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CD 702 Working With People
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LE 5: 12 Step Meeting Paper

I attended a nearby Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) meeting on Thursday, 2/23/2023. When I arrived, I first met Frank, who ran the weekly AA meetings, and he made me feel welcomed. He brought his own snacks and coffee for the meeting and he gave me brochures and pamphlets and also gave me a rundown of what Alcohol Anonymous was all about. I then was introduced to two other people, Tom and Jerry. At first, I thought they were part of the program but later found out that they were the guest speakers for the meeting that day. Tom and Jerry came all the way from Far Rockaway and were part of the Alcoholic Anonymous network. I introduced myself as a seminary student who wanted to attend this meeting to get a better understanding of how I can help people in my congregation who struggle with addictions. I also explained to them that I was an observer and that I really wanted to learn as much as I could from them. They were very supportive of me being there. As soon as it struck the hour, Frank went to the middle table and banged the gavel to officially start the meeting. Frank introduced himself and said, "Hi everyone my name is Frank, and I am an alcoholic." I was first taken aback by that statement because he was the facilitator of the meeting and he even shared that he was 33 years sober but he still considered himself an alcoholic. He then went over the credence of AA and everyone followed along. One of the things that I loved was how involved everyone was in the meeting. As a worship leader at my church, I notice different things during the worship service. Sometimes members are late to service and sometimes members don't really engage in the worship. But seeing everyone follow the credence and actively participate in the meeting was a blessing to see. I felt that everyone in the room had a sense of ownership and they all brought themselves to the

table and were fully present. I believe this is something that the church can learn. I think the trajectory of the Western church has become that of a bystander or an observer. Christians come expecting something and come with an attitude of what can this church do for me. We have a lot of church goers, but not a lot of people who are actively engaging in the kingdom of God. I believe the church can learn from the AA community on how we can foster this kind of participation and community.

After Frank gave the introductions to the meeting, he introduced the speakers to share their personal stories with their struggles with alcohol, how alcohol affected their lives, and what actions they took to help themselves. By this time, I did a quick scan of the room and I realized that it was just the four of us at that meeting. I was a little bummed out that there weren't more people, but I was still glad to get a chance to hear people's personal stories. Tom went first and introduced himself and said, "Hi my name is Tom and I'm an alcoholic." I quickly caught on that this was a common introduction for AA members. One thing I realized was that members of the AA didn't have any egos. People openly admitted that they were alcoholics and that they needed help. There was a sense of openness and vulnerability that was a core identity of the AA community. People didn't sugar coat their short comings or try to hide anything but everyone shared so honestly about what they were going through. I think this is another area where the church can learn and grow in. Even if it is a simple introduction, I believe there is power when we address these things in public and with one another. At the AA meeting, no one was judging one another for their addiction and the main focus was to be a helpful brother.

Tom continued his story and shared that he was sober for two and half years before he slipped up and drank again, and from that day he's been sober 221 days. He talked about his early childhood and how he saw "alcohol" as a disease in his family. He struggled with drinking

and drugs and was in and out of prison. His wife left him because he couldn't maintain a regular job and he was also separated from his kids. He talked about how he started to attend the AA meetings and how that has helped him ever since. He stated that Jerry was his sponsor, and at first, I didn't know what that meant, but I read in one of the pamphlets later that a sponsor is someone who regularly checks in on the person to see how they are dealing with their alcohol addiction. I thought of the church and how we need to learn how to keep each other accountable. I feel that the church tends to shy away from discussing "hidden sins" because it is too shameful. I think the church has a lot to learn in how openly members of the AA share their struggles and how they keep each other accountable through sponsorship. Tom concluded his story by saying that he is getting better by attending AA meetings and he is currently living with his young daughter, who has become a big reason for why he wants to remain sober.

After, Jerry came up and shared his story. Jerry was a veteran and talked about how he's been drinking since an early age. His family members and siblings have lost their lives due to alcohol and other addictions. He shared that his wife got a divorce because of his drinking problem. He explained the difference of how alcohol affects an alcoholic and a non-alcoholic. If a normal person goes to a bar, they have a couple of drinks and are able to go home and leave. However, for an alcoholic, they go to a bar and they can't leave and stay the whole night. Jerry also shared about a time when his ex-wife got sick with cancer and instead of being bitter about the divorce, he just showed up to her place and supported her through her cancer treatment. He talked about the 8th step of AA, which was to make amends with the people that we've harmed and the reason he did that was because that was the right thing to do. Jerry also talked a lot about a "higher power," which he called god. This was very interesting to me because he was talking about how god directs him and speaks to him. He explained why this was an important step in

AA because we have to have a greater power to direct us rather than our own selves. Jerry gave an example and said that when he came to today's meeting he realized there were only four people in attendance and he was kind of bummed out because he traveled a long distance and not a lot of people showed up. However, he shared that god was directing and speaking to him, and although there were only four people in attendance, he looked at me and said that he was glad I came because I can learn all these things from AA and help many more people. I was very blessed by Jerry's comment and all the more wanted to listen and learn so that I can help others.

Overall, I was blessed by attending the AA meeting. As I was driving back to my house I thought about how the meeting felt more like church than church. At the AA meeting, people were sharing honestly their deepest struggles and were encouraging each other. There were no egos, the meeting room wasn't in fancy building, and people were so genuine with one another. I felt more at home at the AA meeting than I do at some churches. I loved the fact that each AA is self-sustaining and that they don't receive any assistance from the government and are not tied to any political parties or backgrounds. Everyone is welcome to join the meeting and AA members are willing and wanting to help other alcoholics. Although I don't struggle with an alcohol addiction, I was able to relate with a lot of the teachings and principles of AA and I believe the church can learn a great deal from the AA program.