

# Sobriety Sentinel

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## God is patient throughout our spiritual journey

by ANDREW H  
Group 968

When I was 21, through the aid of some potent psychedelic drugs, I decided I was my own Supreme Being and that any activity devoted to my pleasure was as sacred as any church communion service. More sacred, even, because I was convinced that your religion - whatever it was - was BS. So was your career, your marriage and your government.

From then on, I considered myself an all-around agnostic, thinking nothing involving God was truly knowable or provable and that I might as well live how I wanted. As I got married, had kids, and finally got sober without AA, I softened my views on a lot of meaningful things, but my view of God remained suspended, as if cryogenically frozen. All the access points I knew had been taught to me when I was young, and I felt like I had never been able to successfully access God through those parameters. Never mind the blocks I'd put up through cynicism, resentment, intoxication and other literal and metaphorical garbage I'd put in that couldn't help but permeate my insides before oozing back out.

I was always able to accept the march of progress made in the outer world. I went from the rotary phone to touch-tone to cordless to a five-pound car phone with a 15-minute monthly plan I was instructed to utilize in emergency situations only. Finally, I had an iPhone, a supercomputer in my pocket that afforded me access to all the world's data throughout history. This sweeping change happened so incrementally that it did not seem weird or jarring to me. Yet my view of God and of my chances of interacting successfully with the Divine Force were cryogenic. Frozen. Static.

There were flashes along the way. A foxhole prayer here and there. A conviction that Providence had brought me my wife and my kids, my jobs and my dwellings, as they materialized. That what was happening to me was not my plan but that it was the right plan. Thus, unstated, also in my subconscious was the knowledge that my life, its events and its purpose were all greater than my whims, my selfishness, my secrecy. *I am here to do something important. I know not what. But I know it's not this - the drinking, the yelling, the sleeping all day, the turning my back on loved ones.* Doing the things I knew I shouldn't, and not doing the things I knew I should, made me feel bad. Guilty. Remorseful. Purposeless. They made me feel like drinking. So I did. Again and again.

The "We Agnostics" chapter in the Big Book hit me hard. In one late-morning session, I read it from beginning to end, and a dozen spiritual barriers, defenses and prejudices I'd been holding onto for decades came down. I was Bill when Ebby told him, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?" *Wait, you mean you can do that? You can approach in a new way?* In a second, my approach went from rotary phone to supercomputer. I closed the book, I attempted contact with God, and I got results. Not just because I was ready, though, but also because patiently over the years, without my knowledge, God had *made* me ready.

One thing I've found in spiritual literature that resonates with me is the idea that God initiates the call to discipleship. "The love of God freely follows our love which it preceded," wrote St. Bernard of Clairvaux. God's love is an ever-widening and growing circle with no end, but it does have a beginning, and God is that beginning. We love God because God first loved us. God is patient, I believe. Forgiving. Only God sees the full scope of our timelines. I can see, and this is with my most keen spiritual senses, what I'm supposed to do right now, and less clearly, what I'm supposed to do next. Out ahead, a little dimmer, are some ideas and goals for the future. The future gets a lot clearer to me as it becomes the present. And that's usually when I have the knowledge and vision to truly act on something. So in the meantime, I trust. Faith to me is a combination of belief and trust, with trust being the more mature component of the two.

So when they say Step 3 is, "I think I'll let Him," well, yes, today, I *do* think I'll let Him, as much as I'm imperfectly able.

I'll let Him, and I'll thank Him.



Brenda F/Sobriety Sentinel

Not far from I-270 and Telegraph Road, overlooking the mighty Mississippi, this

stone retreat center has welcomed countless thousands to its 82 acres.

by BRENDA F  
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For longer than AA has been in existence, alcoholic and non-alcoholic spiritual seekers have enjoyed the natural beauty, silence and spiritual direction provided at the White House Jesuit Retreat Center in St. Louis.

There are one-day retreats held in December and March, but most people attend three-day retreats offered on the weekends or during the week.

Many of the retreats are based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits. Like many of us, St. Ignatius had a spiritual awakening following a terrible accident which severely damaged his leg.

I didn't really know that much about Ignatius or his famous "examen" method of self-review, or how his Exercises can deeply intertwine with the 12 Steps of recovery. I attended because I was seeking both a deeper spiritual connection to my Higher Power and some new practices I could incorporate into my daily life.

I went to the retreat empty and seeking. Three days later, I left filled with a greater understanding

of the Steps. Of 36 fellow attendees to my mid-August recovery retreat, eight were "first-timers." Contrasting that was an attendee who had previously been to 24 White House retreats. Obviously, people are welcomed and encouraged to return annually for their spiritual tune-ups.

There are many well-groomed paths through the woods, as well as benches and comfortable chairs for sitting and reflecting. There is a grotto replica of Lourdes with a small waterfall. Butterflies flutter by, birds chirp, and colorful flowers broadcast their natural beauty.

Each "retreatant" has a private room, with maximum attendance of 90 people per retreat. (During Covid, the numbers were lowered for social distancing, with a maximum of 65.) Throughout 2020 and 2021, almost 3,000 people have attended, and not one person has had Covid. In fact, since they opened 100 years ago, almost 100,000 people have found spiritual renewal there. It is kept spotlessly clean.

Despite losing power on our first night due to major wind storms in the area, everything continued as planned, including a full breakfast with crispy bacon, scrambled eggs, toast and hot coffee,

## Getting A Way

White House Retreat Center provides space and atmosphere for weekend attendees to find meaning

even without power! Now that's service! The food was plentiful and delicious.

There is a small bookstore stocked with spiritual and recovery-centered literature, a large library with picture windows facing the river, and books you can borrow while on-site. The presentations, taught by a Jesuit also in 12-Step recovery, were just the right length and offered useful handouts. There was plenty of time following the talks to write out the journal prompts or to enjoy a scenic walk. Nothing felt forced or preachy. Everything just flowed like the river itself.

I found that some daily structure - rising early, attending collective prayer and engaging in solitary meditation time - was comforting. Each night, we gathered for an open AA meeting which was the only time all day we talked. Silence is encouraged so you can listen to your Higher Power. I detached from social media, from my phone and from the rat race life can become. There is no financial barrier to attending. Make a small deposit to ensure a spot, and give what you are inspired to give at the end of the retreat.

For dates of upcoming retreats, visit [whretreat.org](http://whretreat.org).

## Life going too well? Try booze!

by SIDNEY R  
623 Group

Do you ever walk to the gates of hell and wish you could walk into infinite pain?

Feeling hopeful and want to erase all concepts of self-worth?

Do you wish you were vomiting daily, making friends who like what you have instead of who you are, or generally just want to destroy any hint of sanity you have?

**Try booze!**

Why just consume when you can *be*

*consumed?!*

Healthy inhibitions? Gone!

Sense of purpose? Absolutely not!

Stable job and loving family? Fuck 'em all!

**Booze!**

Kill your anxiety.

Kill your depression.

Kill your inhibitions.

Kill your relationships.

Kill your dreams.

And slowly kill yourself.

**Booze!**

People are *dying* to have it.

### RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

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

### BIRTHDAYS

#### GROUP 77

Jennifer R	7/12	11 years
Pat S	7/29	25 years

#### GROUP 1197

Christine W	8/1	5 years
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#### GROUP 484

Jim L	7/15	6 years
Jeff C	7/29	20 years

#### GROUP 164

Mary M	7/22	29 years
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#### GROUP 1023

Dan L	7/24	2 years
Kim W	8/17	4 years

#### GROUP 228

Deb D	7/28	19 years
Jack L	8/13	53 years

### DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on AA unity depends our lives, and the lives of those to come.

## Pray for Kristina M!



# CHANGE, said the Popsicle stick

My first AA meeting was also my introduction to the "Popsicle stick" format. The stick I pulled had "CHANGE" written on it in Sharpie, all caps.

With the letters written so aggressively, that word "CHANGE" seemed less like a concept to me, and more like a direct order.

It took me 39 years to reach the point of surrender that brought me to that meeting. I may not have gone had a friend from work not agreed to join me.

As I listened to the other people in the room share what they thought about the words on their sticks, I realized that I felt safe there, at home, like one among many.

I looked at the Steps posted on the wall, realized I'd already done the first one, and committed right there and then to do the rest of them.

I bought my Big Book after the meeting. I couldn't believe that thing was only 10 bucks. The first passage I connected with was the list on Page 31 of things that Bill Wilson and the founders of AA had done to control and enjoy their drinking. They had tried and failed to drink like normal people.

So had I, but until coming into AA, I had thought I was the only one who had gone through the struggle. Until coming into AA, I didn't realize there was such a vast community of people who had lived my life and found a way out. I wanted what they had.

I went to three more meetings that week. One of them led me to the Spiritual Experience appendix, which assured me I wouldn't have to have a single dramatic "burning bush" conversion moment. My change could be slow, incremental and intellectual and still be spiritual.

I found the We Agnostics chapter, and after reading it, I found the God of my understanding. I also found my soon-to-be homegroup and sponsor that week.

I started changing before I even pulled the Popsicle stick. I started changing the second I fully knew and accepted that I needed help, and committed to seek it out.

AA has given me a foundation, a fellowship and a new life. My first year brought the most dramatic and unfamiliar results, but the three-plus years that have followed also have given me a new job, a new house, new friends and a happier family.

CHANGE.

-Andrew H  
Group 968

*"I am so grateful I could be a part of something like this! It was a blast. It's amazing to see a bunch of alcoholics come together and have a great time sober. This is a great way to perform service work and get connected to people."*

-Kristen O



John A/Group 164

After enjoying complimentary food and beverage, this row of picnic attendees listens to the AA and Al Anon speakers, not pictured so as to preserve their anonymity. This year's event, held at Olde Town Park in St. Peters, was a wild success.

## CONTENT CROWD

Amid perfect weather, and despite power outage obstacle, Tri-County Picnic draws nearly 250 attendees

by JOHN A  
Group 164

The Tri-County Intergroup Annual Picnic resumed on August 14, after taking a year off due to the Covid pandemic. Before the event, the Activity Committee wasn't sure how many people would show up due to the recent increase in Covid rates. We decided to have enough food and drinks for a small army and to be ready for anything.

When Activity Committee volunteers showed up at 9:30 am to set up, we discovered that all the electrical circuits needed for the heating pans, microphone and loudspeakers - and, most importantly, the coffee pots - were not working. Apparently, this was due to the recent storm. Our volunteers worked with a park ranger for almost two hours to run new power lines from a distant park building, and we ultimately restored power. The volunteers stayed cool under pressure and joked about us being "powerless."

By 11:30 am, people started to arrive. With the help of a beautiful day and a lot of folks ready to have some in-person sober fun, we had a possible record turnout. Throughout the day, we had close to 250 people in recovery, as well as their families, children and significant others.

Our park pavilion was decorated beautifully, and we offered family-oriented fun that included water balloon fights and face painting provided for the kiddos.

The Tri-County philosophy of having accessible, no-cost sober events allowed people new to sobriety and not yet on their feet to attend. Food, desserts, and drinks were all provided. We were able to cover all event expenses by selling raffle tickets for the many amazing baskets that Tri-County homegroups and members generously donated.

There was a young lady in recovery who brought an amazing basket full of puzzles that

she said her mother made. This gal asked us to raffle off the basket before her mother - who attended the picnic with her - had to leave.

She said, "I want to see my mom's face when the winner is announced." They say alcoholism is a family disease. Seeing the proud look on that mom's face reminded me that families are positively affected by the recovery of their loved ones.

That was only one of the stories on a great day where people talked about seeing old AA friends they hadn't seen for awhile and taking advantage of opportunities to catch up, share and enjoy stories of their recovery.

I'd like to offer a special thanks to the AA and Al-Anon speakers who shared their experience strength and hope at our event.

Finally, we can't understate the efforts of the dedicated and passionate volunteers who made this year's Tri County Picnic a first-class success. Thank you for your service!

## Featured birthday: 53 years, one day at a time

### 53 YEARS

I got on the program to get my wife and my family back. She had left me, and I thought I was doing good. I had a lot of properties and a six-figure income, and I thought, *How can she leave a wonderful person like me?* Us alcoholics, we're legends in our own minds.

I got on the program but then quit for about three or four months, and she left me again. This time, she said she wouldn't come back until I could tell her I would never drink again. Of course, in AA, all we can really deliver is one day at a time.

But I saw an article in *Reader's Digest* about Shadel Hospital in Seattle, that said they had a cure for alcoholism. I'd been back on the program about 30 days at that point, and my sponsor Jim asked me if I really thought I needed to go to a treatment center. I said I did, so he took me to see Father Fallon, who told me he had a place for me that was a lot cheaper than the \$10,000 that Shadel hospital wanted.

I got on a plane a few days later and headed up to Center City, Minn. I flew Ozark. They told me I was headed to a resort, so I had my fishing stuff packed, thinking, *I'm just gonna rest up and be cured.* Well, I got there, and it was a whole different story.

They made me go through detox, even though I didn't need it. And they kept me extra time because I kept lying about my Fourth and Fifth Step.

I told them, "I'm not gonna give you any more money," and they said, "We don't want anything else. You can leave whenever you want to."

I said, "What am I gonna do? You've got my money, my return plane ticket, my credit cards. I mean, shit."

They must have kept me an extra couple weeks until I got honest with myself. That's the first time in my life, even coming up through the parochial schools, giving confession to priests - I lied to them, too - that I ever got honest about what I was doing and how I was acting. And, boy, that was a rude awakening for me. I ended up doing a good Fourth Step and Fifth Step, and I think that saved my life.

I came back changed, and I haven't had a drink since, or anything else. It's been good. I've learned that this program is worked a day at a time, just like anything else.

Everybody's on a different part of the program, but the main thing is that you live the Steps. You work the Steps in your life. When you do that, your life's gonna change. You're gonna get some kind of spiritual awakening, whether you like it or not.

I depend a lot on that Higher Power which I choose to call God today. I've got a good life with my family, my business, and everything else. I can go to bed at night and sleep. I don't have to worry about this, that, or the other.

I believe I'm protected and that things are gonna work out the best for me as long as I turn it over and do the next right thing. If I do that, good things will happen. The program's pretty

simple. We can complicate it if we want to.

Believe me, none of us - including myself - ever get it all perfectly, but the main thing is, we make an honest effort to try to do the best we can that day.

One of my small prayers is, I tell God, "I would have nothing or be nothing without You," and that's so true. I just keep going and doing my thing.

I'm getting up in age now, and I'm looking forward to graduating to the Big Meeting in the sky one of these days.

I think I just had, what was it, 53 years? Yeah, 53 years on Friday, August 13. I sponsor about five or six guys, and I told the guys, "I don't need no coins, or cakes, or nothing else," just the appreciation of everyone else at the meeting is what keeps me sober.

I learn from people at the meetings all the time. People quote different things that I say, but I've told them many times that I've never had an original idea in my life. I got it all from somebody else sitting around these tables, things that were told to me that actually worked.

The only thing I can do is just pass on what I've heard from other people. I just do that, live my life, and be the best I can with my wife and kids.

I'm very close to my family. My kids are coming back over here tonight, in fact. I'll be looking forward to seeing them.

Jack L  
Group 228

# When surgery happens, prayer needs to happen

Life keeps happening whether you're sober or not. I can only speak for myself, but since I became a member of AA, I've probably heard that repeated 20,000 times. It's a good thing, too, because I have a really bad habit of forgetting things I have learned in AA, things that repeatedly save me from the pitfalls of the alcoholic thoughts that will always be with me.

I haven't been to a meeting since July 18, as I am recovering from surgery. I've been in frequent contact with my sponsor, friends and fellow AA members. They have all been very supportive and helpful to me. I appreciate everyone's help a great deal.

In those first couple days and weeks of recovery from surgery, I never felt out of touch with my AA program. But something didn't feel right.

It took some time to realize what the problem was. I had not been praying. *How could I have just stopped praying?* Life was definitely happening, and I needed my Higher Power more than ever.

So I dusted the boot prints from my behind and started praying. At first, it seemed more like whining: *God, please take away my pain and discomfort. Give me a speedy and complete recovery.* My prayers were all about me.

I felt a little ashamed. After all, I am living, breathing and still sober, which means my Higher Power has been with me all along.

Knowing that, I have since turned the focus of my prayers to helping other people and being of service to others in any way I can right now.

As long as I approach every challenge I encounter armed with my AA tools and my Higher Power, I know I'll emerge happy, joyous, free and sober.

Missy R  
Group 632

*All opinions expressed are those of individuals and do not necessarily reflect the views of AA as a whole. To report Tri-County AA news or events, submit articles, recommend your homegroup for a feature piece, or just to share your experience, strength and hope with us, please email [sentinel@tricityaa.org](mailto:sentinel@tricityaa.org)*