

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES



MEETS

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**Salesian Perspectives and the
Twelve-Steps Program**

Founded in 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was the first program to use the 12 steps to help people overcome addiction to alcohol. There are nearly 100,000 local chapters in the U.S. today and millions of members worldwide. Over the years, literally hundreds of programs using the AA model have been designed to help people with problems such as drug addiction, gambling, overspending, or sexual compulsivity. These programs usually survive on voluntary donations and are free to all who need them.

The 12 Suggested Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

This resource offers selected insights from the writings of St. Francis de Sales and associates them with each premise of the 12-Steps Program. This is not intended to be a scholarly presentation, but rather, a simple and practical way to offer an additional resource to recovery literature and/or introduce the tradition to those in recovery who have not yet met Francis de Sales.

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Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over (our addiction) – that our lives had become unmanageable.

“Certainly nothing can so effectively humble us before God’s mercy as the multitude of his benefits and nothing can so deeply humble us before his justice as our countless offenses against him.” (Introduction to the Devout Life III: 3)

“Consider your (evil) inclinations and how often you have given in to them.” (Introduction I: 12)

Step 2: We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“God has drawn you out of nothingness to make you what you are and he has done so solely out of his goodness and without need of you.” (Introduction I: 9-11)

“Humble yourself before God: Lord, before you, I am truly nothing. How were you mindful of me so as to create me?” (Introduction I: 9)

“The humble (person) is all the more courageous because (we) recognize (our) own impotence. The more wretched (we) esteem (ourselves) the more daring (we) become because (we) place (our) whole trust in God who rejoices to display his power in our weakness and raise up his mercy in our misery.” (Introduction III: 3)

“Consider the nature God has given us. It is the highest in this visible world. It is capable of eternal life and of being perfectly united to God’s Divine Majesty.” (Introduction to the Devout Life, I: 9)

Step 3: We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

“I give and consecrate to (God) my mind with all its faculties, my soul with all its powers, my heart with all its affections, and my body with all its senses. I protest that I will nevermore abuse any part of my being against his divine will.” (Introduction I: 20)

“Since you wish to live a devout life, you must not only cease to sin but you must also purify your heart of all affection for sin. In addition to the danger of falling again, such base affections so lastingly weaken and weigh down your spirits that it will be impossible to do good works promptly, diligently, and frequently the basis for a devout life.” (Introduction I: 7)

“If it is God’s will that the remedies overcome the evil, then humbly return God thanks. If it is God’s will that the evils overcome the remedies, then bless God with patience.” (Introduction III: 3)

“Humility will have reached the highest step of its perfection when we have no more self will. By humility all justice is fulfilled.” (Conferences VIII, p. 136)

I believe that the duties and obligations of my state in life are God’s will for my salvation. Therefore, I will live in the present moment as much as possible today so that I will be more attentive to God’s will and make better use of the graces God will give me for everything I will do

I will direct my intention as I begin each new activity, so that I will better do God’s will with the help of his grace:

- *My God, I offer You all that I will do in this action. I ask for the help of Your grace so that I can accept whatever happens during it with inner peace, seeing Your hand guiding me to sanity and salvation.*

At the end of my day, I will review the day:

- *Thank You, God, for the times I followed the lead of Your grace today: (mention some particular times)*
- *I’m sorry for the times I chose to follow my own way (mention some particular times)*
- *Help me to remember more frequently tomorrow that Your grace is with me at every moment, especially (mention particular resolutions for tomorrow).*
- *I am mindful again of Your great love for me. I put myself and my day into Your hands. May I sleep in Your peace and rise with joy to welcome a new day and new beginnings.*

PRAYER

STAYING CENTERED IN GOD

St. Francis de Sales suggests some daily prayer practices that can help us to remain conscious of God's presence in the present moments of each day as we attempt to live one day at a time.

As soon as I rise, I will unite myself consciously with God:

My God, I am living in Your presence today. I know that You love me. I put myself in Your loving hands for the day.

Then as I get ready for the day, I will prepare my day with God:

- *My God, these are the activities I will be involved in today: (foresee them specifically)*
- *These are the people I will meet or work with: (foresee them specifically)*
- *These are the possible difficulties I may face today: (foresee them specifically)*
- *My God, show me how I can encounter these people and activities in a way that will please You.*

Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

"For us the beginning of good health is to be purged of our sinful tendencies." (Introduction I: 5-8)

"The highest motive for advancing to this purgation is a strong, living conviction of the great evil sin brings upon us." (Introduction I: 5-8)

"Do not fret over our own imperfections. Refrain from bitterness, gloom, spite or emotional displeasure. We must be sorry for our faults, but in a calm, settled and firm way." (Introduction III: 9)

Step 5: We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

"State everything with candor and sincerity and in this way put your conscience completely at rest." (Introduction 1. 19)

"The work of purging the soul neither can nor should end except with our life itself. We must not be disturbed at our imperfections, since for us perfection consists in fighting against them." (Introduction 1.5)

"The throne of God's mercy is our misery (sorrow), therefore, the greater our sorrow the greater should be our confidence..." (Conferences II: p. 19)

"Your language should be restrained, frank, sincere, candid, unaffected and honest. Be on guard against equivocation, ambiguity, or dissimulation. While it is not always advisable to say all that is true, it is never permissible to speak against the truth." (Introduction to the Devout Life III: 30)

Step 6: We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

“There are few people in whom we may not observe some such imperfections. Now, although they are peculiar and natural to each of us, by care and a contrary affection we can correct and restrain them and even completely purify and free ourselves of them ... first by God’s grace and secondly by our own labor and care.” (Introduction 1. 22-24)

“The man who denies that he has any imperfection is just as much a liar as the man who says that he has no perfections at all. Every person, no matter how good, has some imperfections; every person, no matter how wicked, has some good points. Made in God’s image, every person reflects something of God’s goodness; made from nothing, every person carries some imperfections.” (Pulpit and Pew, p. 258)

“Do not sow your desires in someone else’s garden; just cultivate your own garden as best you can. Don’t long to be other than what you are, but desire to be thoroughly what you are. Direct your thoughts to being very good at that and to bearing the crosses, little or great, that you will find there. Believe me, this is the most important and the least understood point in the spiritual life.” (Letters of Spiritual Direction, Page 112)

“Great opportunities to serve God rarely present themselves, but the little ones are frequent. Whoever will be faithful over a few things will be placed over many...” (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 35)

One day at a time

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“Do not anticipate the mishaps of this life by worrying about them beforehand; instead, prepare for them by a perfect hope that, as they occur, God to whom you belong will deliver you from them. He has kept you until now; you have only to hold fast to the hand of his providence, and he will help you in every occasion, and where you cannot walk, he will carry you. Do not think about what will happen tomorrow, for the same eternal Father who takes care of you today will take care of you tomorrow and always. Either he will not send you misfortune, or if he does, he will give you unconquerable courage to bear it. Live in peace, and put out of your imagination whatever can trouble you.” (Selected Letters)

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“The day that is past must not judge the day present; the day that is present must not judge the day past. It is only the Last Day that judges all.”

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“Let us be firmly resolved to serve God with our whole heart and life. Beyond that, let us have no care about tomorrow. Let us think of only living well today, and when tomorrow comes, it will be called ‘today’. Then we can think about it.”

writhing in spirit, even though it is overwhelmed with distress, is not without peace. So long as we keep our will resigned, nailed to God's will, and in no way repudiating our obligations nor the brave fulfillment of them, we do not lose peace. To be at peace amid wars and to live in sweetness amid bitterness is to be truly Prince of Peace. We are bound to suffer inward pain when God tears away the last skin from the old man that we may be renewed in the new person (Col 3: 1 – 11) who is created according to God. Therefore let us not be troubled or think that we are in disfavor with God. No thoughts which cause disquiet or agitation of spirit are from God who is the Prince of Peace; they are temptations and are to be rejected as such." (Letters to Religious)

"Live in peace. Often say to Our Lord that you want to be whatever he wants you to be, to suffer whatever he wants you to suffer. Fight your impatience faithfully by exercising a holy compliance and sweetness towards those you find most troublesome, not only in case of need but even when you can see no special reason, and God will bless your endeavor." (Selected Letters, pp. 194 – 195)

"As to your old temptations, do not cling too much to the desire to be delivered from them; hide it from yourself that they are attacking you and do not be terrified by their assault...You long for God to give you peace in this matter, you say; and I long for God to give you peace in all things and do not want one of our desires to be contrary to his. And I do not want you to put your will into desiring this peace which is useless and perhaps harmful...As long as the spirit of faith lives in us we are very well off. You see, Our Lord will give us his peace when we resign ourselves to live humbly and quietly in a state of war." (Selected Letters, p. 138)

Step 7: We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

"Humble yourself profoundly before God and don't be the least astonished at your weakness." (Letters of Spiritual Direction, P. 115)

"Those who wish to cleanse their souls perfectly and attain holy devotion must be careful to acquaint their spiritual physician with the evil they desire to be healed of, no matter how small it may be." (Introduction 2. 19)

"Humility causes us to avoid troubling ourselves about our own imperfections by remembering those of others: for why should we be more perfect than others? On the other hand, to avoid troubling ourselves over the imperfections of others humility causes us to remember our own: for why should we think it extraordinary of others to have imperfections since we ourselves have more than enough? Humility makes our hearts gentle toward the perfect and imperfect: towards the former with reverence, towards the latter with compassion. Humility makes us receive difficult things sweetly, knowing that we deserve them; humility makes us receive good things gently, knowing that we do not deserve them." (Letters to Religious, page 62)

Step 8: We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

"We must not forget to correct by just and lawful means the evil that causes (our sense of guilt), especially when it is serious." (Introduction 3. 6)

“There is a sorrow according to God which is employed either by sinners in repentance, by the good in compassion and condolence over their neighbor’s temporal misfortunes, or by the perfect to deplore, lament and condole over the spiritual calamities that befall men’s souls.” (Treatise XI: 21)

“For faults committed we must have sorrow with repentance that is strong, settled constant and tranquil but not turbulent, not unquiet, not discouraged.” (Treatise IX: 7)

“Perfect penitence has two effects: sorrow that separates us from sin and love, which reconciles and reunites us with God and one another.” (Treatise II: 20)

Step 9: We made amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

“We give thanks to God for having preserved us during the past day...If we have done anything wrong in thought, word, or deed, we must ask pardon of his Divine Majesty with a resolution...to make careful amendment for it.” (Introduction 2. 11)

“When attacked by some vice, we must practice the contrary virtue as much as we can.” (Introduction 3. 1)

“Be just and equitable in all your actions. Always put yourself in your neighbor’s place and put your neighbor in yours, and then you will judge rightly.” (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, Chapter 36)

Maintain serenity and peace

“We must in no wise live according to human prudence but according to the faith of the Gospel: defend not yourselves, my dearly beloved, says St. Paul (Rom 12: 19). We must overcome evil with good, bitterness by sweetness, and remain in peace.” (Letters to Religious, p. 239)

“We must in all things and everywhere live peacefully. If trouble, exterior or interior, comes upon us, we must receive it peacefully. If joy comes, we must receive it peacefully, without a throbbing heart. Have we to avoid evil, we must do so peacefully, without disquieting ourselves; otherwise, we may fall as we run away and give time to our enemy to kill us. Is there peace to be done we must do that peacefully; otherwise we might commit many faults in our hurry. Even our repentance itself must be made in a peaceful manner...” (Letters to Religious, p. 62)

“Let us do three things and we shall have peace. Let us have a thoroughly pure intention of willing the honor of God and God’s glory in all things; let us do the little we can for that end and according to the advice of spiritual companions; and let us leave to God the care of all the rest.” (Letters to Religious, p. 60)

“In Scripture Our Lord is called Prince of Peace; (Is 9: 6) therefore, wherever he is absolute master, all is peace. Yet it is true that before giving peace he causes war, separating heart and soul from their dearest, most intimate and most common affections (Mt 10: 34), such as inordinate love of self, confidence in self, complacency in self, and the like. Now when our Lord separates us from such fondly cherished passions, it seems as if our heart was being flayed alive ; so acutely do we feel it, we can scarce help our whole soul’s rising up in resistance. Nevertheless, notwithstanding all this

On the contrary, there are those who do little work, but with a will and intention so clear that they make very great progress in charity. They may have little talent, but they use it so faithfully that the Lord rewards them generously for it.” (Treatise on the Love of God, Part XII, Chapter 7)

“Every vocation becomes more agreeable when united with devotion, care of one’s family more peaceable, love of husband or wife more sincere, service to one’s employer more faithful, and every type of employment more pleasant and agreeable.” (Introduction to the Devout Life, I: 3)

“Our Lord is pleased to accept the great deeds of devout persons, but he also accepts their least and lowest. To serve God faithfully we must have great care to serve God well both in great, lofty matters and also in small, unimportant things.” (Introduction III: 35)

Get – and keep – a sponsor

“Do you seriously wish to travel the road to devotion? If so, look for a good (person) to guide and lead you. This is the most important of all words of advice.” (Introduction 1: 4)

“Those who wish to cleanse their souls perfectly and attain holy devotion must be careful to acquaint their spiritual physician with the evil they desire to be healed of, no matter how small it may be.” (Introduction 2: 19)

“Love everyone with a deep love based on charity, but form friendships only with those who can share virtuous things with you. The higher the virtues you share and exchange with others, the more perfect your friendship will be.” (Introduction 3: 19-22)

“I see you have a debt...never withhold from others anything that belongs to them.” (Selected Letters, p. 69)

“Imagine yourself the seller when you are buying; imagine yourself the buyer when you are selling. In this way you will sell and buy according to justice.” (Introduction III: 36)

“Do not neglect to frequently examine whether your heart be such with respect to your neighbor as you would desire your neighbor’s to be with respect to you, were you in the other’s situation.” (Introduction III: 36)

“Practice those little, humble virtues which grow like flowers at the foot of the cross: helping the poor, visiting the sick and taking care of your family, with all the tasks that go with such things and with all that useful diligence which will not let you stand idle.” (Introduction III: 35)

“How sweet is patience when compared with revenge; meekness, compared with anger and vexation; humility, when compared with arrogance and ambition.” (Introduction V: 11)

Step 10: We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

“For faults committed we must have sorrow with repentance that is strong, settled constant and tranquil but not turbulent, not unquiet, not discouraged.” (Treatise IX: 7)

“The work of purging the soul neither can nor should end except with our life itself. We must not be disturbed at our imperfections, since for us perfection consists in fighting against them.” (Introduction 1.5)

“Sometimes we so much occupy ourselves with trying to live like angels that we neglect to be good men and women.”
(Letters to Persons in the World I: 5)

Step 11: We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves (God as we understood God), praying only for knowledge of God’s will and the power to carry it out.

“Since prayer places our intellect in the brilliance of God’s light and exposes our will to the warmth of his heavenly love, nothing else so effectively purifies our intellect of ignorance and our will of depraved affections.” (Introduction 2. 1-9)

“You should arrange the length of your prayer according to the number of things you have to do, and since it has pleased Our Lord to give you a life which involves constant activities, you must get used to making your prayers short, but also so habitual that you will never omit them except for some great necessity...” (Living Jesus, page 295)

“Prayer is a stream of holy water that flows forth and makes the plants of our good desires grow green and flourish.”
(Introduction to the Devout Life II: 1)

“Do not be over eager; be very careful to serve God with great gentleness, for this is the right way of setting about his service. Do not want to do everything, but only something, and no doubt you will do much.” (Selected Letters, p. 135)

“God assists us to strive toward the life to which God calls us. In this way God shows us divine mercy, but not asking us to strive for something that is unobtainable.” (Treatise I: 18)

“God acts in our works and we co-operate in God’s action. God leaves for our part all the merit and profit of our services

and good works; we leave God all the honor and praise thereof, acknowledging that the commencements, the progress, and the end of all the good we do depends on God’s mercy...finishing what God had begun. O God, how merciful is God’s goodness to us in thus distributing his bounty!”
(Treatise XI, 6)

Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to (addicts), and to practice these principles in all areas of our life.

“When he created things, God commanded plants to bring forth their fruits, each one according to its kind. In like manner, God commands Christians, the living plants of the Church, to bring forth the fruits of devotion, each according to one’s position and vocation.” (Introduction to the Devout Life, I: 3)

“The practice of devotion must be adapted to the strengths, activities and duties of each particular person.” (*Ibid*)

“When charity has reached a degree of perfection at which it not only makes us do good but also do this carefully, frequently and promptly, it is called devotion.” (Introduction I:1)

“To do little actions with great clarity of intention and a strong will to please God is to do them excellently, and then they greatly sanctify us. Some people eat a great deal, and yet are always gaunt, thin and weak, because they do not have very good digestive powers. There are others who eat but little and yet are always vigorous and in good shape because they have a good stomach. So, too, there are some souls that do many good works but increase very little in charity, because they do them either coldly or carelessly or by natural instinct and inclination rather than by God’s inspiration or heavenly fervor.