

History of Alcoholic Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous

By : History guy

The story that Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob started Alcoholic Anonymous in 1935 is completely false. Bill and Dr. Bob started recruiting for the Oxford Group in 1935; they built up their "Anonymous Alcoholics" for the first two years in New York and then for four years in Akron. The history that Bill Wilson started A. A. is also false it was Dr. Bob and his studies with Christian Endeavor that set the mark for what later became Alcoholics Anonymous. Another historical fact that is false is that A.A. or N.A. is not about god; Alcoholics Anonymous is in fact about god. Also Narcotics Anonymous is not a complete and separate inanity it is a program that has been adapted from Alcoholics Anonymous.

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Dr. Bob had done like so many others after entering college he began to drink and party, this is when his drinking really started to get out of hand. He continued this path of self destruction for several years, which also included the years of prohibition. After trying to finally begin the process of recovery he stayed in a mental hospital where he later said, "I was either sick from drinking or sick from not drinking" (Dick B. 2010). While Dr. Bob was at the hospital he started to understand that "Hospitalization is a must" to help with the recovery of addiction. (Dick B. 2010). After a short stay in this hospital Dr. Bob was introduced to the Akron Group. The Akron group was very similar to the "Christian Endeavor" organization that Dr. Bob grew up with. This is where he turned back to the bible and began to read it three times through. This reading of the bible three times was later part of the healing process that Dr. Bob and Bill Wilson along with Rev. Sam Shoemaker insisted on. Because of Dr. Bob's early association with the "Christian Endeavor" group he made an easy transition to becoming part of the Akron group.

Dr. Bob emphasized on more than one occasion that Alcoholics Anonymous basic ideas had come from the study of the Bible. Dr. Bob often stated that Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" contained the underlying spiritual philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous. While staying with the Akron group he would often read bible passages to AA's and he pointed out that some A.A. slogans were taken directly from Matthew 6:33 and 6:34. These slogans included "First things first" and "Easy Does It" (Big Book 2011). When someone would ask Dr. Bob a question about the A.A. program or would want to discuss recovery he would often respond with "What does it say in the Good Book" (Dick B. 2010).

The Akron group was really one of the first rehab facilities in the country for recovering "Drunks". They had four very simple requirements to stay first was a "confession of Jesus Christ" second was daily bible study and the third was group prayer and the fourth was quiet hours (Dick B. 2010). These same principals were carried out with the "Christian Endeavor" group when Dr. Bob was younger. It was while Dr. Bob was staying with the Akron Group that he met a man by the name of Rev. Sam Shoemaker. According to Dick B who is an A.A. historian "Russell Firestone was a drunk" (Dick B. 2010). The Firestone family called Rev. Sam Shoemaker out to take Russell to Akron for recovery and while making the cross country trip Sam Shoemaker took Russell into one of the train cars and led him to "Christ". By the time that they had arrived in Akron he considered that he was cured from addiction. All of this took place in 1933.

Sam Shoemaker was the Episcopal Rector at Calvary Church in New York, this church operated the Calvary Rescue Mission where Bill Wilson had his conversion experiences and gave his life to Christ. But Bill continued to drink until he finally ended in Towns Hospital looking for help with his addiction to alcohol. While at the hospital trying to detox from alcohol he met Dr. Silkworth who Bill had asked for help. Dr.

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Silkworth told Bill "I can't help you but I know a physician that can! he is expensive but he keeps his office in the New Testament and he goes by the name Jesus Christ" (Dick B. 2010). In page 191 of the "Big Book" Bill said "The lord has cured me of this terrible disease and I just want to keep telling people about it". When Bill emerged from Towns Hospital in late 1934 Bill became involved with Sam's "Calvary Church". At the time Bill had also found a new job and was asked to go to Ohio to acquire a new sales account. When Bill arrived the account had fallen through and his business had left him there for a few days to try to find new accounts for the business. While there, he visited a hotel that had a lounge with an open bar in it and Bill made the decision to call someone who was also an Anonymous Alcoholic. Through these phone calls Bill was put in touch with Dr. Bob with the Akron group. During 1935 both Dr. Bob and Bill started recruiting for the Oxford Group based in New York and for The Akron group in Ohio. They were following what the Akron group taught, and that was spread the message, and to both Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob the message was that "The lord has cured me" (Dick B. 2010). Bill Wilson had shared with Dr. Bob what he had learned from Rev. Sam Shoemaker at Calvary Rescue Mission.

Sam Shoemaker talked about the Four Absolutes "Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and love. Dr. Frank Buchman, Founder of the Oxford Group suggested to Sam Shoemaker that "sin" might be blocking Sam's relationship with God. Shoemaker then wrote down the four absolutes compared them as "sins" those areas in his life which fell short of the standards. The Oxford Group people often made lists using the Four Absolutes as moral standards. They would write down where they had fallen short of these standards. They would "confess the shortcomings to another and go about forsaking their behavior, changing themselves, and making restitution for harms done" (Dick B. 237). Today these absolutes have become all but forgotten.

In 1938 Bill Wilson wanted to raise money for hospital chains, missionaries, and for literature. He told Dr. Bob that what they needed was a book to help add credit for their missions to help find poor down and out alcoholics. Bill met with John D. Rockefeller who then sent Frank Amos to assess what Dr. Bob was accomplishing with the Akron Group. Amos said that "their meetings have taken on the form of the meetings in the Gospels of the early Christians" (Dr. Bob, 135-136). Amos described the Akron Program and listed what was really the first "12 step program" which really had only five steps with an optional two others.

- An alcoholic must realize that he is an alcoholic, incurable from medical viewpoint, and that he must never drink anything with alcohol in it.
- He must surrender himself absolutely to God, realizing that in him there is no hope.
- 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.
- 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.
- He must be willing to help other alcoholics get straightened out. This throws up a protective barrier and strengthens his own willpower and convictions.
- It is important, but not vital, that he meet frequently with other reformed alcoholics and form both a social and religious comradeship.
- Important, but not vital, that he attend some religious service at least once weekly.

This list by Frank Amos along with Sam Shoemaker four absolutes helped to form the twelve step program that is in Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book today. John D. Rockefeller helped to back Bill Wilson with publishing his book for A.A. the "Big Book" but he told Bill if this thing is to survive it has to be "self supporting" (Narcotics Anonymous 2008).

Bill Wilson actually asked Sam Shoemaker to write the Twelve Steps; but Sam declined, saying that "The Steps should be written by an alcoholic", namely, Bill (Dick B. 237). After Bill had completed the

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Big Book he asked Sam Shoemaker to review it prior to publication. But much of the history of Sam Shoemaker and A.A. has been ignored by historians. Sam Shoemaker ideas can be found almost verbatim in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and the NA book of Narcotics Anonymous.

Step One: Shoemaker spoke of the gap between man and God which man is powerless to bridge, man having lost the power to deal with sin for himself.

1: We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step Two: Sam declared that â God is God and self is not God, and that man must so believe

2: We come to believe that a Power Greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step Three: Sam taught about the crisis of self-surrender, being born again and declared that man must make a decision to renounce sins, accept Jesus Christ as Savior and begin Christian life in earnest.

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

Step Four: Sam talked about self-examination of the Four Absolutes of Jesus â Honesty, purity, unselfishness and love and to write down exactly where one had â fallen shortâ of the standards. Sam said there was a Moral obligation to face these facts, recognize these as blocks to God and be ruthlessly honest.

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

Step Five: Shoemaker taught of honesty with self and honesty with God, for the importance of confession to others, and stressed the need for detailed sharing of secrets.

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

Step Six: Shoemaker taught often about the need for manâs conviction that he has been miserable, by his sins become estranged from God, and needs to come back to God in honest penitence. Sam urged willingness to ask god exactly where one is failing and then to admit that sin.

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

Step Seven: Sam clarified this as the Conversion step. It meant, the assumption upon ourselves of Godâs will for us and the opening of ourselves to receiving the â grace of God which alone Converts it meant drawing near and putting ourselves in position to be converted utter dedication to the will of Godâ.

7: We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Step Eight: Shoemaker talk of willingness to ask Godâs help in removing the blocks being convicted of the need for restitution and then being sent to someone with restoration and apology.

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

Step Nine: Sam said the last stand of self is pride. There can be no talk of humility, until pride licks the dust and one then acts to make full restoration and restitution for wrongs done

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

Step Ten: Sam taught it was necessary to continue self-examination, confession, conviction, the seeking of God's help, and the prompt making of amends.

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

Step Eleven: Sam wrote about Quiet Time, Bible study, prayer and meditation.

11: We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step Twelve: Sam spoke that after having a spiritual awakening that we need to carry a message about what God has accomplished for us and that practicing the new way of living in harmony with God's will and in love toward others.

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

It wasn't until 1955 that Bill Wilson declared that Alcoholics Anonymous got its ideas of self-examination acknowledgment of character defects, restitution for harm done, and working with others directly from Sam Shoemaker. Later Bill wrote to Sam himself in 1963 saying that "The Twelve Steps of A.A. simply represented an attempt to state in more detail, breadth, and depth, what we had been taught-primarily by you". Without this, there could have been nothing at all (Dick B.).

Alcoholics Anonymous is the first twelve step program and it has helped countless Alcoholics recover from drinking. In each A.A. meeting the group has the autonomy to exclude non-alcoholic addicts from closed meetings. This autonomy is granted by the Fourth Tradition which says that "each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole." (Big Book). In 1944 Bill Wilson began discussing a separated fellowship for drug addicts. In 1953 Narcotics Anonymous, originally called A.A./N.A. was formed in July 1953 by Jimmy Kinnon (Narcotics Anonymous). This fellowship grew and spread across the United States. By September 14, 1953 A.A. authorized N.A. to use the twelve step of Alcoholics Anonymous. The twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous that are adapted from A.A. is the basis of its recovery program. Narcotics Anonymous has only broadened its perspective. Their identification as addicts is all-inclusive with respect to any mood-changing, mind-altering substance (Narcotics Anonymous). In 1954 the first N.A. publication was approved by the fellowship however the "Brown Book" paralleled the "Bib Book" of Alcoholic Anonymous but with the word "Alcohol" was replaced with "drugs". Meetings continued to grow and in 1962 The Narcotics Anonymous White Booklet was written using their own language and incorporating personal stories of recovering addicts (including Timmy Dowel's personal story of recovery). In 1981 a finalized version of the N.A. Basic Text was published based on the "The Little White Book". But the "Basic Text" was written as a massive collaboration between hundreds of recovering addicts.

Both twelve step programs have helped many people recover from the disease of addiction. Alcoholics Anonymous set the path and guidelines for all other twelve step programs that has followed. Narcotics Anonymous has built on the guidelines to include all mind altering drugs including alcohol. Both programs help to incorporate God into the lives of recovering addicts and helps develop moral standing and teaches them how to live on life's terms. "We cannot change the nature of the addict or addiction. We can help to change the old lie "Once and addict, always an addict" by striving to make recovery more available, God, help us to remember this difference.

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