

For this assignment, I chose to attend a Narcotics Anonymous group meeting. Overall, it was an eye opening, yet comfortable meeting. What was immediately noticeable was the regimented and methodical nature in the order of the meeting. Boundaries, rules, and procedures were expressed to begin the meeting. What was familiar about the meeting was how similar it felt like to a Christian small group. There was a devotional-like reading, sharing on the thoughts of the day (called “Just For Today”) from a book, and encouraging words spoken throughout the evening. Interestingly, God was frequently spoken about in the beginning and throughout the evening as central to many of the member’s recoveries from their addictions.

A repeated theme throughout the evening was the mention of “principles over personalities” (as in, the twelve principles to recovery). Nearly every person that had a sharing came back to this. It became clear that many struggled with this concept especially as that evening’s specific theme was about resentment towards others. Most people openly shared a specific person that they felt resentment towards. Many of the sharers expressed how the principles helped them to focus on their own faults and flaws for feeling resentment towards others. What was striking was how easily people spoke about their thought processing on the effects of resentment in their journeys of recovery. It is easy to complain and speak poorly about others, but it is another to process how it affects their thoughts and how it can tempt them back to drug use. You can tell each sharer was raw and honest with how they struggled with the person that they felt resentment towards. However, they always brought it back to how the principles had caused a shift in their thinking and actions towards their targets of resentment.

Furthermore, addiction was spoken about as a disease without a known cure, but that recovery is possible. The life change that they are and continue to hope for is days where using drugs is not on their minds. They want to remain sober and have continual “clean time” under

their belts. Others mentioned that they were looking for freedom from the stigma of being a drug addict. This included freedom from a felony drug charge that prevents them from job opportunities and freedom from the judgment and resentment of others because of their drug abuse. There was visible frustration and regret with how their past drug abuse have affected their present. However, the general consensus was that they have found inner peace without drugs where they thought using drugs was what brought them peace.

As for the specific theme of the evening, their goal in sharing about the resentment was freedom from it, but also a greater appreciation for the person that they were resenting. One person even shared how they were compelled to confront the person that they were resenting based on the principles of recovery. However, most were simply looking to be at internal peace with the person that they were resenting. One strategy that seemed common among the sharers was that of appreciation. They reflected upon the people that they resented (who were mostly people from other recovery groups). They realized that the people that they were resenting were for reasons related to their recovery. In fact, most people shared that the fellow addict that they had felt resentment towards would help them in their recovery. They realized that it was in their best interest to listen to anyone sharing in a recovery group because there were always nuggets that they could extract for their own recovery.

As mentioned above, how they went about seeking the above mentioned change was through the principles. While the majority of the principles were not explicitly mentioned, the spirit of these principles could be sensed throughout the evening. An curious theme that was prevalent in the beginning and end (when the rules, readings, and bonding were most visible) was the mention of God. He was mentioned as a source of the path to recovery. During the sharing time, a few people even mentioned how God had affected and saved their lives. At the

end, the group gathered for a circle hug while reciting the Serenity Prayer. It should also be mentioned that this meeting was located in the basement of a church building. As I had no prior understanding or experiences with a Narcotics Anonymous group, this was a surprise. However, there was no mention of Jesus.

As for what the Church could learn, there is a list that could go beyond these pages. The first lesson the Church could learn is about the culture of vulnerability built up by Narcotics Anonymous. Everyone seemingly shared with no problems or apprehensions. I almost became skeptical if I was hearing the truth because of the brutal honesty in which people were sharing. However, I could sense the Spirit drawing me back to appreciate the vulnerability that I was being exposed to. There were multiple people who claimed that sharing not only healed themselves, but also that they knew that others would be blessed as well. This concept similarly mirrors the Church witnessing to others by offering what Jesus has done in their lives (except for them it was what the group and the principles have done for them).

Another aspect that the Church can learn from is embracing who they are: addicts. Each time someone spoke they shared their first name and that they are an addict. They know it, admit it, and publicly embrace it. They are not under an illusion that something is deeply wrong with them and that they need help. They embrace and accept themselves and who they are. While many believers do this well, the Church can learn to embrace who they are as well (i.e. blessed children of God, free from sin and guilt, and free from a salvation by works mentality). They know it will take work to recover from their addiction, but they do it with an embraced foundation in their identity and their flaws.