

A SIMPLE CHOICE

ALTHOUGH I HAVE BEEN COMING TO TWELVE STEP meetings since February 2008, I still consider myself in early recovery. After my last relapse, I am now counting days again and, by the grace of God and with the help of the fellowship, I recently celebrated thirty days. I am grateful for having so many second chances in recovery. I have never stopped “coming back.” Each time I have had a slip, I have picked myself up and rededicated myself to this program of solutions, a guide to living that transcends my understanding and knowledge.

Early on in my recovery journey, I found a sponsor. I had an interim sponsor when I moved to New York for about a month until I found a permanent one. I heard my current sponsor speak at the Friday beginners’ meeting. I wanted the sobriety he had and also could relate a lot to his experiences. His sponsorship is very much rooted in Step work, and that appealed to me, as well.

I call my sponsor every day. I actually pick up the phone and call him—I don't text him—so that I get used to the action of reaching out voice-to-voice, person-to-person. I also call at least two other people from the program every day. My cell phone is mostly filled with phone numbers of fellows in the program (e.g. Dan, red hair CMA; Ed, glasses meditation meeting). I also keep business cards with my name and phone number in my wallet so I can easily pass along my info to others after meetings. Staying connected is something that I have struggled with because intimate nonsexual relationships are not my forte. But I have found that they are key to my sobriety.

As far as meetings are concerned, people recommended I do ninety meetings in ninety days. For me, this has helped make meetings part of my daily routine. Going every day also keeps me connected constantly to the program. In keeping with the "living just for today" concept, a day with a meeting is a sober day for me. I go to CMA and AA meetings, and one day hope to make Al-Anon a part of my recovery as well. In AA, I try to go to the same meetings each week in order to get to know the people there. In CMA, the fellowship is smaller, so I find that every meeting is filled with people I know. Find a meeting that you relate to and in which you feel comfortable. Maybe you need a gay meeting? Maybe you need a straight meeting? Maybe you need a meeting with mostly business people on their lunch hour? Most important, find a meeting where the people have the kind of sobriety that you want.

I have been encouraged to share in meetings, to be honest with where I am and also to participate more fully in the group. A bigger lesson for me, though, is listening in meetings. Listening means I am fully present in the meeting and keeping my ears open for suggestions and the experience of others who have stayed sober. For me, listening means being open-minded and willing to try other ways of doing things.

When the meeting chair asks for newcomers to raise their hand and share their day count, I do so. Many times in the past, when I was coming back from a relapse, announcing my day count was the last thing on earth I wanted to do. But it reminds me where I am with my sobriety. Counting days out loud is a form of acceptance of that reality. Also, it alerts others—who may be able to help me—that I am coming back.

I write a gratitude list in a journal before bed every night. This reminds

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me of the things I have to be grateful for from that day and takes my mind away from concentrating on what I do not have in my life. I enjoy looking back at the days gone by; it quickly gives me a sense of how rich my sober life is becoming. Recently, my sponsor and a few other fellows started a morning gratitude email. I find it a very intimate experience. It's inspiring to hear about others' daily blessings, the fruits of their sobriety. And the gratitude emails keep coming all day, so I get reminders throughout the day of how the promises of the program actually come true.

I have been told that the three cornerstones of a healthy approach to sobriety are honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. I've spoken about the first two. As for willingness: I am willing to do my Step work on a continuous basis. I am currently on Step Seven, where I am committing myself to a deeper and more intimate relationship with my Higher Power. Humility for me is becoming a way of living. I am teachable, grounded by the reality that I am an addict who has a daily reprieve from my sickness. If I pursue my sobriety as hard as I pursued my addiction, then I have faith that I will continue to stay sober, one day at a time.

None of these tools means anything if I don't put them to use. Thank God, I have a choice today: to either suffer through the life I was living or to use the toolkit the program has given me to live again. It's that simple. —*Nick F.*