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12-Step Meeting: AA

When I stepped into the Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) Meeting, I was approached by a lady with open arms. I found myself in a room in which long tables were placed in a large square with chairs around the outside so that all could be included in conversation. On the wall hung statements of what AA believes as well as a calendar clearly listing the many meetings and an inviting list containing contact information of sponsors. A tree was in the corner, decorated with pictures of current and past members. The ceiling tiles were testimonies to the those who had passed. As the room filled with people, some regulars and some new, there was an air of everyone being “known.” Everyone present had one thing in common, and, while they did not let it define them, they found in it common ground that spurred them on to continue improving their lives with one primary purpose: to stay sober by adhering to tried and true principles that include acceptance, ownership, forgiveness, community, the value of a person, listening not fixing, and total dependence on God.

Acceptance

Acceptance in an AA meeting comes in several forms. It requires accepting where one is at before moving forward while also accepting other members where they are at and allowing them to move forward at their own speed. Acceptance means that sometimes one will go backwards before going forwards and that all one can do at that point is take responsibility and move forward. Acceptance means encouraging others who will move along this jagged path to recovery as well.

Ownership

Ownership means owning the addiction as part of who one is. It requires the one who has “owned” that he or she is an alcoholic to stop passing blame. It means that although someone else may have participated in a wrongdoing, it is only possible to control one’s own actions, therefore, to grow, it is necessary to take responsibility for all the areas in which the alcoholic has wronged someone; these must be rectified as much as it is possible to do so in order to progress forward.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness of self is necessary to stop living in the past; it is necessary in order to continue moving forward because what has been done cannot be undone, but what has not yet been done has the possibility of being done right. Forgiveness of others for the part they have played helps the alcoholic to be relieved of the burden of the other and focus on self-growth. And, while one must forgive others and seek forgiveness from others, the forgiveness from the other is not in the control of the one who is seeking forgiveness, therefore, once one has done what is possible to make amends, it is necessary to leave that conflict in the past and move forward.

Community

AA groups all across the country are open to members. When visitors stop in because they are passing through town, they are accepted with open arms. They are given a place to belong and invited to share their stories. The AA community surpasses the boundaries of one particular group in one particular space and one particular time, stretching its welcome arms out to all who step in.

Value of a Person

Each member, at the start of the meeting and prior to sharing, begins with, “Hi, my name is _____ and I’m an alcoholic.” The communal response is, “Hi, _____.” After an individual has shared, the group choruses, “Thank you, _____.” Each person has a name. Each person takes ownership of his or her self. Each person is greeted and thanked by name. Each person’s name means something and is honored as unique to that individual. Each person has value.

Listening Ears Only

As each person shares, there is no attempt to point out the “would haves, should haves, could haves,” or to give advice on how that person should proceed. There is no judgment for past mistakes, only recognition that, through sharing, that person can be affirmed as not being alone and as moving forward as only he or she can on his or her own path.

Totally Trust on God/Higher Power

There is a repeated affirmation that members are choosing to release the control they have over their lives to their Higher Power. They cannot depend only on themselves and their ability to pull themselves up, but must trust fully on their Higher Power to guide them in the way they should go. And, while they must have regular times of centering on and praying to their Higher Power, it is not theirs to question what they are told to do, merely to ask for help with decisions and to obey. They are not to pray for selfish means, but to always put others first as a reversal of the time they have spent so long with themselves at the center.

Conclusion: What Christians Can Learn From AA Meetings

Imagine a church in which people truly accept where they are at instead of trying to make themselves sound better than they are. Imagine a church that accepts everyone at their own

starting points. Imagine a church in which people take ownership for their actions and openly ask for forgiveness, not harboring resentment when someone is not yet ready to forgive. Imagine a church that is diverse, crosses denominational boundaries, and bestows value on everyone. Imagine a church where people truly listen to one another without trying to “fix” one another. Imagine a church in which the members put others first, and know that, although they must take responsibility and keep moving forward, only God can change them. Imagine a church where people are welcomed and known by name. This is what Christians can learn from AA Meetings.