traditions? And maybe on a wallet card?"

Is this a trend in our Fellowship—this lifting the promises out of context and inscribing them in bronze? Are we sanctifying the promises?

If so, it troubles me. I view such a trend with alarm. Why?

Because, first of all, if we go back to the source and read the paragraph of the Big Book containing the promises, it is immediately clear that they were not intended to be set apart. They are not written as a separate element as are the Steps (page 59) or the Traditions (beginning page 564).

They are buried in the text (and within the context), and for a reason: *They are part of a discussion of how to work the Steps.* Not even all the Steps, really, but specifically the first nine. The paragraph in question follows a *long* description of the mess our alcoholic lives are in and advice on how to work our way out.

Second, these are not *unconditional* promises as they seem to be when set apart. Quite the contrary. They are a spontaneous, almost euphoric expression of the experiences of the authors with the rewards that can be expected "if we are painstaking about this phase of our development." What phase? The working of the first nine Steps as described in the preceding twenty-four pages!

And how many of us have actually worked the Steps that way? How many of us, for example, in doing our Fourth Step inventory, have followed the example in the Big Book?—a written "grudge list" in three separate columns, analyzing the causes of each resentment and how it affects us. Not I. How many of us took Steps Eight and Nine with the diligence and thoroughness recommended in detail from page 76 to page 83 in the Big Book? Not I. Yet we must recognize that that is what is meant by being "painstaking."

What the Big Book is saying on page 83 is that *if we have bared our souls, if we have completely reconstructed our shattered relationships with others, then we "are going to know a new freedom . . .," then "we will not regret the past,"* and so on, through the rest of the promises. In fact, it says "they will always materialize *if we work for them*" (the italics are mine). And the rest of that chapter is devoted to telling us how to continue *to work for them* by practicing Steps Ten and Eleven.

Finally, it seems to me that when I quote the promises so glibly and smugly (as I am inclined to do), I may actually be playing down the Steps. Am I glorifying end results while ignoring the footwork necessary to get there? Is it easier and more comforting to take refuge in the promises (lifting them out of context, of course) than to go through the purging and the pain of taking the first nine Steps—which are clearly the prerequisites of the promises? The alcoholic seizes upon the promises, consciously or unconsciously, as "an easier, softer way."

So let's read and reread Chapters Five and Six (along with the rest of the Big Book, naturally!). And when we get to the beautiful section on pages 83 and 84, let's cherish the promised rewards set forth there. Let's carry them in our minds and hearts as a joyous and inspiring part of our program of recovery.

But let's not sanctify the promises.

B. P.

Riverside, Connecticut

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

41st Annual District 22 Convention

August 22 - 24 2008
 San Luis Obispo, CA
 Website: www.sloaa.org
 Info: 805-931-0601
 Email: archay_one@charter.net

33rd Annual Great Outdoor Beaver Meeting

August 28 - 31 2008
 Beaver, UT
 Info: 213-792-7715, 661-478-5171
 Email: jojopelli@gmail.com

30th Annual Ventura County AA Convention

September 5 - 7, 2008
 Westlake Village, CA
 Website: www.vcaac.org

57th Annual Southern California AA Convention

September 19 - 21, 2008
 San Diego, CA
 Website: www.aasocal.com

5th Annual Santa Clarita Valley Convention of AA

October 17 - 19 2008
 Valencia, CA
 Website: www.scvaaconvention.org
 Info: 661-310-0384

24th Annual Santa Barbara AA Convention

October 24 - 26, 2008
 Goleta, CA
 Website: www.sbaaconvention.org
 Email: chair@sbaaconvention.org

Service Committee Schedule

Aug. 18, 2008	SFV H&I THIRD MONDAY 8PM Business Meeting 7PM Get Acquainted Workshop 5657 Lindley Ave. *****
Sep. 1, 2008	G.S. District #11 FIRST MONDAY (meeting on Labor Day) 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 315 W. Vine St., Glendale *****
Sep. 8, 2008	G.S. District #16 SECOND MONDAY (Sept. Only) 6:15PM meeting 15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills *****
Sep. 1, 2008	G.S. District #17 FIRST MONDAY (meeting on Labor Day) 6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting 5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood *****
Sep. 2, 2008	G.S. District #2 FIRST TUESDAY 5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta *****
Sep. 3, 2008	G.S. District #1 FIRST WEDNESDAY 6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park *****
Sep. 3, 2008	SFV Board of Directors 6:30PM, Central Office *****
Sep. 13, 2008	G.S. District #7 SECOND SATURDAY 9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club 33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd *****
Sep. 8, 2008	SFV Intergroup SECOND MONDAY 6:30PM Orientation 7PM, Business Meeting St. Innocents Church

To All Meeting Secretaries

Help us keep your meeting information up to date.

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

Central Office will be

CLOSED

for literature sales on
Monday, Sept. 1, 2008

for the Labor Day Holiday. We will resume
 our regular hours on Tuesday, 9AM - 6PM.

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs
telephone volunteers for all shifts,
 especially the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous
 sobriety, we invite you to join us and help your
 fellow alcoholics. You can sign up in the office
 or online at <http://www.sfvaa.org/involve.html>.

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 pm (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 pm) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 pm, Meeting at 7:00 pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2009 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 pm at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday.

Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting July 14, 2008

Rick A. Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM
Treasurer's Report: See Insert
Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3 of the Recovery Times for more information
Old Business: None
New Business: None

Birthdays: Laurie - 7 yrs, Derek - 7 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:24 PM
The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for July is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup Meeting.

These minutes are pending approval on August 11, 2008

Next Meeting - August 11, 2008

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

July 2008

Linda S. 23 years

Learning to Live

Men's Stag a number of years

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

A Time-tested Program of Recovery

The Twelve Steps are the best treatment for our disease

Going to meetings and not drinking do not treat my alcoholism. Working the Twelve Steps treats my alcoholism. If all I do is go to meetings and not drink, eventually I'll suffer from untreated alcoholism. Untreated alcoholism comes out as depression, anxiety, fear, hostility, apathy, boredom, despair, and other unpleasant symptoms.

With unfortunate frequency, I've seen men and women with varying amounts of sobriety beset by those crippling conditions. Some of them have had ten, fifteen, twenty, or more years of going to meetings and not drinking. Some wind up drunk. Others end up in the hospital with "nervous breakdowns." Some kill themselves. Many try to solve their problems with mood-changing drugs provided by doctors who should know better but obviously don't.

In the foreword to *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, we read: "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."

In my experience, that is 100 percent true. Precise, specific, and definite, the Steps offer a path to growing mental, emotional, and spiritual health. They provide direction for lives of expanded joy and usefulness. Anytime I take a drug to treat my depression, anxiety, fear, or inability to sleep, I'm wrong. Those symptoms are signs that there's something within me that's not right. I've seen enough AAs led back to drinking by the prescription pad to be sure the answer is not to try masking the symptom with a mood-changing drug. The answer is to look within myself and then do what's necessary to correct the problem.

Perhaps my sleeplessness is caused by something as simple as too much coffee. Possibly, my anxiety or uneasiness can be relieved by a program of exercise designed to drain off tensions accumulated during the day. On the other hand, my symptoms may be the inevitable result of untreated alcoholism. Once again, going to meetings and not drinking do *not* treat my alcoholism. The Twelve Steps treat it. Meetings and sobriety create a climate where my alcoholism can be treated by working the Steps. If I don't use the Steps, I'm eventually going to develop all those painful and unhappy symptoms because of my failure to do enough with the program to get what AA offers.

Six years ago, an AA I knew was deep in depression and riddled with fears from untreated alcoholism. He put himself into a treatment facility. He had been sober eleven years and had never worked the Steps. That's right! Eleven years of sobriety—and suffering so severely from untreated alcoholism that he put himself in an alcoholic treatment hospi-

tal. He went through the three-week program for a few thousand dollars, got out, entered another treatment facility, and went through its three-week program, taking part in psychodrama, group therapy, individual therapy, counseling, testing, evaluation, etc.

Both of those facilities speak highly of AA and describe its important role in their treatment approach. However, no one in either place told this man that if he worked the Twelve Steps, he'd get rid of his depression and fears. Although the facilities employ AA members as counselors, no one seemed to understand that the answers for a drunk at any stage of sobriety are to be found in the Big Book. Not surprisingly, when the man began to take Fourth and Fifth Steps and make amends, he found freedom from his symptoms.

Another man I know was sober sixteen years and had been acutely depressed and afraid during the last six years of that period. Then, he ran into some people who explained to him that, while sober sixteen years, he had managed to miss most of the AA program. He had never worked the Steps. Now, he began. He, too, found his fears disappearing and his depression lifting.

"When you've been sober for years, it's hard to believe that your answers still lie in the Big Book," explained a man who had a similar experience after a number of years without drinking. "I started to think I needed psychotherapy or hospitalization. I suffered from untreated alcoholism, because I hadn't done enough with the Steps. When I got busy with them, it was like walking into a large room with only one small light. As I continued to take inventories and Fifth Steps and made more amends, the light gradually became brighter.

"One of the problems," he continued, "of getting fouled up with a substantial amount of sobriety is that a person finds it almost impossible to understand that his answers still lie in working the Twelve Steps. I didn't drink during this time, but ultimately would have without the freedom that came from using the Steps. This is the point where pills become attractive; we're willing to do almost anything to get rid of the psychic pain within us."

Both the Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* point out with powerful clarity that the AA program is not just for staying sober. Sobriety is the beginning, not the end. The AA program is a transforming prescription for a life of growing health, usefulness, and joy. By working and reworking all of the Twelve Steps on a continuing, lifetime commitment, we experience the promises spelled out on

continued →

Monkey See, Monkey Do

I recently heard a fellow describe his AA program as “Monkey see, monkey do.” I got to thinking and realized what an apt description that is.

At my introduction to AA, on a scale of 1 to 10, my knowledge of alcohol, alcoholism, and AA could best be described as minus 10. Everything I know today about staying sober a day at a time, I learned from one “monkey” or another at meetings.

One woman impressed upon me the importance of attending regular meetings on a regular basis. She also talked about her home group and her sponsor and how she had chosen both. Very often, another member talked of reading the Big Book and how it helped his understanding of the Twelve Steps, giving me the incentive to read it for myself. Others commented on *how* to work the Steps, suggesting that I not shortchange myself, but work them in order to the best of my ability. I could see the progress in others through their work with the Steps, their peace of mind, humor, warmth, and self-respect, and I did want what they had! I knew that by thoroughly following their path, I would be able to admit powerlessness over alcohol, find a Power greater than myself in whom to trust, identify character defects, discuss them, and become willing to change the attitudes and actions

that had caused me harm for so long. I would be able to repair relationships with family and friends and start to enjoy the promises (which at one time *did* seem extravagant but now were shown to me as a reality) offered us in the Big Book.

Many “monkeys” demonstrated how to do Twelfth Step work, bringing newcomers to my home group and other meetings, introducing them, exchanging telephone numbers, and genuinely feeling that the newcomer was the most important person at a meeting. These people talked at open meetings, did service work, did volunteer AA work at local hospitals, went to area conferences, supported the AA General Service Office, read the Grapevine, poured coffee at the breakfast meetings, emptied ashtrays, were knowledgeable of and observed AA’s Traditions, and were, above all, grateful. They also did not gossip, but took their own inventories and looked for the good in others, and did not pick up the first drink.

Because of those examples, I’m all for a “Monkey see, monkey do” program—the trick is to get the right monkeys!

C. K., Chicago, Illinois

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Time-tested Program *continued*

pages 83 and 84 in the Big Book and the guarantee quoted earlier from the foreword of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

Those guarantees, describing what you and I may expect as a result of working the Steps, speak of wholeness. They don’t describe alcoholics who traded drunkenness for sober terror or dry despair. The Big Book and the “Twelve and

Twelve” promise us the capacity to live soberly, confidently, usefully, and joyously—if we treat our alcoholism by working the Twelve Steps. If I haven’t experienced the program’s promises, it is because I haven’t fulfilled the program’s conditions.

P. M., Riverside, Illinois

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*Co-founder
Quotes*

Bill W.

Today I think I can trace a clear linkage between my guilt and my pride. Both of them were certainly attention-getters. In pride I could say, “Look at me, I am wonderful.” In guilt I would moan, “I’m awful.” Therefore guilt is really the reverse side of the coin of pride. Guilt aims at self-destruction and Pride aims at the destruction of others.

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Made a Decision to What?

Step Three: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

When I came to the Third Step, it was pretty frightening for me. It sounded so unsettling and yet so permanent. But I knew I needed to work all of the Twelve Steps in order to gain lasting sobriety. I had tried for nearly twelve years to gain sobriety without working all the Steps and had always found that it just couldn't be done.

I got as far as the third word, "decision." There, I was stopped cold! What *was* a decision, anyway? I didn't really know, so how could I make one? For all too many years, I hadn't really decided anything—I had rolled with the tide and blamed everyone else for the messes I got myself into. And now I was asked to make a decision.

The closest thing I could come up with to describe making a decision was: making a total commitment and following it through with action. Commitments hadn't been my long suit, either, and I had always considered myself a "reacter," not an "acter." But I wanted sobriety, and I thought I might be able to make my decision—at least for the next twenty-four hours, if I could do it that way.

The next problem came with the words "turn our will and our lives over," because I didn't know what my will or my life really was. I had always referred to myself as a strong-willed person, when I really meant that I was stubborn and bull-headed. But I was almost sure that wasn't the kind of will the Step was talking about or asking me to turn over.

After doing a lot of soul-searching and asking others, I decided that my will meant all of my thoughts, inner feelings, behavior, impulses, and desires, and maybe even my subconscious. My life meant my surroundings, my daily living routine, situations, events, and other people. To me, it meant I would be turning over everything in my life—not just the part of it that I was eager to give up, but all of it!

That sounded like a mighty big order. I wasn't sure that I could even attempt it, much less do it. But once again, I

thought I might be able to if I could do it on just a twenty-four-hour basis. I knew I couldn't do it alone. I would need the people I knew in the program; I would need prayer; I would need meditation. Most of all, I would need to learn that it was okay for me to need!

Finally having some understanding of what the Third Step was saying, for me, I began to work on it in this way: I committed both the inside me and my outside life to God, as I understand Him. The "God" part of this Step seemed the easiest part for me. I hadn't lost my God while I was drinking. In my blurred mind, He had become a little less loving and a bit more judgmental; but I hadn't lost Him.

In only a short time, just a few twenty-four hours, I again had the loving God of my childhood, and things were beginning to improve. But, like other recovering alcoholics, I have a tendency to take back my will every now and then. It usually isn't too long before I realize my mistake. I find myself thinking about things that go against my own conscience, or my stomach lets me know that I'm not comfortable. And I have to call on God and let Him have the control again.

I like to run things; I like to control others; and I seem to enjoy making a mess out of my life. So turning it over to God sometimes takes constant effort on my part. But with time and awareness, it seems to take less and less effort, as I let life happen—instead of trying to make it happen.

My twenty-four hours are beginning to accumulate a little now. As I attend my meetings regularly, talk with my sponsor, and work my program, I find more and more time and opportunity for me to practice being myself. When I allow God to keep the control that was once so hard for me to concede, I am at long last free to be myself!

M. S., Minneapolis, Minnesota

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The Promises—Not So Lightly Given

Many times, I have heard the promises read at meetings, yet never have I heard anyone include the first sentence of the paragraph that contains them. Nor have I heard anyone mention that they are included in a discussion of Step Nine, which speaks of having done the first eight.

The lead-in sentence (page 83, Big Book) reads: "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be

amazed before we are half way through." To me, this says that the promises are predicated on the "If." The promises are *not* held out to those who simply "don't drink, and go to meetings."

B. B.

Lemon Grove, California

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Humor from the Grapevine

A drunk decides to go ice fishing, so he gathers his gear and goes walking until he finds a big patch of ice. He heads into the center of the ice and begins to saw a hole. All of a sudden, a loud booming voice comes out of the sky.

“You will find no fish under that ice.”

The drunk looks around, but sees no one. He starts sawing again. Once more, the voice speaks.

“As I said before, there are no fish under that ice.”

The drunk looks high and low, but can't see a single soul. He picks up the saw and tries one more time to saw a hole. Before he can even start cutting, the huge voice interrupts.

“I have told you three times. There are no fish!”

The drunk is now flustered, and somewhat scared, so he asks the voice, “How do you know there are no fish? Are you God trying to warn me?”

“No,” the voice replied. “I am the manager of this hockey rink.”

« « « » » »

An old fellow was discussing his longevity. “I have never allowed alcohol to pass my lips,” he proclaimed, “never smoked or chewed tobacco, never went to a dance or a movie, don't watch TV or listen to the radio, don't drink coffee or tea; and tomorrow I'll celebrate my 90th birthday.”

“How?” somebody asked him.

« « « » » »

An AA, newly on the program, went to a physician for a physical checkup. In discussing his condition, the doctor said, “Your liver is somewhat swollen, but that doesn't disturb me.”

“Well,” replied the AA, “if *your* liver was swollen, it wouldn't bother *me*, either.”

« « « » » »

“It's alcohol and alcohol alone that is responsible for your present condition,” said the Judge.

“Thank you, Your Honor, for sayin' that. You're the first person that hasn't said it was all my fault.”

More than promises

P.O. Box 1980

I want to thank B. P. of Riverside, Connecticut (*see page 1*), for his thoughts on “the promises” in the Big Book (May Grapevine). It is so good to have them put in their proper perspective—some plateaus we climb toward as we steadily chip at the Twelve Steps in an effort to learn and live by the principles of the AA program.

It's unfortunate that in an effort to grab a little attention as a “different or more astute” speaker, we glibly isolate the promises, out of context, and throw them out as something

we've just decided to share with the audience.

How much better for all of us to stick at doing the best we are capable of in working the Steps—the real backbone of AA, offering, not only promises, but hope and sometimes a refreshing breath of serenity in comfortable sobriety!

C. R.

Amado, Arizona

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