

## Families Coping with Alcoholism Step Out of Trouble with Al-Anon

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"Al-Anon is not counseling. It isn't a place to complain about your qualifier. It is a place to work on yourself."

*The following is a written testimony from a Unificationist who participated in the 12-step program of Al-Anon, an organization created to help individuals cope with alcohol abuse by their loved ones. The writer of the testimony chooses to remain anonymous for this article but is available to help anyone who would like to know more about Al-Anon and can be contacted through Mrs. Debbie Gullery or Rev. Phillip Schanker in the Blessed Family Ministry.*

One of the greatest gifts True Father has brought to this world is that of the disclosure of the human fall. The fallen natures that have resulted from the fall have also been pointed out to each of us. The issue I am addressing here is a problem that has been passed on from generation to generation. Every tool at one's disposal is needed to deal with it. I am confident that Father did not point out the results of fallen nature only to have us ignore them.

In everyday society, there are certain afflictions that carry with them a social stigma accompanied by shame. In our beloved church community too often such afflictions fall under an even more serious scrutiny to the point of being ignored, shunned or "shoved under the rug" until consequences take their heavy toll. Abuse of alcohol certainly falls into this category.

### **Why Am I Addressing This?**

I was asked recently to offer my experience with and opinion of Al-Anon. Many are familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), the organization that was created for recovering alcoholics. For those who don't know what Al-Anon is, it is an organization that is specifically designed to help individuals who have someone in their life – parent, spouse, child, relative, or close friend – who is an alcoholic. It is based upon the same 12-step program recovering alcoholics follow. But Al-Anon isn't designed to help you cure the alcoholic in your life. It is designed to help you cure you.

This is a good time to mention that despite my parents being alcoholics, I myself do not suffer from alcoholism. Neither my wife nor I abuse alcohol. We never had alcohol in our home as we raised our children. However, I recognize that being brought up by dysfunctional, alcoholic parents had a

profoundly damaging effect on me.

I am addressing this because, like many of you, I have seen firsthand that abuse of alcohol has become a very serious problem among many in our second-generation. In some cases the consequences are underlying dysfunctions, including withdrawal, denial, depression, manipulation and other silent, less-obvious afflictions. In other cases the consequences have been overtly tragic: abuse, violence, incest, rape, and sexual infidelity leading to marriages' breaking apart.

Unfortunately, when any of these problems are left unattended or unacknowledged, the awful patterns are repeated in young families and passed on to their children. I am writing this because Al-Anon is an invaluable, yet completely available resource. If you recognize and can identify with any of what I am saying, I implore you to act on it by using this resource.

### **It Is Never Too Late**

Just to put this in context in my own life, I can tell you that if someone had suggested that I attend Al-Anon when I was much younger – for instance, when I was growing up in my home where my parents were alcoholics – I might have shrugged it off and told them I wasn't interested. At that point I wasn't interested in taking any necessary "steps" except the ones that would lead me out of my house. I was angry and frustrated. I was only interested in leaving the situation, which I did. An Al-Anon meeting might have been the BEST place for me at that point but no one told me about it, and at 15 years of age I wasn't prepared to take the steps to discover it. Now, more than 40 years later, I am listening, and I am trying to understand, because I realize alcoholism doesn't only affect the alcoholic; it damages the family member or friend in its own insidious way as well; it creates and perpetuates dysfunctional habits including those I mentioned earlier. So, I can tell you from my own experience that it is never too late to begin the work that is required to deal with the very detrimental affects an alcoholic can have on you.

Any person who has an alcoholic in his or her life feels the anger and frustration I'm referring to –they feel it to their core. The frustration is a slow, dull grind. Every day, one faces it. Some days the hopes that things will somehow change are high. After all, today the "qualifier" (that's what Al-Anon terms the alcoholic in your life) seems normal. They seem on track, functioning, completely coherent. But then you catch them in an outright lie or simply denying what is painfully obvious, and you realize nothing has really changed. It eventually becomes the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about.

### **Two Essential Points to Understand**

There are two important things that need to be understood about alcoholism before one can make any progress toward healing oneself. The first thing to know is that alcoholism is a "progressive disease" which means that the change in the qualifier is gradual over a long period of time. It took me most of my adult life to accept this fact, but once I did, I developed a healthier and more compassionate perspective. The second point is what is referred to in Al-Anon as the 3 C's: I didn't *cause* this, I can't *control* it and I cannot *cure* it. What a revelation. This realization doesn't shift blame; it acknowledges that there is responsibility on the part of the alcoholic. These points are important to remember because you will need to go back to them again and again in order to maintain sanity.

### **About Al-Anon Meetings**

I did not know what to expect when I walked into my first Al-Anon meeting. My wife and I searched the internet for meetings and discovered that they are everywhere. When I say everywhere I mean in every small township or neighborhood and often in two or three locations, frequently in a church but sometimes in a community center. Meetings are held in the mornings, the afternoon or in the evening. I have

attended them on almost any given day of the week.



Al-Anon is an organization that is specifically designed to help individuals who have loved ones in their lives suffering from alcohol abuse.

Meetings always last for only one hour. They follow a very set pattern – no surprises. After a brief explanation of the purpose of Al-Anon, a reading of the 12 steps, and a welcome to any new members, a principal speaker may be introduced. That person shares a little about himself and why he is there. Following that the floor is open to anyone who cares to share. There is no cross-talk, which means you are asked not to interrupt the speaker by questions or comments and people are asked to respect a five-minute speaking rule. You know the other person only by their first name: “What is shared here stays here.” They are asked to share only about themselves but invariably there are testimonies about their qualifier because, after all, that is the person that compelled them to attend in the first place.

I’ve listened to individuals share about their spouse, their child, their best friend and every conceivable situation; every one of the things I mentioned earlier and then some. More importantly, I’ve realized, almost from the moment the other person opens their mouth, that their pain is real and their sentiment genuine. I have felt a bond to almost every single individual whose story I’ve had the privilege to hear. This is a very real part of the healing that I have experienced. I have realized that I am not alone.

For me, and it’s different for everyone, these bring up the painful memories I thought I had put behind me. In fact, I hadn’t gotten rid of them – they were festering beneath the surface. These meetings have allowed me to *express* those feelings in a safe and confidential environment where everyone can identify with what I am saying. I can *talk* about it while knowing there are others around me who understand.

### **What Al-Anon Is and What It Isn’t**

Al-Anon is not counseling. It isn’t a place where you are expected to say a word. It isn’t a place to expect immediate feedback or a place to dialogue. It isn’t a place to complain about your qualifier (although from time to time I have heard this). It is a place to work on yourself. It is a place to listen to others in order that you can identify the problems you may be having and then, through careful and consistent practice of the 12 steps, you can become a healthier person.

### **In Conclusion**

Throughout the brief history of the Unification movement our endeavor has been to help create an ideal world. This has evolved to developing many projects initiated by True Father including but not limited to educational conferences, the creation of institutions and businesses and the establishment of Blessed

families through many international and intercultural mass weddings. It has been a beautiful offering and a sincere effort by many hands. Along the way tremendous sacrifices have been made. In the process and urgency to accomplish God's will, individual problems of a more serious nature have too often been overlooked.

However, if our hope is truly to create an ideal world, a kingdom of heaven, a Chun Il-Guk, we can no longer afford to ignore problems of this type. To do so is to risk the demise of the most important institution we seek to create: the family.

### **The Twelve Steps**

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

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