

## Alcoholics Know How To Pray

A few months into my hell of mercy, I ran across the prayer often used by *Alcoholics Anonymous* groups. The first “stanza” is the most familiar, but I’ve found the entire prayer, originally written by Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, to be super helpful to me. I memorized it and have prayed it over and over. I may not be an alcoholic, but I sure am a *recovering sinner*.

*God grant me the serenity to  
accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.*

*Living one day at a time;  
enjoying one moment at a time;  
accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;*

*Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it:*

*Trusting that He will make all things  
right if I surrender to His Will;  
that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen*

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change...*

“Serenity” is such a great word, don’t you think? (Have you seen the Seinfeld episode where George’s dad screams out, “Serenity now!” every time he feels stressed? Pretty funny.) Anyway, these days I’m looking for all the serenity that I can find, especially related to “things I cannot change.” Never have I been so aware as I am today of the innumerable things over which I have no control. I told a friend a while back that I “hated” free will! Hating it didn’t make it go away though. But it *is* my prerogative to hate it if I want to. I’ve actually amended my disdain for it to more of an intense irritation. In a theological discussion I can pretty aptly defend God’s “free will experiment.” I understand that love is impossible without the ability to choose against it. Nevertheless, since I’ve been so nearly fatally bitten by it, I tend to recoil at free will. Therefore, I desperately need *serenity* about things that I can’t change, like free will.

*Courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference...*

There are some things that I *can* change, and I really do want to. If you know me, I think you’d admit that I’m fairly self-aware and pretty clued-in to my own sinfulness. It’s clear to me that my own crummy choices over the years have made an enormous contribution to my divorce. I can’t change anyone else’s choices, nor can I amend the ones that I’ve already made. I can only change those things that are still out in front of me, and for those I need *courage*.

*Living one day at a time...*

This is another one of those things about which I used to give very solid biblical teaching, but had very little idea about how to actually do it. It really helps when you have a fatal disease that could take

you at any moment. Of course we all have the fatal disease called “mortality” and could perish from any number of causes at any time. Think of how much better we would live each day if we were more aware of that.

*Enjoying one moment at a time...*

This is quite tricky actually. In the last couple of years it has been important for me to not get locked up in the *past* or freaked out about the *future*. I can't very well enjoy the *present* if I'm not there. The past is where many of my mistakes are and I feel guilty. The future is the place where a bunch of scary things might exist and I become anxious. So, even though it may not feel like it sometimes, the *present* is actually the safer and more enjoyable place to live.

*Accepting pain as the pathway to peace...*

I can't be sure what was in Niebuhr's mind when he wrote this, but I know I've found a new kind of peace while enduring the pains of loss and sickness. I wouldn't have used the term, “pathway” for it, but I can see how pain has given God an *opportunity* to give me something I didn't know existed. A “peace that passes understanding” comes when I bring my problems to God.

*Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it...*

“*It is what it is!*” Ever heard that? I may want it to be something other than it is, but wishing it to be so won't make it so. In fact, it makes me feel worse and even more disappointed with reality when I spend much time wishing for another reality. I don't have magic power to change the reality I encounter – not even when I pray or do other spiritual exercises. I tried that with mind altering substances during my youth. It didn't work then and it won't work now. I live in a fallen world, alongside other twisted people, and am influenced by my own corrupt nature. Someday Jesus will change all that, but today is not that day (at least it hasn't been so far).

*Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will...*

Someday he'll set it right, he'll fix what's broken in the world. In the meantime, it's up to me whether to be part of the problem or part of the solution. My job is to surrender to his will. “Surrender” sounds so much like I go there kicking and screaming. Yep.

*That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next...*

God doesn't promise perfection in this life. “Reasonably happy” is a good goal for me right now. It's achievable. “Supremely happy” will have to wait for another day and I can wait, knowing that it's coming. I know that the crux of supreme happiness is being “with him” in that place he's prepared for me (and me for it). I can wait. I'll have to wait. In the meantime, I'll pray like my alcoholic friends.