

Carry the Message

This article is from the “Edifying the Body” section of the Church of God Big Sandy’s website, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of June 9, 2018.

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LEE’S SUMMIT, Mo.—If you are familiar with Alcoholics Anonymous and its 12-step program, you might be aware of the wording of the 12th step.

Step 12 of the program reads: “Having a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry the message to other addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

“Carry the message,” the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous said. To those in the 12-step programs it’s more than just a nice thought. It can be the difference between life and death.

This 12th step requires those who are recovering from the cauldron of substance abuse to form a network of support for others who suffer from the same problem.

This is a unique concept, this idea of sinners helping sinners. It’s a very biblical one, but one that many churches might find troublesome. Sinners helping sinners? Horrors!

Yet Jesus Himself said, “First remove the plank from your own eyes, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:5).

That means, if you have overcome a specific problem, you are in an excellent position to help those who struggle with the same thing. We are all nothing more than recovering sinners, and who better to understand the mind of an addict than a recovering addict?

In the book of Hebrews, we read about the high priests of ancient Israel who were able to “have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness” (Hebrews 5:2).

Indeed, we have today the greatest High Priest of them all, who “had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God . . . Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:17-18, NIV).

Though He never sinned, Jesus was nevertheless a recovering human being who laid aside His immortality in order to transcend His humanity with the hope that we can transcend ours.

When we face various trials or overcome our many weaknesses, the glory belongs to God, but our duty is to our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we have walked the road ourselves, we have special compassion and insight that can come only from the hard experience of suffering.

As Paul once wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God . . . If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort (2 Corinthians 2:3-7, NIV).

Don't be discouraged by the temptations and trials of life. They can lead you to the way of greater compassion and impact.