

# **Surrender and Accountability**

## **Keys to Recovery**

Revised Preliminary Draft

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by

Roy K.

With contributions from Craig M.

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P O Box 31, Simi Valley, CA 93062  
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*Self-surrender has been and always must be regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life, so far as the religious life is spiritual and no affair of outer works and ritual and sacraments.*

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

*Abandon yourself to God . . . . Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past.*

“A Vision for You”

*Some of us tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely. . . . We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.*

“How It Works”

From the White Book:

*We surrender. We win by giving up. (p.66)*

*There seems to be no such thing as surrender in the abstract. Surrender is a giving up of something specific. (p.80)*

*Surrender as an attitude becomes the key to this spiritual program and the summary of its very essence. Once this initial turnaround is made, it gives us faith in the surrender process. . . . Surrender is not only the key to the Twelve Step program and sexual sobriety, but to a joyous and purposeful life with others. (p. 81)*

*“The Third Option” Both options [expressing the obsession or suppressing it] made it worse . . . . We never knew there was another option—surrender. What a beautiful liberating word it has become to those of us who do it! (p. 84)*



## *Preface*

This booklet is a follow-on of two papers presented to the fellowship in the *ESSAY* newsletter titled A New Look at Lust Recovery. (December 1999 and Issue Two 2000. The first paper, now updated, is included here in Appendix 1; the second paper is summarized here in chapter 2.) Since then, a growing number of groups have been trying to translate the principles discovered when the program originated in Akron in 1935 into a deeper recovery fellowship. The results have been so heartening that we want to give any who might identify and wish to continue the venture the benefit of what we're experiencing.

Twenty two years of SA history, in the context of the whole Twelve Step recovery movement, have given us much to consider. Searching and fearless inventories of where we are in recovery as a fellowship suggest that we examine ourselves as never before. What many groups and individuals are finding is not only insobriety, but the lack of *lust recovery*, the unique calling and promise of our program. We are discovering how "impossible" that is. We are also painfully discovering the truth that without real recovery there can be no inherent SA unity. And without recovery and unity, what is there to offer those who still suffer? This paper points back to the simple origins of our program, suggesting that what those other "impossibles" were doing in 1935 to stay sober, joyous, and free can meet a crucial need for us today.

In 1935-1938, in the midst of that ragtag roundup of woebegone rummies, something was happening which would turn into the greatest event of the twentieth century. This was the joyous discovery that God was doing for hopeless drunks what they had never been able to do for themselves. Before there was any AA name or literature, this was where hope for *lust-aholics* was also born. That seminal AA experience was centered around one simple fact—Surrender. Surrender to God. *Surrender to God in a fellowship of deeply personal accountability, in the context of helping others.* This is the original Third Step experience, the heart and soul of the entire "program."

What worked for these alcoholics in 1935 was very simple, very direct. And it wasn't for everybody. But that's when the fire struck. That's how the miracle began.

There is great hope here for SA individuals and groups which may be adrift today, wondering why, after endlessly repeating, "Keep coming back; it works!" it is *not* working.

*Trying to "work the program" without real surrender does not work.*

It is our hope that this back-to-basics experience, applied to sexaholism, will open a door into the deeper recovery and unity we need and want today.

What we offer here is not for everybody in SA. The surrender-accountability circles described are small intimate associations of members outside of regular SA meetings. This holds promise of supporting and augmenting deeper recovery in the fellowship at large. We hope many will join us in this venture so we can benefit from a broader field of experience and pass on what is working to others.

This kind of fellowship circle is based on the Second Tradition, calling on a loving God as our only authority, not just in group matters, but first for our *mutual recovery*. The priority need for such a companionship of the Spirit is in doing battle together through the wilderness of insobriety, lust, resentment, and rebellion against God, into the promised land of personal victory and joy in helping others. Also, individual sponsors often aren't seasoned or strong enough to lead us into breakthrough recovery from so pernicious a malady. We are often simply too much for any one person to handle. And sponsors too need a deeper base of support and fellowship.

Plus, this offers an unusual opportunity for healing our crippled interpersonal relatability, so characteristic of our malady and unavailable without such a deeper fellowship.

This booklet—really a workbook—is a work in process, updated as we go along. It represents what is working for us and for an increasing number of others. Early indications are that this is also working in mixed circles comprising both men and women. As with anything else written about recovery, this too will remain incomplete and unfinished. God will disclose more to you and to us, and we shall be interested in hearing from any who are getting results from this approach.

Roy K.

Feedback: Comments are solicited, especially from those trying this approach. Except where specified otherwise in the text, send comments to S&A, P O Box 31, Simi Valley, CA 93062 or to [royk300@aol.com](mailto:royk300@aol.com). Hard or e-mailed copies may be obtained from the above. The May 5, 2002 workshop tapes introducing the S&A approach are also available from the above.

## **What If . . . ?**

You could go to an SA meeting where slipping was not the rule?

Where both acting out and acting in have stopped?

Where people are walking and talking in absolute honesty?

Where sober people are actually learning how to live free from resentment, unforgiveness, and lust?

Where focus is not self-centered, as in a therapist's office?

Where we reveal the deepest thoughts and intents of the heart and where that is carried through to forgiveness, victory, & joy?

Where you are finding what you hoped for but could not get in Twelve Step meetings, religion, therapy, or medication?

Where spiritual awakening bursts forth in helping others?

Where both the lingering trauma of the sins of others upon us and the burned-in stigmas of our own past sins are not only forgiven but cleansed and healed and turned into avenues of healing for others?

## **An Oldtimer's Look at Some Unintended Aspects of Regular Meetings**

- SA meetings can reinforce focus on and obsession with the self.
- Meetings can promote or reinforce isolation, notwithstanding the pseudo-togetherness we feel.
- They may not give God the rightful place in recovery.
- Meetings rely for the most part on the “talking cure.” One responds to the passage read in a book study or to the question raised in a topic meeting or to the sharing of others in participation meetings by whatever triggers one’s mental association at the time. Although one may temporarily gain insight or identification, the result can be a) reinforcing obsession with the self, and, b) avoiding or covering over underlying rebellion, anger, unforgiveness, or resentment, which are primary blocks to the healing grace of God.
- Meetings act as a confessional, making us feel better, even without sobriety or lust victory—without absolving guilt or revealing points of rebellion against God. We’re acting out and lusting, but still a member in good standing in the club.
- Meetings can promote cheating on sobriety by “democratic” people-pleasing and pseudo-forgiveness: “Keep coming back” (no matter whether you’ve ever surrendered your right to act in or act out or even want recovery). Thus, there’s implied license to support lust and slipping.

Anonymous

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## **Part I**

### **The Need and the Promise**



# 1

## What Is Lust Recovery?

We need to talk more openly about what lust recovery entails. Let's start by examining false recovery strategies. False, not necessarily in themselves, but in how they can be used to shut out what we now see as a better Remedy. False, in that they don't solve the problem and deal only with symptoms and techniques, instead of fundamental character change.

### False Lust Recovery Techniques

☞ **Group exercise:** Pass out 5 x 8 index cards to every member present. Write, answering the question, *What are false recovery techniques I or others have used?* Write for a set number of minutes, say five or ten. Stress that this is confidential, optional, and that the one requirement is absolute transparent honesty. Note that in these sessions, there's no roll call of length of sobriety; we're all equal before the bar of absolute honesty. Since this is optional, members may choose to refrain. Then open the meeting for members to share what each has written. Share honestly and evaluate the effectiveness of such techniques. You'll be amazed at how this kind of inventory brings the group together at a level never before experienced. This general procedure can be used for the other suggested group exercises which will come later. As in any group exercise, no judgement is made on one's particular comment. The point is to spark honest dialog and evaluate effectiveness of *recovery*.

Here's a list drawn quickly from a few members at random who were asked, What are false recovery techniques you or others have used? We keep adding to the list; it seems endless.

“Sober is well.” Calendar sobriety is enough.  
Resetting the sobriety date  
Out-praying lust  
Three-second rule, two-second rule . . .

Calling someone on every temptation  
Allowing permission to lust only in dreams  
Figuring out what's behind the lust. Knowledge will save.  
Avoiding triggers  
Not taking the second look, or third look, or . . . .  
Counting the number of looks and asking, Was that lust?  
Praying the Lord's Prayer  
Praying the Serenity prayer, the Third Step prayer, the Seventh Step prayer . . .  
Doing a daily sobriety renewal  
Doing two or more sobriety renewals per day  
"The next time I look at this I'll reset my sobriety."  
As long as I confess it to the group or sponsor . . . .  
As long as it's only an erotic dream . . . .  
Calling after every sexual dream  
Resetting sobriety after every sexual dream  
Keeping a calendar of the number of erotic dreams  
A little lusting to keep from the "bad" stuff.  
Writing First or Fourth Step inventories after each bad lust slip  
Keep narrowing one's lust boundaries  
I'll try cutting out the newspaper or watching R-rated stuff  
I'll only take showers at night and not in the morning  
I won't look at myself in the mirror  
I won't look at my wife's body  
I won't touch myself  
Restricting meetings to men  
Restricting meetings to only properly dressed people  
Changing sponsors  
Looking for the program member with the magic piece of advice  
Going on medication or therapy to stop lusting  
Switching between SA and AA or other S-groups  
90 meetings in 90 days  
"Keeping busy."  
"Covenant eyes"  
"Bouncing eyes"  
Joining a Surrender and Accountability circle

### **Calendar Sobriety Syndrome**

The following questions are adapted from one member's lust inventory and point up the tricky issue of how calendar sobriety can be a detriment to true recovery.

1. During introductions at meetings, do you find yourself comparing your length of physical sobriety with others in the room?

2. Do you sometimes fear that if you were totally honest about your current lust state, others would question the legitimacy or quality of your sobriety?
3. Do you fear being judged?
4. Are you hiding behind the calendar date?
5. Do you justify periodic giving in to lust temptations by telling yourself that there is only "progressive" freedom from lust?
6. Have you ever considered resetting your sobriety date because of lust, even though you did not cross the physical bottom line, but then decided not to because you would lose status or a service or leadership position?
7. How do you feel when you deliberately give in to lust—get drunk on it?
8. Do you ever feel that it could be a lapse in your sexual sobriety?
9. What about sex in your dreams?
10. Do you feel that you are not responsible for what happens in your sleep?
11. What may any of this tell you about your surrender or lack of it?

*“We have found that more important than the mere length of our calendar sobriety is its quality and our own personal integrity.”*

(White Book, p. 192)

### **What Is Victory Over Lust?**

☞ **Group Exercise:** (Refer back to page 1 for suggested procedure.)

Write for ten minutes on the question, *What is lust recovery?* Then open the meeting for sharing and discussion.

So far, we don't seem to have found anyone who never feels tempted, who has permanently been kept free from lust *temptation*. We frankly admit we can still get hit in the gut and feel its power so strongly that we know we're powerless over it, even though in real recovery the frequency and intensity of temptation decrease over time. We finally admit we are *lust*-aholics, who actually still want to lust; *resent*-aholics, who actually still want to resent, etc. The desire to lust and resent is still inside *us* somewhere. This is what makes our program different and seemingly “impossible.” The drug is within. And of course, we can't avoid exposure to lust from without. That's why we need to discover what was working for those other “impossibles” (AA) in 1935, as we'll see later.

### **So What Is Victory Over Lust?**

**Let's Face the Facts.** Human males and females, as well as those of other animal species, ogle and judge each other's physical attributes and appearance as a matter of course. It's part of our natural biology. We can't change that, though some have gone to great lengths to try and turn that instinct off. We are sexual beings, so ordained by creation, with all that entails.

However, something has happened to complicate matters. Something has entered our human consciousness which creates problems not only with the sexual instinct, but with our other instincts as well. “Instincts gone astray.” We find within ourselves a principle in conflict with our best interests. Something in us opposes natural fulfillment of our biological instincts, and sex is one of the more obvious victims of that “something.”

The Twelve Step program, judging from AA’s two main texts, has been rightly called “a God program.” In this context, we physical beings with our animal natures find ourselves thrust into another dimension—the spiritual. So we exist in both the animal and spiritual kingdoms and have to struggle with something the rest of the animal kingdom doesn’t have to deal with—something opposing the divine consciousness. The best word the race has been able to come up with to describe this opposing principle is *sin*, from the Old English *synn*, dating from around the year 800. A simple three-letter word, but a concept fraught with immense complexities. Especially for sexaholics. Without God in the picture, the word *sin* is meaningless. But once we start talking about our relation with God, we need to look *sin* square in the face—the face we see in the mirror. We’ll see how those early alkies had to face up to that very word themselves. (For me, *sin* is any attitude or action which shuts God or others out.) That’s what Steps One through Ten are all about—facing and turning from our sins—so we can receive the grace of God and others.

**Our Dilemma.** So we’re caught in that strange dilemma of being humans with all our sexual instincts intact—though gone astray and infected with lust—who cannot help noticing and evaluating various physical attributes and degrees of attractiveness, as any other males or females would do. But while experiencing our natural sexuality, we can be hit with something which is unnatural—lust. ” Can we recover normal sexuality? And if so, how can we do so without recovery from the sins which drive it—resentment, rage, hate, rebellion, unforgiveness, envy, fear . . . .

This is why the report of what the early alkies were doing to recover is so helpful. The report says that for recovery, “. . . *he must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, adultery, and others which frequently accompany alcoholism.*” That’s what Dr. Bob and Bill and the others were saying and doing in Akron and elsewhere. (We’ll discuss this in chapter 2.) And that’s why Bill W. confessed, “*I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away . . . .*” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p.13) This is precisely why, for us to recover from lust, we too must remove these “other sins” from our lives, have our new-found Friend take them away. This is the very heart of the surrender-accountability process we’re talking about.

But can lust and resentment and our other sins be *expelled*? Does that mean I won’t be tempted any more? Or does it mean that when tempted, I

won't have to *drink*? Is our prayer to be, Keep me sober *from* every lust today? or, Keep me sober *in* every lust today? (*That* would make for interesting sharing.) The latter prayer acknowledges the fact that I *shall* be tempted and that part of me *wants* to drink. This acknowledgment is the key to my personal freedom and joy today. That's why I call it "impossible" joy.

**The Promise.** In presuming thus to work the back-to-basics of AA, we come face-to-face with the promise expressed in the Preface of the Twelve and Twelve: "*AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.*"

Can we say that SA's Twelve Steps, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to lust (and resent and hang on to unforgiveness . . . .) and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole? Our experience says, YES, but with two qualifiers: 1) if by "expel" we mean the *obsession* to drink—the compulsive necessity to drink—and not the temptation to drink, and 2), "if practiced as a way of life" means in the context of the kind of surrender and accountability experienced in 1935. Our recent experience is confirming this.

That brings us back to what *is* lust recovery? Should we not eventually be able to look and see and be attracted to people in terms of normal sexuality—without lusting? If recovery cannot offer that, what is lust recovery? Why is natural attraction—seeing and looking—so complicated for us sexaholics? Can we ever be healed of the lust response? Can lust be taken out of the natural-attraction response? Can we ever be free to look and see and evaluate "clean and sober"?

I say YES! But I need a Friend who can take it, just like Bill discovered. I need the God solution, which is the lust solution, which is the sin solution, which comes through continuing surrenders and accountability. My wrong relation to God, created by my wrong attitudes and actions, can then be discovered and dealt with through Steps Four through Ten. This is the very surrender process made effective in our accountability community, a fellowship of overcomers.

**Program Legalism.** All this puts Akron 1935 in a new light, doesn't it? For real lust *recovery*, we're going to need something more than "meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings." And more than program *legalism*. What is program legalism? Here are answers given by two members who were buttonholed after reading the above section:

- "Legalism is me using Program techniques—as techniques—to fight lust, but without *surrendering* my right to lust to God with others. Fighting lust is the same as lusting because I'm still obsessing on it, obsessed with

it while fighting it. It might stop temporarily, but it's only repressing it, and it comes out later."

- "Legalism is fighting my natural male instinct of attraction to the opposite sex. Fighting or denying that instinct only makes lust more powerful."
- Going to meetings as ends in themselves—confession and penance.

☞ **Group Exercise:** (Refer back to page 1 for suggested procedure.)

Write and share on *How is legalism active in my program today?*

### **Lust Recovery and Orientation**

Although our sexual acting out and acting in may exhibit gender preferences, lust itself is asexual; that is, lust is not gender-specific. Lust is a non-sexual spiritual force within us, which happens to use sex—or eating or resentment or money or power or whatever. Thus, the problem is not the gender we lust after, but lust itself. The problem is not our so-called sexual "orientation"—that situation in which life and experience find us—but the spiritual attitude driving our sexualizing. This was especially difficult for me to see, that even though my lust focused on the opposite sex, I was still perverting my sexuality.

I thought I was God's great gift to women—the quintessence of sexual masculinity. Before I entered recovery, all of my sexual fantasy and acting out were with the opposite sex. However, lust corrupts the natural reality of the person or picture we happen to be looking at into something to suit our sick need (read *demand*). Lust perverts the innocent reality of that person or picture into something I take, ingest, and consume spiritually. This happens regardless of whether or not the lust is sexualized or remains pure fantasy. Lust destroyed my ability to see and relate to the person, and instead, sees only what is there to be taken or used. It is this taking, ingesting, and consuming that is the real spiritual force at work within me. This is the force possessing more and more of me as it finally masters me and I become powerless over its power over me. This is the force which has become hardwired into my body, brain, and soul. And this is the force from which I must be saved in recovery. But how? This is the crux of the whole matter.

For me, the so-called "heterosexual," this is a most difficult part of recovery, because it's so difficult to see. First, it means I must change my way of perceiving a woman. But that faulty perception is intrinsic to my basic personality and character! I must thus surrender my whole learned relatability to Woman, my right to women, my *mis*-connection with women. And how can one change that?! It also means I must give up the core of my sexual identity, my very sexuality, because that sexuality was twisted, self-centered, and perverted. Thanks to lust! Deeper yet, this means I must give up the right to my very *personal identity!* (This must be the same terrifying dilemma same-sex sexaholics face.)

I'm glad no one tried to tell me this when I came in. I could never have understood what they were talking about, much less known what to do about it. It's taken me years of progressive lust recovery to be able even to begin to see this. This may be why recognition of deeper surrender is usually so slow in coming. Maybe that's why it's taken over twenty years of SA history before we could even write about this. This may also be why the surrender-accountability work we're talking about here may be more applicable to those who have been in the program for awhile than for relative newcomers. (However, recent work has shown great value in this as a way of dealing with newcomers, with remarkable results; see chapter 9.)

This may help explain why single men often have problems as they think about dating and begin dating in recovery and why we proceed cautiously and stay in the light about it. This can prove most challenging. This can also explain why we seem to take such a long time before we can view women, or men, with even the beginnings of a recovered "male gaze."

If we can see and understand this most difficult aspect of our illness in opposite-sex recovery, we can begin to understand the dilemma we have with our same-sex recovery. It's the same dilemma; but can we see or admit it? Recovery for us lust-aholics means "stepping outside the box" into unexplored territory. This is why we must chart our own way and be careful not to get caught up in the shifting cultural mind-sets concerning our sexuality. Sexaholics know more about lust (the problem, at least) than those cultural mind-sets will offer. And we must follow what recovery dictates for *us*, not what the changing world out there says about it.

**Note Well:** The temptations are still in the framework of the old mis-orientation, but the healing is being set free from the temptation, one temptation at a time. *This contradicts any misconception that recovery means temptations must shift to the other gender.* This is very very important and, sadly, misunderstood. Many may be stuck with the shame and guilt that the temptations are still with the gender involved in their lust or acting out. But that's the very place we bring God in.

This concept of lust recovery, if we can see it, promises deeper unity in our fellowship, unity based on *recovery*, across the board of all our so-called "orientations." Very few of us seem to realize the psychic depths recovery must penetrate when it comes to our opposite-sex delusion. But these are the very same depths recovery must penetrate in our same-sex recovery. It is at this very personal-identity level where we have our common "impossible" problem—and challenge. As we see this and allow recovery to penetrate this deeper dimension of being, we can discover the God of Recovery together in a deeper way. What a marvelous prospect.

So, getting back to surrender-accountability, how many of us see our heterosexual perversion, have surrendered our mis-directed “right” to woman, and are willing to die to our old identity so we can enter real recovery? If we can’t see and do that, how can we offer any recovery to our same-sex members? Just yesterday I heard that a very long-term member who came from the same-sex lust background, one of our early pioneers, had a relapse. Had we more of this deeper recovery to offer, could that have been averted?

How many of us from both same- and opposite-sex backgrounds are at the place where we can say, “I don’t want any of this false identity” and are willing to surrender it unconditionally to God in accountability to others on a continuing basis—and, start growing slowly into real manhood? Let’s honestly face where we are and where we are not today and humble ourselves before God so we can enter this new frontier of recovery, under God, *together*.

• • •

So the question is: How can we overcome lust in whatever expression it takes in us without denying it, fighting it, or without resorting to those futile “half measures”? Or, is that kind of recovery even possible? Will what they were doing in Akron work for us at this deeper level?

How will we know, unless we try it? So let’s begin by becoming absolutely honest with where we are with lust today, and test our program.

### **How is Lust Active in My Life Today?**

Since “We’re as sick as our secrets,” uncovering the secrets is the starting point for recovery. We come to see the depth of our sickness as we discover how lust (or resentment, etc.) is kept under wraps in ourselves and others: in marital sex, in dreams, in various lust-avoidance or lust-battle strategies, etc. Our lust is truly “cunning, baffling, and powerful.” That’s why we need each other’s help in uncovering, discovering, surrendering—and *overcoming*.

☞ **Group Exercise.** (Refer back to page 1 for suggested procedure.)

One of the most powerful exercises any group can engage in is to periodically take their lust inventory. One way is to set aside a meeting just for this purpose. This can be done with or without a writing exercise. We’ve found that writing it out, however, is most effective. Write, answering the question, *Where or how is lust active in my life today?* Then open the meeting for members to share what each has written. You’ll be amazed at how this brings the group together at a level never before experienced.

This becomes a leveling process when we come clean with our common adversity. Since “sober is not well,” this exercise reveals what our underlying

problem really is—lust, of whatever sort.

**Third Tradition Personal Lust Inventory.** The following is a list of questions developed for surrender workshops. Remember the Twenty Questions in the White Book and on the SA brochure? Well, those were drafted when SA first got started in 1981 and dealt primarily with our acting out. Over time, physical sobriety has led us to discover the power of lust—*acting in*. So, let's let our experience confront us with deeper questions.

Why do we call this a Third Tradition lust inventory? Because “a desire to stop lusting” is a requirement for membership in SA, specified in our Tradition Three. Taking a personal lust inventory can help us see where we are in lust recovery, the core challenge facing us today. (This questionnaire is still a work in process. Suggested changes or additions are welcome.)

1. When trigger material appears, such as in real life or in the media, do you continue taking it in?
2. Do you “drink” on fantasies or memories when they come up? That is, do you consciously dwell on them, get a hit off of them, nourish them, let them continue to play?
3. Do you deliberately seek out images/people to drink on?
4. Do you resort to other images, memories, or fantasies during marital sex?
5. Do you have erotic dreams? How often?
6. Do you have sexual dreams, with or without climax? That is, do you engage in sexual encounters of whatever sort in dreams, and let them continue to play out? How often?
7. Do you fantasize about leaving your wife (or husband) and finding another?
8. When you are with your wife, husband, or friend and encounter a trigger, are you free not to have to look?
9. Do you feel you can still tolerate certain kinds of lust? If so, what kinds of lust do you still tolerate and why?
10. Do you have recurring fantasies or memories? What are they?
11. Do you want to be lusted after?

12. Do you have any lust objects or media in your possession?
13. Does the fear of triggering the lust cycle prevent you from entering into a loving physical relationship with your spouse or entering a relationship with others?
14. Describe the connection your lust may have with attitudes such as anger, rage, fear, resentment, unforgiveness, etc. (If the roots of our lust are deeper than the lust itself, then how can we surrender lust to God without also surrendering the deeper issues? Such issues are often revealed during surrender & accountability sessions and help focus the surrender.)
15. Do you identify with what some call “the spirit of lust”? What is it? When/how did you let it in? What power does it have over you? What power do you have over it?
16. Do you have a choice to not *have* to take the first drink?
17. Are you free to not *want* to take the first drink?
18. Do you want the *obsession* to look or drink expelled?

Add other questions you think might be helpful:

## The Fire Strikes — Akron, Ohio, 1935

### Origins

It was 5 PM on Mother's Day, May 12th, 1935, in the Seiberling mansion gate house in Akron Ohio, where two men met for the first time. That was where transpired—for the sex- and lust-addicted—the most significant event of the twentieth century. Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, two hopeless alcoholics, discovered that two drunks, surrendered to God and working together, could find what had eluded science, medicine, and religion. Sobriety for the addicted, strength for the weak, hope for the desperate, peace for the restless, safety and home for the lost and disaffected, joy for the discontented.

On the verge of drinking again, Bill Wilson had sought out another drunk and began working with Dr. Bob. When Dr. Bob got and stayed sober, they sought out and began working with number three, then with other alcoholics in Akron, where the first group formed.. After that first three months with Bill and Dr. Bob working together, Bill returned to New York City, and Dr. Bob immersed himself in what I call the Akron Experience.

With each of the growing number of recovering alcoholics working together to find and help other alcoholics, Dr. Bob was able to admit one after another into detox for a week in Akron City Hospital, where he was a staff surgeon.

### Surrender

Of the many interesting aspects of what was happening there, I'd like to call attention to the one that was central, one largely ignored today—unconditional surrender to God. Our source is *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers—A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest*, especially chapters 7 - 11 (AA World Services, Inc, 1980). I'll begin by relating the experience of Ernie, who became the fourth member in late July of 1935. In Akron City Hospital, he went through medically supervised withdrawal for six days. The three recovering alkie who came to see Ernie in the hospital got the feeling that he seemed willing to take direction.

They then told him, "Well, in that case, we'd like to have you make a surrender."

"What do you mean by a surrender?" Ernie asked.

“Well, you have to say a prayer.”

“I’m not very well prepared to do that, because that’s been a little out of my line,” he replied. [That must have brought a chuckle.]

Nevertheless, they agreed to help him. They said the prayer and had him repeat it after them. Ernie said, “For some reason or other, I felt quite relieved after making this so-called surrender. The surrender business was something that was in effect at the time and continued up to a few years later. I don’t know when it was stopped. But I believe even today it was a good thing.” (pages 92-93)

The surrender was more than important; it was a must. Bob E., who came into A.A. in February 1937, recalled that after five or six days in the hospital, “when you had indicated that you were serious, they told you to get down on your knees by the bed and say a prayer to God admitting you were powerless over alcohol and your life was unmanageable. Furthermore, you had to state that you believed in a Higher Power who would return you to sanity.”

“There you can see the beginning of the Twelve Steps,” he said. “We called that the surrender. They demanded it. You couldn’t go to a meeting until you did it. If by accident you didn’t make it in the hospital, you had to make it in the upstairs bedroom over at the Williamses’ house [before they were allowed to go to the meeting downstairs].”

Dorothy S. M. recalled meetings in 1937 when “the men would all disappear upstairs and all of us women would be nervous and worried about what was going on. After about half an hour or so, down would come the new man . . . And all the people who were already in A.A. would come trooping down after him. They were pretty reluctant to talk about what had happened, but after a while, they would tell us they had had a *real* surrender.

“I often wonder how many people that come in now would survive an experience like that—a regular old-fashioned prayer meeting,” said Dorothy. . . . “The newcomers surrendered in the presence of all those other people.” After the surrender, many of the steps—involving inventory, admission of character defects, and making restitution—were taken within a matter of days. (101-102)

Times change. And our addiction is incredibly complex. We are discovering that for us today, surrender is more involved than “saying a prayer” (as though sincerely reciting the Third Step prayer is the surrender). Our wrong attitudes and rebellions seem to lie just as deep if not deeper than those last-gaspers facing either insanity or death. For those alkie, there was apparently no doubt that their entrance into recovery meant surrender to God. For one thing, they were nearer physical death than we and confined to a hospital bed. For most of us *lust*-aholics, however, who haven’t been beat up that badly in body, the point of our required surrenders is less obvious, especially since most of us profess religious faith. But that’s the very place where we need to reexamine our own “program.” So let’s revisit Akron 1935 and see what it might have for us today.

### **The Hospital Experience**

A raw alkie is admitted to Akron City Hospital and put under Dr. Bob’s care. Dr. Bob, usually the first sober member to get to him, introduces him—in no uncertain terms—to what’s working for him and the other sober men. The word gets out to the fledgling little group in Akron, and on each of the next five or six days, two or more recovering alkie drop by and also talk with the man. They get to know him and his drinking history and share their own stories with him. During this process, the man on the bed begins to get the picture. He is told what he must do to recover. *What* he was being told—in other words, the “program” in effect at that time, when there was no literature or Steps—is contained in the Frank Amos Report on page 131 of *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, which we will discuss below.

This five- or six-day period has relevance for us today. It takes *time* for a person to see and surrender to God. And it takes continuing contact with others in deeper recovery. That’s why we wonder sometimes, when working with one in need of surrender, where they are in their “hospital stay.” Is this Day One for him or Day Five? Do we keep on with him, or go on to the next? Thus, when there’s the prospect of a new member coming into the surrender process, circle members in some groups start calling and/or seeing the prospect ahead of time to get to know where they’re at. Basic questions are asked, and they get to know each other at a deeper level. This saves time in the actual surrender session, which might otherwise go on for hours just in getting to know the person and his history. (Chapter 6 contains suggested Get-To-Know-You questions being used for prospects.)

### **The Frank Amos Report**

In 1938, J. D. Rockefeller sent Frank Amos, a business executive, out to Akron from New York to see what was going on, what these drunks were up to. Bill Wilson had asked Rockefeller for money to keep the thing going, such the excitement of what was happening in Akron and Cleveland—and such

Bill's mistake that this thing had to get money from outsiders.

So Frank Amos goes to the Akron meetings and stays for awhile to investigate. He talks with members and non-members, interviews Dr. Bob's professional associates, and gets the low-down on this strange happening. Mr. Amos then returns to New York with his report. Remember, this report was written by an outsider, a non-alcoholic, observing—with initial scepticism, no doubt—what was going on with these rummies. But what this outsider witnessed and reported was something which was working for those “impossibles” like nothing had ever worked before.

It is this very report which has inspired our efforts to see if that Akron experience could be translated into a deeper approach to lust recovery and fellowship. The following (quoted in bold italics) are the seven points in the Amos report, describing *how* the Akron alkies were recovering. Following each of these points is what we come up with as we try translating these requirements into lust recovery. Read them for yourself, discuss them in your group, and see how you might translate them into SA recovery. Experiencing it is the only way. This is nothing less than invitation to high adventure.

Here's a sample of how we're translating them. More will be revealed.

***“1. An alcoholic must realize that he is an alcoholic, incurable from a medical viewpoint, and that he must never again drink anything with alcohol in it.”***

- Do you realize you are a *lust*-aholic, incurable from a medical viewpoint?
- Have you admitted that your *lust* is incurable from a medical viewpoint and from your own viewpoint?
- Do you want to stop lusting? That's a requirement for membership in SA; are you sure you belong?
- Are you *willing* to stop lusting?
- Have you come to the place where you know that you must *stop* lusting; that to *recover* you “must never again drink”?

Many of us seem to think we can or should be able to stop the lust; we've never come to terms with our Step One powerlessness. The real issue of what's necessary for this recovery experience is the rock-bottom realization that *you can't get away with it anymore*. That's the real power of the first Step. And unless we make this deeper surrender giving up our right to drink, we're cut off from recovery. That's why the early alkies—and some of us—are calling this surrender “absolute,” not in the sense that it is perfect or a once-for-all-this-is-going-to-be-IT kind of thing, but that it is “unconditional.” This draws a line in the sand. This is also why these surrender circles should not be open to everyone. They are not SA meetings, as such.

The SA experience forces us to see we are truly powerless over the looking, dreaming, and fantasizing, so we too need this kind of desperate,

absolute recognition of powerlessness leading to surrender which the Akron alkies practiced. What makes lust so seductively cunning is that we think we're getting away with the sipping, or even guzzling, because we can say we're still technically SA sober. That's a delusion in the SA air, isn't it? We're the only ones who can change that.

***“2. He must surrender himself absolutely to God, realizing that in himself there is no hope.”*** (This is where some of us picked up the word “absolute.”)

- Do you really know that in yourself there is no hope for lust *recovery*?
- Are you willing to give up resting in your current stage of recovery, surrender it absolutely to God?
- Are you willing to give up your right and desire to lust in any way?
- Are you willing to give it up to *God* because there's no way *you* can overcome it yourself?
- Will you give up your right and desire to lust absolutely to God? Back-to-basics Third Step!
- Are you trying to “work the Program” without surrendering to the fact that you must shut yourself up completely to God as your only saving resource, not relying on anything you can do? If you can't see this, why are you in a program whose First Step is admission of powerlessness?

***“3. Not only must he want to stop drinking permanently, he must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, adultery, and others which frequently accompany alcoholism. Unless he will do this absolutely, Smith and his associates refuse to work with him.”***

- Do you want to stop lusting *permanently*? Scary, isn't it? But why not? Isn't tolerating lust the Achilles heel of our recovery? Look around; see what it's doing to us, to you. Isn't *that* what we must surrender in our Third Step—giving up the right to lust? That's what they did; they gave up their right to *drink*. How can I turn my will and life over to God *without* including my right and desire to lust? How can you? It's here that we get into the real nitty-gritty of surrender to and faith in God. Yes? or No?
- Are you willing to remove from your life other sins, such as hatred, resentment, rage, and unforgiveness? Do you want to keep trying half measures, or are you willing to go to any lengths to be free from the obsession of having to drink or fantasize?

“We were supposed to share all our sins besides alcohol with the new man and encourage him to do the same. . . .”

(*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 141).

- The Surrender & Accountability circle is where we can draw the line in refusing to enable the disease (note the last sentence about refusing to

work with someone).

The remaining four points of the Amos report reveal more tough specifics:

***“4. He must have devotions every morning—a ‘quiet time’ of prayer and some reading from the Bible and other religious literature. Unless this is faithfully followed, there is grave danger of backsliding.”***

- “Quiet time a “*must*”? Wait a minute! I’m a religious person. I *believe* already. You mean, if I don’t have a radical *change* in my relation with God, regardless of what I believe and practice, that I can’t recover from lust?” Exactly. If we were right with God, how could we be thinking and doing the things we were thinking and doing? Otherwise, why is it so “impossible” for religious people to get free of lust?
- Are you willing to admit your relation with God is wrong and that it must undergo radical change? Are you willing to make quiet time a must in your life?

***“5. He must be willing to help other alcoholics get straightened out. This throws up a protective barrier and strengthens his own willpower and convictions.”***

- I’ve changed my approach to newcomers and sponsees. I tell ‘em right off, To recover you’re going to have to help others. Clarence and Dr. Bob not only told the man to go work with other drunks, they took the newcomer along when *they* went. Working the front-line trenches *together*. The beauty of it was that they *wanted* to do that without being told. You couldn’t keep them from doing it. Their joy in being released from the obsession was so great that it burst out into finding others to help. This is what can make the S&A circles so vital—the recovery energy which only comes in helping others.
- Are you willing to take actions in helping others? Are you willing to make that a “must”?

***“6. It is important, but not vital, that he meet frequently with other reformed alcoholics and form both a social and a religious comradeship.”***

- SA members are often the most isolated, yet also the GREATEST RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, the universe has ever known. Yet we can stay isolated, rotting inside with the cancer of self and lust. The spiritual comradeship I have with just a handful of people is the most blessed spiritual fellowship I’ve ever known. It’s not just better; it’s unspeakably different. And it’s real. We can pray together, work with sex drunks together. We have the same vision. There aren’t enough of us, but there

are some people who want what I want. (If that sounds selfish, read page 164 in the Big Book.)

- Are you willing to meet frequently with other reformed (victorious) lustaholics and form both a social and a spiritual comradeship? This is the very hope these S&A circles offer! Also, attending regular SA meetings brings contact with others who may be prospects for surrender.

***“7. Important, but not vital, that he attend some religious service at least once weekly.”***

- The intent of this point, for me—and I can only speak for myself—is the need for growing in grace, improving our “conscious contact with God.” I substitute the word “spiritual” for “religious.” But I don’t grow in grace very well in a vacuum. And this is where the S&A circle holds the greatest promise for me personally. It’s where God has met us in power, the likes of which I’ve never seen in regular meetings—or anywhere else. The sky’s the limit here because we’re not bound by regular meeting protocol and bogged down by the pall of insobriety in so many meetings. And regular meetings are, after all, our equivalent to Akron City Hospital; that’s where we meet the drunks and hope to find likely prospects for surrender. This is where I can experience what I haven’t found in mere religious practice but need and want more and more—real spiritual “comradship” at the deepest level. Focused on helping others, I am experiencing and knowing the Presence of God both within me and collectively in our midst. Amazing grace!

Now we can see how the original recovery program has been weakened by accommodation over the years. Note the seven “musts” in the Amos report. Sound extreme? Dare we examine ourselves in the light of these seven points today? How would *you* or your surrender & accountability circle do that? Why not “step outside the box” and give it a try, as others are doing?

This is the essence of the Akron Experience—specific, focused surrender, accountability, and saving fellowship under God. Stop and ask yourself, Have I been trying to “work the Program” without real surrender? And ask your group, ***Are we trying to have a spiritual fellowship with unsundered people?***

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As an example of how this approach can be implemented, let’s now take an inside look at how this is actually working.



## **Part II**

### **How It's Working**



## 3

### **How To Begin**

(The Phoenix Experience 5/21/03)

#### **1. Find your people**

We recommend that you find at least one other person who wants a deeper 12 Step-driven recovery, though, for a true S&A circle, you need at least three people. However, you have to start somewhere, so find your person. When you have at least three people, then you can start to meet for the purpose of surrender to God.

Go out and find your people! Don't wait for the perfect candidates to arrive, be open-minded. Look for those who have a willingness to be honest and a desire to deepen their recovery. Ask God in prayer to send them to you. Invite people you sponsor, invite your sponsor. Speak with others within the fellowship and make your desires known. Don't be shy! For us it was a sense of urgency, since the status quo of regular one-hour meetings, lack of sobriety, and hit-and-miss Step work weren't enough.

Our circle started with four men, two sponsors and two sponsees. It has progressed from there. We have found that about half the people we bring in, stay. Every one of our members is sober, with the least amount of sobriety being three months. Also, not all of the people who leave our circle leave because of a lack of surrender. Three men and one woman decided to leave because they wanted to become more active in their church recovery programs. We supported them in this decision and prayed that they may continue to carry God's message of hope to those who suffer through their testimonies. We realize we don't hold a monopoly on recovery.

After we started meeting every week we realized that the circle seemed to take on a Spiritual power of its own. This is why it is important just to start a circle rather than waiting for the perfect people to arrive. Once we began, the process took care of itself. We do recommend some basic requirements that seemed to have worked for us: that the people who begin the circle have at least 30 days sobriety, have sponsors themselves and are working the Steps. This will give the circle the Spiritual foundation that it needs to begin.

We have found that some people want an S&A type format, and that some don't. Members let us know by their actions if this is for them or not. We don't force this upon anyone. However, the circle does have the final say on who its

members are, and we have asked some people who came in not to come back. (There was one fellow who wanted to argue about what counted as far as sobriety. He was single and didn't see a problem with having sex with female classmates at his collage. We didn't argue with him, we just told him to go live his life and leave us to live ours.)

## **2. Find a place to meet.**

This seems simple but it is very important. The need for an open-ended period of time is essential. The need to meet at the same location is helpful. We do not recommend having the circle meet at a member's house, although, with an attitude of service, this could work if necessary.

Try not to squeeze the S&A meeting in between other meetings or start too late at night. It is best not to have any other event using the facility after your circle, for some of our sessions have lasted up to four hours. It is nice not to have people looking at their watches, or having to leave at a certain time.

This allows total focus, and it allows God to work through us to be more of service. This is also very comforting for a person who may be at a turning point. They know that everyone is concerned for them at that moment. No one has to hurry the process or rush off to another appointment (which is a way of discounting what the surrender process is all about). As far as time is concerned, "It takes what it takes."

Again and again we have heard a new person say, "Don't you folks have anywhere to go? I can't believe your willing to spend all of this time listening to me!" They are genuinely amazed that there is a group of people willing to place their lives on hold to help them, especially people who are not asking for dues or fees.

## **3. Start fresh; don't take over an existing SA meeting.**

The S&A circle meets separately from the regular 1-hour SA meetings. These sessions do not compete with the regular SA meetings; they complement them. We liken our gatherings to an expansion of the sponsor-sponsee relationship. For example, when a sponsor normally hears a 5th Step from a person, they do not hear it at a regular SA meeting. They hear the admission in private, at a place where there are no disturbances or time restraints. This event is usually solemn and prayerful, with trust being an important factor. If these two participants chose to invite others to this discussion, that is their concern.

This is the very type of atmosphere that we have created in our S&A circle. This emotionally safe environment is very conducive to taking the Steps. This allows for transparent honesty; which is necessary for recovery.

Trust in the group is very important and is not taken lightly. We cannot have someone we don't know very well just stopping by to "check in." This is why this is not open to everyone.

With few exceptions, sponsors bring the people they sponsor into the circle. Group Step work is discussed ahead of time and, if the sponsee agrees, the process will begin. We do feel that the regular 1-hour SA meetings serve a very important purpose. These meetings are needed. They provide a place where people can be exposed, on an initial level, to the basics of the recovery program. SA meetings also give newcomers a place to sober up and let their head clear. We just feel that the combination of the regular SA meetings and a once-a-week S&A circle is the best overall solution.

#### **4. Discuss the purpose of your S&A circle.**

We know why we started our circle; make sure you understand why you are starting yours. If you don't really have a need or desire, don't start an S&A circle. You may be in a different situation than the one in which we found ourselves when we began. And this is not for everybody.

Here are some of the reasons we had for starting our S&A circle:

1. Our SA meetings had little sobriety and almost nonexistent progressive victory over lust.
2. Members were confessing at meetings or talking on and on about their problems.
3. There were few people with recovery, (sobriety, sponsorship & Step-work) so the overall atmosphere was one of staying in the problem.

Instead of continuing to try to change the status quo, (and finding ourselves becoming discouraged and burnt out,) we chose to start a separate S&A circle. This way we could have a place where we could speak openly and honestly with others who wanted something more than just meetings.

So we found that having a separate place to come together once a week was, for us, life saving. This was a place where everyone was sober, where members had sponsors and were taking the Steps, and where defects are brought out into the open and healed. This also helped us to be more of service during the rest of the week at the regular SA meetings.

The S&A circle is our filling station, a place of Spiritual renewal. We have found this time we set apart to be our comfort and our solace. Because of this once-a-week S&A meeting, we now have a number of people who have taken the Steps and who are now busy sponsoring others. The regular SA meetings are changing toward sobriety and the joy of recovery. Newcomers are offered a solution right away, instead of being left alone to flounder.

We also now have a new intergroup and a city-wide telephone number. We send contributions to SA national central office and are reaching out more statewide. We go out on 12-Step calls and meet for coffee after meetings. Our circle has sober women! (which we never had before). We also hand out the SA 20-Question pamphlet to treatment centers, counselors, and churches. All from the inside out, not from the outside in, because we laid a foundation for recovery, one person at a time.

#### **5. Read the related material, listen to the tapes and get into action.**

We heard a talk about the S&A process and got the tape so we could understand it more fully. We also picked up the December 1999 and 2000 Issue Two issues of the *ESSAY*. Then we read Dr Bob and the Good Old-timers. We gained much insight from these early days of AA and how they went about carrying the message of recovery from the inside-out, one person at a time.

We found that they didn't just start a meeting and wait for people to show up, they went out and found newcomers, presented them with the decision to surrender, brought them to the meeting, and then took them through the Steps. So we started something similar, we decided not to print our meeting time and location, bring in one person at a time, and then take them through the Steps.

#### **6. Share with each other your first Steps and personal information.**

Fill out the newcomer questionnaire in this booklet (the Get-to-Know-You Questions) and share that information with the other members. Also, each of you share your first Steps to the circle; this is a great way to start, once you have found your people and meeting place.

We have found that the more we know about a person, the more we can help them. This is so simple yet so easily overlooked. We have found ourselves in the habit of going to meetings, often sitting beside the same people week after week, and yet not really knowing much about them.

This is fine if we are searching for a limited personal connection, but with us love cripples, what we end up with is a limited recovery. Within our circle we have found that knowing a person's story, such as how many times they've been married or what their childhood was like, aids us in helping them. We tend to see repeating patterns in their lives, or certain fears and behaviors just stand out. Yet the main profit from this disclosure is by way of relating to, and bonding with, a person's experience.

This is why we have found it best to expand the circle one person at a time. It just takes time to get to know someone. And this also develops the necessary trust in God, through trust in the circle. We all share very openly

with each in our S&A circle, and everyone leads through their weakness. We don't hide behind length of sobriety or program knowledge. And yes, we do have plenty of cross talk. (We prefer to call it dialogue.) We can have open discussions because of the fact that there is accountability and familiarity within the circle. There are no short speeches here, just openness and honesty and a place to bring problems and get solutions.

#### **7. Have everyone in the group make a specific Step 2-3 surrender.**

Before anyone else is brought into the circle, and after everyone has shared their first Steps and the personal information, have all of the original members make a specific top plate surrender. One surrender per session, no more. Do not rush this process; remember, as far as time is concerned, it takes what it takes.

We have found that a surrender usually takes 1-3 sessions, with each session lasting 2-3 hours. Quite a lot of emotions, past hurts, and memories can be brought up, so waiting a week in between sessions allows everything to sink in and can help the process. Yet we try not to miss an opportunity if we feel a person is at a jumping off point. We let the Spirit lead us in these decisions, getting a consensus from the group as to the best course to take. Remember tradition two: *"There is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience."* Trust that process. We begin and often interrupt the session with spontaneous prayer, as appropriate.

If they have not done so, have members in the group take the rest of the Steps, one person and one Step at a time. (See chapter 8, Group Step Work for details.) By the time everyone has experienced this initial process, the circle will have a solid Spiritual bond. The process also asks each member to make a specific, initial decision to commit to recovery. If the entire circle is devoted to his end, then this will be a place where joy and heartache will be shared, and a place where deep healing will take place. *"May this be a place where you come to know the grace of God!"*

#### **8. Carry the message of recovery to one person at a time.**

ring in one new person at a time, no more. It may seem to be a slow process, but don't get wrapped up in numbers; be concerned with individuals. If the size of the group becomes too large and members are uncomfortable, you can split into two S&A circles. Another S&A circle we know of meets at a location where there are breakout rooms; this allows them to initially meet together, then split off as needed.

We usually bring in the people we sponsor, for this seems to work the best. It is very helpful to bring a circle of sober people directly into the Step work

of a new person. Then the recovery process can unfold the way it was originally meant to, by having a core group of people working with a newcomer right after the initial 12-Step call.

Usually, before the new person comes into the S&A circle they will have gone to some regular SA meetings, written out their first Step, and sobered up. (There is no certain amount of sobriety that is required, we just know from working with a new person if they are sober or not.) We have tried bringing in people who couldn't stay sober, for we felt that the S&A process would be their solution, so far it hasn't worked. Sober is sober, if a newcomer can't stay sober; we feel they just haven't hit their bottom.

Taking a new person through the Steps together adds to the awareness of ourselves. This new insight then propels us into deeper surrenders and into a deeper relationship with God. This intimate connection with our people within the circle, and within this fellowship of the Spirit, is where we find recovery.

## 4

### Scenes from a Surrender Session

The scene below represents how the S&A approach was being implemented in Southern California in the Fall of 2001. It began by being limited to the actual surrender process itself. The person came into the circle with a stated desire to make a specific unconditional surrender to God in the presence of a few others who were willing to do the same. The process continued until all were “surrendered,” at which time they would pray for another. Later, it developed as follows:

“We begin with quietness so we can all come down. Then we write down the top three things in our lives today that are shutting out the sunlight of the Spirit and needing surrender. Then each person reads what he's written. Then in the spirit and practice of the 11th Step together, we ask for God's guidance on whose issue should take priority. Then the focus is on that person's "top plate," leading toward his surrender and follow-on accountability. After each circle member has gone through his initial surrender, we are ready to take on the newcomer, lead him up to and through his initial absolute surrender, and then start him through the Steps.”

**THE SCENE:** It is 10 AM on a wintry Saturday morning, inside a member's modest apartment. A glass-topped table is surrounded by chairs. The wall of light from a large glass patio door behind the table gives the room an inviting feeling. A small upright piano is in the far corner of the room.

Two men are in the kitchen chatting and pouring themselves some grape juice when they hear a knock on the door. The door pushes open and Michael eagerly enters. As they exchange Hi's and embrace, there's a gladness in the air, a specialness. Michael, a tall lanky man around thirty, is a graduate student and lab assistant at the nearby university. Greg, John, and Michael (not their real names) are all sober members of an SA group they attend. They exchange heartfelt How-are-you's, as they gravitate to the table. Michael and John are single, Greg is older and married. We get the feeling they've broken bread here before—bread of a different kind, that this is their coming-together place. Not the place; the coming together.

The friendly chatter continues as they settle into chairs around the table. Though they've been meeting together like this often, sometimes with others present, there is no special format. Normally, they would begin with spontaneous prayer for guidance and help, then go around briefly leading with

their weakness. But today, there's a heaviness about Greg, and he breaks in by confessing the dishonesty of a remark he had made to John earlier.

This is a sanctuary for coming clean—no secrets here—deeper than in program meetings. They are here to help one another by being accountable to each other, under God. They've learned the hard way that any wrong harbored between them shuts God out and makes the real fellowship they crave impossible. This opens the session in absolute honesty, the hallmark of their *fellowship of recovery*.

This is not an SA meeting, as such. Various called check meeting, surrender session, accountability circle, discovery meeting, Third Step meeting, group sponsorship, or best, nothing at all, its ultimate aim is *focused Third Step surrender to God together, for ongoing deeper recovery and helping others*. A process with a beginning but no end.

Greg's amends sets the tone for this morning's session. After he and John clear the air, sharing the truth between them, Michael speaks up. From this, it turns out the special focus of this session should be Michael's "surrender."

Michael, sober in AA for twelve years and in SA for a couple of years with long stretches of sexual abstinence, has been troubled from the beginning with heavy lusting, both during the day and in his dreams. In these special get-togethers over the last several months he has become progressively aware of behaviors or attitudes needing surrender which were not revealed in his regular program meetings, and he has made these surrenders at various times in this surrender circle.

In previous sessions, they might have begun by helping a newcomer toward his first surrender or by asking how someone's surrender made at the previous session was going. That's where the accountability comes in. But this time, it's just the three of them, and Michael gets right into his "top plate" issue. Last week's session had revealed that he needed to go into open-ended abstinence from dating to recover from lust and the threat of his acting out, which was virtually certain. But Michael did not make that surrender then, and says he's not ready for it now. Matter of fact, he reveals he's gone "whacko" again and doesn't know where he's at. The direction he got last week is only a distant nag.

Thus, half an hour or so into their get-together, the priority need among them is getting clarified. Often, one person may be slated as the designated surrenderer, but the honest sharing and prayer at the outset reveals another priority. Time, patience, and being open to the Spirit of guidance are the key to these get-togethers. So Greg and John begin asking Michael questions—the all-important searching and disclosing process at the heart of these very special times together. Supportive questioning, prayerful

questioning, is aimed at helping the person discover the underlying issue that's in the way, needing surrender to God.

These men have come to a place where they have become accountable to one another, not just with what they're doing, but in the "thoughts and intents of their hearts." That's why there is only one absolute requirement in their fellowship—*honesty*. They sense they need more than program "meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings." Something deeper. And something different from what they get even from their sponsors, as helpful as that is.

Sponsors have been known to get caught in the trap of winding up outside continuing accountability. And recovery from this malady, perhaps like no other, requires accountability of us all. Do any of us have the dubious luxury of standing "outside"? The very essence of our illness is isolation and self-centeredness, and to recover, we must recover relationally. How better than by rubbing elbows, egos, sins, and hearts together, day after day, week after week, in such a circle of absolute honesty, where God's light is working and burning?

This is not one-on-one or two-on-one; it's *three or more together—under God*. A fellowship of recovery.

Finally, Michael comes clean with where he's really at today, the result of a process through his two years in SA, several accountability sessions such as this one, and much phone and personal contact with the circle in between.

"To be honest with you guys," he says abruptly, "I haven't found anything better than sex in a woman's arms. Even AA and SA haven't given me anything better than that." Greg and John are hit in the gut, but say nothing. The force of Michael's transparent honesty leaves them speechless—and powerless. "But if I go back there, it's death!" Michael exclaims, the conflict tearing at him.

Michael's disclosure echos the sentiments of other SAs who may never have had actual sexual intercourse, but who can identify with the all-consuming ecstatic rush of the trance while masturbating to images or fantasies. Without freedom from the tyranny of this common underlying obsession of lust, and without finding something to take its place—and better—what sexaholic has a chance at recovery?

"So why should I abstain from dating," Michael agonizes, "when I can't get beyond the fact that for me there's never been anything better than sex? I want to get well—that's why I'm in SA!—so I can control and enjoy lust!"

Michael's dilemma stops John and Greg cold. Advice is cheap, but there's no way they have the answer for their friend, and they know it. Greg

drops his head to the table and prays; and then John joins in. They are powerless to help. As Michael stares straight ahead into his own desperation, Greg asks that God reveal to *him*, Greg, anything that may be unsundered in *his* life. John follows by making his own prayerful surrender and request for help and wisdom.

Here's the key to this fellowship of recovery and its powerful promise—each person is as open and willing to see, turn, and surrender as the one seeking surrender. Anything else, and it can turn into just another group therapy, “Let's-play-shrink,” power trip, or some kind of religious session, devoid of the special grace and presence of a loving God meeting helpless people who want help and want to help others. Instead of having a rigid format, the priority is on the spiritual. This does not come easily. It takes a solid recovery base, practice, and experience. And above all, reliance on God instead of self. No one has to have any answers; but we do need to be *absolutely honest* where each of us is, in the light of God, right now, today, together. Michael feels safe in putting himself under the authority of such searching questioning because he senses it comes from identification and reflects the leading of a loving God.

We can't fully enter this kind of experience in regular group meetings because that's where there are untested newcomers to the program who don't even know which end is up. Plus, some members aren't sober, and some don't even seem to want sobriety. It takes *time* for most of us to see our need for deeper recovery or discover whether we even *want* recovery, much less know what real recovery is. Also, in meetings, we usually don't *pray* together. And it's here where the baring of our souls together before God is the very holiest of sanctuaries. Surrender-consciousness is in the air, and unless one is personally in tune with that, he doesn't fit in. Actually, his presence would be working against the Light. This is how it was in Akron in 1935; those who had not made their surrender to God could not be part of the *fellowship* circle.

After Greg and John pray out of their desperation, powerless to help Michael, there's a deep and silent pause. These men are learning that God often speaks and leads in such silences—“that God could and would—if He were sought.” Plus, they know that in the ultimate sense, they have to give each other up to God. Not everyone makes it.

This shared trust and prayerful honesty of his two helpers draws out of Michael something deeper, and he makes a startling confession: What he's been recently revealing to them as his new-found faith is really based on his fear that John and Greg would reject him unless he believed and prayed as

they did.

Another bombshell! And this eventually leads John and Greg to discern a surrender priority: Michael has to let go of such sham religion before he can even begin to see what the real problem is, much less surrender it unconditionally to God and find the peace he seeks.

Mind you, Michael is SA sober. He has not sexually acted out for over a year. Which points up the real need in our recovery. “Sober” is not well. Sobriety is the mere beginning of recovery, opening the door. Sobriety progressively reveals the underlying sins of the spirit which need to be discovered and surrendered in an ongoing fellowship of surrender.

Michael’s new honesty at depth helps give John and Greg insight and direction in their further questioning. This clarification process is most important and should be open-ended. We never know where it’s going, and it could take hours, or another session. It turns out that Michael’s surrender to God must be to God as Michael *really* understands God, that is, where Michael himself honestly is with God today. It was now clear that Michael’s relation to God was the problem.

This powerfully reveals one of our most basic and recurring discoveries: *When we come into SA, regardless of the degree of our religious persuasion, belief, or practice, our relation with God is wrong; and for us to recover, that relation must change.* How could any of us be doing and thinking the things we were doing and thinking and have been *rightly* related to God? But we could not see that alone, such the nature of our religious blindness.

We have discovered that our relations with God must not only change but be continually open to stages of new surrender. Third Step surrender is not some one-time prayer or “decision.” Surrender is a process with a beginning, leading to continuing stages of discovery and surrender. That’s what makes it possible for Steps Four through Ten then to become effective in changing us.

Greg then asks, “Michael, you’re coming down pretty hard, so black-and-white, on what you’re calling false faith. I appreciate your honesty and humility, but I seem to remember in the last year of your doing battle with lust and journey toward God that there were times when you might have actually been experiencing his saving power. Was that illusion or sham? Was there anything real going on?”

“No, you’re right,” Michael says. “There *were* times when I was at the end and cried out, and there He was. And I knew it.”

“Then what’s wrong?” John asks. “Is there something in the way of that Connection, as weak as it was?”

That struck home. Michael leaned back in his chair: “Yeah, it keeps

coming back to this, doesn't it? Suddenly real clear. The conflict. On the one hand, continue in SA, my newfound church-going, and trusting in God doing what I can't do for myself, as I'm trying to do; or, on the other hand, follow the idea that I can through analysis, therapy and medication figure out what's wrong with me and eventually get to the place where I can control and enjoy lust. That through my intellect and education I won't have to depend on God." Then Michael suddenly blurted out: "I have to give up graduate school!"

Two or three hours of yielding to the light of honesty with two other men, under God, had gradually sharpened this person's surrender focus. What began with the idea that he should surrender to dating abstinence, wound up with something else. *That's the object of these sessions; that's the clarity that is sought—focused surrender.* Not an easy venture. And not for everybody. Michael's earlier surrenders—to stop lusting, have sex in dreams, etc.—which he had been progressively making in this accountability circle—had been leading the way to today's top-plate issue. But he could never have discovered that without having made the previous surrenders. That's the way recovery is working for us in these circles, layer after layer.

• • •

This particular story doesn't end here. Michael wasn't done with his surrender yet. And this illustrates another aspect of this kind of Third Step surrender fellowship: We get progressive revelation toward that next sticking point which is in the way of our further recovery. Plus, you never know where any particular session is going. What an adventure!

Michael's surrender session was adjourned, and the three broke to a local eatery, since everyone was hungry and needed to get away from the intensity of it all. The next day, Michael kept in touch with his circle by phone as he faced the hard choices involved in his decision. It was in one of these extended phone conversations that Greg detected something he had never sensed before about Michael. (Another reason why this takes *time, patience, and great care* on the part of everyone in the circle. We go slow. And we do unto each other as we would have them do unto us. This is love—even though sometimes it has to be tough.)

Greg sensed that Michael had to have some kind of belief System on which to ground his life, some kind of "religion" to rest on as the foundation of his being—whether philosophy, self-knowledge, twelve Step program, or Christianity. Allegiance to faith in some *system*. And when this point was examined honestly through more prayerful questioning, it became apparent that Michael's whole personal security, *his very identity*, had to be grounded in some kind of System or "religion." That's when the real surrender became apparent. His conflict was not between SA and graduate school or between

Christianity and graduate school or between Christianity and psycho-analysis. The conflict was, What would he have as the source and foundation of his being? Knowledge? System? Religion? Or a personal indwelling Friend who saves? Trying to serve two masters was tearing Michael apart.

. . .

That's where this particular surrender session ultimately led. No two are alike. There's no pushing; we "live and let live." Another session awaits Michael and his accountability circle next Sunday at one o'clock in the afternoon, when there will be one or two additional men present. And based on prior experience, no one knows where that session will go. We hope Michael, based on his previous willingness, will break through again and continue his process of surrender to God. The same with Greg and John, as their needs continue to surface also. Truly an odyssey charged with wonder and grace.

In the meantime, we pray for each other and ask for another to whom we can carry the hope we are discovering together.



## 5

### Working Principles

From our experiences to date we are discovering that certain principles are emerging which help protect and guide such a surrender and accountability fellowship:

1. This is not for everybody. It cannot be open to all, as regular program meetings are. The requirement for being part of the circle is continued willingness to be accountable and transparently honest with the others, open to continued surrender to God, and putting the needs of others ahead of one's own. The circle has the final say on who attends simply because this is a get-together whose controlling principle is *surrender and accountability*. Regular SA meetings are the equivalent of Akron City Hospital; that's where we hopefully find those who are willing to surrender.
2. We trivialize the taking of the Third Step by thinking we can, by a simple rote prayer, experience what that Step promises. Historically, what is now called the Third Step was not called anything. It was an event, an experience—the very center and source of one's whole recovery. It was specific, not generic, as it is worded now. And it was not an isolated thing; it was done in community.
3. Our sicknesses are more profound and lie far deeper than we had thought. The spiritual principle here is that a surrender circle can have a deeper potential than the one-on-one or standard meeting approach, if, that is, the Tradition-Two principle is a working reality in their midst—the presence and authority of a loving God. If you set about to work together in such a circle, you'll soon discover your collective need for the Second Tradition God—One who really is guiding, directing, saving, fulfilling, and accomplishing his ends in and through surrendered men. Best not to try it without such a Center and without each person in the circle being of one spirit with the others in this

God-consciousness. Unity springs from the inside out.

Here are some thoughts on such a Tradition Two fellowship from Bill W., written in 1945:

“. . . [*H*]uman authority, be it ever so impartial or benign, seldom works long or well in our affairs . . . . our AA program is spiritually centered. Most of us have found enough humility to believe in and depend upon God. We have found that humility by facing the fact that . . . we are individually powerless. The Washingtonians, on the contrary, thought drinking to be just another strong habit which could be broken by willpower as expressed in pledges, plus the sustaining force of mutual aid through an understanding society of ex-drunks. Apparently they thought little of personality change, and nothing at all of spiritual conversion. Mutual aid plus pledges did do a lot for them, but it wasn't enough . . . Self-serving forces . . . having no greater power to serve, finally destroyed the Washingtonians.” (*The Language of the Heart*, pp 7-8)

Note what this tells us of the spiritual atmosphere Bill is describing in 1945: Bill and others surrendered their human authority and lived and worked under the authority of a loving God. That means they were surrendered to God in their close circle of *fellowship*, not just their private lives. They called this *spiritual conversion*. In contrast with the Washingtonians, they were depending on and serving *God*. If the truth were known, how many of *us* act as though our addiction is “just another strong habit which could be broken by willpower as expressed in pledges” [read *sobriety renewals*], “plus the sustaining force of mutual aid through an understanding society of ex-drunks” [read *the SA fellowship*].

4. The circle's center is a loving God as he may express himself in our collective surrender to him and helping one another. Dare we actually try this and put it into practice? The key is willingness to subordinate sobriety status, sponsorship status, opinions, advice, and psychoanalytical insights to calling upon God. This means prayer together for direction and guidance in helping one another discover and make the surrender—not relying on our own wisdom or understanding. See where God may be leading in a person's life and work, rather than trying to impose personal expectations or agendas. This is why *periods of prayerful silence* during surrenders play such an important part in them.

5. Questioning directed at achieving clarity and simplicity toward focused surrender is the heart of the surrender session. That's why it is so very

important to have members of the circle practicing Steps Three and Eleven as a way of life and willing to surrender to the all-important principle of God's presence and leading in their get-togethers, versus any dominance of personality or ego. To have any who are not sober or who are not surrendered asking questions goes against the whole idea and is asking for trouble.

6. Members of such a circle find that commitment and accountability to each other and the circle must have top priority. Where the presence and power of God are present, people can't wait to get to their next get-together. Without it, we can expect the circle soon to collapse or devolve into just another SA meeting.

7. Decisions should stand the test of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. These four "absolutes" were the spiritual soil in which the recovery miracle took root in Akron.

In 1948, Dr. Bob recalled the absolutes as "the only yardsticks Alcoholics Anonymous had in the early days . . . ." He said he still felt they held good and could be extremely helpful when he wanted to do the right thing and the answer was not obvious. "Almost always, if I measure my decision carefully by the yardsticks of absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love, and it checks up pretty well with those four, then my answer can't be very far out of the way," he said. (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 54)

8. Each member of the circle must be as open and willing to see, turn, and make their next indicated surrender as the one who is up for surrender. Sponsorship status and length of sobriety take a back seat. Often, someone other than the surrenderer winds up also making a newly-revealed surrender.

9. Unconditional surrender of one's current point of rebellion to God has a beginning, but apparently no end, as we continue to discover more in successive sessions. And more is revealed in the continuing fellowship of recovery. That initial surrender we make in the circle opens the door to a surrender *attitude*, and follow-on surrenders of all circle members become a matter of course. That's one of the wonders of our continuing accountability with each other in the light of God's presence.

10. Each surrender brings the person into a deeper supportive relationship with the others in the circle. (What would we do without cell phones?) In our

work-a-day world, we continue to bring to the light of the others how we're doing on that particular issue after the initial surrender has been made. We become accountable to the others on that point; and they aren't shy in asking how we're doing. Thus, surrender is not made as if that's the end of the matter; it's just the beginning. We know we'll be tempted on that point again. True recovery on that issue begins with unconditional surrender, which then becomes an *attitude in process*.

11. It's not a surrender unless and until there's follow-up. We do hold each other accountable, in identification and loving support. This is why we maintain contact during the following week and make it a point to see how last week's surrender is doing. We do "bear one another's burdens. . . ."

12. Surrender without accountability is not surrender.

13. This is not for everybody. Not even for people who might need or want it. It's for those who are willing to give up sobriety status, yield to the authority of a loving God together, and pay the price of continuing surrender—in community. It's for those who are willing to commit to a deeper *fellowship* of recovery, centered, not on themselves, but always reaching out to the next one in need. This is what was going on in Akron and Cleveland when the fire struck.

## 6

### Getting Started

This section contains reprints and/or revisions of material made available in previous surrender-accountability workshops.

#### What Is A Surrender-Accountability Circle?

The previous chapters try to describe what goes on in surrender-accountability sessions, even though this varies from circle to circle and changes with experience. The term came about in 1999 when we began translating the Akron 1935 experience into lust-surrender get-togethers. It goes back to what was happening in Akron City Hospital with Dr. Bob, the newly-admitted wet drunk, and the few sober men who showed up at the hospital and went to work on him. The term helps differentiate this kind of recovery get-together from scheduled meetings, which are available to all. This is a gathering of a few core members to whom one is personally accountable on a continuing basis in supporting each other's recovery and reaching out to others. This goes beyond the one-on-one of sponsorship and is deeper than what we have in typical meetings.

In 1935 the new man in the hospital bed was visited by at least two sober men every day for five or six days. These visiting alcoholics became those who dealt intensively with the new man. They got to know him, and he got to know them. If the man eventually made a surrender to God in their presence, he had at least two or three men who were with him in one of the most crucial spiritual experiences a man can ever know. This brings accountability and bonding. In a similar context this has been called "bearing one another's burdens" and fulfilling the law of love.

Just as there were two or more sober members supporting each man in the hospital, the accountability circle is three or more sober members supporting each other in comprehensive recovery. This becomes one's *core recovery fellowship* because recovery is deeper here. The individuals may or may not be members of the same SA group, depending on need and circumstances. What is required is that the members of such a circle maintain close personal contact with each other based on absolute honesty and have the willingness to continue the surrender process and help others.

Our experience indicates that an individual's accountability circle should be limited in maximum size. With over seven people in the circle, we've found that there isn't enough time to go into depth for each of the member's continuing needs, much less deal with a newcomer. As time goes on, circles have had to divide into two or more circles to maintain spiritual quality and effectiveness. Too many people asking questions can dilute the spiritual focus and energy. We're learning from experience.

Typically, those who participate in a surrender session become the person's accountability circle.

In a sense, members of an accountability circle are in an ongoing check-and-surrender meeting. They check on each other, and are accountable to one another in the continuing surrender process. This is how what needs to be surrendered is often revealed and where we support each other in implementing our next surrender.

Most important: Such a circle, if born in the crucible of powerlessness, surrender to God, and accountability to one another, is not self-centered but is *reaching outward to the next prospect*—driven by the power of a growing spiritual awakening in carrying its message of recovery to others in need.

Note: Check meetings, so-called, have been used as a tool among members for years. Though focused on problem-solution and member support, check meetings have not had the surrender-to-God focus and objective that surrender meetings do. On the other hand, every surrender session does have all the elements of a good check meeting. (See Appendix 3 for the latest version of the Check Meeting paper.)

## Get-to-know-you Questions Prior to the Surrender Session

[The following is a suggested communication to a member indicating the willingness to make a surrender. The idea is for the other circle members to get to know the person before the surrender session.]

“Thanks for agreeing to do a surrender with us. If you are looking for something deeper, this is it. What we would like to get to is the “top plate” lust issue in your life today. Being very specific, come up with three different items that are bothering you, and we will sort them out during the surrender.

“These would be things in your life that are really bothering you (e.g., lust, resentment against your father, etc.) items that are holding you back from a deeper relationship with God. What is it that is blocking out the sunlight of the Spirit in your life today?

“If you could give us some basic information about yourself, please answer some or all of the following questions. Also, add any other pertinent information about your life. You don't have to disclose anything now that makes you feel uncomfortable. We have simply found that having this basic information saves a lot of time during the surrender. This way we can get to the point faster. Thank you very much, and we are looking forward to knowing you better.”

Note: Although these questions can be answered readily, if you find that the writing is helpful, let it continue revealing what it may. Some have found that this helped clarify or reveal things which proved very valuable to their surrender.

1. What brought you to SA?
2. Are you married, divorced, living with someone? \_\_\_ Any children? \_\_\_
3. Have you disclosed to your spouse? How much? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Describe your relationship with your wife and children. What is the emotional tone of your family life?
5. Are you currently seeing a mental health worker? How long? \_\_\_
6. Do you have any other addictions?
7. Are you prone to rage, violence, or resentment? Describe.
8. Have you ever been molested or incested?
9. Are you currently taking medication (anti-depressants or anti-psychotics)?
10. Do you currently have a venereal disease?
11. Are you currently putting anyone in possible physical or emotional harm?
12. Have you gone to or participated in any other 12step programs or self help groups? \_\_\_ Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you have an SA sponsor? Do you sponsor others?
14. Where are you on the Steps?
15. What is your occupation?
16. Describe your childhood.
17. What are your personal hobbies; how often do you participate?
18. Were you raised within a religion? \_\_ Which one? \_\_\_\_ Do you participate in any type of religion or spiritual practice besides SA? (Your particular form of religion is irrelevant.)
19. Have you ever dabbled in the occult, witchcraft, spiritualism or satanism?
20. Where are you with God today?
21. Describe your spiritual health.
22. Describe your physical and mental health
23. What do you want out of SA? Out of S&A?
24. Anything else you feel is relevant?

## Surrender Session Guide and Questions

This is a suggested guide for an actual surrender session. It has proved helpful for surrender circles just getting started. It is the result of our experience so far and is still a work in process. Feedback is welcome.

Surrenders can follow naturally from any number of situations as discussed throughout. This material can also be used for those doing their initial Third Step surrender to stop acting out or for those at a stage where surrender of any sort is indicated. Keep it simple. As one participant observed, “This is a very simple surrender, made on a specific point, before God, in the presence of others to whom we’re accountable.”

We have discovered that each session should be guided, not so much by format or set questions, but by the guidance of the loving God at work in that particular session, as discussed above in this booklet. This is the indispensable Tradition Two principle at work in the accountability circle—a loving God actually expressing himself in our midst.

**Get to know the person beforehand.** This is the Akron City Hospital experience, where two or more men in recovery met the man in the bed every day during his week in detox. They related what they had done to recover and told the man in the bed what he had to do. *Identification and experience!* (See “Get-To-Know-You Questions,” above for questions being used in some circles.) Members of the existing circle contact the prospective surrenderer during the week(s) prior to the surrender session and get to know him in this way. This saves much time during the actual surrender session and prepares the way by gaining knowledge, trust, and support.

**Have the person formulate their surrender in writing beforehand.** Ask them to be as specific as possible. For example, “*I surrender unconditionally to God and this group my right to consciously look at porn . . . or, to contact my former \_\_\_\_\_.*” We’ve found it best to have the prospect write out *three* top surrenders he/she knows they need to make. In discussing these, the circle then decides which one takes the priority.

**Get together.** Meet privately. The leader should state the ground rules, and the session should open with voluntary spontaneous prayer(s). Continue in an attitude of prayerfulness in the light of God’s presence. Allow an open-ended period of time (three hours is not unreasonable.) Pagers and cell phones off. Those who continue to resist surrender, or who do not fit in for whatever reason, should be excluded. Those witnessing the surrender should have the

same willingness by asking themselves, “Where am I unsurrendered?”

**Absolute Honesty.** The only requirement, and that for everyone present, is *absolute honesty*. We tell the person there’s no agenda or expectation or judgement, but we do insist on honesty in everyone’s responses. There is no ritual to follow here. And there should be no expectation on their part or ours of any special happening. They need not even complete their surrender. Sometimes it takes more than one session to get to the bottom of things, even for an initial surrender. Don’t rush the questioning. Stop the questioning at any stage where there’s any reservation. Let the person think about whether they’re really ready. Let them count the cost. Better to go slow. Here’s where the accountability circle comes in; often, only continuing sessions reveal the direction one’s surrender should take. (See chapter 4, for example.)

As appropriate, we’ve found it helpful to begin some sessions by going around briefly stating where each of us is with lust or our own surrenders, especially helpful when we don’t know one another intimately. That honesty helps put the surrenderer at ease and puts us all on the same level before God. More than once this initial honesty has led the group in a direction unanticipated, where the focus shifts to someone else.

**Make clear what this is *not* about.** Make sure the surrenderer knows that this is not to be some new self-willed commitment or attempt at stopping. Also, this is not a “fix” or another Program technique that will solve the problem. It’s a *beginning*. It is *surrender to God* out of absolute powerlessness, giving up to God and those to whom we are accountable the right to continue. Trust in God, not the experience.

**Ask the Questions (suggested below).** This is the heart of the surrender session itself. Suit the questions to the person’s specific situation. Ask other questions that may arise, examining the person’s surrender statement, powerlessness, sincerity, willingness, etc. This is why it is valuable to have those present who know you and to whom you will continue to be accountable in implementing your surrender. That’s where the accountability comes in.

**1.** What are you surrendering? State it specifically.

As the surrender statement is examined by those present, reformulating it may become (and usually is) necessary.

Leader: Take your time here! This is the most important part of the examination, where typically most of the time is spent. Be crystal clear on focusing down to the person’s surrender priority. Initially, surrenders tend to be general or abstract, instead of specific and to the point. In one case, instead of “*I surrender my shame and guilt . . .*” it turned out that it had to be “*I surrender this woman and give her up unconditionally to God . . .*” In another

case, instead of “*I surrender my anger . . .*” it turned out to be “*I surrender unconditionally to God any and all abuse of my wife. . .*”)

2. Are you powerless over this (whatever you have just confessed to)?
3. Is there any chance you can control or limit this yourself? Why not?
4. Are you powerless over the appearance of this? That is, do you have any control over whether you’ll be tempted again? (You will be tempted again! It’s okay to be tempted, but we can be free not to *drink*. You will be tested, and that will enlarge your need and desire for God. Such unconditional surrender creates a surrender *attitude*.)
5. What has this defect cost you? Again, spend some time exploring this.
6. How can you live without it?
7. What will it cost you to give it up?
8. What is it going to take for you to recover from this?
9. Are you *willing* to stop? Why? Permanently? (The word “*permanently*” makes us think, as it should. Spend some time exploring this, honestly and in depth.)
10. Do you want to stop now? Why?
11. Will you make that specific surrender now? (The person then prays his surrender audibly in our presence, all on our knees, and others follow, as led.)
12. Spend time after the surrender “coming down.” Take time to stay together and be there for the person afterward. How are they doing? Don’t “play pretend.” Have they got clarity and direction? Where are they going from here? See how others present may also have been affected. *Honestly* assess what took place. (The person may wish a copy of this questionnaire.)
13. **Pass it on.** Learn from each surrender experience and exchange experience and helpful ideas with other surrender circles.



## 7

# Questions and Answers

Here are some frequently asked questions and answers, representing our growing and diverse experience to date:

**Q: How Can We Get Started?**

**A:** You get three people, who are your people, who know you, who have the fire for something more, and you just meet together. Read *Dr. Bob and the Good OldTimers*. Read this booklet. Keep in contact with us. Start talking together about it: When shall we meet? How can we make the time open-ended? Then just start with the first surrender and go from there.

Don't just wait or hope for it to happen. If you want and need one, you're the key. You take the action. If need be, start by finding one other person, (just like Bill and Bob had to do). Find someone who wants what you want, regardless of whether or not you like that person and regardless of status in the program. Get together and talk about it and see if you are together on this. Make your own initial surrenders. Keep the focus outward, toward others. Then, start meeting together and praying together for another person to join with you in this. Pray spontaneously and aloud from your own honest need. If God isn't in it, forget it. ***Without God, we can't; without us, he won't.***

Then start taking various actions to find potential prospects, such as talking to members in SA meetings who you sense may have special needs and may be open to surrender. "Knock on doors" to see if one will open. Begin communicating with others in existing circles and with those coordinating that communication. Read the material being passed around. Get involved in the larger experience. Don't let not having an accountability circle keep you from your own surrender.

**Q:** When you don't have anyone show up who is working a surrender, do you have a get-together anyway, and if so, what format do you use?

**A:** [The following represents what's being done in one area.] We don't always have someone doing a surrender. We have never had a no-show though. Other

circle members are talking to the person who is to do the surrender during the days leading up to the surrender. This is the information gathering process that is so important.

A new person has to be invited in by someone from the group, which is usually their sponsor. They will have given their First Step to their sponsor and also in a meeting that some of the circle members attend. Everyone in the circle may not have heard the surrenderer's First Step, so we rely on the ones who have heard it to lead the surrender and ask most of the questions.

There are nights when we just have a top plate check meeting for ourselves. This is very helpful and on-going. We will also pray and ask God to send us another. The main focus is on bringing in the next person. We have at least one top plate check meeting a month. A check meeting can turn into a surrender and vice versa. We have also had spontaneous check meetings for pressing concerns of an individual.

**Q: What About Prayer?**

**A:** All of these meetings start with one or more of us leading the group in a personal prayer. Not a memorized one. This seems to add a sense of closeness to the group. We also end this way. No Lord's prayer or serenity prayer, just one that a person says from their heart concerning the specific subject of the night.

**Q: How Much Time Do You Allow?**

**A:** We don't hurry the process. It takes as much time as is needed, and is open-ended. Very important. We've found we need to allow at least three hours. Groups have tried setting a time limit, and the tendency is for it to turn into just another SA meeting. On the other hand, after three hours it can start fading. Sometimes continuing at the next get-together helps bring clarity and focus. We learn through experience if we're willing to be led and have the courage to follow God's leading.

**Q: For those interested in being in your S&A circle, what do you tell them what's expected of them?**

**A:** It's up to each circle what their guidelines shall be. As of this writing, the following were some of the items being discussed by a circle which disbanded but is considering getting together again and adding another member:

- Absolute honesty.
- It is essential that a person be willing to do an unconditional surrender, since that's the initial object of getting together.
- Must want SA sexual sobriety and release from lust obsession.
- Commitment and accountability to each other and the circle must be their

- number one priority.
- Must be willing to stay through sessions until they come thorough to resolution.
  - Must defer to the group conscience, even if it questions your right to stay in the circle.
  - Must maintain one's personal surrender attitude to God and accountability to the circle regarding what becomes apparent to the circle about you.
  - Must be of one spirit with the others in the God-consciousness the circle requires.
  - Must put the needs of others above those of your own.
  - Must be willing to be of one spirit in prayer together, guided by God's leading and presence.
  - The circle cannot function with members continuing to be not sober or inhibiting lust or resentment recovery.
  - Each member must be as open and willing to see, turn, and make their next indicated surrender as the one who is up for surrender.
  - This is not for everybody. It's for those who yield to the authority of a loving God revealed through the circle and are willing to pay the price of continuing surrender and accountability—in community.
  - Absolute honesty.



## **Part III**

### **Working the Steps in the S&A Circle**

Various S&A circles are experimenting with different approaches to integrating surrender and accountability with newcomers and with continued Step work within the circle. Various approaches have been evolving independently of each other and are showing exceptional promise and progress over prior recovery experience. These are works in process and no attempt is made here to compare, evaluate, or finalize; they speak for themselves. They show that when this basic approach is seriously implemented, amazing things can happen, encouraging other areas to see how this might work for them. Personal contacts are provided at the end for any questions and comments..



## Working the Steps in the Circle (Phoenix, as of 05-22-03)

We believe in what is so eloquently stated in the Foreword to the 12 and 12 of Alcoholics Anonymous:

*A.A.'s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink, and can enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole.*

We'd like to share how this very promise is being fulfilled among us today regarding our obsession with sex and lust.

**How It Starts.** We take an active part in carrying this message of hope that the 12 Step program of recovery offers to those who suffer. To us, carrying the message of recovery is more than just going to meetings and saying to a newcomer "Keep coming back it works!" and hope they come back. It is actively speaking to a new person out on a 12 Step call, (or sometimes after a meeting,) and if they want what we have, seeing them through the Steps.

This recovery program, of taking the new person through the Steps as a group, begins when two or more people make a 12 Step call. They answer the new person's questions, share something of their own story, and describe the SA program. The SA 20-question pamphlet is also discussed to see if the person can identify. If they can, then they are asked to make an initial decision to begin the process of recovery. If they do not identify or do not want what we have, we will then refer them to other recovery programs. If they want what we have, then their road of recovery starts at that moment. We assign them a temporary sponsor, and ask them to start writing their 1st Step.

After the 12 Step call, we just extend this process of "two or more carrying the message" to its logical conclusion. Have the very people who had the initial contact with the newcomer see to it that the transition is made into group Step work. They call the new person on a continuing basis, disclose the locations of the regular meetings, and introduce them to other sober members.

A permanent sponsor is then assigned to replace the temporary. The permanent sponsor gets the newcomer a copy of the White Book and asks them to read and practice Step “Zero”. The sponsor will also guide the newcomer on the writing of the 1st Step. The program of recovery is laid out, and sobriety is explained and expected. The new person then goes to meetings, sobers up, and becomes acquainted with other members.

**Get To Know Them.** When they finish writing their 1st Step, they will then disclose it to their sponsor. If the person is staying sober, their sponsor will recommend that they join a Surrender & Accountability Group (henceforth: S&A group, or circle.) The S&A group will not replace going to the regular 1-hour SA meetings. The newcomer will usually join the same S&A circle that their sponsor belongs to. The new person may want to wait, or may not want to join an S&A group at all. This can only be suggested to them; it is between them and their individual sponsor.

If they do choose to join an S&A group, they will then be given the questionnaire to fill out (“Get To Know You Questions,” printed in another part of this booklet). The new person will then read their 1st Step, and the answers to the questionnaire, to the S&A circle. During this initial session, the group will learn much about the new person’s life and addiction. This way the S&A group can effectively discern the newcomer’s priorities, ask questions, and be of immediate help to them. Members of the group will also share their own stories, speaking openly about their experiences. This will put the new person at ease and let them know that they are not unique or alone.

This process also saves much valuable time. A person could go to regular one-hour meetings for months without disclosing this much information. Or, they could speak quite openly at these meetings and turn them into a confessional. They may develop an attitude that if they just talk about the problem; the problem will go away. This would bring them short-term relief, yet would never get to the root cause of their dilemma. During the open-ended sessions of an S&A circle, many glaring defects and risks to sobriety can be exposed and overcome during the first few weeks.

This also brings to light needed information which the newcomers may have otherwise kept to themselves. One of our members casually mentioned that she always tried to please her mother while at the same time resenting her. To us, this was a huge revelation; to her it was just a pattern in her life that had been going on for years. She later surrendered her constant need to seek approval from her mother.

We find that most newcomers just want to talk about their current overwhelming problems. They find it hard to see how talking about causes and conditions (such as their relationship to their parents) has anything to do with the pending crises of today. They may become impatient and want to divert the conversation to current turmoil. At this point the circle

steps in and gives needed direction. The circle gives support to the newcomer and assures them that this information gathering is a means to an end and quite necessary.

**Stop the Music.** We believe that with every new person, there is a “window of opportunity.” If they are given too much idle time, they may get attacked by deluded thinking and go back out. So something must be done to keep them focused until they can find their connection with God. The tradition in many recovery programs has always been to keep the new person busy. At many meetings around the world they are given service jobs such as making the coffee or setting up and taking down the meeting place. This is not exactly what we are talking about as a solution to idle time.

Most of us have come into SA from other 12 Step programs, therapy, or religious organizations and have often been kept very busy with different sorts of recovery activities. And for whatever reason, these activities couldn't solve our lust problem. It is a wonder how we ever found the time to act out sexually, but we did. So with us, going “back out” means going back to our same false recovery techniques and believing that this time... it will be different.

Another problem we face is that some new people view SA as a minor supplement to their own recovery program. They do not intend to surrender their lives to God. For if they had a true connection with God, why do they need SA? They usually just want another technique. There was one fellow who cancelled a 12 Step call with us because he had to go pick up his three-year AA chip. He didn't even see the irony of this decision. He considered himself perfectly sober in AA and just wanted to tone down his sexual activity. We never heard from him again.

We don't want a new person to just be busy, or only take half measures; we want to help them find recovery through an intimate connection with God. We would like to have them stop their frantic lives for a while, so that we may have a long deep look into their souls. We want to find out what they have been through, and how they think. We wish to know what their beliefs are and what their temptations are.

The group is just a mirror, and its goal is to show the new person just how their actions are not corresponding with their intentions. We will use their own stories to show them how they have lost the power of choice concerning lust. We want to drive home the point that, on their own, they are powerless to stop their lust addiction.

We ask them to make a decision to find God, and to forgo their deluded lives for a time, to see why all their recovery activities are not working. We also wish to give them the immediate hope, that there is a solution, and that they are on the right path. We share our personal recovery testimonies freely and we are very open about how we have lost the obsession to lust. We also

share our own current struggles and temptations to let the new person know that we are human and that God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

This is the main reason for them starting on something concrete, such as writing out their 1st Step right after the 12 Step call we made with them. This is also why staying sober is so important, because acting out—and acting in—only adds to their delusion that they may someday control and enjoy their addiction.

We have found that having the new person give their 1st Step, as well as the answers to the “Get To Know You” questionnaire, to their S&A group allows other sober members to truly start to know them. When this initial three-hour S&A meeting is finished, there will be a number of people the new person can call for help. And the fellow members of their S&A group can offer practical solutions. This is because they have heard the newcomer’s story and can often see repeating patterns that cause injury. They know much about the new person’s life, and what is likely to trigger another sexual spree. Most importantly, the group usually gets a sense of what is initially blocking out the sunlight of the Spirit, that “top plate” which must be surrendered.

**The First Surrender.** This often determines if a person stays in the circle, or if they leave. This specific surrender tells us just how serious a person is about recovery. We have found that many people would rather confess than change. Remember, when it comes to vice, it’s easier to ask for forgiveness, than it is to ask for permission.

After the new person has disclosed their 1st Step to the group, we then lead them directly into the specific 2-3rd Step surrender process. The 2nd Step involves the questioning, and the 3rd Step is the action of the decision, which is a prayer. We have found that the support of the group, in praying with—and for—the new person, is essential.

The newcomer is asked to write down the top three items they feel are getting in between them and a closer relationship with God. Then we ask questions on each of the items, and then the group determines which is the priority. It’s not that the other two items aren’t valid, and won’t come up later; we just start with what is most pressing. The reason we do this is because the group has a better sense of what is a priority than the newcomer.

After we have decided on the top plate issue, we spend a few hours asking questions and telling the person just how we can relate to their problem. There is quite often someone in the group who has gone through the very same thing. This is very helpful for the new person, for now they sense that we can help them. The program of recovery takes root here, for we are not talking in theory, but in real life events.

What usually happens is this; the original top plate dilemma is changed to something different, yet related. For instance, we had one man

come into our group and his top plate was “Driving angry.” He wanted to be able to drive his car in traffic without getting mad at other drivers. Boy, could we relate to this one! So we talked about this for a long time and somewhere during the discussion, the focus turned towards his anger towards his father.

This absolutely amazed him, for his dad had passed away a few years back and he thought all of that emotion was behind him. Apparently it wasn't. Whenever he thought about being angry with his dad, he felt guilty, so naturally he turned the anger elsewhere. This was a very emotional surrender for everyone in the room. All of us took turns talking openly about our relationships with our fathers. Other members of the group had to examine where they were today, and this brought forth new surrenders in subsequent weeks. Yet the focus was not taken off the new person.

So we asked him to make a decision, would he surrender to God his right to resent his dad or not. Either he would or he wouldn't, the time to decide was now. Our friend had carried around this “justified resentment” for years and had been convinced of its validity. Now he was being asked to walk away from this anger, and give the power it had over him to God. Together we looked at just what this resentment had cost him.

He had a very real problem with anger, and it seemed to stem from this core resentment towards his dad. This affected almost every area of his life: his wife and children, his workplace, his inability to be at peace with himself, his driving, and most of all his need to escape through sexual lust. And if his sexual addiction wasn't stopped, he could lose everything.

Our man decided to surrender this resentment to God, before the group. We all got on our knees and the new person said a prayer out loud. He asked God to remove his anger towards his father. He asked God to forgive his father for past harms. He continued to say everything he needed to say, for this was between him and God, we were just witnesses.

After he finished, everyone else prayed for this man, and also asked for this resentment to be removed. Then, as we always do, we asked God to send us another, so we may show them this joy of recovery that we have found. Then we got up, hugged and enjoyed this moment of true discovery and fellowship in the Spirit.

This is what it is and it's wonderful, but we are also an accountability group. If the surrender is not followed up by concrete actions, a person can believe that everything will just be surrendered and wait. This is why, during the questioning process, solutions are presented. For example, we asked our new person to keep talking to us about where he was his father. It was also suggested that he could start speaking to his father directly, in the spirit of forgiveness.

**Follow-up.** At this point we have the person come back the next week for a follow-up to their surrender. There is often quite a bit of emotion after a surrender, so contact with other group members during the week is important. The circle is sure to stay in close contact with the new person to see how they are getting along. And if they need to talk, we lend them an ear.

We always start the next S&A meeting with the follow-up of the person who did a surrender the week before. If the person has surrendered, it will be apparent to all involved. When our man came back the next week, he no longer had the constant scowl on his face. He looked quite refreshed and happy. God had made His presence known!

What a joy it is to witness the Spiritual beginnings of a newcomer. To see light in their eyes and calmness in their nature, this is a wonderful experience. This is the point where they become convinced enough to take Step 3.

So at the end of this follow-up S&A session, they will again get on their knees with the group to ask God to direct all of their will and all of their life. The 3rd Step prayer makes sense now, for they have experienced it first-hand. After this, we ask them to start writing out their 4th Step under the guidance of their sponsor.

**Group Step Work.** This is a continuance of a process that begins when a person gives their 1st Step to the S&A circle. Having newcomers give their 1st Step at a meeting has long been a tradition in many SA groups. We have just extended this process. We have a person take the rest of the Steps in an S&A circle setting as well. We have found that having a sponsor and a small (3- to 12- person) S&A circle deepens recovery.

The S&A circle meets separately from the regular 1-hour meetings. These sessions do not compete with the regular meetings; they complement them. We liken our gatherings to an expansion of the sponsor-sponsee relationship. When a sponsor hears a 5th Step from a person, they do not hear it at a regular SA meeting. They hear the admission in private, at a place where there are no disturbances or time restraints. This event is usually solemn and prayerful, with trust being an important factor. If the two participants chose to invite others to this discussion, that is their concern.

This is the very type of atmosphere we have created in our S&A circle. This emotionally safe environment is very conducive to taking the Steps. This allows for transparent honesty, which is necessary for recovery. Trust in the group is very important and is not taken lightly. We cannot have someone we don't know very well just stopping by to "check in." This is why this is not open to everyone.

With few exceptions, sponsors bring the people they sponsor into the circle. Group Step work is discussed ahead of time and, if the sponsee

agrees, the process will begin. The individual sponsor will take a person through the Steps in conjunction with the circle. For example, the sponsor will hear the entire 5th step, and then only the core issues of the Step will be brought into the S&A circle for insight and clarity.

After the 1st Step what follows is the 2nd-3rd Step surrender process, as is described in other related material. This 3rd Step surrender process entails the focusing down of what initially needs to be surrendered to God, the “top plate.” This culminates in making a 3rd Step decision to turn the will and life over to the care of God. We have found that this process takes usually about 1-3 sessions, depending on the person and their ability to be honest.

After their surrender to God before the group, the newcomer will begin their 4th Step under the guidance of their individual sponsor. Then the group Step work continues in Steps 5-8. Only the most glaring defects of the 4th Step are brought into the group 5th Step. This continues with the discussion and removal of the deepest and most painful shortcomings in Steps 6-7. After that, the 8th Step list is brought before the group. The primary amends and any reservations over making them are discussed. Then insight is given as to the best way each amends would be carried out.

**Group Sponsorship.** What is unfolding is a two-part process: first it brings the group into the Step work of the individual, and secondly it focuses lives down to specific details. Bringing the group into the Step work adds valuable experience and insight to the process. With more people involved, the odds are better that the truth will be shown.

And this also takes pressure off of the sponsor, who may feel they have to have an answer for every problem, no matter how big. With the amount of sickness and secrecy of our sexual problems, this can be a daunting challenge for any sponsor. Thus, what we end up with is “group sponsorship,” a small number of surrendered and recovering people who take an individual through the Steps. And what flows out of this type of intimate fellowship is the open confession of one’s shortcomings and the bearing of one another’s burdens.

The reason we focus on the details is because we addicts are great at taking pledges (Step 3), and quite often, we never follow through with our promises. We want the mountaintop experience, the flash of lightning; we want to be fixed. It becomes more difficult when we speak of letting go of specific fears, resentments, and selfishness. How do we pay back money and time stolen from an employer? Or how do we make amends to our spouse? How can we forgive our abusers? These are difficult issues that need the focus of a circle, under God, to gain clarity.

**Surrender Through the Steps.** Our group Step work meeting is held at a location where there are no disturbances and no time restraints. These sessions are open-ended, for we feel the process must not feel rushed. This allows enough time for specific details to be touched upon and discerned. All of our gatherings are begun with someone saying a prayer from their heart, not a memorized one. Then this quiet, meditative attitude is maintained throughout the afternoon and brought to a close in the same fashion.

At one of our gathering we heard the 5th Step of one of our members. There were four of us present, including the sponsor and the person giving his Step. The goal of the group 5th Step was to focus on the most glaring resentments and fears that had come out of the earlier sessions with his sponsor. Thus, we did not plan to hear the entire 5th Step, and concentrated only on the main driving forces behind his addiction.

The afternoon went well and as planned. We spent much of the time talking about this man's intense resentment towards his mother. We could see how this primary resentment had manifested itself in many other areas of his life. Some of these areas included his current pending divorce from his second wife, his teenage son who lives across the ocean, his estranged and angry first wife, and his mistrust of female coworkers. The manifestation into his sexual addiction goes without saying.

This resentment was so large, and the manifestations so deep, that it would have been almost unfair for one person, (the sponsor, for example) to take it on himself. Since the other men had already witnessed this mans 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Steps, and since he was involved in their accountability circle, they could be a part of this confidential disclosure.

We found that others in the circle added needed experience and insight to the process. They shared information about their own relationships with their mothers. They had compassion for their friend. They helped him to see where he was at fault for blaming his mother for his wrecked life. They spoke of how she might be a sick person who needed love and compassion. This was all done without pointing a finger of shame.

In following sessions we have had individuals take Steps 6-7. For these gatherings we had an average of four to six people. Although some of the members had not heard the earlier 5th Steps, they were in the same S&A circle. This way they could fit in with a sense of ease that only comrades have known.

During these Step 6 discussions, there was much talk concerning forgiveness for shame-based folks such as we. Since our particular dilemma goes to the core of our being, it is essential that God must go there as well. There can be no dark unforgiven caverns in our minds or souls, places where the sunlight of the Spirit is not allowed to shine. Thus our focus came to be, "The forgiveness of our most unforgivable sins." Every other defect of our past lives would pale compared to this disclosure and the healing of

forgiveness. If we can continue to truly know this most wonderful experience, we will indeed be blessed beyond measure.

The afternoons really flowed when members who had been through the Steps shared their experience. They told of how their deepest, darkest faults had been dismissed. What once used to be the painful recollection of a past tragic episode, was now something to be looked upon with tears of gratitude. Having been released from their despair and guilt, members could then see how the grave events of their past could be allowed to take on a new purpose. Grace and love had replaced hurt and darkness.

The tears could be seen in the eyes of the members as they recounted in detail their past events, and spoke of how God, in His infinite wisdom, saw fit to forgive them. And it was made very clear that this same gift was right there for anyone who humbly asked for it, even for those who were about to take Step 7. The testimony of a pardoned man is very powerful. So the others heeded the call and took the Step, on their knees with their fellows, before God.

**What About the Professional Connection?** We recommended that if members are dealing with professionals or spiritual advisors on the side, they should speak with them in conjunction with our group Step work, but not in place of it. From our experience, we see that only speaking to the professional community doesn't entirely finish the job. It doesn't offer the same promise as this deeper fellowship of the Spirit. And because the past experience was not used to help others, it was self-centered and lacking.

When this process did not keep us sober, the fault was usually ours, for we never entirely opened up about our worst or most embarrassing moments. We have seen that confession to only one individual, and that to someone who really doesn't know us and to whom we are not continually accountable, can be not only very clever and dishonest but shaped according to our own self-interest.

The fellow, who took Steps 5,6 and 7, had a therapist and a spiritual advisor with whom he confided. Still, for whatever reason, it just didn't fill the vacuum left from years of sexual acting out. He felt like an outsider in their world, just someone briefly spending time with them while hoping for a miracle. We have found that having the common bond of companions who were also recovering from the same malady as ours becomes immensely vital.

We also feel that, as Sexaholics, we must go further than most people. For us, a backroom confession, away from the people we associate with or are accountable to, is not enough. We need to be able to speak openly and freely about our worst defects so that we may use these experiences to help others. If we only confide with a pastor, therapist, or sponsor, we are apt to look at the past events as something to be kept hidden. The events themselves are locked away in an upper, dusty closet. Even if we know we

are forgiven, we are still being somewhat selfish for hanging on to these experiences and not letting their healing be used to glorify God in helping others.

We are not saying past defects should be proclaimed from the rooftops, just at small intimate recovery meetings. Newcomers will pay attention to what you say, and they will notice the gratitude in your voice. They will wish to know how you got free of the pain and guilt this event had caused. Thus, this openness is most effective in group Step work, during which you can help someone feel safe and less unique by sharing your story. This will also help them open up about themselves, which is key to their recovery.

**Group Eighth Step.** We have also had individuals take their 8th Step within the circle. We spend most of the time going over their primary amends, such as to spouses, parents, siblings, organized religion, and employers. Every major amends is talked about in detail with the main question being asked: Have you harmed or wronged this person? If so the circle then helps clarify and give support for all the amends discussed.

In some cases it is felt that a direct amends would cause further harm to the people involved. We sometimes recommend to the individual that a letter be written stating where the member was at fault. This letter would be written and then given to the circle for possible editing before sending. Again this is because the group has better insight than the individual; and this insight comes to be depended upon more and more as we continue on our personal journey of recovery together.

Methods on how to approach people on the 8th Step list are given. As with one man's father, this relationship had been distant and emotionally troubled for years. Our man was at fault for ignoring his dad and being consumed with his own life. (His father's part in this was irrelevant.) Thus our man could begin this amends immediately by actively pursuing a closer personal relationship with his dad.

The group suggested that our friend approach his father with a willingness to spend time conversing with him. Our man could start the conversation by asking about his father's childhood. What was it like growing up in the Depression? What does he miss from the old days? These types of questions would get his dad to open up emotionally. And since his father put a lot of importance into the family farm, it could be an opportunity for the passing on of their family history, which most fathers want to share with their children.

The amends was to correct a broken relationship, to try to get inside his father's past and see what motivated him. This way he could have compassion for him for past harms. If his dad didn't open up, he could try something else. If he did open up, it would be the start of a closer personal relationship, which all children value. If he approached his

entire family with this attitude of patience and understanding, years of isolation could melt away.

One of our fellow's stories includes how he made an amends to his father by having his dad get out his old war pictures. He asked questions about what it was like to be in combat on the front lines. For the first time he heard about some of the horrors of war his father had witnessed. After this, the fellow realized why his father had been so emotionally disconnected.

Our man knew that it was up to him to continue to open up this relationship. So he stopped waiting for his dad to make the first move and started to contact his dad more frequently. He even ended up writing a song in tribute to a friend of his dad's who was killed in battle. This touched his father deeply.

After the 8th Step has been completed, the 9th Step amends are made in a resolute manner, one at a time. Members are encouraged to keep the circle updated as to the progress of this Step. If an amends is especially troubling, the impediment could be brought before the circle for further direction. Many of our core amends will be made over our lifetime, yet we do not delay or assume that simply staying sober will make it all better. We are open to what acts of kindness we may be asked to take. With the overall motive being one of love and service.

We pay attention to the opportunities we are given at this moment, for we realize the chance may not come again. We wish to be real and face life on life's terms. This may be difficult, yet sometimes the joy in healing a past harm is immeasurable. And sharing this together in the circle is unbelievably rewarding.

**Staying Focused.** During these discussions we read from different references for clarification and inspiration on specific issues. Some of these references include, the White Book of Sexaholics Anonymous, the Big Book and the 12 and 12 of Alcoholics Anonymous, The Bible, and other sources of inspiration depending on the person and their background.

We do not turn the session into a "Big Book study;" rather, we go to source material as an outflow of the conversation taking place. This way we can apply passages to specific life instances instead of discussing general philosophy. This helps us to focus on the hard details instead of drifting away into glittering generalities.

Meeting as a group to have someone take a Step is now our focus. We in the 12-Step movement are great at attending Step meetings and talking about the Steps. We love to fill out lengthy workbooks and listen to "How to work the 12-Steps" tapes. Our circle Step program is different, but not radically so; *instead of meeting as a group to talk about the Steps; we meet to actually experience the Steps, one person at a time.*

When we acted out, we didn't sit around and just talk about acting out; we physically acted out. So why would recovery within the fellowship be any different? We must take the Steps—that is, experience them together—instead of just spending time discussing “Step work.” We meet regularly anyway, so why not use this time to have members take the Steps within their own circle? This can happen if a circle becomes committed to recovery. We feel that the priority of the S&A circle is to have its members “*Surrender through the Steps.*” Then they will have a message that they can carry.

It is very tempting to let top plate issues of other members creep in and take over the conversation during a circle Step meeting. This would be great for the individual with the top plate, but if we allowed this, no one would get through the Steps. (It is amazing how the Steps solve many initial top plate issues.) The fact is, there is always someone who has a burning desire. If this is our only focus, then our meetings will just turn into another group therapy session. The priority has to be for a new person to get through the Steps with the circle.

We do not have a new person every week, so there is time set aside for members to get current with their surrenders. Besides, the circle can also hold special impromptu check meetings for a member with a pressing dilemma.

Since the members of the circle speak to each other and their individual sponsors throughout the week, there are few surprises. We know each other's concerns and it just doesn't take as long to get to the solution because the process is in place. (A note of caution about further surrenders: It is very tempting for the circle to get too comfortable with its own members and stop bringing in newcomers, this can be dangerously selfish.)

We have found that new people are the lifeblood of the circle. For us, taking a person through the Steps is a pleasure, and the process only adds to the understanding of ourselves. (A perfect combination!) This exposure to new people and different backgrounds only adds to our experience, and this allows us to more of service to the next person who reaches out for help. Most of all, this gets us out of our selfishness. Unless we can become less concerned with ourselves, there is little hope for recovery.

**Continuance.** By the time the new person has taken the Steps, they will be a core part of the circle, adding their experience and strength for the benefit of others. They will be active in sponsorship and other 12-Step work. Continued Step 10 inventory will become a way of life, as will deeper surrenders and further accountability. At some point they may want to break out and form their own S&A group. This will work as long as the basic requirements are met. These requirements are absolute honesty, open-mindedness and a willingness to go to any lengths for victory over lust.

The S&A circle will continue on with its work of further top plate surrenders and of carrying the message of recovery to others. The individual

members will also continue deeper spiritual discoveries through Step 11. This Step may be done individually, though we find it best to incorporate one's family or members of the circle into this daily devotion. We also have found that the atmosphere of the surrender circle calls for much prayer and quiet time. Some of our most cherished moments have been found while praying together.

In this recovery process we feel that taking a person through the Steps in a circle of recovered members fulfills the true spirit of Step 12. This experience is uplifting and joyful. A deep sense of purpose is found when contemplating the extent of the problem of sexual lust in our world today. May we continue to offer this hope that we have found to those who still suffer, and may we never forget where we came from, and just how far God has brought us.

Contact Person: Craig M.  
Telephone: 602-788-1011  
E-mail: [craigm805@msn.com](mailto:craigm805@msn.com)



## Appendix 1

### Stages of Lust Recovery (Personal)

Recorded in Cranford, NJ, November 6, 1999. Published in the December 1999 *ESSAY* as Part One of “A New Look at Lust Recovery” and now edited and updated. (Original tape available from Glenn K Audio Tapes.)

[In my 1999 inventory I noted something like twelve stages. I had a sneaking hunch there'd always be more, but had no idea what it might be. I'm just beginning to experience stage thirteen, and I can't believe the wonder of it all. What an amazing grace! So let me reiterate those first twelve, as related in 1999, and then bring it up to date. In reading through this again, I am struck by the fact that there was no more progress in victory over my lust than there was corresponding progress in victory over my other defects, the result of patient and persistent work in the Steps.]

Roy K.

For me to talk about the stages of my lust recovery is to lead with my weakness. My most recent lust experience happened on the airplane coming in. One of the flight attendants would have been someone I was attracted to in the early years. When I saw her I felt a pull. I didn't want to drink, but I felt a pull which got my attention, unusually so as it goes today. And as I relate going through the stages of my recovery, I'll be trying to figure out where this experience fits, because I've got to be honest with you and I want to take you with me on this journey. And you know as well as I that I can't do it alone. For me to get farther in my recovery, I need others. It's never been any other way. That's why I need a deeper fellowship of people who want what I want.

What I'm saying is that there have been stages of lust recovery for *me*. If you identify fine, but look at your own stages of lust recovery as I share mine, for this is really a dialogue, an experiment. Because what we're after in this great endeavor in SA is absolute honesty. In this program, for true lust recovery, if we can't get honest in the “thoughts and intents of the heart,” it won't be enough. So let's try our best, together.

**One.** The first stage was, **I discovered the presence and power of lust.** For me, that happened once I got sexually sober in AA. Some of us may discover the power of lust while still not sober. I stopped acting out and was doing substitute teaching when I entered recovery. Every skirt on campus— I discovered a force in me I couldn't control. I had never recognized lust before. Why? Because when I took a hit off of a trigger, I'd eventually act out. So lust never got my attention. But it sure did once I wanted sobriety.

**Two. I started trying to limit and control lust.** I'm sure most everyone here identifies with that. [Audience reaction indicates they agree].

**Three. I discovered I could not eliminate lust.** It wouldn't go away. I began to be bothered by that; it got my attention. But I still didn't do much about it until after I slipped after a year and a half.

**Four.** After discovering I couldn't eliminate lust, **I started surrendering it.** How we surrender I'm not sure is that important. But we start trying to stop lusting.

**Five. The lust problem appears to get better.** Bouts with lust are less often and less intense. Anyone identify here? [audience identifies]. If not, isn't that what you're in this program for—"to stop lusting"? [Tradition Three]

**Six. I begin to discover lust in different forms.** With me, one of the first other forms I discovered was the presence of lust in my marriage bed. After that terrible separation, when my wife took me back and we had sex for the first time, and when she was so accepting of my disclosure, I discovered something absolutely new: I had *sex* for the very first time in my entire life. A spiritual connection, a oneness coming out of love. There's no way I can describe the difference. It's like the difference between mere ecstatic sensation and real love; they're poles apart, in different universes. For the first time, I did not have a memory, a picture, or fantasy juicing up the sexual system to maintain arousal. Experiencing the reality of sex was so meaningful an experience that putting all the other lifetime sex together, including the most ecstatic, wouldn't hold a candle to this one solitary experience. It was different, real. And it needed no repetition. But that was a one-time experience; it didn't last. I discovered I couldn't maintain arousal without conjuring up lust. And I'm sure you've read in the White Book of that long slow process I had to go through to overcome that (a year of abstinence and more work on the Steps), one of the most marvelous breakthroughs in my lust recovery.

A word of caution: Never tell your spouse what I just told you. They may never be able to overcome that thought you've planted in their minds when

you're having sex with them. It's *your* problem; don't make it theirs. Tell it to sponsor, group, and God. It's too much to expect of a woman to erase that from her mind, even if you've overcome that problem.

Another form in which lust showed up was erotic images in dreams. Sex is optional, even in dreams. We can learn the same surrender in our dreams that we can in the waking state. But it takes work. In this stage I came to very serious surrender when it came to both waking and dream lust. *"I ask that you keep me sober from every lust in any form, active or passive, conscious or subconscious."* That was my daily prayer.

In Southern California, when sex in dreams comes up for a member, we suggest tying in with a team of a few people who are willing to be called at any hour of the night. The member calls as soon as they have the dream and are aware of it, telling explicitly what it was, bringing it to the light. By doing this, they can intervene earlier and earlier on subsequent dreams. And this tells us where we really are with lust. Pretty soon, they're making a surrender as soon as the image hits in their dream, and lust is nipped in the bud. Try it. This works, believe me. If it doesn't work, something's wrong, and more work is indicated for your waking program. Continued erotic or sexual dreams is telling us, "Stop, Look, and Listen!" Something's going on in your waking life that needs fixing.

Sex and lust in dreams is probably the best-kept secret in SA—dishonesty. It doesn't have to be. We need to share more about this one-on-one and in groups and in our *Essay* newsletter and other writings. Let it tell us our real condition and how absolutely powerless we really are with lust, and let it drive us to finding what our lust was really looking for. I could never have victory over lust in dreams without His presence.

Another form of lust I discovered was the *mis*-connection. This is *spiritual* misconnection, and may have nothing to do with sex or lust as commonly perceived. Some of our members relate more to romance/relationship addiction than to lust, whether in or out of marriage. Well, I think the *mis*-connection is at the very heart of our spiritual illness. *"'Connect with me and make me whole,' we cried with outstretched arms."* For me, it's another form of lust. And if we had a show of hands here on stage Six, we'd find many other forms lust can take, which lead us to a deeper stage of surrender and reliance on the presence, love, and power of God.

**Seven. Deeper surrender.** Once I discovered these other forms and strategies of lust *progressively*, once I was able to see, then I came to deeper surrender. This legitimate use of the word "progressive" is the very process of discovery we've been talking about in these various stages. I've got to keep progressing; there's no fulfillment of the promise otherwise. The *misuse* of our expression "progressive victory over lust" is when we confuse it with our encounter in the moment of temptation, seeing the image in the corner of our

eye, for example. In that instant, there is no such thing as progressive victory. We either drink or don't drink. Think about it. Man, can we ever let our "progressive victory" wording cover a multitude of sins! (See Appendix 2, "The Luster's Fear of Dying.")

**Eight.** So, after deeper surrender what did I find? It's all gone? Never tempted? [audience reaction] Nooo! **Something is still there.**

Some of us experience some of these progressive stages of lust recovery we've been describing above and think that's all there is, without ever getting better, or even wanting to. That's what I did. Tempted to lust and then surrender; lust and surrender; lust and surrender . . . And then we wonder why we're still having erotic and sexual dreams! We get stuck on our own almighty length of technical sobriety and current degree of "surrender."

There are those with many years of sobriety who work a good program—confessing lust, calling during sexual dreams at all hours, writing inventories, working with others, service, you name it. Yet they're stuck at one stage of lust recovery and begin to see they're unhappy and unfulfilled, and they know it. *Something's still there*, and it dawns on them that they're really not free. Not free not to lust.

Later in the talk we'll be looking at what was happening in Akron and Cleveland in the late 1930s, to discover the kind of surrender hopeless drunks were making, where they *stopped drinking*. If we in SA can't *stop drinking*, then this Twelve Step spiritual program doesn't work for us, and we should stop saying that it does and close the doors. I'm here to challenge you to believe that there's something beyond even this stage, beyond what we might settle for as "successful" recovery. It's a promised land we could never have imagined, but it's actually becoming true in our experience.

**Nine.** When I got to this place of seeing something was still there and that maybe there was a deeper surrender and deeper victory waiting for me, one day I just got tired enough of it to do a deeper Six and Seven on it: "Lord, I don't want *any* of this!" In that prayer I was thinking, "I don't want any of these *temptations*." I didn't get what I asked for, but I got what I needed. What I really needed was that I don't want any of the FEAR when it hits, or subterfuge, or taking a look to see if it's something I shouldn't be looking at—the bloody uncomfortableness of it all! That got tiresome after awhile—and too threatening. *Fear-driven sobriety is doomed to failure. We can be free of the fear of lust!*

Don't settle for less. I wanted more, so I did a deeper Third and Seventh on it. I asked for more. And that brought me to my ninth stage. **Not having to take the first look.** Can you believe that? Yes!

Does that mean that I never took the first look after that? What do you think? Noooo [laughter]. But the joy of that breakthrough—not having to

take the first glance—pulled me on. “*A man’s reach must exceed his grasp/ or what’s a Heaven for?*” (Robert Browning). I had to have more. And you know what? We really can have it, or the promise of this Program is a lie. There’s incredible hope here—if we can just be absolutely honest about where we really are, today, right now, with our lust, and believe in the 1935 miracle. Believe in God!

**It’s Not Wrong to be Temptable or Tempted.** I want to digress to a very important subject. *Temptation to lust doesn’t have to be a fearful or drudge experience; because it can bring great joy.* That’s our “Joy Response,” isn’t it? (*Recovery Continues*, p.38) Most of us are religious people in this program or come from a religious background, like I did. Somehow, many of us feel it was wrong to be tempted, or that we shouldn’t be tempted any more. I don’t know about you; I can only speak for myself, but man, I felt I should never be tempted any more, since I’d turned my life over to God. I discovered that’s not true. It’s not wrong to be *tempted*. What made me *feel* like it was wrong was that in that temptation *I was really drinking*, even though it was “only” teeny-weenie slightly, conning myself.

Today it’s okay for me to be tempted by the images, by whatever it is out there or in here. *Why* is it okay? Because I have a remedy today, and that remedy is not me. If that remedy were my strength or my religious conviction or the strength of my Program or endeavors, you know where I’d be. But guys, I don’t have it. I’m 23 years sober today [1999] in stage after stage of victory over lust, but I still do not have it. But I’ll tell you what I do have. There’s the shield of his Presence within that shields me from my lust, both from within and without. Ask for something better and do a deeper surrender. “*Expect great things from God.*”

This kind of surrender doesn’t mean we’re never going to be tempted, does it? We’re going to be; that’s the glory of God—the fact that I was tempted yesterday on the plane and made the saving Connection. I don’t want the pill that will protect me from being tempted; I want to be alive and sexual as a normal human being. I’m more sexual now in my abstinence and victory over lust than I ever was in my acting out. I *love* women! I’m even beginning to love my wife a little bit [laughter]. The fear of woman is almost gone!

Along with entering deeper stages of lust recovery, we should be experiencing stirrings of healthy natural sexuality. Don’t be afraid of it. Our sexuality is God-given, not our diseased perversion of sex, which was subverted so long by our lust and sex addiction. So *if we’re recovering from lust*, we should also be recovering from our perverted sexuality into the healthy progressive awakening of our real sexuality and mature maleness, manhood, husbandhood, and fatherhood, our femaleness, womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood. This is the promise of our recovery; don’t settle for anything less! But are you willing to pay the price?

**The danger in discussing the stages of lust recovery is we can let it become more striving in the flesh,** ratcheting up our resolve all the more in trying. Piling on more “thou shalt nots.” Don’t let yourself get into that mode; it’s like the old “salvation by works” instead of grace. It’s miserable!

**Ten.** If you think stage Nine is impossible—not having to take that first look—wait till you hear what’s coming up next. When you heard me talk in those early years, I’d be saying something like this: “Well, I’m tempted, and I wanted to drink today, but I didn’t have to drink, and that’s good enough for me if I die and go right now.” And I meant it; that’s all I had, and it was marvelous. To be tempted, to know it’s my drink out there beckoning, but not having to take that first sip-drink. Not only good enough, it’s a miracle! But that’s not good enough for me today. Because lust recovery can be not only not *having* to take the first drink, **it’s not wanting to take the first drink.** Real freedom. Not freedom from being tempted or being temptable, but freedom from *wanting* to drink or fantasize. This is crossing over into the Promised Land. [In editing this, I changed “look” to “drink” three times in the last four sentences, indicating there can be healing in the looking too. Maybe this is the delayed adolescence we talk about sometimes.]

I’ll tell you what that takes. If I get to the place where I don’t *want* to take the first drink, that means I have experienced something better. I don’t know about you, but the Program itself can’t do that for me. It merely gives us the tools. What gives this new freedom to me is what one of my spiritual sponsors said, “*the expulsive power of a new affection.*” A real affection, the love of God. And all I knew and believed *about* the love of God didn’t help me one single bit. But when I began to ask and make the daily surrender—“*I don’t want to take that first drink and I ask you to keep me sober from wanting or taking it today. And I ask that you give me what my lust was really looking for*”—that’s when I discovered the love and power of God and impossible joy. And that’s my prayer today: “*I want to know You more.*” And knowing him more for me comes through the temptations! The fear and uncomfortableness go! How incredible.

**Eleven.** And that’s the next stage in my lust recovery—**finding what my lust is really looking for.** Look at it logically: How could *recovery* from lust as you and I know it today be possible without finding what it was really looking for? Isn’t finding that what gives us the freedom and joy—fulfillment? Isn’t that what pulls us into that next stage? But unless we get honest in our groups and meetings and in ourselves, as to where we are *not*, we’re never going to get any further. Stuck in No Man’s Land.

My lust heart, my sexaholic heart, was crying out for the connection with Woman, “*I need you, I want you. . .*” The cultural air is full of these songs and images, yet the desire and lack and emptiness are still there. The songs

are testimony to our collective LACK, our unfulfillment. You know what I do today? I want Him, and I say so, *“I want You. Come in. I come to you.”* Right while being tempted! Yes! And He comes in and takes it, and I’m not only free—in that very temptation!—I’ve Connected with my very own Source. [Just dawned on me how this stage eleven relates to Step Eleven!]

**Twelve.** That prayer [above] is a joy for me today, and I’m just beginning to taste a little bit of stage Eleven. Practically nothing on stage Twelve. And I don’t even know for sure what Twelve is, because I’m not there yet. But so far it’s going something like this: **Instead of withdrawing in fear, to look her in the eyes and take her *in*, giving outward in love.**

There she is, walking down the street, and my brain knows it’s trigger material. I want to get to the place where, instead of being in fear—I can’t look; it’s wrong to look; I’m not gonna look; I’ll get into the darkness; I’m gonna lose God (all the while stealing a microsecond glance)—I’ll look her in the eyes and take her *in*. Not the snatch or steal or sip or the will-powered turn-away, but she’s a human being in the image of God. Look her in the eyes, smile, and say, “Hi, how are you?” And *give out* in love. I don’t have that. I’m not that person. But *“Perfect love casts out fear.”* I can only do that with the love of God. And I want his love shed abroad in my heart.

[The following was added January 5, 2004: Two weeks ago, on an airliner, I asked this gorgeous flight attendant to hand me my jacket. “It’ll cost you!” she said, smiling mischievously, and handing me my jacket. NOW THAT was a temptation! But I was okay, and it was so good to take her into my heart in prayer, sensing she was in for trouble in her life. On leaving the aircraft, I stopped, made direct eye contact with her and said kindly, “I want you to have a good life. And don’t settle for the substitutes. Promise?” She was taken aback, but then said, “I promise. Thank you.” And I sensed she felt the truth. What a joyous experience! I left floating on air and impossibly happy and free, thanking God.]

**Thirteen—Detoxification of the Memories and More** (added Nov. 2002).

This new stage of lust recovery is so wonderful, I can hardly believe it. For years I’ve been blessed with being released from the obsession. When those toxic memories come up, I’ve been able to surrender them to the cleansing presence of the One who bears my lust or resentment and takes them on himself. This was enough, and more than enough. So toxic memory still hit once in awhile. So what? The Remedy was there, and I didn’t have to drink (as described in stages Ten and Eleven, above). However, I’ve recently discovered the incredible joy that there’s more.

Erotic memories or traumas are not just memories; *they're events that become part of us*. That's what gives them such power; they're burned into our being. Who among us doesn't feel the triple-whammy when one hits? And this is where many fall. Well, if the impossible recovery from the obsession is real, why not recovery from these very events which are still part of us? I'm discovering there is deep healing here! Thanks be to God.

A spiritual helper led me through this type of experience initially with a childhood incident (the threat of amputation for thumb sucking). Once I experienced that inner healing, I began applying it to memories of affairs and prostitutes. Let me relate the first of these, and you'll get the idea. Of course, I'll have to be somewhat explicit to honestly describe what happened, both in terms of the encounter with the woman and with my higher power.

During my morning quiet time of meditation it came to me that the following recurring toxic memory was to be next on my list for healing. This event took place in 1975 during my last sex drunk, which lasted for three months after my relapse. I had just had sex with this actress-dancer-prostitute, the embodiment of the most beautiful and erotic images and fantasies I could ever have imagined. She indicated that for me to continue having her, I would have to be party to her prostitution. And it was there on that couch where I made the terrible decision to do just that: give up job, career, marriage, morality—and God—so I could have her. For me, there was no longer any choice, and there was a dark and helpless resignation to that. Then I realized that within three days I'd be looking for another. "Pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization!"

So, recently in God's presence and quietness one morning, I felt healing was in order. So I played back that very scene in my mind's eye. There I was, and there was the naked woman, just as it happened. But what I had learned from the healing of the thumb-sucking incident was that *my Lord was also there*, and that all I had to do was play back the event and let him come into that very scene and reveal himself. So when I got to the point in the scene where I made that hellish decision to repudiate Him and give in to the Darkness, I saw, behind me as it were, the horrendous agony of His impalement, with my sin tearing into his being as a violent Black Hole.

I was appalled by the sight of his taking the agony of my sin-death into himself. Shaken to the very core. For *me . . .* taking it on himself for me! And then and there I was released from all the power of that memory. I knew in an instant that I was healed from that event. Not just forgiven, but released from its power forever—healed!

But then I found myself pleading for the woman and crying out, "What about her?" And there He was, between me and the woman, now ministering to her. And there she was, with the light of God in her eyes, clothed and in her right mind. Transformed! And I *knew* that this woman—somehow, somewhere, sometime—is being redeemed by the grace and love of God.

How can this be? But so it is. The reality of that memory, that event, has been forever changed. Whenever this memory appears now, instead of coming with toxic power, it comes with Light, joy, and peace.

I believe with all of my heart that we can have the real personal love of God for our sex object, and for anybody. And if I can't have it with *her*, I'm sorry, I don't have it with my wife or children, or with you. But man, do you know the promise this holds? This is *recovery*! How lucky we are to have even this prospect of such recovery? We're just at the beginning of discovering what SA recovery is. *Recovery* from lust is possible. Together we can, stage after stage, enjoy deeper awareness and surrender and freedom. Together! Don't despair, and don't settle for less. "*Ask, and you shall receive.*" God answers prayer.

**Another Stage?** [January 2004] Question: Should we eventually be able to view women or men with a progressively recovering eye, observation, or gaze, without fear or lust or temptation? At times I find myself with an adolescent kind of curiosity, one that I never had as an adolescent, able to look at women neutrally, as one might scan an interesting sunset or tree without temptation or disturbance. Time and continued accountability with my S&A friends will tell. Better not to trust one's own feelings; they've led me astray before.

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Some of us may despair after hearing about what's possible in lust recovery, feeling the impossibility of it all. The danger in discussing the stages of lust recovery and even thinking about freedom from the looking, sipping, and drinking can be terrifying, can't it? How can we achieve this when we know we're powerless in ourselves to do it? Matter of fact, just talking about these stages can load us up with more "Thou shalt nots." And we're back to recovery by works of the law (or works of the Program), instead of the grace and power of God. Back to more striving in the flesh, thinking we'll have to ratchet up our resolve all the more in trying to stop lusting or in denying it more cleverly. How many know by now that that does not work? I suspect this kind of legalism lies behind some of the popular strategies in use we mentioned on pages 1-2. What I'm saying is, Don't get caught up in the curse of thinking that your striving is going to do it. "Let go and let God." And what better way and place to do that than in a surrender and accountability circle?



## Appendix 2

### The Luster's Fear of Dying

This paper was first published in the *ESSAY* in Spring of 1999.

For the typical lust addict, our whole system screams out that we're going to die if we don't take that "drink." It's too fearful *not* to drink. Lust is our spiritual life-support system. Yes, the fear is that real. So, we wind up drinking. We're hooked on it and remain a slave. It's the fear of this kind of death that keeps us in bondage and forces us to keep slipping with lust.

The sad fact today is that so very many in the sex addiction recovery movement remain in bondage to lust because of this very threat of death. They are unable or unwilling to connect with the Life-giver instead. We can't break through this death-barrier; we shrink back at the death-threat of not drinking. It's so unnatural for us *not* to lust or misconnect. Ours is the compulsion of the look, the fantasy, or the misconnection, which when denied, is the very threat of death. But eventually we learn the hard way that for us to *drink* is to die. So recovery is learning to act against the fear—to lean into the fear—and go ahead and die. So we can live. The amazing paradox of our program.

This is why the decisive action-point of our malady is the instant of temptation, typically in the look, the memory, or the fantasy. That's where we face the feeling of death each time. And that fear drives us to resort to that drug again and again and again. So we won't die! We've used and heard all kinds of formulas on how to deal with it. Some are foolish or frantic, such as the three-second rule: "If you look for over three seconds, you're lusting." (What's yours? See pages 1 and 2.) As though lust had anything to do with duration. Lust has nothing to do with duration and everything to do with *intent*. If the intent is to snatch a quick drink, does it really matter how long it is, or even what we see? The intent is what we *are*. We need salvation from the intent, from the disposition of our heart.

Most of us initially feel it's something *we* must do to get out of it. "I shouldn't be doing this!" we say to ourselves, as we go ahead and take the drink. This tells me that we don't fully understand the nature of what we're dealing with and that we underestimate the strategies of spiritual blindness and

denial. We don't comprehend that lust is a disposition of the heart, an *attitude*. We rely on our own efforts—even our prayerful efforts—to save us. (Who says religious exercises can't support the illness?) This is why so many of us—sober from “acting out”—do not recover from acting *in*. Mere sexual sobriety just deals with externals. Sober is not well. The tragedy in such lust-avoidance or lust-distraction technique is that we can still “feel better about ourselves” and support the illness.

### **Is Victory over Lust Progressive?**

Our program affirms that “true sobriety includes progressive victory over lust.” How can there be any argument with that? We know of no instant cures from lust yet (though we keep an open, if skeptical, mind). But our relation to this sobriety definition may be too shallow. We can abuse it. We can hide in it. So let's examine the question: ***Is there such a thing as progressive victory over lust?*** There are two ways of looking at it.

On the one hand, I came slowly to see in my own progressive recovery what lust is and the many ways I denied and blinded myself to what was really going on (see appendix 1). Apparently it takes a certain amount of recovery to begin to see lust for what it is. I didn't discover lust as the underlying pathology until I stayed sexually sober. The overt “drool” is merely one of the more obvious forms. What about addiction to Woman or Man—“Connect with me and make me whole!”? What about the “wandering heart”? Ours is preeminently the malady of the *misconnection*. What about lust in the marriage? Lust and sex in dreams? Lust is cunning, baffling, and powerful, and more gets revealed. In this sense, victory over lust is progressive; unfortunately, in many of us, it isn't, and we pay the price.

On the other hand, *in the instant of temptation*, there is absolutely no such thing as progressive victory over lust. Any rationalizations we have notwithstanding, whenever that image, that fantasy, or that memory hits, we either lust or we don't. We either drink or we don't. The intent is either there or it isn't. There's nothing progressive about it. There's no in-between. Suppressing it through will power might be considered kind of an in-between, but not really.

Suppression or repression—will-powering it—is just another avoidance technique which may be worse than consciously going ahead and lusting. Worse because in that forced ascetic denial, we think we're making it. But the lust is still there inside, building up steam. It's like saying I really want to lust, but for whatever reason, *I* will put it away. That's really not surrendering it to God. It's locking it in a cage deep within. That's not *victory* over lust; it's merely trying to put a bridle on it, putting lust on hold. There's no freedom in suppression, only more fear. And it all lodges in the subconscious, storing up energy, only to bust out later in dreams or get expressed in other forms, such as resentment (or even self-loathing) or cross over into other addictions,

such as food or TV. For the lustaholic, there's no way out of our awesome dilemma. Except the Program way of surrender to God, dying to it, and being released from it in that moment of temptation.

In AA we hear the expression, "Resentment is the number-one killer of alcoholics." With us, the killer is lust. "*Lust kills the spirit . . . Lust kills me*" (White Book, p. 44).

Too often this idea that victory over lust is progressive becomes the excuse for aborting true recovery. "I'm sober so many years" equates to "I'm okay now." As though calendar sexual sobriety is the "real" sobriety. Or, as we hear so often, "I'm dealing with lust the best I can; it's a goal to aim toward." More often, we hear nothing at all about member lust temptations. We discover the person who calls himself technically sober is still drinking. Missing out on true recovery. This is tragic and damages group and Fellowship unity. Continuing sexual sobriety is only the *prerequisite* for recovery, not recovery itself. The recovery which our program promises is being saved *in* that next temptation, being released from its power. Instead of being self-driven or fear-driven, recovery is the victory of incredible joy.

Therefore, the first and only line of defense in a lust temptation must be a prior changed attitude of the mind and heart. If that prior attitude—which only comes via unconditional surrender to God—is a decision to give up lusting and rely on God, that attitude will be in place before we're even tempted. Then, when hit with the image, in that first blink of an eyelash, the shield of God's presence is already in place, and you don't have to *do* anything. Victory over lust is where you *are*, where you are in your attitude with your Lust-bearer, not what you *do*. The Shield is already in place, and you don't have to *do* anything. That's where we are either saved from it or not. Victory over lust begins with the unconditional surrender to give up lust to God. Deliverance in the moment of temptation follows as a consequence as we stay in the light of others. But that will take something stronger than meetings and literature, and that's what we're trying to do in the S&A circles.

### **Real Recovery**

We may have this whole idea of sex addiction sobriety backwards. We need to consider and talk about this very seriously. Victory over lust is the real recovery, and continued recovery from acting out sexually flows from that. There is no true recovery if all we're doing is not acting out. Merely not acting out only minimizes the real problem, which is *acting in*.

Question: Should the persistent practice of acting in be considered sober? More and more, people are saying No.

On coming into the program, most of us are mainly concerned with stopping the acting out. That's what we thought was killing us. But once sober, we begin to see the real problem. Remember that our program is aligned with the AA model of *not drinking*, because ours is an *internal* drug,

the alcohol of the spirit. How does SA's Third Tradition read?—"The only requirement for membership is a desire to become sexually sober"? No. It reads, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to *stop lusting*," (then adding) "and *become* sexually sober." Think about it. We need to get down to the nitty-gritty basics. The Calendar Sobriety Syndrome is killing us! I laud those who are beginning to set their dates back with a decision to stop acting in. Let's encourage and support one another in breaking through the Lust Barrier. Maybe that's the SA equivalent of AA's statement of "separating the men from the boys."

### **It's Impossible**

This is where we'll discover that true sobriety from lust by our own doing is *impossible*. This is where we're up against our real powerlessness and have no recourse but to One who can restore us to sanity in the very temptation. I wonder if it would not be better to challenge people right up front with the fact that *recovery* is impossible without victory over lust. Once we discover we're powerless over lust, let's challenge each other so we don't hide it. Let's keep bringing it into the light.

For myself today, I am absolutely powerless over lust in some form or other. But there is One, who himself is my victory over it, whenever I go through that fear of death, die to the temptation, upward to him, and bring him in, personally, savingly. It works. *He* works!

We should honestly face this impossibility of a "lust cure" so people will be forced to find their saving connection with God before settling into either the Slipper Syndrome or the Calendar Sobriety Syndrome or shifting from acting out to acting in. Why not state the nature of this problem as it really is, right up front: True *recovery*—joyous victory *over* lust—is utterly impossible without finding God, cleaning house, and working with others. That is the distilled essence of the original Twelve Step program. Have you found God *in your lust*?

Fear of dying to lust holds us in bondage to the slavery of impossible addiction. And the longer we're in the fellowship of recovery, the clearer we see the true spiritual nature of our addiction and our utter dependence on a Power greater than ourselves, greater than our lust. But in each temptation—over and over again—we, you and I, must be willing to go through the threat of death to discover that there really is *life after lust*

The whole point here is that *we don't have to lust at all*. We can and will be tempted—by triggers, memories, and fantasies—but we don't have to drink at all. We can have total victory over lust *in that next temptation*, which is all we ever need. ***There is no victory over lust before the fact!*** No magic bullet that

makes us immune. The victory is in the prior attitude before we're ever tempted—an attitude issuing from unconditional surrender to God. The victory is in the prior disposition of our heart. We either have it or we don't. And it's our choice, either for the god of Self, the god of Lust, or for the One who is eager and able to deliver us *in* the trial. The choice is ours. The choice either to give up, to die to self, to die *in* that next temptation, or to drink. Thus, victory over lust, our Great Impossible, becomes The Great Possible! We *can* discover and experience the expulsive power of a new affection. This is our calling, our hope, and our great joy in fellowship.



## Appendix 3

### Check Meetings

Check meetings have been around for quite awhile and have proven to be a valuable means of implementing the deeper fellowship we need in our recovery. (“*Recovery never ends for the lustaholic.*”) Often a sponsee will have a problem that does not readily yield to the sponsor's knowledge, recovery experience, or ability. In such cases, there can be wisdom and breakthrough by bringing the issue to a small select group of trusted members, together, under God. At least two others, and not more than five others has been found to be effective. It is ideal if this can be done in one's accountability circle—the few core members to whom one is personally accountable on a continuing basis in mutual recovery support. See *How It's Working* (chap. 3) and the *What Is A Surrender-Accountability Circle?* in chapter 6. Check meetings can easily led into surrender meetings

**Examples:** A member who can't get or remain sober or who is a habitual slipper. A member can't breakthrough into lust victory or wet dreams. A member doesn't know how to cope with his wife's response for his decision to go into total sexual abstinence. A member has a major decision, like whether to break off with a girlfriend, whether to get married, accept a job offer, etc. Other members seek help with problems such as fear, dating, career . . . Sometimes Akron 1935-type Surrender meetings wind up being check meetings only, when it becomes apparent that the person is not ready to proceed with the surrender. At other times, check meetings called for some other purpose lead right into focused surrenders.

Sometimes it becomes apparent that the person needs to write on something that surfaces during the check meeting that had little direct connection with the original topic.

#### How We Go About It

**1. Get together.** Meet privately. The leader should state the ground rules and the session should open with prayer(s). Continue in an attitude of prayerfulness in the light of God's presence. Allow an open-ended period of time (two or three hours is not unreasonable.) Pagers and cell phones off. Those participating should have the same honesty and willingness as the checkee. The checkee should have the right to exclude any with whom they

do not feel comfortable.

**2. Stress the requirement of absolute honesty.** The only requirement, and that for everyone present, is *absolute honesty*. We tell the person there's no agenda or expectation or judgement, but we insist on honesty in everyone's responses. There is no ritual to follow here. And there should be no expectation on their part or ours of any special happening. Often, the check meeting has as much or more value to those participating than for the checkee.

We've found it helpful to begin the session by going around briefly stating where each of us is, with lust or surrender, for example, especially when we don't know one another intimately. That honesty helps put the person at ease and puts us all on the same level before God.

**3. Approach.** We do not criticize, pass judgment, or give advice. We simply play back what we hear, what comes through between the lines. We do not take responsibility for the other person's life or decisions. We are simply a sounding board. We speak as we would be spoken to. We ask questions for clarification, the aim being to bring clarity and direction. Often, a check meeting can lead directly into revealing the present point of resistance in surrendering to God's will. (Also, using the four absolutes as a guide in decision making has proven helpful to Dr. Bob and others.)

(See the other material on Surrender & Accountability in this booklet, since the sessions involve a similar approach: privacy, open-ended time, honesty, and accountability.)

**Example:** A woman a few years sober realizes she still cannot forgive the men who perpetrated wrongs upon her.

In this case, it was suggested that the woman write a concise Step 8 ½ inventory (see page 125 in the White Book) on her unforgiveness. The woman wrote on each person or incident: what happened, how her unforgiveness expressed itself within her, and what this told her about her herself and her own spiritual condition and attitude. The focus was to be on her response to the wrongs, responses both within her and in her behavior, not on those who wronged her.

The woman wrote it out and called four or five members to hear and offer feedback. They began with prayer for guidance, and she asked for guidance and courage. She read her inventory all the way through. (Had it gotten off track, the members could have intervened, if appropriate.) When she was through reading it, they prayed again, and one by one the members shared what they heard. She was able to break through into free and total forgiveness.

**Example:** A member who is a minister has been sexually involved with members of his congregation calls a check meeting for guidance on how to make amends to these persons. It's very touchy because this might injure others. Penetrating questions are asked, which reveal that his "top plate" priority is a surrender of anger toward his own wife.

**Example:** A member is stuck in her career/education and seeks a broader range of input and wisdom than her sponsor is able to offer. She was asked to bring a written "inventory" dealing with her education and employment history. The questioning revealed that the underlying problem was the person's fearfulness. This led her to begin working all the Steps on this new "addiction," leading eventually to a new job.



## Appendix 4

### Group Exercise

One or more of the following writing exercises have proven very helpful as a change in meeting format for special sessions of regular SA meetings. Such group exercises can actually help create awareness of the need for surrender and accountability. Follow the suggested general procedure on page 1.

One member said, after his group had done the first question, “This honest sharing turned out to be the most significant thing this group has ever done for its recovery. It broke through.”

NOTE: This is not intended to take the place of an actual surrender, as we have been talking about. However, this group exercise opens us up to honestly seeing what our “top plate” surrender might be. Some may later want to actually do their private surrenders (as described above) with their core accountability group.

- 1. In what ways is lust active in my life today (including dreams)?**
- 2. Focusing narrowly on the core lust (or other problem) your above inventory reveals, write out what your core surrender to God would be in one sentence (NO NAMES, please).** For example:

“I surrender unconditionally to God and this group.....

- 3. Since “faith (or surrender) without action is dead,” what action(s) would you have to take to fulfill your surrender?**
- 4. How and when would you implement those actions?** (For example, changed relation to TV, Internet, writing a letter, a face-to-face meeting . . . .)
- 5. How would you become accountable to your core group in this matter on an ongoing basis?** (The group referred to is those in your fellowship to whom you will be transparently accountable in this matter as you are tempted.) Example: Call one when tempted, ask for a check meeting, etc