

Should You Do All 12 Steps in A Single Month?



Tackling all 12 steps in a single month may seem a tad excessive to some. But for a growing group of AA purists, Back to Basics has practically become gospel.

By Kristen McGuiness

Melissa, an attractive brunette in her seventh year of recovery, was “struggling but just about two weeks sober” when a friend took her to her first Back to Basics meeting in the basement of a Los Angeles church. “I didn’t know what I was in for,” she recalls. “At the time, I didn’t really know about AA. I knew virtually nothing about the steps to sobriety as outlined in AA’s Big Book. But in less than a month, a sponsor sped me through all 12 steps and I felt a lot better. Since then I’ve gone through them twice more, and I have a lot more insight into how and why they work. But in the beginning, all I knew was that they were working, and that was enough for me.”

Back in the '40s, when Bill W. and Dr. Bob first published AA’s Big Book, they encouraged their fellow alcoholics to speed through all 12 steps during their first 30 days of sobriety. “Most alcoholics don’t respond well to over-thinking,” Bill said. But finding a Higher Power, admitting all your flaws and apologizing to everyone you’ve hurt during your wasted past is often a painful process for even the most committed “Big Bookers,” who sometime take months or years to complete the steps. But in ensuing years, Bill W.’s basic prescription has fallen out of favor with the AA establishment. Indeed, it was practically forgotten until an Alcoholics Anonymous archivist named Wally P, who was writing a history of the AA Intergroup and Central offices in the 1940s, stumbled across notes that AA-er’s had taken at some early meetings. “As I was writing that story, I kept running across the Beginners’ Meetings that were being conducted in the earliest days of AA,” he remembers. “I knew nothing about them, but I kept copies of those notes. And after I wrote the Intergroup book, those notes formed the basis of *Back to Basics*, which was published in 1997.”

Back to Basics in Bethpage, LI is a 5 week - one hour per week meeting – guiding people in pursuit of recovery through the 12 Steps as presented in the “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous. In different parts of the state and country the format may be different. But the principles are the same. Do the work and manifest the promises of stable recovery A.S.A.P. “It works-it really does.” Next session starts Tuesday, September 4th 2012 at 8 PM in St. Martin of Tours School Cafeteria at 40 Seaman Avenue (between Broadway and Central Ave). All are welcome. Contact Jimmy D at sodevine69@optonline.net – and see attached flyer. Bring a friend.

As Wally explains, Back to Basics is a reenactment of Bill W.'s early vision for the fellowship. “The format is basically a one-hour session a week for four weeks in which people take all 12 steps. It’s not a step study because the book says the steps we ‘took,’ not the steps we sat around and talked about. We don’t just ‘study’ the steps—we take them.”

While some newcomers may find the process a bit overwhelming, Melissa says that Back to Basics was exactly what she needed. “I really had no idea what was going on but each week, my mind became clearer,” she explains. “We started with steps one through three, then we did four and five, and then we made our amends list and went out and did our amends. After that, we went through ten, eleven and twelve. It wasn't always easy, but I thought if [AA co-founder] Dr. Bob could do 12 steps in one day, I could do them in one month.”

“In the 1970s, a lot of people forgot how to do the steps, especially in a group—even though fellowship is one of the reasons AA has historically been so successful,” says Wally. “Back in the 1940s, people who came to AA had a 50-75% rate of recovery. The success rates have gone down ever since. But since *Back to Basics* came out in 1997, over 500,000 people have been through the program. Hundreds of thousands more have accessed it via Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, and other 12-step groups.”

“I was first introduced to the book when I was 12 years sober,” says Steven F., an enthusiastic proponent of Back to Basics. “Before that, I had a pretty good life in AA. I was getting all the “promises,” but there was something missing in my life, and I didn’t really know what it was. Then one day I turned up at this meeting, and someone handed me a book that laid out a 30-day path to recovery. At that time, the whole concept was very controversial in most AA circles. Even now, most of what you hear in the rooms is people’s opinions. Everyone has different ideas about how

quickly or slowly you're supposed to work the steps. The prevailing idea these days is that you work the steps when you're ready. But when I started reading this book, I began to realize that back in AA's earliest days, there was a much greater sense of urgency and a greater rate of success."

"I like to look at it in terms of a hospital," says Wally. "If someone comes into the emergency room, bleeding profusely as the result of being in a knife fight, the doctor doesn't give you a book and send you home. He puts on a tourniquet. Then someone else sutures up the wound and someone else gets you ready to go home. As I see it, *Back to Basics* is the tourniquet. You then go home and take the steps again and again and again."

When Steven was deciding that he would see how effective the Back to Basics tourniquet was, he asked a couple of people if they would go through it with him. "These guys didn't know each other but they had all been in and out for years," he recalls. "Before Back to Basics, nobody had ever told them how simple this program was. But this time, they did the work and they did it quickly, and the next month they did it again, and what was most miraculous was that all three guys were sober and working with others within 90 days. And 14 years later, those guys are all still sober today."

Louise—a personal assistant from San Francisco who still looks like the punk rocker she once was—discovered Back to Basics late in her life, but the experience forever altered her recovery. "It was like that feeling when you first go to AA and you realize that you don't have to do it by yourself," she says about her first Back to Basics foray. "There is so much energy when people come together. Though I had worked the steps already, I thought it was good to go through them over and over because as you stay sober, more stuff comes up. It's like why people go to church every Sunday—it really reinforces how you can use the steps on a daily basis in your life."

For Wally, seeing Back to Basics grow from a book about the fellowship into a program for recovery has been one of the great joys of his own sobriety. And the rewards keep coming: a Virginia prison program recently implemented the Back to Basics structure. "They started with 12 sober beds in a sober pod and now they have 400 sober beds in a sober prison," Wally marvels. "I call it shock therapy—it's a diversion program. You have to sign an agreement when you have one year left on your sentence that you will participate in four sessions a week, wherein you go through the steps each week for 26 weeks, followed by a 26-week "Big Book" study.

When you are released, you know as much about recovery as anyone. Then, as part of the contract, you have to come back to the prison for a year after your release to sponsor other men. Since the program began, the recidivism rate at that prison was lowered from 70 to 15%.”

Louise has seen similar changes in her life—but she admits that real change happens only for the willing. “I think it goes back to the idea that if somebody’s ready, everything will work and if they’re not ready, nothing will work,” she says. “I saw a lot of people come in that were desperate and I could see how working the steps so quickly gave them relief, but I also could tell who was there to get sober and who was doing it for another reason—the courts or somebody else or maybe they did want to get sober but hadn’t really surrendered. It’s kind of hard to hide that stuff when you’re doing it in a group. It’s easier to hide in the rooms—you can mask it—but when you’re intensely going through this process with a group of people, it’s difficult to hide how committed you are.”

According to Steven, that’s what makes Back to Basics so effective. “It’s a very powerful meeting,” he says. “You hear the 12 steps in the way that AA’s founders intended them to be heard. People forget that like most diseases, alcoholism has several stages. Some people who enter the program are still at stage one—they can’t stop drinking but it’s easier for them to surrender. But you also meet many people who are struggling through stage four of this illness—and they need a much quicker solution. Either way, it all comes back to one simple fact: AA doesn’t simply teach you how to stop drinking; it teaches you how to live your life.”

**“Back to Basics – The Way It Was”
Journey through the Big Book’s 12 Steps in
Five WEEKLY One Hour Sessions 9/4 – 10/2, 2012**

Mark your calendars and join us in exploring “a design for living” through the 12 Steps. A series of meetings based upon the work of AA pioneers in the 1940’s. Beginners were led through the 12 Steps – using the only book they had, i.e., the “Big Book” - in FOUR consecutive weeks. We do it in FIVE. All are invited to take the same guided journey thru this marvelous experience. The pioneers found “The Solution” with all its promises (about 72 that I have counted) and over 75% recovered. Please pass this on; it may be a life changer.

When: *Tuesday eves: Sept. 4, 11, 18, 25, October 2, 2012
@ 8 PM – 9 PM.*

Where: *St. Martin of Tours School Bldg., Bethpage, NY
40 Seaman Avenue -1 block east of Broadway off Central Ave.
(Parking in Municipal lot behind School – enter via Seaman Ave)
Note: Same place where Caring & Sharing Group meets. But on Tuesdays!*

Bring: *The “Big Book,” a highlighter, a pen, an open mind, and your own coffee, tea or*

Contact: *For more info > Marty W & Jimmy D
(516-456-5837 = Jim)
(516-931-1430 = Marty)
Email>sodevine69@optonline.net*