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AA Meeting Reflection

I attended an online AA meeting. While I would have liked to go to an in person meeting, for the time being, this was my only option. I found a forum. To start off the forum, they have a welcome, with pdf's full of information about AA and what it believes. This was an open meeting- the only requirement is that participants want to stop drinking and that discussion is only about alcohol problems. The preamble states the primary purpose; to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety. The "How It Works" listed the simple 12 step program. It stated that no one fails following the path, the problem is that people cannot 100% commit to the path. However, no one is perfect (only God) and it is understandable, and advisable to not become discouraged because of it. Anonymity is to not identify anyone in an AA meeting outside of AA. Tradition Seven's main statement is "Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." This struck me as odd, because from my perspective recovering alcoholics needs support from those inside the program and outside. Additionally, I know meetings in person are often held in churches or other public places, so how could they not accept help? There was a story in this document that really changed my perspective. It talked about a man in AA who gave a large contribution he really couldn't afford to his AA group. However, he saw it as an investment not only in himself, but those around him too. This act encouraged others to give small donations for their own good. The document also stated that alcoholics are all or nothing types of people. What I took from this is that alcoholics providing for themselves teaches them to lean on each other and themselves for support staying in the program. The last introduction piece was the daily reflection. The one I read was "We invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt." Although this is aimed at alcoholics not seeing the destruction they have caused until it is too late, it hit me because I have been in relationships where I set myself up for failure, yet tried to make them work even though they were destined to end in heartbreak, and was distraught when it ended up exactly how it was expected.

The main topic was called "Drinking Was Fun Until It Wasn't." This details the story of a woman who is an alcoholic. Growing up, she saw her parents and their friends drink and was immensely infatuated with the idea.

She was uncomfortable with herself and thought that drinking would be her escape from being shy, and that it could change her. She started drinking in college. Even though she enjoyed it, she often got herself into trouble because of it. Graduation came, and she was very nervous, not only because she was so hungover she was miserable the whole day, but also because there was an unknown coming rapidly. To her, alcohol was the only constant. She got her first job, and was constantly drinking at night and on the weekends, which turned into drinking before going to the gym and eventually waking up at 4 am to have a drink. Her first DUI required she go to AA meetings, but she thought that the people at the meetings were crazy. She blamed more unfortunate circumstances, such as another DUI, losing majority of her family and friends, and several injuries, on other things, not drinking. Finally, at the age of 34 she got serious with her life, and at an AA meeting, saw the peace and satisfaction that others were experiencing.

Some comments in the discussion that stood out to me:

1. "Was it ever really fun to drink, or a way to escape the pressures of life?"
2. "Drinking was fun when I was younger, but life got hard. Drinking made the pain and problems go away, and I couldn't get through the day without it."
3. "Drinking is never a problem until it causes a problem."

These stood out to me because I saw myself there. I started drinking for fun occasionally my freshman year of college, but I felt like I was never drunk enough to have fun like I was supposed to. I kept pushing myself to have another drink on the few occasions because I wanted to feel silly and relax a little. This continued into my sophomore year when one day I invited a friend over to have a wine night with me. She ended up not coming for several hours, and I drank so much that I ended up blacking out before she got there. I was ashamed of myself for months. I was also in a place where I felt so alone and that no one would ever want me because I was damaged goods. I didn't think I was good enough to be at a christian university, and I felt like I had to hide my problems because everyone else seemed perfect. I thought I was damaged goods, because I had had boyfriends before, I had been physically intimate, I drank, and I was a very strong personality, which was the exact opposite of what felt like every other girl that went there. I tried to make myself stand out, so I kept drinking, to seem like a rebel. I often spent most weekends drinking and trying to have a good time, so I could change who I was to others and feel more confident in myself. My breaking point was a year ago, right after I started nursing school. I drank so much that I once again blacked out, then tried to go the bar with my friends. Because I was too intoxicated and a minor, I got kicked out of the bar and sent home. Having to show up to my parents house drunk and having to explain why I was

home so early was humiliating. I do not remember any of that night, I know my dad tried to wake me up the next morning to clean up my mess, and I was still drunk. My parents kept bringing it up, blamed me for everything, and tried to make me feel guilty about it, but the guilt I felt on the inside was much worse than anything they could have said to me. I was ashamed, felt dirty and knew I had crossed the line. There was nothing I could do or say to fix what had happened. I had to live with the consequences, and I still feel like I cannot live it down. I consider that the turning point of me turning into an adult.

Although I do not consider myself an alcoholic, I now know where the line is. I now actively avoid drinking, I do not allow myself to take a drink to relax, calm down, unwind or have fun. I have tried to replace a drink or two at night with a cup of coffee in the morning, and a cup of hot chocolate or a soft drink in the evening. It still gives me the same happy feeling, yet I don't wake up feeling awful about myself. I occasionally have a glass of wine or a beer or two with dinner, but I no longer have a desire to drink until I'm drunk. I saw the way it was effecting me and making me feel dirty. I have also started to see how it is just not "cute" to go drinking all the time. I also see from a health perspective how damaging it is to my body. I no longer have a desire to do these things. While I am glad that I went through this phase then, I am upset that it was not handled better earlier. I too was curious about alcohol, and wanted to see how it could change me. I wish I would have experienced that months long (emotional) hangover years earlier instead of a long, dragged out process.

One of the comments on the forum also made me really come to terms with something I had suppressed. The comment mentioned something about "it was never for a fun time, it was always to suppress the pressures of life." In PMH sim, we were talking about alcoholics and CIWA protocol, and Mrs. Powers asked our group if anyone had a family member that had gone through it. I didn't think anything of it and said no (I now realized I straight up lied to her, I had suppressed the memory, sorry!). However that comment brought back memories of my grandpa literally drinking himself to death and it made me have a very emotional response. My grandpa had a hard life- he grew up in the Great Depression, only went to school until eighth grade, because his four older brothers were drafted for World War II and he had to work on the farm. He had two children, my aunt and my dad, with his wife. However, in their fifties, my grandma developed breast cancer that metastasized to her liver. She was sick for months and eventually died. This impacted everyone in the family hard- everyone had a hard time coping, and from what I can see, they on a level, refused to accept her death. Her clothes hung in the closet for over fifteen years after her death, her silverware was exactly where she left it and nothing could be changed from what it was. Although I

was not alive, the house was still the same as the day she died when my mom moved in fifteen years later. Six months after my grandma died, my grandpa met a woman and got married in secret. Their marriage was an unhealthy one, as she was controlling and mean not only to my grandpa, but also to my family and even her own son. She isolated my grandpa from his family and made him maintain an appearance that was perfect for church. We would sometimes take him on weekend trips with us, and we would always have to go by the liquor store to buy him a bottle of whiskey, and he would start drinking as soon as we pulled out of the parking lot. He would drink until we took him home, and then he would hide his alcohol around the house where she wouldn't be able to find it. One day, she came home early and found all the alcohol, kicked him out, and filed for divorce. He had never been alone in his life and started drinking heavily because of it. He would drink so much he was always drunk. My family would take him away from us because my brother and I were still very young. He would often throw up in the middle of dinner. He had several falls and would often scrape himself up pretty good. Eventually my family started restricting his drinking, so he started to sneak it around. He eventually developed encephalopathy and sodium levels low enough to land him in the ICU. He was never the same, often couldn't hold a conversation, comprehend what was being said, and couldn't communicate his feelings. He eventually had a heart attack, broke his hip, and almost died in surgery because he was so frail. He did not last long after the surgery. It made me realize that I have firsthand seen an alcoholic. It made me see all the signs. I suddenly realized that he had a major problem, and had been drinking to try to heal the wounds of my grandma dying for years to no avail. It made me see that all the fun times of my grandpa being silly after a couple cokes and whiskey was not funny anymore, that it was him coping, not just having a good time. My family saw a problem and constantly was trying to intervene, but he didn't see a problem, so he found ways around it. He only stopped when it almost killed him and did not have a way to obtain alcohol at all anymore.

Thinking of my grandpa helped me understand what AA and alcoholics are all about. Alcoholics do not choose this lifestyle. Alcoholics just want to feel the peace that everyone else feels, and they know that alcohol is how they can achieve that peace. They often do not see a problem, because their other problems are being solved through drinking. In a way, it is almost best for alcoholics to reach a rock bottom. That sounds awful, but sometimes that is the only way to get them to see that they have a problem that is out of their hands and their control. Reaching rock bottom helps these hurting people lean on each other for support, lean on their higher power for guidance and come to the understanding that this situation is in desperate need of change.

The serenity prayer is used at AA meetings. The Serenity Prayer: "God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference." After this meeting, this prayer hits home. I cannot change the past. I cannot go back and undo my mistakes and make the hurt from the past disappear. I can actively choose to not make those decisions again. I can choose to find ways to better myself, to encourage myself to be the best I can, to find effective ways to cope. I do not know the difference on my own, God has led me down a path to find the difference. I feel like recently, God has been trying to change my heart to stop letting things I cannot control get the best of me. God is granting me wisdom, slowly but surely, to know what is worth getting upset over, and what will not change by getting upset. Although not all my problems are alcohol related, this AA meeting has given me an introspection onto things deep within me and tied connections to things. I feel like this meeting and reflection has helped heal me from a dark place, and realize that God is on my side, he has not abandoned me, even though I have felt like it for months based on the past and the dark hole I am in now. I am truly thankful for this assignment. I dreaded it at first, because I wanted to get something out of it, but didn't think I had the time nor the energy to do it, and I am not an alcoholic, so it didn't apply to me. However, I got something out of it I did not think I would. I got a sense of peace that I have not felt in a long time. God is telling me it is all going to be okay. I do not need to stress about it, because He is in control.