

STEPS

A MAGAZINE OF HOPE AND HEALING
FOR CHRISTIANS IN RECOVERY



STEPS

A MAGAZINE OF HOPE AND HEALING
FOR CHRISTIANS IN RECOVERY

Same Disease, Different Symptoms

by James Ryan

Page 3

Love Without Limits

by Teresa McBean

Page 4

Acceptance and Gratitude

by Nerissa

Page 9

The Names of God

by Glenn Chesnut

Page 14



In some Christian traditions, having a ‘good testimony’ is highly valued. In theory, there’s nothing wrong with valuing certain qualities in public testimony. In practice however, ‘good testimony’ usually means deceit, denial, spin, public relations, or image management. The drive to perfect our testimony easily turns into an effort to make us (and God) look good, and there is something very wrong with that. When the stories we tell about our spiritual lives are deceitful, it makes it impossible for people to really identify with us. ‘Good testimony’ all too often takes the form of an idealized narrative that isn’t really available to ordinary mortals. The more we become the kind of people who can tolerate telling the truth about our spiritual journey—including all the complicated, confusing and ‘ungood’ parts—the more likely it is that our stories will be helpful—both to us and to others. May God grant us all the courage to tell the truth.

BEYOND ANONYMOUS



STEPS is a publication of The National Association for Christian Recovery.

Vol. 16, No. 4

Executive Director: Dale S. Ryan
Editor: James Ryan
Associate Editor: Barbara Milligan

ISSN 1099-5412

[NACR Membership Information: General membership in the NACR includes STEPS and other member services and costs \$30 per year. [In Canada, US\$40. Countries other than U.S. or Canada: US\$50.00. Please send U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank, or an international money order.]

Send address changes to:
NACR
P.O. Box 215
Brea, CA 92822-0215
Voice: 714-529-NACR (6227)
Fax: 714-529-1120

For writer's guidelines please visit:
<http://www.nacronline.com/dox/guidelines.shtml>.

Send letters to the editor or requests to reprint material to: Editor, STEPS,
P.O. Box 215, Brea, CA 92822-0215.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, NIV. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The opinions expressed in STEPS do not necessarily reflect an official position of the National Association for Christian Recovery or its parent organization, Christian Recovery International.

© 2007 Christian Recovery International

SAME DISEASE, DIFFERENT SYMPTOMS

BY JAMES RYAN

The recovery community is segmented into special-interest groups. Here we have the alcoholics, there the codependents, over there are the drug addicts, the gambling addicts, the overeaters, overspenders, and the sex addicts—each in their own meetings, their separate cubbyholes. This separation is not without its purpose. Traditional wisdom tells us that, even if our disease is essentially the same, newcomers identify best with those who share their particular symptoms. A drug addict is not likely to identify with an overeater, and vice versa. Therefore, we subdivide.

In our subdivisions, however, we are prone to forget that we are all cut from the same cloth. Yes, we use different substances (alcoholics drink alcohol, overeaters abuse food, and so forth), but we use these substances for essentially the same reasons. When we first found our “drug”—whether substance, behavior, or relationship—it made us feel good. The drug gave us something that we were unable to find anywhere else in our world; it gave us comfort. Without the drug, whatever it may be, we generally had a hard time in life. Unable to find that same comfort without our favorite drug, we either turned to other substances, behaviors or people, or we simply suffered along in our lives as best we could, hoping that a long, dry abstinence might eventually grant us some peace.

Without a really vital spirituality, a living, breathing relationship with our Creator, we are unlikely ever to find that peace. For this disease, which we all share, is at its core a spiritual disease. We hunger for grace in a world full of grace. In our resentments, our fears, our denial and secrets, we close ourselves off from participation in the work of the Spirit. Then we look for something that will help us cover the pain of our spiritual isolation. In fact, it doesn't matter all that much what drug we choose, just as long as it gets us out of the pain we're in. Ask the alcoholic who tried to stay “sober” by smoking pot. Ask the overeater who thought a relationship would change his eating habits. Ask the Alanon who started drinking with her husband in the hope that this might save their marriage.

Bottles, as they say, are just a symptom.

In this issue we'll hear from a codependent, an overeater, and an

Continued on back cover

LOVE WITHOUT LIMITS

BY TERESA MCBEAN

I hate labels.

“I’m just a raging codependent! My therapist swears I’m suffering from the disease of codependency. I personally think my wild kids have just made me crazy!” a woman announces after she sashays into the meeting twenty minutes late. “Who wouldn’t be crazy with all the chaos going on in my life?”

She chuckles as she says it, inviting the group to join her in sympathy. She rustles around and squeezes into a seat between two women who just moments ago were pouring out the pain so closely associated with love gone awry. The room falls silent in the face of such jocularity over such a serious malady.

All the signs and symptoms are present—she is a raging “codependent.” She’s doing what many of us do—labeling our dysfunction and hanging it around our neck like a red warning flag. We make little jokes about it. We warn others of our affliction and dare them to enter into relationship with us at their own risk. That’s why I hate labels.

Years ago experts began observing a cluster of behaviors in sick families and decided to call these symptoms codependency. This thing we call codependency helps us identify one way of living that contributes to bad loving. But labeling doesn’t help us find solutions. If all we’re going to do is give ourselves a label and act like it gives us permission to keep up the cycle of a hurting love . . . I hate that!

On the other hand, if we can identify what’s going wrong after we “go codependent,” perhaps we can find a way to love better.

First, let me ask you a question: Do you know what *codependency* means? I ask because I realize that we throw that term around like loose change, sometimes without a true understanding of what it means. The definition of codependency has evolved over the years—so it’s no wonder we find it a bit confusing!

Pia Mellody, a nationally recognized authority on codependency, describes it as a disease of immaturity. She has a list of symptoms that she uses to describe how codependents are unable have a healthy relationship *with themselves*. Does that startle you? It does me.

I hear stories from men and women who describe with great pain and passion their inability to maintain a healthy relationship with others. Parents, children, spouses, significant others, bosses, employees, extended family, friends, even enemies—all their relationships end up hurting. People consistently tell me one particularly misguided belief

about their relationships: other people are to blame. Other people hurt us, and then we get angry, frustrated and depressed. We don't understand why this hurting love keeps happening to us.

Remember Melody's theory: the problem lies in our inability to have a healthy relationship not with others, but with ourselves. This is hard to hear when we believe that others cause our pain.

Here are her five symptoms of codependency. (For further explanation, see Pia Melody, A. Miller and J. Keith Miller, *Facing Codependence*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989, especially chapter two. I've paraphrased liberally.)

- Difficulty loving self.
- Difficulty protecting oneself.
- Difficulty identifying who one is and knowing how to share that appropriately with others.
- Difficulty with self-care.
- Difficulty being appropriate for one's age and various circumstances.

Melody, Miller and Miller go on to describe how codependents see their problem relationships through a faulty lens. Codependent lovers attribute failed relationships to other people's bad behavior. When we back up from that belief and examine it carefully, we can see that it leaves little room for hope. If all failures are the result of another person's choices, then we are helpless victims to the whims of others. If all our unhealthy, hurtful relationships are someone else's fault, *there is absolutely nothing we can do to keep it from happening over and over again*.

That kind of faulty logic leaves one feeling unlucky in love. The truth is—and this is a tough one to swallow—we are not the recipients of random acts of bad loving. We are relating to others in a way that creates an environment where unhealthy love thrives and healthy love dies. We can change how we're relating. We don't have to live like this anymore.

When my daughter was four, she decided she wanted her room painted pink. Pink is a tricky color to pick off a paint chart, so I spent a long time deciding on just the "right" shade.

Everyone who paints knows that when you roll on that first swipe, you have to let it dry before deciding if you like the color, so I ignored the garish glare of pink as I swiped, and swiped, and swiped paint across the walls of her room. I had taken a long time picking this color—how could I be wrong? *When it dries, it'll lighten up*, I thought to myself. *It's dark in this room. In the daylight, it will be perfect*.

It wasn't perfect. Pepto Bismol pink—that's what I splashed on those walls. But did I stop? Noooooooo! I kept going like my life depended on having chosen wisely with my first attempt. We kept that color for four long years. Why? Because I simply couldn't face the fact that this was *not* the color I had intended to put on my little princess's walls (although it did match perfectly with the Barbie doll playhouse).

WE CAN CHANGE HOW
WE'RE RELATING. WE
DON'T HAVE TO LIVE
LIKE THIS ANYMORE.

I ASKED SOME
OF MY FAVORITE
CODEPENDENT FRIENDS
IN RECOVERY TO TELL
ME HOW IT FEELS WHEN
THEY'RE IN THE MIDST
OF CODEPENDENT
LOVING.

Maybe you read the description Pia Melody has written about codependency and you thought, *Not me! It'll be better in the light of day! This isn't my problem!* I hope you don't waste four years waiting around for something magical to happen. I asked some of my favorite codependent friends in recovery to tell me how it feels when they're in the midst of codependent loving. Here are their descriptions:

You know you are codependent if you do the following:

- You give constantly to others but don't know how to receive; you are an expert at taking care of others but would fail the test on how to take care of yourself. (People say you're great in a crisis.)
- You race mindlessly from one activity to another, unable to say no.
- You obsess with other people over their "issues" and go to great lengths to help them.
- You can (and do) recite long lists of other peoples' feelings and thoughts, but cannot tell what you are feeling and thinking. You know everyone else's problems and how to solve them but have no idea how to solve your own. You believe that other people are your problem and that life would be great if everyone would just get with your program.
- You feel responsible for the entire world but realize some of your personal responsibilities are slipping while you take care of everyone else's needs.

Sound familiar? (If you are thinking, *Yeah, that sounds just like . . . me*, then you know you are a codependent.) If this list rings true, you may be struggling with a failure to love with limits. You're probably stressed, depressed and miserable. You may not feel free to share your situation with others.

Are you the problem solver in every crisis? Do you believe you must be strong at all times, especially when you see everyone around you falling apart? If someone asks how you're feeling, do you reply, "Fine, just fine, thank you very much"?

Pia Melody says that those of us who live and love poorly do so because we don't know how to love ourselves. Frankly, I used to think this was hogwash. I was one of those people who thought you dropped everything for another in need. I loved without limits. I loved without pausing to prepare. I thought it was selfish to say no without a pretty extensive list of reasons why no was the only option. I thought Jesus wasn't going far enough when he said, "Greater love has no one than this—that he lay down his life his friends." I thought you were supposed to lay down your life all the time for everyone. If there was only one piece of apple pie left after the Thanksgiving feast, you were supposed to give it away.

Living like this left me tired, grumpy, disconnected.

I was in a "state" one day as I boarded a plane for Chicago with

my family. They were excited about getting away, seeing relatives, and enjoying the delights of Chicago. Not me. I was exhausted. It was hard work leaving behind all my committees, commitments, and concerted efforts to meet the needs of others. The flight attendant began talking about emergency situations and instructed parents with small children to first place the dropped-down oxygen masks on themselves, and then help place the other masks on their children. I was horrified. Certainly a good mother would first meet the needs of her babies. I spent the rest of the flight pondering those simple instructions. Something was really wrong with the way I'd been living.

Jesus frequently talked about this problem. For example, he said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). We can't rescue, heal, exhort, teach, instruct or comfort anyone unless God does it through us. We can't give away what we don't possess. Jesus gave an analogy of a vine and branches, but for me, the dangling oxygen mask told the same story. If God is the source of all that is good, then we can't "do good" unless we're receiving that good from a higher source and simply passing it along.

God gives us a limit. Running around playing the role of a Rescue Ranger is not conducive to a life lived in intimate, daily, conscious contact with God. It's pretty hard to hear our marching orders if we've run off to battle without listening to the Commander-in-Chief.

Before my moment of clarity I thought Scripture taught us to be self-sacrificing, self-less, need-less, and want-less. I believed that was the way Christians were supposed to live. I had some scriptural support to back up my lousy loving, including Jesus' command (quoted earlier) about laying down our lives.

This is hard to admit, and harder to explain, but I was wrong. Certainly Scripture does say those things—it is a righteous thing to lay down our life for our friends—but that is not the same thing as living codependently by loving lousily. Scripture says some other important, clarifying truths. Jesus gives us limits to help us effectively dispense his unconditional love.

If all we do is give ourselves away, we probably don't understand healthy boundaries. If we spend all our time attending to the needs of others, we are lousy lovers. If we think spending time wisely means all work and no play, we're out of balance. And if we always, always give away the last serving of dessert—I can assure you, we are angry.

No one can deny that Jesus is the ultimate example of laying down one's life for a friend, but he also did many things that do not fit the codependent mold. At age twelve he ignored his parents' request to stay close to them and chose to hang out in the Temple instead. He got aggravated when his mother demanded that he turn water into wine at a wedding feast (he was trying to maintain a low profile). He often departed by himself to solitary places to pray even when the crowds demanded his attention. He instructed his disciples to "move

IF ALL WE DO IS GIVE
OURSELVES AWAY,
WE PROBABLY DON'T
UNDERSTAND HEALTHY
BOUNDARIES.

on” when a community didn’t welcome them. He ignored his mother and brothers when they wanted to speak with him about his ministry decisions. He refused to perform miracles on demand, and amazingly enough, Jesus remained silent when questioned by religious and political leaders at his trial (a perfect forum if he had wanted to have a codependent moment and blast them for their evil ways). So Jesus himself—our best example ever of a perfect lover of mankind—did not always respond to the perceived needs of others without pausing to prepare. And sometimes *he said no*.

Perhaps at this point you feel the urge to explain away the flight attendant’s command to put on our own oxygen mask before helping others with theirs. (If so, I’d refer you to Matthew 7:1-4.) Do you want to wrap caveats around all this talk about loving with limits because you fear we all might turn into selfish, self-serving you-know-whats? It is true that some people have difficulty loving others because they are selfish and self-centered. But here’s another thought: sometimes our endless giving is just as selfish and self-centered. I recognize that there are times when I’m giving simply because I don’t want to seem like a selfish, self-centered kind of human. (Not at all the same thing as asking God to remove my selfish, self-centered defects of character, is it?) Being a giving kind of person is good; being a perpetual taker is bad. But there is one kind of giving that springs from fear or need: a fear that we might appear selfish or a need to give so that we might get. (For further study, you might want to read Luke 6:32-36 for another limit Jesus put on loving.) That’s bad love, and it exceeds the limits described in Luke 6.

There’s another kind of giving that grows out of gratitude. This kind of giving is the by-product of coming to believe that God loves us, appreciates us, and provides for us. Secure in the love of God, we are now free to pause and prepare, listening for the gentle whispers of instruction given by the Holy Spirit. Now we can dance with our heavenly Father, giving and taking at his instruction, not out of our need to look good or to prove ourselves or to manipulate someone to do something for us in return, but out of an abiding sense of appreciation for all that God is doing for us.

People who know how to love others well are this way because they know how much God loves and appreciates them. They apply that same appreciation and acceptance to their relationships with others. They live within the limits of love.

Teresa McBean became Minister of NorthStar Community (a ministry of Bon Air Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia) in January, 2003, after serving in the same capacity as a volunteer for four years. She is a graduate of the University of Virginia and a certified biblical counselor. Teresa is passionate about building community—a place where hurting people can find their way back to God. She and her husband Peter have been members of Bon Air for almost 30 years and have three children. She can be reached through www.NorthStarcommunity.com.

ACCEPTANCE AND GRATITUDE

BY NERISSA

May 1, 1998. Not my last binge, but the beginning of the end. I had been white-knuckling a no-sugar diet for about a month, but that day I woke up with that restless, irritable and discontented feeling, a feeling that I knew meant a binge was fast approaching. On the way to a gig in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, opening for a famous Top Ten band, I made my husband stop at a convenience store. I bought three huge chocolate bars (think Cadbury) and the requisite diet soda. For the rest of the drive, I devoured them, slowly but methodically. The first bite tasted like heaven. I thought, *How could I ever have believed I could live without you? You are my long-lost best friend!* But soon I stopped being able to taste the chocolate. There was no pleasure left in the ritual; it was automatic, hand to mouth, chew, swallow. I didn't want to eat, but I was powerless to stop. By the time we arrived at the gig, I was sick, full, and disgusted with myself. I still had a half a bar left, and I tossed it on the table in the green room, ostensibly sharing my "one" chocolate bar with my band mates. I then retired to the ladies' room to stick my finger down my throat and purge the two and a half bars I'd consumed. I was getting good at making myself throw up—a dubious accomplishment but one I was grateful for. I simply could not let the excess calories show on my body. I'd rather die.

This is no exaggeration. Sometimes at night, after a binge, the sugar racing through my veins, faster and faster, causing my heart to beat as if I were running a marathon, I contemplated throwing myself out the window to make the insanity stop, to make *me* stop. More than anything, I wanted to stop. I wanted to follow the wisdom of my therapists and sit still, watch my breath, listen for the voice of the God I had grown up with. But I couldn't sit still. To sit still meant the calories might catch up with me, and I was committed to out-racing them. This entailed a running program that had me banking up to six miles a day, even after I'd fallen off a stage and broken my left foot (I "crutched" my miles in at that point, even in the icy Massachu-

AND I REALIZED, ONE
DAY, ABOUT A YEAR
BEFORE I HIT BOTTOM,
THAT IN A LIFE THAT
LOOKED RICH AND
WONDERFUL TO
OUTSIDERS...I ONLY
CARED ABOUT TWO
THINGS: EATING AND
EXERCISING.

setts winter). As far as I was concerned, nothing would stop me from achieving my goal: to be 105 pounds, to be 15% body fat, to wear the 27-inch-waist jeans I'd worn when I was fourteen and prepubescent.

I'd lost my periods two years earlier. My gynecologist had diagnosed me as anorexic and sent me to a therapist. Though I loved therapy and made lots of excellent insights, my eating was getting more violent; the periods of control were getting more intense and the periods where I lost control—those days and weekends when I ate pints of ice cream, boxes of cookies, candy bars by the handful—were becoming more extreme. And I had started purging: making myself throw up by sticking a finger down my throat.

I was thin—not as thin as I wanted to be, but thinner than I'd ever been in my adult life, and I loved my thin body more than anything in the world. More than my family, more than my marriage, more than my career, more than my house or my pets. I saw myself as a master of weight and low-fat cooking, except when I binged. Then I saw myself as a complete failure, a pig, a monster. I loved the fact that I had finally succeeded in establishing a daily exercise routine, that I was running every day. I had always wanted to be a daily exerciser, but I was the kind of person who would go out jogging on the first nice day in spring, vow to continue and then hang up my shoes until the first nice day of autumn. Now I was out there every day, in the scorching heat and the subzero blizzards. The only problem was, I now had to run. On the rare day when I wasn't able to, I felt such intense anxiety that nothing but a sugar binge could calm me down—and the binge always led to another binge, and it would take several days, sometimes weeks, for me to get “back on the horse,” back to my rigid diet and exercise regime.

And I realized, one day, about a year before I hit bottom, that in a life that looked rich and wonderful to outsiders—complete with a happy marriage, a successful career as a member of a rising folk-rock band, health and good looks—I only cared about two things: eating and exercising. Those were all I thought about: when I would exercise and what I would get to eat as a result of the calorie calculus. I had created a prison and I was living within its bars.

What was I eating? “Grass and twigs,” quipped my sister, who had witnessed my progression from a relatively healthy omnivore to the obsessive controlling person I was becoming. On “good” days I ate almost no fat and very few carbs. I ate fat-free, sugar-free frozen yogurt and copious amounts of diet soda, lean protein and vegetables, and quite a bit of fruit. It looked like an adequate diet in a way, but with nowhere nearly enough calories to sustain my reproductive hormones. And on “bad” days, it all went out the window and I subsisted on junk food—mainly sugary products like cupcakes, muffins, ice cream, granola. Oh, and red wine. Lots of red wine.

For a while I thought I'd found the solution to my dieting problems when I discovered how much I loved red wine. When I had a couple of glasses, I didn't feel like I needed dessert. And wasn't red wine good for the heart? Wasn't it the beverage of choice for those healthy Mediterranean types? But something curious began to happen over the years: the older I got, the more the wine seemed to affect me; the more I wanted to drink and was able to drink. Soon I couldn't stop at two glasses; soon it was half a bottle a night or more, and after a certain amount, I was too drunk to control my impulses, which would lead me to eat the desserts I was drinking the wine to avoid! Soon, drinking one glass of wine inevitably meant drinking half a bottle, which inevitably meant getting drunk, which inevitably meant binging, which inevitably meant purging. I was stuck in a cycle I couldn't escape from.

My therapist gave me a book called *Drinking: A Love Story* because the author, Caroline Knapp included a chapter in which she described her struggle with anorexia. I devoured the book and related to the anorexia, but even more so, I related to her relationship with alcohol. I remember putting down the book and whispering to myself, "I am an alcoholic with food."

Ten years earlier, two friends of mine from college had put an end to their own obsession with food, dieting and the ongoing battle with the scale by joining Overeaters Anonymous and surrendering to a program that suggested weighing and measuring all food and abstaining completely from sugar and flour. In the middle of what was, God willing, my last binge, in May 1998, I picked up the phone. With a shaky hand, I called one of these old friends and said, "I think I am a food addict. Can you help me?"

She told me I had a disease. She said I was powerless over that disease, that I was powerless over food, powerless over my obsession with the scale. She said it wasn't my fault; I was probably born with it. Looking over my family history, I couldn't really argue: my grandfather and his siblings were obvious alcoholics, my grandmother and one of my aunts was anorexic and my own mother had struggled with bulimia when I was two. Not only that, but one of my sisters had just joined OA herself and was a shining example to me of what abstinence could give a person. Within weeks, she had lost some weight, but more importantly, she had gained a new clarity in her eyes; her face glowed with some inner radiance and she spoke softly of a relationship with God—something she'd never had before.

I had a relationship with God. I had prayed to God since I was a very little girl, and I knew God could help me if I really surrendered and followed his direction. The problem for me was finding the willingness. I still thought I could do things my way. "What if," I said to my old friend, the one in OA, "I defined my abstinence to include a couple of glasses of wine a day?"

I REMEMBER PUTTING
DOWN THE BOOK AND
WHISPERING TO MYSELF,
"I AM AN ALCOHOLIC
WITH FOOD."

“That’s fine,” she said. “You can. I just don’t know anyone who’s been able to stay abstinent for long that way. Wine has a lot of sugar in it, and most of us food addicts are very sensitive to sugar.”

I did some more research and found that almost everyone I spoke to concurred. “We have a threefold illness,” people said to me. “Physical, mental and spiritual. The physical part is an allergy. We have an allergy to sugar, flour and quantities that sets up an uncontrollable craving. The craving can be arrested, a day at a time, by committing to a food plan and abstaining completely from troublesome foods.” With the help of my sister, old- and newfound friends, I found a branch of OA near me where the members followed the precepts of the Big Book of AA very closely, modeling their program on that of AA and treating their addiction to food the way alcoholics treat alcohol—absolute abstinence from foods that caused cravings, and carefully weighed and measured meals to keep from overeating, which is the food addict’s equivalent of taking the first drink.

I got abstinent on May 7, 1998. Immediately a power flew into my life unlike any I’d ever experienced. I felt God in a much more present way, and interestingly, the words of the Bible began to sing for me as they never had before. I saw the old familiar stories about Jesus healing people in a whole new light. For hadn’t I been healed? Hadn’t I been blind and now I could see?

I had been going to church my whole life. I had also begun to explore Buddhism and the ways in which it intersected with Western psychology. The Twelve Steps didn’t contradict anything I’d learned or believed: rather, they seemed to enhance it all. The slogan “One day at a time” brought to mind the story of the ancient Hebrews, traveling through the desert for forty years, having only enough manna for one day. It was helpful to me to think about my disease the way my Christian forebears had imagined Satan: that evil was a disease. While I was abstaining, it was doing push-ups, becoming stronger daily and waiting for me to pick up again. I am grateful that nine years later, I have not needed to pick up my drug.

And I am grateful to be grateful—to recognize that a life of sane and happy usefulness is the very best gift any of us can be given, and that any of us can choose to have this life if we but see how beautiful this kind of life is. If you had asked me before I came into the program what kind of a life I would like, the qualities “sane” and “useful” would not have made my top ten. “Beautiful,” “thin,” “successful,” “influential,” “talented,” “celebrated,” “wealthy,” yes. “Sane” and “useful”—who cared? But I would have asked for “happy.” What I didn’t know then was that “happy” is possible only when we are sane and feel useful.

Studying the Twelve Steps with others has given me all this. It was suggested early on that I do a complete and thorough moral inventory,

THE SLOGAN “ONE DAY
AT A TIME” BROUGHT
TO MIND THE STORY OF
THE ANCIENT HEBREWS,
TRAVELING THROUGH
THE DESERT FOR FORTY
YEARS, HAVING ONLY
ENOUGH MANNA FOR
ONE DAY.

exactly as the Big Book suggests. This task turned into a two-and-a-half year project of writing down resentments, turning them around, and writing my fears and my sex inventory, culminating with a reading of almost 800 index cards to my sponsor. I'm glad it took me so long to do, because the practice of seeing how each and every resentment could be turned around to teach me something about myself has become almost automatic in me today. When I feel that angry feeling, I have some objectivity today, and I am able to remove the log from my own eye before trying to take the mote out of my sister's.

Today I lead Twelve Step study groups with a friend in the program. I write a tenth step every night, even if it's only a gratitude list and a resentment list and a commitment to abstinence. I meditate and write and make phone calls; I attend three meetings a week and I sponsor three recovering food addicts. And I have a life second to none. I put the program first, and then my beautiful little family (I have a wonderful husband and an adorable one-year-old baby). They are miracles in my life. When I first came into program, I was married to a good man who was not interested in having a spiritual life. After ten years of marriage, I had a miscarriage and my husband confessed to having an affair; we divorced shortly thereafter. It was a dark time in my life, but not as dark as my years in the food. I was thirty-four when we broke up, and I wasn't sure I would meet someone in time to be able to become a mother. The love I share with my current husband is grounded in the principles of our Twelve Step program. We pray together before our meals and we attend church as a family. I am richly blessed.

Today, I practice gratitude and acceptance. In two words, that's my spiritual path. When I am grateful and accepting, I know that I have enough. When I am grateful and accepting, my whole life makes sense, even the difficult and unpleasant parts of it. Even when I relapse into judging or competing or self-pity, I get to learn. I get to try again. I see people who have more time in the program than I do and I want what they have. Today I try my best to live by the credo that "acceptance is the answer to all my problems today." When I see all that is occurring as part of God's perfect plan, I am truly living in heaven on earth, and I hold the keys to the kingdom in my hand.

THE NAMES OF GOD

EXCERPTED FROM CHAPTER SEVEN OF *CHANGED BY GRACE:
V.C. KITCHEN, THE OXFORD GROUP, AND A.A.*
(HINDSFOOT FOUNDATION 184 PP., \$17.95 WWW.HINDSFOOT.ORG)

BY GLENN CHESNUT

The early Christians of the first five centuries recognized that there were different names for God. We could say that God was (1) the glory and the holiness revealed in the world of nature and in sacred places, (2) the holy spirit that was present “when two or three were gathered” in the divine name, and (3) the Good Itself. When Twelve Step people refer to their higher power as the power of Nature or as the kind of feeling of the divine presence that Bill W. felt in Winchester Cathedral, or when they refer to their higher power as the spirit of the tables or as the principle of Good Orderly Direction, these words (taken in the context in that these terms are used in AA and Al-Anon) are simply modern translations and adaptations of those three early Christian names of God. In terms of the doctrinal standards of orthodox Christian belief during the early centuries, the AA versions are all three theologically correct and completely appropriate ways of practicing God consciousness and being immediately aware of the divine presence.

And there is one additional ancient traditional name for God which is especially important, because this one explains why Absolute Honesty plays such an essential role in Twelve Step spirituality: (4) God is Truth Itself. We are told in the scriptures that “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” It also gives us the solemn promise that “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Augustine, the great African saint, put this idea at the very center of his thought. His spiritual and philosophical writings were the most influential source of ideas (after the New Testament itself) for all of western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. Those who cannot be honest will never find the truth, and will never find the path of life . . .

In ancient Greek, the verbal root *lêthô* meant to escape, to go unseen or unnoticed. The noun *lêthê*, which came from this same root,

meant forgetfulness or oblivion. The Greeks put the privative prefix *a* in front of this root, equivalent to putting “un” or “not” in front of a word, to produce their word for truth, which was *alêtheia*. So the Greek word for truth literally meant “no longer allowed to go unseen or forgotten.” It was an action word, which meant the uncovering of that which was hidden.

Augustine said that it was this word that described God’s saving act, which snatched us back from the path to destruction. The truths that would save us were invariably buried under denial, lies, and confusion. When the divine light shone, the coverings were stripped away, and the truth of our lives (and the fundamental truths of the universe) came into view in a moment of saving insight. This is referred to in books on the history of philosophy as Augustine’s doctrine of illuminationism. As we have already seen, the co-founder of the modern evangelical movement, Jonathan Edwards, put this doctrine at the very center of his system also, as seen particularly in his little piece called “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” where he said that the conversion experience itself, where we are changed by grace, is an act of illumination by God’s eternal light, the sunlight of the spirit.

Sgt. Bill S., the best spokesman from the early AA period for that branch of the movement that preferred to interpret the Twelve Steps in mostly psychological terms, said that “alcoholism is a disease of perception,” a phrase that we still hear in AA today. Alcoholics look at the world around them from a perspective that distorts everything they see and feel and hear. Alcoholics seethe with injured feelings as they say things to themselves such as: “This person deliberately did that to hurt me.” “Because my spouse does not cater to my every demand instantly and unfailingly, and does not read my mind in advance as to what I will want, my spouse is a terrible person.” “It was totally unfair for the boss to fire me simply because I was coming to work drunk all the time.” They fall into unbelievable grandiosity when they say to themselves, “I am a great genius who is going to make a million dollars with this marvelous scheme I have.” “The only reason I am not a world-famous musician [novelist, race car driver, movie actress, or what have you] is because I have just had a little bit of bad luck.” They can get in especially bad trouble when they begin telling themselves, “I can lick anybody in this bar.” Or they fall into total despair as they say to themselves, “I am no good. I am a failure. I will never achieve anything. I will fail at everything I try to do. Life is not worth living any longer.” Fearful and resentful phrases like these all arise from a distorted perception of the world.

In order to perceive the world around us at all, the human mind has to construct a cognitive framework, which takes every piece of information coming in through the five senses, and assigns each

WHEN THE DIVINE
LIGHT SHONE, THE
COVERINGS WERE
STRIPPED AWAY, AND
THE TRUTH OF OUR
LIVES (AND THE
FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS
OF THE UNIVERSE)
CAME INTO VIEW IN A
MOMENT OF SAVING
INSIGHT.

piece of information to one or another of the pigeonholes created by that framework in the person's mind. In other words, the new piece of information is given a label of one sort or another. This mental framework can make very prejudicial judgments, because all too often it tells us, prior to any investigation, that it is "obvious" that this kind of information is vitally important, but this other kind of information can be totally ignored. And it can do even more dangerous things. This cognitive framework also prestructures each piece of information in advance in terms of the way it will fit in with the other things we know, or think we know. So the boss simply says, "You need to put those screws in a fraction of an inch deeper," but if I have an alcoholic perception of the world, my mind may label this instantly under the category "deliberate insult," in a cognitive framework where I believe that if I do not respond with instant anger and aggression at any "attempt to insult me," I will be labeled a spineless wimp and be stomped into the ground by all the people around me who sense my weakness and vulnerability.

Alcoholics look at the world around them through a cognitive framework which not only distorts everything that they hear and see, but also blocks out any possibility of hearing or seeing anything that might make them aware of how wrong their ideas about the world are. They live in continual denial because the cognitive framework of their minds will usually not allow any negative counter information to pass through to the judgment centers of their brains. On the rare occasion when a piece of information manages to get through that would raise questions about the truth of their preconceived ideas about the world, this same cognitive framework supplies them with a ready-made set of alibis and excuses for "explaining all that away."

One of the reasons alcoholics have to "hit bottom" is because the weight of counter information must finally become great enough to force that distorted cognitive framework to totally collapse. The realities of the mess I have made out of my life have to finally become huge enough to cause all the alibis and excuses to collapse and fall apart. And Al-Anons and people in all the other Twelve Step programs likewise have to do some version of hitting bottom, of getting to the point where their lives are falling apart, and they finally realize that they can go on no longer, because their old ways of thinking about the world do not work any longer.

But then we must receive a new vision of life, built on new . . .

Glenn Chesnut, a doctor of theology from Oxford University, is Professor Emeritus of History and Religious Studies at Indiana University. He is the author of one of the classic works on early Christian history, as well as a study of the traditional Christian teachings about the person and work of Christ over the past two thousand years, and five books on Alcoholics Anonymous and the Twelve Step movement. He invites you to visit his website at <http://www.geocities.com/glennccc@sbcglobal.net/> and to read some of his other articles on Twelve Step history and spirituality at <http://hindsfoot.org/>.

Continued from page 16

principles of perception and behavior. We have to “reframe” our perceptions of the world, as the cognitive therapists put it. Otherwise we will simply commit suicide or go hopelessly insane at that point. And that is where the divine illumination comes in. The Light of God, as the Truth Itself, has to shine on our souls and show us how to form a different kind of cognitive framework to structure our thoughts and perceptions. As it says in the letter of James (1:5)*, “If any of you are lacking in wisdom, ask God who gives to all, without lying to you and without blaming you, and it will be given to you.” And how does God give us this gift of his grace? As it says in James 1:17-18*, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change [in his light] or turning away into shadow. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the Word of Truth [*logô alêtheias*].”

*Author's translation

Continued from page 3

alcoholic, each in recovery, and each will offer his or her own unique point of view on our shared condition.

Teresa McBean is a pastor of NorthStar Community, a recovery church in Richmond, Virginia. In her article (“Love Without Limits,” page 4), Teresa reexamines the value of terms like *codependency*. “I hate labels,” she says, and explains that the misuse of terms can become a way of excusing bad behavior. Codependency, for Teresa, is a selfish form of selflessness. Codependents ignore their own needs and throw themselves into the lives of others in the hopes that those others will take them for the sweet, self-sacrificing saint that they pretend to be.

In the next article (“Acceptance and Gratitude,” Page 9), Nerissa offers us her experience, strength and hope as a member of Overeaters Anonymous. Her story reflects the themes that are common to many addicts. Even when her life was a great success by all external appearances, she was empty inside. Her eating and her obsession with her weight both raced uncontrollably, leaving her little time to enjoy the life she had. Nerissa’s recovery began when she admitted her powerlessness and sought spiritual help from other overeaters.

Glenn Chestnut (“Changed by Grace,” page 14) is the author of several books about AA history. He operates the Hindsfoot Foundation, a group dedicated to publishing works of interest to people in recovery. Glenn’s article in this issue is excerpted from his latest book, *Changed By Grace: V.C. Kitchen, the Oxford Group, and A.A.* In this excerpt, Glenn looks at four names of God used by the early church and finds those same names used today in the rooms of AA. One name holds particular significance for people in recovery—the name Truth. Glenn’s article examines the theological history of this idea of God as Truth, and also spells out the practical implications of this theology in the life of the average alcoholic.

The three authors in this issue represent three distinct segments of recovery culture. Gathered together here, their voices remind us that we all have much to learn from one another.

Together in Christ, we can.

Honesty without kindness is cruel. Kindness without honesty is codependency.

The National Association for Christian Recovery

A Ministry of
Christian Recovery International
P.O. Box 215
Brea, CA 92822-0215

Non-profit org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Fullerton, CA
92834
Permit #288

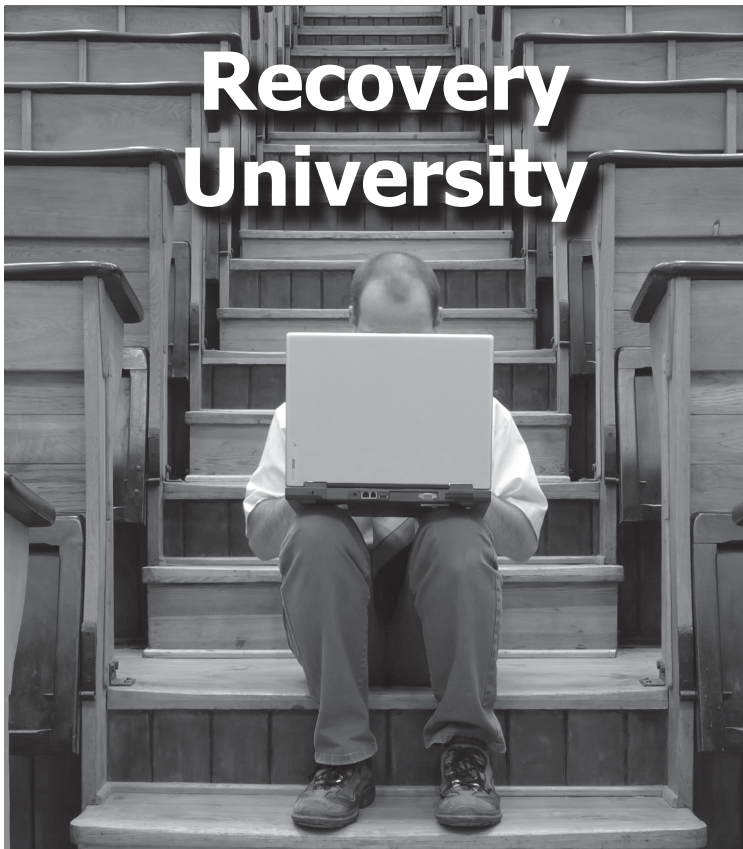


It would make a huge difference to have a pastor who understands about addiction, abuse and trauma.

Want to help the church become a safe and healing place for people in recovery?

The School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary offers a Master of Arts in Recovery Ministry, an M.Div. with a Specialization in Recovery Ministry and a Certificate Program in Recovery Ministry. We are committed to training leaders for the Christian community who understand the profound importance of addiction, abuse and trauma for all aspects of Christian life and ministry. If you are looking for postgraduate training that is serious about being part of the solution, we invite you to consider the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry.

www.fullerinstitute.org



Interested in free, quality online video presentations that might help your recovery? We invite you to check out the resources at www.recoveryu.com.

There are over 20 hours of video available at present, and we have plans for a lot more!

Open for business 24/7/365.
Accessible from any computer in the world with internet access.
How cool is that?

www.recoveryu.com
Watch us grow!