

my viewpoint

Gratefully Recovering!

After serving as pastor, missionary, and college Bible teacher, my final 25 years in church employment were as hospital health educator. Probably the most life-changing experience for me was running residential and out-patient stop-smoking programs. Through my association with smokers, I became acquainted with many people who had already dealt with other addictions. One evening a recovering alcoholic gave me a copy of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (frequently referred to as *The Big Book*) which of course I did not need!

But when I finally got around to reading it, what a surprise to find its stories and counsel resonating with my own experience and feelings. Page 62 brought it into focus in a painful and powerful way. Rather than alcohol it said that "Selfishness, self-centeredness is the root of our troubles. . . . We had to have God's help!" Now that was getting real personal, way beyond alcoholism. At the bottom of the page came this painful summary: "First of all, we had to quit playing God." When I read that I said, "Wow, that's it. That is my problem. I didn't originate it, but I did inherit it." It's the basic human issue, powerfully biblical and enunciated succinctly in the *Big Book*.

So the power of 12-step programs in life lies in the fact that they address the root cause of real problems such as alcohol, gambling, overeating, overwork, sex, or any other problem. They challenge our selfish nature and remind us to acknowledge our powerlessness and to continually turn our will and life over to the care of God as we understand Him.

A few years ago, while staying with some new friends, the subject of AA came up and the husband expressed frustration with an Adventist church member who would call himself an alcoholic instead of saying he used to be an alcoholic. I replied, "You may have missed a point along the way. There are three kinds of alcoholics. First there's the *practicing alcoholic*, drinking up a storm under the illusion he or she is having a good time, but messing up their own and other people's lives. Then there's the *dry drunk* who, as a teetotaler, doesn't touch the stuff but is miserable because he wishes he could. Finally, the third one is a *recovering alcoholic*, who also is not drinking but who on a daily basis accepts his powerlessness over

alcohol, acknowledges a power outside of himself that can change him, and is daily turning his will and his life over to the care of God, making things right, keeping things current, sharing with other people. He is at peace — with others, with God and with himself!"

Then it occurred to me that there are also three kinds of sinners. There's the *practicing sinner*, doing all those things people aren't supposed to do and apparently having a great time. Then there is the *dry drunk sinner* who obeys all the "rules" but harbors envy for what other people seem to be enjoying. It's so difficult to let go.

The third is the *recovering sinner* who is also avoiding the "pleasures of this world" but who daily remember their powerlessness and that God can do for them what they can't do for themselves. They are turning their will and their life over to the care of God, making amends, keeping current, sharing with others, and increasing their daily communion with God.

Another time I was staying with a family and at breakfast the husband said, "I'm going to an AA meeting tonight." I said, "Oh really? Is it an open meeting?" It was. So Friday evening there were six of us in a memorable meeting — four smokers and two non-smokers!

Memorable, because when it was my turn to share, I simply told the truth — "Hi, my name is Harold, and I'm a gratefully recovering human being. I came with my friend tonight just to thank you and the AA family. You see, the God I worship today is so much better than the one I used to worship even though we've always been on good speaking terms."

A dozen years later, by the grace of God, I'm still recovering. The process continues because He is passionate about my progress and I claim the promise that "He who began a good work in me will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." What a journey! From a self-centered life to a God-centered land where we will see Him face to face, where God himself will be with us and be our God, forever. Now that is eternal recovery and good news!



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Harold Burden, '56, is a CHIP volunteer living in Oregon. He studied theology at PUC (with an interruption for a term of military service) and contributed to our "Lifework in the Church" feature in the summer *ViewPoint*.