

Impossible Lust

Preface

This paper is a follow-on of two papers presented to the fellowship in the ESSAY newsletter titled A New Look at Lust Recovery (December 1999 and Issue Two 2000). Since then, a few groups have been trying to translate into a deeper recovery fellowship the principles which were discovered when the program originated in Akron in 1935. The results, though meager in terms of numbers, have been so heartening that we want to give any who might identify and wish to continue the venture, the benefit of what we've experienced so far.

Twenty years of SA history, in the context of the whole Twelve Step recovery movement, have given us much to consider. Searching and fearless inventories of where we are in recovery suggest that we examine ourselves as never before. What many groups and individuals are finding is not only insobriety, but the lack of Ins/ recovery, the unique calling and promise of our program. We are discovering how "impossible" that is. We are also painfully discovering the truth that without real recovery there can be no inherent unity. And without recovery and unity, there can be no effective service. This paper points back to the simple origins of our program, suggesting that the answer for us today is the same as it was for those other "impossibles" in 1935.

In 1935-1938, in the midst of a ragtag roundup of woebegone rummies, something was happening which would turn into the greatest event of the twentieth century. This was the joyous discovery that God was doing for hopeless drunks what they had never been able to do for themselves. Before there was any AA literature, before there were any Steps, this was where hope for lust-aholics was born. That seminal AA experience was centered around one simple fact—Surrender. Surrender to God in a fellowship of deeply personal accountability.

What worked for alcoholics was very simple, very direct. And it wasn't for everybody. But that's when the fire struck. That's how the miracle began. There is great hope here for SA individuals and groups which may be adrift today, wondering why, after endlessly repeating, "Keep coming back; it works!" it is not working. Trying to "work the program" without real surrender does not work. It is our belief and hope that the Akron experience, applied to sexaholism, will help us break through into the lust recovery and unity we need and want today.

What we offer here is not for everybody. It is offered in the hope of better realizing a fellowship of lust recovery—the promise of our program. We hope many will join us in this venture so we can benefit from a broader field of experience and pass it on. This kind of fellowship circle is based on the Second Tradition, calling on a loving God as our only authority, not just in group matters, but first for our mutual recovery. The priority need for such a companionship of the spirit is in doing battle through the no-man's-land of insobriety, lust, and rebellion against God, into the promised land of personal victory and joy in helping others.

This is a work in process. Although this paper is based on recent experiences to date, the conclusions and opinions expressed are my own. This is working for me better than anything I've seen so far. As with anything else written about recovery, this too will remain incomplete and unfinished. God will disclose more to you and to us, and we shall be interested in hearing from any who are getting results from this approach.

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Note: So far, our only experience has been with circles comprising men only. Thus, the vocabulary is of necessity set entirely within the masculine framework. We would be anxious to learn if and how such an approach would work with women or mixed groups.

Feedback- Comments are solicited, especially from those trying this approach. Send comments to Libera Publishing. P O Box 3LSimi Valley, CA 93062.

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1-Lust, The "Impossible" Addiction

Lust—What It Isn't

It is very important to realize what we are not talking about when we talk about lust and lust recovery. We are not talking about the sex act itself. Sex can be lustful, as most of us know, but sex is not lust. Neither are we talking about whatever it is that produces the normal chemistry of romance, attraction, attachment, and sexual passion. These are natural phenomena that have been around forever.

Marital sex in recovery can have all of this chemistry, and more—real sex with romance, passion, attraction, attachment, and love. Sex that is optional, free of demand, free of lust, and issuing from real connection and love as a joyous physical-emotional-spiritual experience. As one married man testifies in Recovery Continues, *We discovered we had each other, that we were bonded to each other apart from lust and sex. What a beautiful freedom! I would never have guessed that was possible. And I began to see ... that the real sex was very simple and good, that it asked for nothing, that it didn't demand anything and came from the inside out, rather than from the outside in, that it satisfied,* (pp. 31-33)

Our experience also shows that life for the recovering unmarried can be every much as joyous and fulfilling in its own way. As one forty-year old man puts it, *When I came to the program, it seemed that sex was the best thing I'd ever known, even though it had completely messed up my life. As a single, sober man, I've found that my friendships with other people are now much more wonderful for me than sex ever was. Looking back, my old way of life seems like being a "dead man walking." Now I'm getting to really experience life, instead of being drugged. Lately I've noticed a need to connect still more deeply with others, including with women.*

What Is Lust?

We are talking about lust. Today's lust. What some call "the new lust," new from the impact of photography, image-addiction, consumerism, the media, and the whole cultural mind-set. Lust takes a fantasy, memory, picture, image, person, body part, object, animal, words, music, art ... and does something to it for unnatural ends. Better than anyone else, sexaholics in recovery can answer the question. What is lust? Try it and see.

Group Exercise: Try a powerful experiment, with group consent: Pass out 5 x 8 index cards and spend five minutes or so writing on What is lust? Limit the time so answers will be concise and suitable for sharing. Stress that this is confidential, optional, and that the one requirement is absolute transparent honesty. Then have all who want to share read what they've written to the group. You'll be surprised at the collective insight we have into the problem. (Appendix 1 contains the results of one such group's writing and sharing exercise.)

Why Is Recovery From Lust So "Impossible"?

Group Exercise: Write for five or ten minutes (as above) on this question and then share. See Appendix 2 for one group's statements.

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There are many factors involved in why lust recovery is so formidable. Let's look at it from various perspectives:

Persistence of Susceptibility to Lust.

Men sexually sober and with years in recovery testify to the persistence of susceptibility to lust triggers, and this seems to be typical for lust-sex addicts of any stripe. "I'm sexually sober and want victory over lust; why is this craving to take a "drink" still there when I see a trigger?" This persistence of susceptibility is no respecter of "orientation" and is no respecter of length of sobriety. It seems to be one of the fundamental and virtually universal characteristics of our particular malady. Let me illustrate from a typical experience of my own after several years of my current sexual sobriety:

I pull into the store down the street to make a phone call. Suddenly, in the corner of my eye I see the image of a woman at the bus stop. There's something about the figure, body language, emanation, whatever, that wants to grab me, a powerful magnetic force pulling at the center of my soul. I'm reminded of a prostitute I once knew. I want to look and connect. I have to. The image is an overpowering trigger for my lust. I'm a goner! The compulsion to turn and take that first look is irresistible. I know that I must look—and drink. I'll die if I don't. [This incident illustrates the difference between lustaholics and "problem lusters."]

To not take that visual or fantasy drink is a very real threat of death to lustaholics. The fact that I was given the freedom not to take that particular drink points up the difference between wanting to drink and having to drink. It's okay for a lustaholic to be tempted by lust and want to drink. "I am a lustaholic." The freedom not to have to drink is the miracle of progressive recovery. Surrender to God in the context of accountability is making this possible for me and others. But the awesome power that temptation had in me is the point here. Susceptibility to lust persists in recovery. We must acknowledge and accept that as a simple fact.

Our experience so far reveals that most sexaholics sober from acting out are still susceptible to wanting to lust as they did before. The desire to drink is still there, though in time, the frequency and intensity of such desire should diminish. However, in some cases of uninterrupted physical sobriety, the frequency and desire to lust have increased over time. In one such case that is what led the man to enter the very surrender process we're talking about. And it was a continuing series of unconditional surrenders in his accountability circle over time which reversed the trend toward almost certain acting out again and led to what can best be described as real progressive victory over lust. However, the fact remains that he—and apparently most others—still can and do feel the fire of temptation. Recovery must be able to deal with this so we can be comfortable with who and what we are.

Does God Remove Our Susceptibility to Lust?

Apparently not. One of the biggest misconceptions is that recovery from lust means we should never have to feel the fire of temptation again. Before recovery, I prayed as though God would remove my temptability, not realizing that that was part of my very humanity and the basis of God's love and help for me. I see now that I was in denial. The First Step cuts through that for me, and I know the truth of who and what I really am, a luster, a resenter, a fearful person. . . . God's remedy is for me just as I am, just where I am, with a continuing compelling need to know him better in my powerlessness.

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Hardwired to Lust?

The neurology of addiction helps in understanding our susceptibility and the complex nature of lust recovery. Whole systems of the brain's neurons are apparently configured by conditioning to respond to stimuli as we become habituated to substances or behaviors. In other words, the brain becomes "hardwired" for the lust response, much as it is for an automatic muscular reflex. This explanation has obvious merit and points up another of the difficulties and challenges in recovery: We must experience a personal Power which can transcend our electrochemistry and neuronal programming so we can act against that programming.

Lust Is Spiritual. If alcoholics and drug addicts can overcome (not eliminate) their neurological conditioning so as to no longer crave the chemical, why does susceptibility to lust remain so potent in the lustaholic? Why are the pull or craving still there, even when one is sexually sober and/or abstinent and where sustained victory over such temptations may be in effect for a long time? I don't think we have anything like a complete answer to this important question; and we must be willing to learn.

For one thing, lust reveals a deeper dimension of human existence, which, for lack of adequate vocabulary, we call the spiritual. Denying myself the drink in the above incident felt like the threat of death. But since the threat of death had nothing to do with physical craving, as with a drug, the threat was spiritual. Knowing I would die if I did not drink tells me I have created within myself a spiritual life-connection with Lust. A life-support system. Little did we know that it was The Big Mis-connection. Anti-life.

This means I've been having spiritual intercourse with Lust and have become one in spirit with it. It means Lust has been my god or goddess, my object of worship, the life-giver without which I cannot live. ("Man worships what he cannot live without. ") Thus, through a religious-spiritual addiction, I have created a perverted soul-set. And thus, my spirit-to-spirit interface has become diseased, changed, programmed. Not just neurological programming, soul programming! And breaking that spiritual connection is the threat of death. No wonder lust is so hard to surrender absolutely! And no wonder our relation with God is wrong and cries out for continual surrender.

The "Psychology" of Lust.

The "impossible" nature of lust recovery hits home when we see what's really going on within and its effects. A slow-motion replay of a typical lust event reveals the following:

- Visual (or fantasy) contact is made with the object
- Instant evaluation for lust potential
- Lock-on occurs
- A drink is taken—the visual snatch
- What lust is seeing really isn't there; it's a delusion
- The person is taken over—possessed
- But there's a rush of "energy" and "power"
- The Lie is that he feels empowered
- The payoff is a powerful shot of what feels like "Life"
- The delusion of feeling more "alive" than at any other time
- Lust is feeding on something—consuming

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- But what to feed on but himself?
- Lust is a taking, an act of violence
- But the violence is within himself
- Lust is destructive to self
- Lost in the trance.
- He "connects" with the entity now possessing his inner being—intercourse.
- He is violating himself
- Mind-altering and mood-altering
- His personal reality is altered
- Falsification of personal identity
- Character change
- Sexuality is distorted.
- By "enhancing" sex, lust destroys sexuality
- Lust is really pseudo-sexuality at work; it is non-sexual
- Lust kills (For a full discussion of this and what follows, see Lust Virus.)

How Lust Changes Us

Reality distortion and transformation

Delusional anti-reality

Character change

Distortion of sexuality

Progressive loss of masculinity

Inner violence

Sexual reality progressively diminished

Diminished capacity for love

Functional impotence

Increased negative feelings against the gender used in lust

Self-hatred

Crippling of interpersonal relationship capability

Increasingly possessed by the negative force

Increased isolation

Increasing susceptibility to other addictions.

Spiritual death

Implications for recovery:

- Facing the stark reality of our condition forces us to see the implications of what "must happen in recovery. Recovery is not a bunch of negatives.
- Recovery means nothing less than this hard fact: The negative items in the above lists must be counteracted or fulfilled by their positive counterparts
- This means nothing less than rebirth into new personhood. And we thought all we had to do was stay sober! Lust, the "impossible" addiction, needs an impossible remedy.

Also, consider:

- Since lust is asexual, irrespective of orientation, and generates a false sexuality, our attitude toward any of our so-called orientations must change. To recover, we must see

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the lie in our sexuality and the lie in our false sexual identity, of whatever "preference." This means beginning by discovering the lie in our own personal sexuality, not that in another. (See Lust Virus.)

- Recovery must include and be based upon changed relations with others, beginning with open-ended sexual abstinence for marrieds and all of us improving our relations with both sexes. Relational "anorexia" and fear of women and men must yield to changing attitudes and actions.
- Now add to this how most of us are addicted to images—devotees to the image religion—and we see how our susceptibility problem and recovery become immensely complicated. How many of us can say that our recovery is not jeopardized or weakened by our use of television, movies, videos, computer games, music, and other media?

All of the above—why lust is so "impossible" to overcome—is why the recovery solution must penetrate as deeply as the problem.

For recovery, we must be willing absolutely to give up—surrender to God—our "right" to lust, even though in so doing, the very basis of our human identity will be threatened, and even though we know that in ourselves we cannot change. This brings us to the surrender-accountability we're talking about. So let's begin by seeing what constitutes lust recovery, then see where we are with lust today.

2-What Is Lust Recovery?

We need to talk more openly about what lust recovery entails. Let's start by reexamining the question of false recovery strategies. False, not necessarily in themselves, but in how they can be used to shut out what we now see as a better Remedy—surrender.

False Lust Recovery Techniques

Group Exercise: Write for five minutes or so on false lust recovery techniques we or others have used. Then share and evaluate their effectiveness.

Here's a list drawn quickly from a few members at random. As in any group exercise, no judgment is made on one's particular comment. The point is to spark honest dialog and evaluation of impact on lust recovery.

- "Sober is well." Calendar sobriety is enough
- Resetting the sobriety date
- Out-praying lust
- Three-second rule
- Calling someone on every temptation
- Allowing permission to lust only in dreams
- Figuring out what's behind the lust.
- Knowledge will save.
- Avoiding triggers
- Not taking the second look, or third look, or....
- Counting the number of looks and asking, Was that lust?
- Praying the Lord's Prayer
- Praying the Serenity prayer

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- Doing a daily sobriety renewal
- Doing two or more sobriety renewals per day
- "The next time I look at this I'll reset my sobriety."
- As long as I confess it to the group or sponsor....
- As long as it's only an erotic dream....
- Calling after every sexual dream
- Resetting sobriety after every sexual dream
- Keeping a calendar of the number of erotic dreams
- A little lusting to keep from the "bad" stuff.
- Writing First or Fourth or __ Step inventories after each bad lust slip
- Keep narrowing one's lust boundaries
- I'll try cutting out the newspaper or watching R rated stuff
- I'll only take showers during at night and not in the morning
- I won't look at myself in the mirror
- I won't look at my wife's body
- I won't touch myself
- Restricting meetings to men
- Restricting meetings to only properly dressed people
- Changing sponsors
- Looking for the program member with the magic piece of advice
- Going on medication to stop lusting
- Switching between SA and AA
- 90 meetings in 90 days
- "Keeping busy."

Calendar Sobriety Syndrome.

The following questions are taken from one member's lust inventory and point up the tricky issue of how calendar sobriety can be a detriment to true recovery.

- During introductions at meetings, do you find yourself comparing your length of physical sobriety with others in the room?
- Do you sometimes fear that if you were totally honest about your current lust state, others would question the legitimacy or quality of your sobriety?
- Do you fear being judged? Are you hiding behind the calendar?
- Do you justify periodic giving in to lust temptations by telling yourself that there is only "progressive" freedom from lust?
- Have you ever considered resetting your sobriety date because of lust, even though you did not cross the physical bottom line, but then decided not to because you would lose status, or a service or leadership position?
- How do you feel when you deliberately give in to lust—get drunk on it? That it could be a lapse in your sexual sobriety? What about sex in your dreams? Do you feel that you are not responsible for what happens in your sleep? What may this tell you about your surrender or lack of it?

"We have found that more important than the mere length of our calendar sobriety is its quality and our own personal integrity."

(White Book, p. 192)

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What Is Victory Over Lust?

Group Exercise: Write for ten minutes on the question. What is lust recovery? Then open the meeting for sharing and discussion.

So far, we don't seem to have found anyone who has permanently been kept free from lust temptation. We frankly admit we can still get hit in the gut with a double-whammy and feel its power so strongly that we know we're powerless over it. We finally admit we are lust-aholics, who actually still want to lust; resent-aholics, who actually still want to resent, etc. The desire to lust and resentment is still inside us somewhere. This is what makes our program different, and not only more difficult, but "impossible." The drug is within, and we can't avoid exposure. That's why we need to discover what was working for those other "impossibles" (AA) in 1935.

So What Is Victory Over Lust?

Let's Face the Facts. Human males and females, as well as those of other animal species, ogle and judge each other's physical attributes and appearance as a matter of course. It's part of our natural biology. We can't change that, though some have gone to great lengths to try and turn that instinct off. We are sexual beings, so ordained by creation, with all that entails.

However, something has happened to complicate matters. Something has entered our human consciousness which creates problems not only with the sexual instinct, but with our other instincts as well. "Instincts gone astray." We find within ourselves a principle in conflict with our best interests. Something in us opposes natural fulfillment of our biological instincts, and sex is one of the more obvious victims of that "something."

The Twelve Step program, judging from AA's two main texts, has been rightly called a "God program." In this context, we physical beings with our animal natures find ourselves thrust into another dimension—the spiritual. So we exist in both the animal and spiritual kingdoms and have to struggle with something the rest of the animal kingdom doesn't have to deal with—something opposing the divine consciousness. The best word the race has been able to come up with to describe this opposing principle is sin, from the Old English *synn*, dating from around the year 800. A simple three-letter word, but a concept fraught with immense complexities. Especially for sexaholics. (Why should we be afraid of talking about sin when those who discovered this solution did?)

Our Dilemma. So we're caught in that strange dilemma of being males with all our sexual instincts intact—though gone astray and infected with lust—who cannot help noticing and evaluating various physical attributes and degrees of attractiveness, as any other males or females would do. But while experiencing our natural sexuality, we can be hit with something unnatural—lust. "Can we recover normal sexuality? And if so, how can we do so without recovery from those "other sins" which drive it—fear, envy, resentment, rage, hate, or any number of other "sins?"

This is why, as we shall see, point three in the Frank Amos report is so crucial. It says that for recovery, ". . . he must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, adultery, and others which frequently accompany alcoholism. " Because that's what Dr. Bob and Bill and the others

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were saying and doing in Akron and elsewhere. And that's why Bill W. confessed, "I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away . . ." (Alcoholics Anonymous, p, 13) And this is precisely why, for us to recover from lust, we too must remove these sins from our lives. But what does it mean to "remove"?

Can the lust be expelled? Does that mean I won't be tempted any more? Or does it mean that when tempted, I won't have to drink? Is our prayer to be, Keep me sober from every lust today? or. Keep me sober in every lust today? The latter prayer acknowledges that I shall be tempted and that part of me wants to drink. I have found this to be a key to my freedom and joy today. What I call "impossible joy."

The Promise. In presuming to work the original program of AA, we come face-to-face with the promise expressed in the Preface of the Twelve and Twelve: "AA's Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."

Can we say that SA's Twelve Steps, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to lust and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole? Our experience says, YES, but with two qualifiers: 1) if by "expel" we mean the obsession to drink—the compulsive necessity to drink—and not the temptation to drink, and 2), if practiced as a way of life in the context of the kind of surrender and accountability experienced in 1935. Our recent experience is confirming this.

That brings us back to what is lust recovery? Should we not eventually be able to look and see and be attracted to people in terms of normal sexuality—without lusting? If recovery cannot offer that, what is lust recovery? Why is natural attraction—seeing and looking—so complicated for us sexaholics? Can we never be healed of the lust response? Can lust be taken out of the natural-attraction response? Can we ever be free to look and see and evaluate "clean and sober"?

I say YES! But I need a Friend who can take it, just like Bill and Dr. Bob had. I need the God solution, which is the sin solution, which is the lust solution, which comes through unconditional surrender and accountability. My wrong relation to God, mediated through my lust and other sins—my wrong attitudes and behaviors—can then be discovered and dealt with through Steps Four through Ten. And this is the very surrender process made effective on a continuing basis in our accountability community.

All this puts Akron 1935 in a new light, doesn't it? For real lust recovery, we're going to need something more powerful than "meetings, meetings, meetings" and program legalism. What is program legalism? Here are answers given by two members who were buttonholed after reading the above section: .

- Legalism is fighting my natural male instinct of attraction to the opposite sex. Fighting or denying that instinct only makes lust more powerful.
- Legalism is me using Program techniques—as techniques—to fight lust without surrendering my right to lust to God and others. Fighting lust is the same as lusting

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because I'm still obsessing on it, obsessed with it while fighting it. It might stop temporarily, but it's only repressing it, and it comes out later.

So the question is: How can we overcome lust without fighting it or trying not to lust? Or is that even possible? Will what they were doing in Akron work for us? How will we know, unless we try it? Let's begin by becoming absolutely honest with where we are with lust and put our program to the test.

How is Lust Active in My Life Today?

Since "We're as sick as our secrets," uncovering the secrets is the starting point for recovery. We come to see the depth of our sickness as we discover how lust is kept under wraps in ourselves and others: in marital sex, in dreams, in various lust-avoidance or lust-battle strategies, etc. Our lust is truly "cunning, baffling, and powerful." That's why we need help in uncovering, discovering, and surrendering.

Group Exercise. One of the most powerful exercises any group can engage in is to periodically take their lust inventory. One way is to set aside a meeting just for this purpose. This can be done with or without a writing exercise. We've found that writing it out—the Fourth Step process—is most effective.

Pass out 5 x 8 index cards to every member present. Write, answering the question, Where or how is lust active in my life today? Write for a set number of minutes, say five or ten. Stress that this is confidential, optional and that the one requirement is absolute transparent honesty. Note that in this session, there's no roll call of length of sobriety; we're all equal before the bar of absolute honesty. Since this is optional, members may choose to refrain. Then open the meeting for members to share what each has written. You'll be amazed at how this brings the group together at a level never before experienced.

It is amazing how this becomes a leveling process when we come clean with our common adversary. This exercise reveals what our underlying problem really is. not physical sobriety—"sober is not well"—but lust, of whatever sort. (Appendix 2 contains the results of one group's exercise.)

Third Tradition Personal Lust Inventory. The following is a list of questions developed for surrender workshops. Remember the Twenty Question on the SA brochure? Well, those were drafted when SA first got started in 1981 and dealt primarily with our acting out. Over time, physical sobriety has led us to discover the power of lust—acting in.

Why do we call this a Third Tradition lust inventory? Because "a desire to stop lusting" is a requirement for membership in SA, specified in our Tradition Three. Taking a personal lust inventory can help us see where we are in lust recovery, the core challenge facing us today. (This questionnaire is still a work in process. Lists drafted by other members are also available.)

1. When trigger material appears, such as in real life or in the media, do you continue taking it in?

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2. Do you "drink" on fantasies or memories when they come up? That is, do you consciously dwell on them, get a hit off of them, nourish them, let them continue to play?
 3. Do you deliberately seek out images/people to drink on?
 4. Do you resort to other images, memories, or fantasies during marital sex?
 5. Do you have erotic dreams? How often?
 6. Do you have sexual dreams, with or without climax? That is, do you engage in sexual encounters of whatever sort in dreams, and let them continue to play out? How often?
 7. Do you fantasize about leaving your wife (or husband) and finding another?
 8. When with your wife, husband, or friend and encounter a trigger, are you free not to look?
 9. Do you feel you can still tolerate certain kinds of lust? If so, what kinds of lust do you still tolerate and why?
 10. Do you have a core fantasy? What is it?
 11. Do you want to be lusted after?
 12. Do you have any lust objects or media in your possession?
 13. Does the fear of triggering the lust cycle prevent you from entering into a loving physical relationship with your spouse (or with a relationship with anyone)?
 14. Describe the connection your lust may have with attitudes such as anger, race fear resentment, unforgiveness, etc. [If the roots of our lust are deeper than the lust itself, then how can we surrender lust to God without also surrendering the deeper issues?]
 15. Do you identify with what some call "the spirit of lust" ? What is it? When/how did you let it in? What power does it have over you? What power do you have over it?
 16. Do you have a choice to not have to take the first look?
 17. Are you free to not want to take the first look?
 18. Do you want the obsession to drink expelled?
- Add other questions you think might be helpful:

3-The Fire Strikes — Akron, Ohio, 1935

Origins

It was 5 PM on Mother's Day. May 12th. 1935. in the Seiberling mansion gate house in Akron Ohio, where two men met for the first time. That was where transpired—for the sex- and lust-addicted—the most significant event of the twentieth century. Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, two hopeless alcoholics discovered that two drunks, surrendered to God and working together, could find what had eluded science, medicine, and religion. Sobriety for the addicted strength for the weak, hope for the desperate, peace for the restless, safety and home for the lost and disaffected, joy for the discontented.

On the verge of drinking again. Bill Wilson had sought out another drunk and began working with Dr. Bob. When Dr. Bob got and stayed sober, they sought out and began working with number three, then with other alcoholics in Akron where the first group formed.. After that first three months with Bill and Dr. Bob working together, Bill returned to New York City. and Dr. Bob immersed himself in what I call the Akron Experience.

With each of the growing number of recovering alcoholics working together to find and help other alcoholics. Dr. Bob was able to admit one after another into detox for a week in Akron City Hospital, where he was a staff surgeon.

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Surrender

Of the many interesting aspects of what was happening then, I'd like to call attention to the one that was central, one largely ignored today—unconditional surrender to God. My source is Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers - A Biography, with Recollections of Early A.A. in the Midwest, especially chapters 7-10. (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. 1980). I'll begin by relating the experience of Ernie, who became the fourth member in late July of 1935. In Akron City Hospital, he went through medically supervised withdrawal for six days. The three recovering albies who came to see Ernie in the hospital got the feeling that he seemed willing to take direction.

They then told him, "Well, in that case, we'd like to have you make a surrender."

"What do you mean by a surrender?" Ernie asked.

"Well, you have to say a prayer."

"I'm not very well prepared to do that, because that's been a little out of my line," he replied.

Nevertheless, they agreed to help him. They said the prayer and had him repeat it after them.

"For some reason or other, I felt quite relieved after making this so-called surrender," Ernie said.

"The surrender business was something that was in effect at the time and continued up to a few years later. I don't know when it was stopped. But I believe even today it was a good thing."

(pages 92-93)

The surrender was more than important; it was a must. Bob E., who came into A. A. in February 1937, recalled that after five or six days in the hospital, "when you had indicated that you were serious, they told you to get down on your knees by the bed and say a prayer to God admitting you were powerless over alcohol and your life was unmanageable.

Furthermore, you had to state that you believed in a Higher Power who would return you to sanity."

"There you can see the beginning of the Twelve Steps," he said. "We called that the surrender. They demanded it. You couldn't go to a meeting until you did it. If by accident you didn't make it in the hospital, you had to make it in the upstairs bedroom over at the Williamses' house [before they were allowed to go to the meeting downstairs]."

Dorothy S. M. recalled the 1937 meetings when "the men would all disappear upstairs and all of us women would be nervous and worried about what was going on. After about half an hour or so, down would come the new man . . . And all the people who were already in A.A. would come trooping down after him. They were pretty reluctant to talk about what had happened, but after a while, they would tell us they had had a real surrender.

"I often wonder how many people that come in now would survive an experience like that—a regular old-fashioned prayer meeting," said Dorothy. . . "The newcomers surrendered in the presence of all those other people." After the surrender, many of the steps—involving inventory, admission of character defects, and making restitution—were taken within a matter of days. (101-102) Times change. Our addiction is incredibly more complex. We are discovering that

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for us today, surrender is more involved than "saying a prayer." Our wrong attitudes and rebellions seem to lie deeper under the surface than those last-gaspers facing either insanity or death. For those alkies, there was apparently no doubt that their entrance into recovery meant surrender to God. For one thing they were near death and confined to a hospital bed. For most of us lust-aholics, however, who haven't been beat up that badly in body, the point of our required surrenders is less obvious, especially since most of us profess religious faith. But that's the very place where we need to re-examine our own "program." So let's revisit that scene in mid-1935 and see what it might have for us today.

The Process

A raw alkie is admitted to Akron City Hospital and put under Dr. Bob's care. Dr Bob usually the first sober member to get to him, introduces him (in no uncertain terms) to what's working for him and the other sober men. The word gets out to the fledgling little group in Akron, and on each of the next five or six days, two or more recovering alkies drop by and also talk with the man They get to know him and his drinking history and share their own stories with him. During this process, the new man on the bed begins to get the picture He is told what he must do to recover. What he was being told-in other words, the "program" in effect at that time, when there was no literature or Steps-is contained in the Frank Amos Report on page 131 of Dr. Bob and the Good Old-timers.

This five or six-day period has relevance for us today. It takes time for a person to see and surrender. And it takes continuing contact with others in deeper recovery. That's why we wonder sometimes, when working with one in need of surrender, where they are in their "hospital stay." Is this Day One for him or Day Five? Do we keep on with him, or go on to the next? Thus, when there's the prospect of a new member coming into the surrender process circle members in some groups start calling and/or seeing the prospect ahead of time to get to know where they're at. Basic questions are asked, and they get to know each other at a deeper level. This saves time in the actual surrender session, which might otherwise go on for hours, just getting to know the person and his history. (A list of such background questions being used for prospects in some circles is available on request.)

The Frank Amos Report

In 1938 J D Rockefeller sent Frank Amos, a business executive, out to Akron from New York to see what was going on. what these drunks were up to. Bill Wilson had asked Rockefeller for money to keep the thing going, such the excitement of what was happening in Akron and Cleveland (and such Bill s mistake that this thing had to get money from outsiders).

So Frank Amos goes to the Akron meetings and stays for awhile to investigate, talks with members and non-members, interviews Dr. Bob's professional associates, and gets the low-down on this strange happening. Mr. Amos then returns to New York with his report. Remember, this report was written by an outsider, a non-alcoholic, observing—with initial skepticism, no doubt—what was going on with these rummies. But what this outsider witnessed and reported was something which was working for those "impossibles" like nothing had ever worked before.

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It is this very report which has inspired our efforts to see if that Akron experience could be translated into a new beginning for lust recovery. The following are the first three of seven items in his report, describing how the Akron alkies were recovering. The following is what we come up with as we try translating these requirements into lust recovery. Read them for yourself, discuss them in your group, and see what you come up with.

"1. An alcoholic must realize that he is an alcoholic, incurable from a medical viewpoint, and that he must never again drink anything with alcohol in it. "

- Do you realize you are a lust-catholic, incurable from a medical viewpoint?
- Have you admitted that your lust is incurable from a medical viewpoint and from your own viewpoint?
- Do you want to stop lusting? That's a requirement for membership in SA; are you sure you belong?
- Are you willing to stop lusting?
- Have you come to the place where you know that you must stop lusting; that to recover you "must never again drink"?

Whether you can stop drinking is not the issue. Of course you can't, if you're a lustaholic. The real issue of what's necessary for this recovery experience is the rock-bottom realization that you can't get away with if anymore. That's the real power of the First Step. And unless we make this deeper surrender giving up our right to drink, we're cut off from recovery. That's why the early alkies—and some of us—are calling this surrender "absolute," not in the sense that it is perfect or a once-for-all-this-is-going-to-be-IT kind of thing, but that it is "unconditional." This draws a line in the sand. This is also why these surrender circles should not be open to everyone.

In SA we confess to being truly powerless over the looking, dreaming, and fantasizing. We too need this kind of desperate, absolute recognition of powerlessness leading to surrender which the Akron alkies practiced. What makes lust so seductively cunning is that we think we're getting away with the sipping, or even guzzling, because we can say we're still technically SA sober. That's a delusion in the SA air, isn't it? We're the only ones who can change that.

"2. He must surrender himself absolutely to God, realizing that in himself there is no hope."

- Do you really know that in yourself there is no hope for lust recovery?
- Are you will to give up resting in your current stage of recovery, surrender it absolutely to God?
- Are you willing to give up your right and desire to lust in any way?
- Are you willing to give it up to God because there's no way you can overcome it yourself?

"3. Not only must he want to stop drinking permanently, he must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, dultery, and others which frequently accompany alcoholism. Unless he will do this absolutely, Smith and his associates refuse to work with him."

- Do you want to stop lusting permanently: Scary, isn't it? But why not? Isn't tolerating lust the Achilles heel of our recovery? Look around; see what it's doing to us, to you. What if that is what we must surrender in our Third Step – giving up the right to lust? That's what they did; they gave up their right to drink. How can I turn my will and life over to God without including my right and desire to lust? How can you?

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- Are you willing to remove from your life other sins, such as hatred, resentment, rage? Do you want to keep trying half measures, or are you willing to go to any lengths to be free from the obsession of having to drink or fantasize?

This is the Step-One-Two-Three-Four Akron Experience – Surrender. Sound extreme? Stop and ask yourself, Have I been trying to “work the Program” without real surrender: Let’s take a look at an actual surrender session in action patterned after what was happening in Akron.

4-How It's Working

The Scene

It is 10 AM on a wintry Saturday morning, inside a members modest apartment A glass-topped table is surrounded by chairs. The wall of light from a large glass patio door behind the table gives the room an inviting feeling. A small upright piano is in the far corner of the room.

Two men are in the kitchen chatting and pouring themselves some grape juice when they hear a knock on the door. The door pushes open and Michael eagerly enters. As they exchange Hi's and embrace, there s a gladness in the air: a specialness. Michael, a tall lanky man around thirty, is a graduate student and lab assistant at the nearby university. Greg, John, and Michael, (not real names) are all sober members of an SA group they attend. They exchange hearty How-are-you's, as they gravitate to the table. Michael and John are single, Greg is older and married. We get the feeling they've broken bread here before - bread of a different kind, that this is their coming-together place. Not the place; the coming together.

The friendly chatter continues as they settle into chairs around the table. Though they've been meeting together like this often, sometimes with others present there is no special format. Normally, they would begin with spontaneous prayer for guidance and help, then go around briefly leading with their weakness. But today, there's a heaviness about Greg, and he breaks in by confessing the dishonesty of a remark he had made to John earlier.

This is a sanctuary for coming clean - no secrets here – deeper than in program meetings. They are here to help one another by being accountable to each other under God. They've learned the hard way that any wrong harbored between them shuts God out and makes the real fellowship they crave impossible. This opens the session in absolute honesty, the hallmark of their fellowship recovery.

Sponsors have been known to get caught in the trap of winding up outside continuing accountability. And recovery from this malady, perhaps like no other requires accountability of us all. Do any of us have the dubious luxury of standing "outside"? The very essence of our illness is isolation and self-centeredness and to recover, we must recover relationally. How better than by rubbing elbows, egos, sins, and hearts together, day after day, week after week, in such a circle of absolute honesty, where God's light is working and burning?

Greg's amends sets the tone for this morning's session. After he and John clear the air, sharing the truth between them, Michael speaks up. From this, it turns out the special focus of this session should be Michael's "surrender."

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This is not an SA meeting, as such. Variouslly called check meeting, surrender session, accountability circle, discovery meeting. Third Step meeting, or best, nothing at all, its ultimate aim is focused Third Step surrender to God together, for ongoing deeper recovery. A process with a beginning but no end.

Michael, sober in AA for twelve years and in SA for a couple of years with long stretches of sexual abstinence, has been troubled from the beginning with heavy lusting, both during the day and in his dreams. In these special get-togethers over the last several months he has become progressively aware of behaviors or attitudes needing surrender which were not revealed in his regular program meetings, and he has made these surrenders at various times in this surrender circle.

In previous sessions, they might have begun by helping a newcomer toward his first surrender or by asking how someone's surrender made at the previous session was going. That's where the accountability comes in. But this time, it's just the three of them, and Michael gets right into his "top plate" issue. Last week's session had revealed that he needed to go into open-ended abstinence from dating to recover from lust and the threat of his acting out, which was virtually certain. But Michael did not make that surrender then, and says he's not ready for it now. Matter of fact, he reveals he's gone "whacko" again and doesn't know where he's at. The direction he got last week is only a distant nag.

Thus, half an hour or so into their get-together, the priority need among them is getting clarified. Often, one person may be slated as the designated surrenderer, but the honest sharing and prayer at the outset reveals another priority. Time, patience, and being open to the Spirit of guidance are the key to these get-togethers. So Greg and John begin asking Michael questions—the all-important searching and disclosing process at the heart of these very special times together. Supportive questioning, prayerful questioning, is aimed at helping the person discover the underlying issue that's in the way, needing surrender to God.

These men have come to a place where they have become accountable to one another, not just with what they're doing, but in the "thoughts and intents of their hearts." That's why there is only one absolute requirement in their fellowship—honesty. They sense they need more than program "meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings." Something deeper. And something different from what they get even from their sponsors, as helpful as that is.

This is not one-on-one or two-on-one; it's three or more together--under God A fellowship of recovery.

Finally Michael comes clean with where he's really at today, the result of a process through his two years in SA, several accountability sessions such as this one and much phone and personal contact with the circle in between.

"To be honest with you guys," he says abruptly, "I haven't found anything better than sex in a woman's arms. Even AA and SA haven't given me anything better than that." Greg and John are hit in the gut, but say nothing. The force of Michael's transparent honesty leaves them

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speechless—and powerless. "But if I go back there, it's death!" Michael exclaims, the conflict tearing at him.

Michael's disclosure echoes the sentiments of other SAs who may never have had actual sexual intercourse, but who can identify with the all-consuming ecstatic rush of the trance while masturbating to images or fantasies. Without freedom from the tyranny of this common underlying obsession of lust and without finding something to take its place—and better—what sexaholic has a chance at recovery?

"So why should I abstain from dating," Michael agonizes, when I can't get beyond the fact that for me there's never been anything better than sex? I want to get well—that's why I'm in SA! - so I can control and enjoy lust!"

Michael's dilemma stops John and Greg cold. Advice is cheap, but there's no way they have the answer for their friend, and they know it. Greg drops his head to the table and prays; and then John joins in. They are powerless to help. As Michael stares straight ahead into his own desperation, Greg asks that God reveal to him, Greg, anything that may be unsundered in his life. John follows by making his own prayerful surrender and request for help and wisdom.

Here's the key to this fellowship of recovery and its powerful promise—each person is as open and willing to see, turn, and surrender as the one seeking surrender. Anything else, and it can turn into just another group therapy "Let's-play-shrink," power trip, or some kind of religious session, devoid of the special grace and presence of a loving God meeting sinners who want help and want to help others. Instead of having a rigid format the priority is on the spiritual. This does not come easily. It takes a solid recovery base practice, and experience. And above all, reliance on God instead of self. No one has to have any answers; but we do need to be absolutely honest where each of us is. in the light of God, right now. today, together. Michael feels safe in putting himself under the authority of such searching questioning because he senses it comes from identification and reflects the leading of a loving God.

We can't really enter this kind of experience in regular group meetings, because that's where there are untested newcomers to the program who don't even know which end is up. Plus, some members aren't sober, and some don't even seem to want sobriety. It takes time for most of us to see our need for deeper recovery or discover whether we even want recovery, much less know what real recovery is. Also, in meetings, we usually don't pray together. And it's here where the baring of our souls together before God is the very holiest of sanctuaries. Surrender-consciousness is in the air, and unless one is personally in tune with that, he doesn't fit in. Actually, his presence would be working against the Light. This is how it was in Akron in 1935; those who had not made their surrender to God could not be part of the fellowship circle.

After Greg and John pray out of their desperation, powerless to help Michael, there's a deep and silent pause. These men are learning that God often speaks and leads in such silences—"that God could and would—if He were sought." Plus, they know that in the ultimate sense, they have to give each other up to God. Not everyone makes it.

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This shared trust and prayerful honesty of his two helpers draws out of Michael something deeper, and he makes a startling confession: What he's been recently revealing to them as his new-found faith is really based on his fear that John and Greg would reject him unless he believed and prayed as they did.

Another bombshell! And this eventually leads John and Greg to discern a surrender priority: Michael has to let go of such sham religion before he can even begin to see what the real problem is, much less surrender it unconditionally to God and find the peace he seeks.

Mind you, Michael is SA sober. He has not sexually acted out for over a year. Which points up the real need in our recovery - "Sober" is not well. Sobriety is the mere beginning of recovery, opening the door. Sobriety progressively reveals the underlying sins of the spirit which need to be discovered and surrendered in an ongoing fellowship of surrender.

Michael's new honesty at depth helps give John and Greg insight and direction in their further questioning. This clarification process is most important and should be open-ended. We never know where it's going, and it could take hours, or another session. It turns out that Michael's surrender to God must be to God as Michael really understands God, that is, where Michael himself honestly is with God today. It was now clear that Michael's relation to God was the problem.

This powerfully reveals one of our most basic and recurring discoveries: When we come into SA, regardless of the degree of our religious persuasion, belief, or practice, our relation with God is wrong; and for us to recover, that relation must change. How could any of us be doing and thinking the things we were doing and thinking and have been rightly related to God? But we could not see that alone.

We have discovered that our relations with God must not only change but be continually open to stages of new surrender. Third Step surrender is not some one-time prayer or "decision." Surrender is a process with a beginning, leading to continuing stages of discovery and surrender. That's what makes it possible for Steps Four through Ten then to become effective in changing us.

Greg then asks, "Michael, you're coming down pretty hard, so black-and-white on what you're calling false faith. I appreciate your honesty and humility but I seem to remember in the last year of your doing battle with lust and journey toward God that there were times when you might have actually been experiencing his saving power. Was that illusion or sham? Was there anything real going on?"

"No, you're right," Michael says. "There were times when I was at the end and cried out, and there He was. And I knew it."

"Then what's wrong?" John asks. "Is there something in the way of that Connection, as weak as it was?"

That struck home. Michael leaned back in his chair: "Yeah. it keeps coming back to this, doesn't it? Suddenly real clear. The conflict. On the one hand continue in SA, my newfound church-

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going, and trusting in God doing what I can't do for myself, as I'm trying to do; or, on the other hand, follow the idea that I can through analysis, therapy and medication figure out what's wrong with me and eventually get to the place where I can control and enjoy lust through my intellect and education I won't have to depend on God." Michael threw up his hands and suddenly blurted out: "I have to give up graduate school!"

Two or three hours of yielding to the light of honesty with two other men, under God, had gradually sharpened this person's surrender focus. What began with the idea that he should surrender to dating abstinence, wound up with something else. That's the object of these sessions; that's the clarity that is well-focused surrender. Not an easy venture. And not for everybody.

Michael's earlier surrenders—to stop lusting, have sex in dreams, etc.—which he had been progressively making in this accountability circle—had been leading the way to today's top-plate issue. But he could never have discovered that without having made the previous surrenders. That's the way recovery is working for us in these circles, layer after layer.

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This particular story doesn't end here. Michael wasn't done with this surrender yet. And this illustrates another aspect of this kind of Third Step surrender fellowship: We get progressive revelation toward that next sticking point which is in the way of our farther recovery. Plus, you never know where any particular session is going. What an adventure!

Michael's surrender session was adjourned, and the three broke to a local eatery since everyone was hungry and needed to get away from the intensity of it all. The next day, Michael kept in touch with his circle by phone as he faced the hard choices involved in his decision. It was in one of these extended phone conversations that Greg detected something he had never sensed before about Michael. (Another reason why this takes time, patience, and great care on the part of everyone in the circle. We go slow. And we do unto each other as we would have them do unto us. This is love—even though sometimes it has to be tough.)

Greg sensed that Michael had to have some kind of belief system on which to ground his life, some kind of "religion" to rest on as the foundation of his being—whether philosophy, self-knowledge, twelve Step program, or Christianity. Allegiance to faith in some system. And when this point was examined honestly through more prayerful questioning, it became apparent that Michael's whole personal security, his very identity, had to be grounded in some kind of system or "religion." That's when the real surrender became apparent. His conflict was not between SA and graduate school or between Christianity and graduate school or between Christianity and analysis. The conflict was, what would he have as the source and foundation of his being? Knowledge? System? Religion? Or a personal indwelling Friend who saves? Trying to serve two masters was tearing Michael apart.

That's where this particular surrender session ultimately led. No two are alike. There's no pushing; we "live and let live." Another session awaits Michael and his accountability circle next Sunday at one o'clock in the afternoon, when there will be one or two additional men present. And based on prior experience, no one knows where that session will go. We hope Michael, based on his previous willingness, will break through again and continue his process of surrender to God. The same with Greg and John, as their needs continue to surface also. Truly an odyssey charged with wonder and grace.

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In the meantime, we pray for each other and ask for another to whom we can carry the hope we are discovering together. Working Principles From experiences such as the above, we are discovering that certain principles have evolved:

- This is not for everybody. It cannot be open to all, as regular program meetings are. The requirement for being part of the circle is continued willingness to be accountable and transparently honest with the others, open to continued surrender to God, and putting the needs of others ahead of one's own. The group has the final say on who attends simply because this is a get-together whose controlling principle is surrender.
- We trivialize the taking of the Third Step by thinking we can, by a simple rote prayer, experience what that Step promises. Historically, the Third Step was the very center and source of the whole Twelve Step program.
- Our sicknesses are more profound and lie far deeper than we had thought. The spiritual principle here is that a surrender circle can do what the one-on-one approach cannot-if, that is, the Tradition-Two principle is a working "reality in their midst. (Since November 1999 I have come to trust more in such a circle in helping others in recovery than in private sponsoring one-on-one. The wisdom and direction revealed exceed what one can offer alone.)
- If you set about to work together in such a circle, you'll soon discover your collective need for the Second Tradition God-One who really is guiding, directing, saving, fulfilling, and accomplishing his ends in and through surrendered men. Best not to try it without such a Center and without each in the circle being of one spirit with the others in this God-consciousness.
- The circle's center is a loving God as he may express himself in our collective surrender to him and helping one another. The key is willingness to subordinate opinions, advice, and understanding to dependence upon God. This means prayer together for direction and guidance in helping one another find and make the surrender-not relying on our own wisdom or understanding. See where God may be leading in a person's life and work, rather than trying to impose personal expectations or agendas.
- Questioning directed at achieving surrender clarity and simplicity is the heart of this approach. That's why it is utterly important to have members of the circle practicing Steps Three and Eleven as a way of life and willing to surrender to the reality of Tradition Two, the all-important principle of God's presence and leading in their get-togethers, versus any dominance of personality or ego.
- Members of such a circle find that commitment to each other and the circle must be their number one priority.
- Decisions should stand the test of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love. These four "absolutes" were the spiritual soil in which the recovery miracle took root in Akron.

In 1948, Dr. Bob recalled the absolutes as "the only yardsticks Alcoholics Anonymous had in the early days . . ." He said he still felt they held good and could be extremely helpful when he wanted to do the right thing and the answer was not obvious. "Almost always, if I measure my decision carefully by the yardsticks of absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness, absolute purity, and absolute love, and it checks up pretty well with those four, then my answer can't be very far out of the way." he said. (Dr. Bob and the Good

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Oldtimers, p. 54)

- Each member of the circle must be as open and willing to see, turn, and make their next indicated surrender as the one up for surrender. Sponsorship status and length of sobriety take a back seat.
- Unconditional surrender of one's current point of rebellion to God has a beginning, but apparently no end, as we continue to confront what was surrendered in successive sessions. And more is revealed in the continuing fellowship of recovery.
- Each surrender brings the person into a deeper supportive relationship with the others in the circle. We continue to bring to the light of the others how we're doing on that particular issue after the surrender has been made. We become accountable to the others on that point. Thus, surrender is not made as if that's the end of the matter; it's just the beginning. We know we'll be tempted on that point again. True recovery on that issue begins with unconditional surrender, which then becomes an attitude in process.
- This is not for everybody. Not even for people who might need or want it. It's for those who are willing to give up sobriety status, yield to the authority of a loving God together, and pay the price of continuing surrender—in community. It's for those who want a deeper fellowship of recovery, centered, not on themselves, but always reaching out to the next one in need. This is what was going on in Akron, Ohio in 1935, when our program was born.

5-Getting Started

This section contains reprints and/or revisions of material made available in previous Third Step surrender workshops.

What Is An Accountability Circle?

How It's Working. In the previous chapter, is a fair representation on of a typical surrender session of an accountability circle. The term came about in 1999 when we began translating the Akron 1935 experience into lust-surrender get-togethers. It goes back to what was happening in Akron City Hospital with Dr Bob the newly-admitted wet drunk, and the few sober men who showed up at the hospital and went to work on him. The term helps differentiate this kind of recovery get-together from scheduled meetings, which are available to all. It is a gathering of the few core members to whom one is personally accountable on a continuing basis in supporting each other's recovery. This goes beyond the one-on-one of sponsorship and is deeper than what we have in typical SA meetings

In 1935 the new man in the hospital bed was visited by at least two sober men every day for five or six days. These visiting alcoholics became those who dealt intensively with the new man. They got to know him and he got to know them. If the man eventually made a surrender to God in their presence, he had at least two or three men who were with him in one of the deepest spiritual experiences a man can ever know. This brings accountability and bonding; we're in a lifeboat together in an uncharted sea. In a similar context this is called "bearing one another's burdens."

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Just as there were two or more sober members supporting each man in the hospital the accountability circle is three or more sober members supporting each other in comprehensive recovery. This becomes one's core recovery fellowship because recovery is deepest here. The individuals may or may not be members of the same SA group, depending on need and circumstances. What is required is that the members of such a circle maintain close personal contact with each other based on absolute honesty, both within and among themselves and willingness to continue the surrender process.

Our experience from check meetings, and especially surrender sessions indicates that an individual's accountability circle should comprise at least two others and perhaps not more than five others. However, at this writing, one group, begun specifically for the purpose of surrender accountability, keeps on growing in numbers. We'll all learn from experience. What has happened in some cases is that those who participate in a surrender session become the person's accountability circle.

In a sense, members of an accountability circle are in an ongoing check-and-surrender meeting. They check on each other, and are accountable to one another in the continuing surrender process. This is how what needs to be surrendered is often revealed and where we support each other in implementing the next surrender.

Most important: Such a circle, if born in the crucible of powerlessness, surrender to God, and accountability to one another, is not self-centered but is reaching outward to the next prospect—driven by the power of a growing spiritual awakening in carrying its message of recovery to others in need.

Note: Check meetings, so-called, have been used as a tool among members for years. Though focused on problem solution and member support, check meetings have not had the surrender-to-God focus and objective surrender meetings do, while every surrender session does have all the elements of a good check meeting. (See Appendix 3 for the latest version of the Check Meeting paper.)

The Surrender Session Third Step Unconditional Surrender

The following paper is the result of our experience so far, and is a work in process. This revision is based on recent experiences, largely in one surrender group. It was created originally to serve as a suggested guide during an actual surrender process, if and when any individual gets to that point.

Surrenders can also follow naturally from any number of situations: a person's lust inventory, after a check meeting revealing the person's surrender priority, perhaps even after a First Step inventory. This material can also be used for those doing their initial Third Step surrender to stop acting out or for those at a stage where surrender of any sort is indicated. Keep it simple. As one participant observed, "This is a very simple surrender, made on a specific point before God, in the presence of others to whom we're accountable."

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We have discovered that each session should be guided, not by format or set questions, but by the guidance of the loving God at work in that particular session, as exemplified in How It Is Working. This is the indispensable Tradition Two principle at work in the accountability circle.

1. Have the person formulate their surrender in writing beforehand. Ask them to be as specific as possible. For example. "I surrender unconditionally to God and this group my right to consciously look at porn or to contact my former_____."
2. Get together. Meet privately. The leader should state the ground rules, and the session should open with voluntary spontaneous prayer(s). Continue in an attitude of prayerfulness in the light of God's presence. Allow an open-ended period of time (two or three hours is not unreasonable.) Pagers and cell phones off. Those witnessing the surrender should have the same willingness by asking themselves, "Where am I unsundered?" The one doing the surrendering should have the right to exclude any with whom they do not feel comfortable. By the same token, others who continue to resist surrender, or who do not fit in for whatever reason, should be excluded.
3. Stress the requirement of absolute honesty. The only requirement, and that for everyone present, is absolute honesty. We tell the person there is no agenda or expectation or judgment, but we do insist on honesty in everyone's responses. There is no ritual to follow here. And there should be no expectation on their part or ours of any special happening. They need not even complete their surrender. Sometimes it takes more than one session to get to the bottom of things, even for an initial surrender. Don't rush the questioning. Stop the questioning at any stage where there's any reservation. Let the person think about whether they're really ready. Let them count the cost. Better to go slow. Here's where the accountability circle comes in; often, only continuing sessions reveal the direction one's surrender should take.

We've found it helpful to begin the session by going around briefly stating where each of us is, with lust our own surrenders, especially helpful when we don't know one another intimately. That honesty helps put the surrenderer at ease and puts us all on the same level before God. More than once this initial honesty has led the group in a direction unanticipated when the focus shifts to someone else (e.g., see How It's Working, above).

4. Make clear what this is not about. Make sure the surrenderer knows that this is not to be some new self-willed commitment or attempt at stopping. Also, this is not a "fix" or another Program technique that will solve the problem; it's a beginning. It is surrender to God out of absolute powerlessness, giving up to God and those to whom we are accountable the right to continue. Trust in God, not the experience.
5. Ask the Questions. Suit the questions to the person's specific situation. Ask other questions that may arise, examining the person's surrender statement, powerlessness, sincerity, willingness, etc. This is why it is valuable to have those present who know you and to whom you will continue to be accountable in implementing your surrender. That's where the accountability comes in.

1- What are you surrendering? State it specifically. As the surrender statement is examined by those present, reformulating it may become (and usually is) necessary. Leader: Take your time here! This is the most important part of the examination, where typically most of the time is spent. Be crystal clear on focusing down to the person's surrender priority. Initially, surrenders tend to be general or abstract, instead of specific and to the point. In one case, instead of "I surrender my shame and guilt...." it turned out that it had to

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be "I surrender this woman and give her up unconditionally to God..." In another case, instead of "I surrender my anger..." it turned out to be "I surrender unconditionally to God any and all abuse of my wife...")

2- Are you powerless over this (whatever you have just confessed to)?

3- Is there any chance you can control or limit this yourself? Why not?

4- Are you powerless over the appearance of this? That is, do you have any control over whether you'll be tempted again? (You will be tempted again! It's okay to be tempted, but we can be free not to drink. You will be tested, and that will enlarge your need and desire for God. Such unconditional surrender creates a surrender attitude.)

5- What has this defect cost you?

6- How can you live without it?

7- What will it cost you to give it up?

8- What is it going to take for you to recover from this?

9- Are you willing to stop? Why? Permanently? (The word "permanently" makes us think, as it should. Spend some time exploring this, honestly and in depth.)

10- Do you want to stop now? Why? 11. Will you make that specific surrender now? (The person then prays his surrender audibly in our presence, all on our knees.)

12- Spend time after the surrender "coming down."

13- Follow-up questions to help continued implementation of the surrender in the accountability circle:

- Are you willing to be accountable on a continuing basis to us here?
- Will you have a quiet time?
- Will you start helping and working with others?
- Will you contact another when you are tempted?
- Are you willing to be called when another is tempted?
- Will you ask God to keep you sober in the next temptation?
- Will you ask God to keep you sober from all lust and sex in dreams?
- Are you willing to see there may be another stage beyond this where the love of God will be leading you in deeper awareness, surrender, and victory?
- Will you continue through the Steps? (Add other questions appropriate for this individual.)
- And finally since "faith without action is dead," will you start making things right with others right now? What will that mean for you now, today?

14. Take time to stay together and be there for the person afterward. How are they doing? Have they got clarity and direction? Where are they going from here? See how others present may also have been affected. Honestly assess what took place. (The person may wish a copy of this questionnaire.)

15. Pass it on. Learn from each surrender experience and exchange experience and helpful ideas to other surrender groups.

Focusing and Implementing the Surrender

The following follow-up questions have been used in group exercises and in surrender meetings where applicable.

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1. Focusing narrowly on the core lust (or other problem) your inventory reveals, write out your core surrender to God in one sentence (NO NAMES, please). For example, "I surrender unconditionally to God....."
2. Since "faith (or surrender) without action is dead." what action(s) must you take to fulfill your surrender?.....
3. How and when will you implement those actions (#2, above)? (For example, changed relation to TV, Internet, writing a letter, a face-to-face meeting . . .)
.....
4. How will you become accountable to your core group in this matter on an ongoing basis? (The group referred to is those in your fellowship to whom you will be transparently accountable in this matter as you are tempted.) Example: Call one when tempted, ask for a check meeting, etc

A Group Exercise

The following writing exercise has proven very helpful as a change in meeting format for special sessions of the group. Some groups have done this where, after members have finished writing, each member reads what they have written. This was described by one member, who said, "This honest sharing turned out to be the most significant thing this group has ever done for its recovery. It broke through."

1. In what ways is lust active in my life today (including dreams)?
2. Focusing narrowly on the core lust (or other problem) your above inventory reveals, write out your core surrender to God in one sentence. NOTE: This is not intended to take the place of an actual surrender, as we have been talking about. However, this group exercise opens us up to honestly seeing what our "top plate" surrender might be. Some may later want to actually do their private surrenders (as described above) with their core accountability group.

Appendix 1

What Is Lust?

The following are comments written by members or one group during a lust inventory session:

- Lust is an escape-a drug. It lures me in and folds around my body like a soft pillow. Lust is dangerous and destructive, causing spiritual and emotional death, the path to a spiritual wasteland.
- Lust is a desire to see, smell, touch, and feel women. A constant desire to be needed by any woman and to prove to her that I can sexually and emotionally fill her need.
- Lust is an obsession to look and drink in a female's form. Separates me from God
- An exciting experience/sensation when seeing/reacting to attractive women. An abnormal perversion of the need for love and faithful sex.
- A state of mind that begins with my ritual of first making sure that I am alone and will not be discovered
- Lust is spiritual, a spiritual drug. For me it is absolutely tied to violence. rooted in my violence for myself and others, especially women. The drug of lust seems to be the way I calm myself from my fear of violence ... to calm down from my fearful, anxious and angry/violent states.

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- A power that affects my way of thinking and my behavior... and gives me power. I desire the effect of its power within my mind and body. . . I can find no peace until I act out. Even Prozac has no deterrent power..."
- What lust does for me now: Craving for self-satisfaction, fantasy, desire for physical stimulation with no emotion or price, no emotional connection, pure escape from reality, no fear, no reprisals or judgment, numbing of anger and resentment, pain relief, power illusion, accepting illusion. Results: regret. fear!!! loss of self-confidence, loneliness, isolation, depression, procrastination, negative emotions, anger.
- Lust is an instinctual and completely natural feeling that I believe all humans possess in some degree ... to help man reproduce the problem is I let it become so important and so exciting to me that I become obsessed with it. I let it control my behavior. . . controlling me.
- Lust to me is the inability to control my need to speak with other women either on the phone or on the computer. The need to feel that I am needed. A power much stronger than I... it eats me up and spits me out. Lust is a habit, makes me lie, is making my life miserable, makes me angry, filled with guilt. Lust is destructive.
- Lust is desire which overpowers and defeats my will. Perversion, controlling, deceitful, destructive, spiritual, escape from reality.
- A sexual or other fantasy that once triggered takes over my mind and "makes" me respond to the impulses in a physical way even though I don't really want to.
- Lusting for me is to allow my anger to break through and control how I act and what I say without regard for how it affects those around me. It is an evil thing that controls my spirit.
- Lust is a built-in self-destruct mechanism, a reflex to punish myself for my wrongs. It's a pointer to a God who's taking my place in being punished and destroyed.
- When I'm lonely, I use lust as a way to feel wanted and loved. When I'm angry and seriously hurt by someone else, I use lust as revenge and a way to prove I'm valuable. However, lust is really always lies. A way to escape from reality, to avoid difficulty, decisions, and feelings, and a method to feel better right off the bat, but at the cost of tomorrow.
- Lust for me is adrenaline rush. A chemical change, it takes me out of whatever I'm doing. It puts me in a trance. . . . short-term medication, taking away whatever pain I'm in. But there is a price. It is spiritual noise, preventing me from having meaningful relationships with myself, others, or God. Lust today can bring depression/self-criticism/guilt. Lust keeps me lonely. It allows me to live in my head. I don't have to have outside contact. It's also a conditioned response to pain. Acting out today will not relieve the pain.
- Lust is my addiction It makes me angry. ... It is a dark power It makes me feel so good, but so bad... resentment, anger after the act.
- Lust is a force inside me that wants to kill me. It's a Deceiver and Liar because it offers me one thing, promises me life, and gives me the opposite, spiritual death. It's a seducing spirit that is cunning, baffling, and powerful and comes in many disguises. Lust is a perfecter of reality, an anti-God spiritual force. Lust is ME—apart from God!

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Why Is Lust So "Impossible" to Overcome?

The following comments were written by members of one group in a special inventory session. Members were asked to write for five minutes on the question. Why is lust so "impossible" to overcome, either generally or for me personally"? Members shared aloud what they had written. The follow-up question was. Based on why you said lust was so "impossible" to overcome, what will recovery have to do to fix that? Or. What must I do to or what must happen in me to recover from lust?

- Lust happens in my head, so I can't stop it by not doing something physical (like turning my head). I can lust without even moving a muscle! I don't even have to be awake. It seems like if I try to fight it. I'm lusting just by fighting it. I can't even be sure whether I've done it or not. It seems so close to normal things, like attraction to members of the opposite sex.
What must happen for me to stop? I must give up any possible way of tryin" to fight it, even if I'm afraid it'll kill me. I must give up fighting for my life in all its forms. I need to come to trust, through experience in God, to give me and to care for me so that I can be free of having to make it happen through my effort. I also need to learn to connect with other people in a more healthy way.
- Lust has been such a big part of my life for 30 years and has been an obsession for most of that time. That's 30 years of getting positive reinforcement for acting out on that lust. I would think about lust then act out think about it. act out. And I would get the reward of the pleasure of sex from that Over time, this has become somehow ingrained in my soul. It's who I am. It only seems natural that to try to overcome something so powerful and so deep inside me would be impossible.
What do I have to do or change so I can overcome lust? Attitude. Attitude has been the most important part of my recovery. Changing my attitude from: What I am doing is okay, good, normal and natural. To: hey wait a minute, lust may be a natural instinctual desire, but what I m doing is wrong I've taken this instinct and turned it into an obsession. lusting after any woman I see. compulsively acting out. I have to realize that what I am doing hurts other people, people I love. And most importantly, it hurts me. This is not who I want to be. I don't want to be a pervert. I want integrity. I lust because I want to. To stop, I must want that more.
- Because in growing up and maturing, males are "conditioned" to believe that lust for females is good-okay-natural, and satisfying the lust physically is okay-natural-good.. Because the female is constantly portrayed as an acceptable lust object for males.
To recover: Must enforce difference between general lust and love of spouse plus sexual acts as expressions of love only. • My eyes have been fed images for so many years that this has caused such a strong addiction ofdrinking-in the sexual anatomy of women, causing me to only see a female as a sexual image or object to lust after and desire to lust out.
- To recover: I need God's strength from His Word daily and through prayer ask for His help. For me, I always have to not allow myself to take any first drink when a very sensuous female appears, I have to remember to look away from her attraction and pray for her to be blessed. I also need to be ever mindful of the end result of my addiction

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when let run wild, taking me into the deep pit of incarceration and the horror of that humiliation of being a sex offender.

- Lust seems impossible to overcome because it is so deeply rooted in my sexual need. I want what is sexually desirable and when I can't have it, I fantasize about having it through lust. Sometimes I feel like a man walking through desert yearning desperately for a drink of water. Suddenly, a glass of cool refreshing water is offered, put right up to my lips to drink, but the holder of the glass tells me that I cannot, must not drink. That is what sexual lust is like. To realize that I don't need that drink of water while I am standing there under the hot sun of the desert seems impossible. To recover, the man in the desert has to come to an awareness that the drink being offered to quench his thirst is not water at all, but poison that does nothing more than bring on more thirst. I must find the thing that satisfies my thirst. Jesus said, "I offer water that will become a wellspring rising up within you. And you will never be thirsty again." Then I must find my way out of the desert. My lust will be replaced by something greater: Love. Loving God, loving my wife and kids, loving myself.
- First of all, it's attraction and the false sense of feeling good for a short period of time; the escape of reality for a brief moment. It makes me feel good about myself and run away from everything and everyone. It's all a big lie. It's too painful to face reality most of my life. So my addiction is my temporary escape. It's truly addiction, like a drug I'm hooked. First of all, I must truly want to stop lust and ask and do whatever it takes to go down to the root of the problem and face it and truly work towards recovery. At any cost, if it takes all the rest of my life, which will probably be.
- Lust is so "impossible" because it's part of my brain, body, mind, and soul. It's more powerful than I am. My antenna is permanently tuned to lust's wavelength. Lust is radiating everywhere in my world, wanting me to tune in and be lusted after. Lust was my god-connection. Lust programmed my sexual identity. Lust programmed my personal identity. Lust was the biggest payoff in my life. To recover, I'll have to have something more powerful than lust. Something that can transcend my chemistry and neurology. It must be more personal than lust. Be true instead of deceitful; clean instead of dirty. Enable me to see what lust was covering, what was driving the lust so I could deal with the real problem. I must have something better than lust, a connection with God that works. Recovery must enable me, a total love cripple, to discover love, enable me to give instead of take.

Tall order, isn't it. No wonder "meetings, meetings, meetings . . ." isn't enough.

Appendix 3

Check Meetings

Check meetings have been around for quite awhile and have proven to be a valuable means of implementing the deeper fellowship we need in our recovery. ("Recovery never ends for the lustaholic. ") Often a sponsee will have a problem that does not readily yield to the sponsor's knowledge, recovery experience, or ability. In such cases, there can be wisdom and breakthrough by bringing the issue to a small select group of trusted members, together, under God. At least two others, and not more than five others has been found to be effective. It is ideal

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if this can be done in one's accountability circle—the few core members to whom one is personally accountable on a continuing basis in mutual recovery support. See *How It's Working* and the *Accountability Circle* paper. Check meetings can easily led into surrender meetings.

Examples: A member who can't get or remain sober or who is a habitual slipper. A member can't breakthrough into lust victory or wet dreams. A member doesn't know how to cope with his wife's response for his decision to go into total sexual abstinence. A member has a major decision, like whether to break off with a girlfriend, whether to get married, accept a job offer, etc. Other members seek help with problems such as fear, dating, career. . . . Sometimes Akron 1935-type Surrender meetings wind up being check meetings only, when it becomes apparent that the person is not ready to proceed with the surrender. At other times, check meetings called for some other purpose lead right into focused surrenders.

Sometimes it becomes apparent that the person needs to write on something that surfaces during the check meeting that had little direct connection with the original topic.

How We Go About It

1. Get together. Meet privately. The leader should state the ground rules and the session should open with prayer(s). Continue in an attitude of prayerfulness in the light of God's presence. Allow an open-ended period of time (two or three hours is not unreasonable.) Pagers and cell phones off. Those participating should have the same honesty and willingness as the checkee. The checkee should have the right to exclude any with whom they do not feel comfortable.

2. Stress the requirement of absolute honesty. The only requirement, and that for everyone present, is absolute honesty'. We tell the person there's no agenda or expectation or judgment, but we insist on honesty in everyone's responses. There is no ritual to follow here. And there should be no expectation on their part or ours of any special happening. Often, the check meeting has as much or more value to those participating than for the checkee.

We've found it helpful to begin the session by going around briefly stating where each of us is, with lust or surrender, for example, especially when we don't know one another intimately. That honesty helps put the person at ease and puts us all on the same level before God.

3. Approach. We do not criticize, pass judgment, or give advice. We simply play back what we hear, what comes through between the lines. We do not take responsibility for the other person's life or decisions. We are simply a sounding board. We speak as we would be spoken to. We ask questions for clarification, the aim being to bring clarity and direction. Often, a check meeting can lead directly into revealing the present point of resistance in surrendering to God's will. (Also, using the four absolutes as a guide in decision making has proven helpful to Dr. Bob and others.)

(See the *Third Step Unconditional Surrender* paper, since the sessions involve a similar approach: privacy, open-ended time, honesty, and accountability.)

Example: A woman a few years sober realizes she still cannot forgive the men who perpetrated

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wrongs upon her.

In this case, it was suggested that the woman write a concise Step 8 1/2 inventory (see page 125 in the White Book) on her unforgiveness. The woman wrote on each person or incident: what happened, how her unforgiveness expressed itself within her, and what this told her about her herself and her own spiritual condition and attitude. The focus was to be on her response to the wrongs, responses both within her and in her behavior, not on those who wronged her.

The woman wrote it out and called four or five members to hear and offer feedback. They began with prayer for guidance, and she asked for guidance and courage. She read her inventory all the way through. (Had it gotten off track, the members could have intervened, if appropriate.) When she was through reading it, they prayed again, and one by one the members shared what they heard. She was able to break through into free and total forgiveness. Example: A member who is a minister has been sexually involved with members of his congregation calls a check meeting for guidance on how to make amends to these persons. It's very touchy because this might injure others. Penetrating questions are asked, which reveal that his "top plate" priority is a surrender of anger toward his own wife.

Example: A member is stuck in her career/education and seeks a broader range of input and wisdom than her sponsor is able to offer. She was asked to bring a written "inventory" dealing with her education and employment history. The questioning revealed that the underlying problem was the person's tearfulness. This led her to begin working all the Steps on this new "addiction," leading eventually to a new job.

John's Story . When I first came to SA eight years ago, it became clear, as I talked to other members and heard their stories, that if I continued my acting out habit, it would lead to death or jail. So I became willing to lay down my habit, get a sponsor, and start working the twelve steps with my sponsor and others in my group. It became clear that I could not stop on my own power, and that even SA could not keep me physically sober. So, it is nothing short of a miracle of God that I have not had to act out physically for the past eight years. But, like they say, "sober is not well."

A little bit about me: I'm a single man, never married, 32 years old when I came into SA My acting out had centered around masturbation and fantasy. When I first started this program, I was beginning to act out the fantasies that could have put me in jail, or six-feet under: exposing myself or suffocating myself while masturbation. (The technical term for the latter, I believe, is auto-erotic asphyxiation.) Given the way I was going, were it not for God's work in my life, by now I would likely be in jail, in a mental hospital, or dead.

What has happened to my lust during the past eight years? At first, I kept doing all my lustful behaviors except physically acting out, but this experiment did not work. So, I accepted that I had to stop lustful behaviors that could lead me to act out. If I started one of these behaviors, as soon as I realized I was lusting, I surrendered my lust to God, and to my surprise, he took it! The realization of lustful behaviors kept coming earlier and earlier, so that eventually I completely stopped going to newsstands to look for triggering material, and then I started to be able to give up the first "glance" to check out who was walking by. It was (and continues to be) such a relief

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to not have to do these things any more! Eventually, I came to see that God actually takes my place in bearing my lust, so that I am free of having to do it. I came to the program simply to save my neck, but what I found was the real God.

Although I was happy with the progress I'd made, there was a nagging problem: I was surrendering the glances with my eyes, was still lusting after people in my head, even without looking, and there didn't seem to be any progress in this area. Furthermore, there were impossible situations when I had to look at the triggering person, such as when working with someone, or (later on, when I tried it) going out on a date with someone.

Furthermore, I became aware that other people, some with many years of recovery, were losing their sobriety, never to regain it, even though these people seemed to be doing all the things I was doing. This really scared me, because I cannot act out, it could cost me my life.

About two years ago, I started to have a series of worsening erotic dreams, which made me fearful that my sobriety, and hence my life, was in jeopardy. I was mechanically doing all the program actions that had worked before, especially calling people and bringing to the light my lust, yet the problem kept worsening, the dreams coming almost every night. At that time one of the men I was calling with my dreams suggested that I try an absolute surrender with a group. I resisted the suggestion at first, since I wanted to believe that if I kept doing everything in the program I had done before, it would be enough. Eventually, I became desperate enough to take the suggestion, and got together with several others for a check/surrender meeting. This first meeting led to a series of meetings over several months as the crisis continued to get worse for me.

The initial breakthrough for me happened at a rather large surrender meeting where I'd called together most of the people I'd been close to in my years of SA I read an inventory I'd written, and a statement of what I thought I needed to surrender, which was something like, "I surrender my lust and obsessing, including in my dreams." The group didn't think that was specific enough, so we started to talk about what was it that I really needed to surrender. I really believe God was at work in this meeting, because there were a number of times when we seemed to be completely stuck, that there was no solution to where we'd gotten. But each time, a different person would know where we needed to go next. Eventually, my resentment toward the person who'd suggested the surrender came out, and we looked at that. Bringing this out allowed all of us to see the real sticking point: that I was running my life as a sham, using the program to help me look good to my family, my church, my coworkers. So, I got on my knees, and surrendered to God my right to my sham.

The next several months for me were scary. I knew what I had to do. Although it probably would have gone better if I'd stayed in closer fellowship with the people from the surrender meeting. I stopped going to church for an indefinite period, had some honest talks with my parents about my addiction and our relationship, and let people at work know in various ways that I wasn't all together the way I'd pretended to be. I fell into a frightening depression, as I began to realize for the first time the depth of my rebellion against God. I seriously doubted that he would give me any more help, given who I really was. For the first time ever, I could not carry out my job properly, and was getting in trouble with my boss because of this. There was

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fear that I would act out, and kill myself doing so. Without my even trying, my mind developed a new fantasy for how I might commit suicide while masturbating. Looking back on this experience now, I have a sense that God was very close to me, even though I didn't know it, and all seemed hopeless. Although it seemed that there was nowhere to turn, in desperation I surrendered the new lust fantasy to God, and asked him to show a way out of the crises. My thoughts were completely confused, and gyrating back and forth, yet as I asked for his help, there would always be moments of clarity when I'd know what my next step was to be. Eventually, there was another surrender meeting where I became willing to let go of my job, my status, and my right to myself. Although I doubted if it would make any difference, I went ahead and surrendered these things to God, admitting that there was nothing left in me with which I could take care of myself. Over the next few days, as I stopped fighting for my life, my mind started to clear, and God started to return me to sanity. Several people, inside and outside of the program, noticed a change right away.

Over the next few months, things still seemed quite shaky, but I kept close to those I'd surrendered with, keeping myself in the light with them and with God. Eventually, there was another, wonderfully freeing surrender in which I let go of my right to mind unconditionally giving it to God and leaving to him whether or not I would remain sane and functional. (My trying to analyze what was going on in my recovery had become an addiction all its own.) Since then I have felt less and less in danger of slipping into insanity or depression, although I continue to have the capability to do that.

Over the past year and a half since my crisis, God has done for me what I was unable to do in all those years of strictly "working the program." He's giving me victory over the lust inside my head, including the erotic dreams. The biggest miracle is that I'm starting to find out what it's like to connect with women, and, yes, even feel attracted to them, and maybe tempted to lust, but to let God in and be saved from lust in that moment. By the way, my employers are happy again with my work, although I'm not sure how long I want to continue the current job.

The book [Sexaholics Anonymous](#) says that fighting lust doesn't work, and giving in to lust doesn't work; the only thing that works is surrender to God. Looking back on the last few years, it is now clear that I was "working the program" including going to meetings, calling people, doing inventories, etc., as a way of fighting lust, all because of my fear that I might go back "out there." Fear-based sobriety! Surrender to God is freeing me from this tyranny of having to "work the program" hard enough to keep myself sober. I'm just beginning to find a God who can save me from my lust, resentment, and fear, so that I can follow him in freedom, instead of out of having to do it to save my neck. I'm learning that freedom which I really want, freedom to follow God's call because it's what I want to do, instead of what I have to do.

One more thing: it used to be at meetings that I would seek out people who seemed to have certain qualities that I wanted in a friend, hoping that I would find fellowship that way. It turns out that the best way I'm finding fellowship today is to look for the person at the meeting who's messed up and knows it, who's experiencing their powerlessness over something; because that means we have something in common, powerlessness. Instead of trying to fix them with my program knowledge, what seems to work best is to get several people together to meet with them in a spirit of surrender, admitting that we're all powerless over their problem. God is working in

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situations like that. This afternoon, I'm going to be spending time with a lustaholic who, like me, is powerless over something in his life. I don't know exactly what it is, and I don't know what I can say to help him. I'm powerless over this person. So we'll see what God does this time!

Appendix 4

The Luster's Fear of Dying

For the typical lust addict, our whole system screams out that we're going to die if we don't take that "drink." It's too fearful not to drink. Lust is our spiritual life-support system. Yes, the fear is that real. So, we wind up drinking. We're hooked on it and remain a slave. It's the fear of this kind of death that keeps us in bondage and forces us to keep slipping with lust.

The sad fact today is that so very many in the sex addiction recovery movement remain in bondage to lust because of this very threat of death. They are unable or unwilling to connect with the Life-giver instead. We can't break through this death-barrier; we shrink back at the death-threat of not drinking. It's so unnatural for us not to lust or misconnect. Ours is the compulsion of the look the fantasy, or the misconnection, which when denied, is the very threat of death. But eventually we learn the hard way that for us to drink is to die. So recovery is learning to act against the fear—to lean into the fear—and go ahead and die. So we can live. The amazing paradox of our program.

This is why the decisive action-point of our malady is the instant of temptation, typically in the look, the memory, or the fantasy. That's where we face the feeling of death each time. And that fear drives us to resort to that drug again and again and again. So we won't die! We've used and heard all kinds of formulas on how to deal with it. Some are foolish or frantic, such as the three-second rule: "If you look for over three seconds, you're lusting. (What's yours'?) As though lust had anything to do with duration. Lust has nothing to do with duration and everything to do with intent. If the intent is to snatch a quick drink, does it really matter how long it is. or even what we see? The intent is what we are. We need salvation from the intent, from the disposition of our heart.

Most of us initially feel it's something we must do to get out of it. "I shouldn't be doing this!" we say to ourselves, as we go ahead and take the drink. This tells me that we don't fully understand the nature of what we're dealing with and that we underestimate the strategies of spiritual blindness and denial. We don't comprehend that lust is a disposition of the heart, an attitude. We rely on our own efforts—even our prayerful efforts—to save us. (Who says religious exercises can't support the illness?) This is why so many of us—sober from "acting out"—do not recover from acting in. Mere sexual sobriety just deals with externals. Sober is not well. The tragedy in such lust-avoidance or lust-distraction technique is that we can still "feel better about ourselves" and support the illness.

Is Victory' over Lust Progressive?

Our program affirms that "true sobriety includes progressive victory over lust." How can there be any argument with that? We know of no instant cures from lust yet (though we keep an open, if skeptical, mind). But our relation to this sobriety definition may be too shallow. We can abuse

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it. We can hide in it. So let's examine the question: Is there such a thing as progressive victory over lust? There are two ways of looking at it.

On the one hand, I came slowly to see in my own progressive recovery what lust is and the many ways I denied and blinded myself to what was really going on. Apparently it takes a certain amount of recovery to begin to see lust for what it is. I didn't discover lust as the underlying pathology until I stayed sexually sober. The overt "drool" is merely one of the more obvious forms. What about addiction to Woman or Man— "Connect with me and make me whole!"? What about the "wandering heart"? Ours is preeminently the malady of the misconnection. What about lust in the marriage? Lust and sex in dreams? Lust is cunning, baffling, and powerful, and more gets revealed. In this sense, victory over lust is progressive; unfortunately, it many of us, it isn't, and we pay the price.

On the other hand, in the instant of temptation, there is absolutely no such thing as progressive victory over lust. Any rationalizations we have notwithstanding, whenever that image, that fantasy, or that memory hits, we either lust or we don't. We either drink or we don't. The intent is either there or it isn't. There's nothing progressive about it. There's no in-between. Suppressing it through will power might be considered kind of an in-between, but not really.

Suppression or repression—will-powering it—is just another avoidance technique which may be worse than consciously going ahead and lusting. Worse because in that forced ascetic denial, we think we're making it. But the lust is still there inside, building up steam. It's like saying I really want to lust, but for whatever reason, / will put it away. That's really not surrendering it to God. It's locking it in a cage deep within. That's not victory over lust; it's merely trying to put a bridle on it, putting lust on hold. There's no freedom in suppression, only more fear. And it all lodges in the subconscious, storing up energy, only to bust out later in dreams or get expressed in other forms, such as resentment (or even self-loathing) or cross over into other addictions, such as food or TV. For the lustaholic. there's no way out of our awesome dilemma. Except the Program way of surrender to God, dying to it, and being released from it in that moment of temptation.

In AA we hear the expression, "Resentment is the number-one killer of alcoholics." With us, the killer is lust. "Lust kills the spirit.. .Lust kills me" (White Book, p. 44).

Too often this idea that victory over lust is progressive becomes the excuse for aborting true recovery. "I'm sober so many years" equates to "I'm okay now " As though calendar sexual sobriety is the "real" sobriety. Or, as we hear so often, "I'm dealing with lust the best I can; it's a goal to aim toward." More often we hear nothing at all about member lust temptations. We discover the person who calls himself technically sober is still drinking. Missing out on true recovery. This is tragic and damages group and Fellowship unity. Continuing sexual sobriety is only prerequisite for recovery, not recovery itself. The recovery which our program promises is being saved in that next temptation, being released from its power. Instead of being self-driven or fear-driven, recovery is the victory of incredible joy.

Therefore, the first and only line of defense in a lust temptation must be a prior changed attitude of the mind and heart. If that prior attitude—which only comes via unconditional surrender to God—is a decision to give up lusting and rely on God, that attitude will be in place before we're

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even tempted. Then, when hit with the image, in that first blink of an eyelash, the shield of God's presence is already in place, and you don't have to do anything. Victory over lust is where you are, where you are in your attitude with your Lust-bearer, not what you do. The Shield is already in place, and you don't have to do anything. That's where we are either saved from it or not. Victory over lust begins with the daily decision to give up lust to God. Deliverance in the moment of temptation follows as a consequence. (Morning and evening, I surrender my right to drink and ask him to keep me sober from every lust.)

Real Recovery

We may have this whole idea of sex addiction sobriety backwards. We need to consider and talk about this very seriously. Victory over lust is the real recovery, and continued recovery from acting out sexually flows from that. There is no true recovery if all we're doing is not acting out. Merely not acting out only minimizes the real problem, which is acting in. Question: Should the persistent practice of acting in be considered sober? More and more, people are saying No.

On coming into the program, most of us are mainly concerned with stopping the acting out. That's what we thought was killing us. But once sober, we begin to see the real problem. Remember that our program is aligned with the AA model of /?o/ drinking, because ours is an internal drug, the alcohol of the spirit. How does SA's Third Tradition read?—"The only requirement for membership is a desire to become sexually sober"? No. It reads, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting" (then adding) "and become sexually sober." Think about it. We need to get down to the nitty-gritty basics. The Calendar Sobriety Syndrome is killing us! I laud those who are beginning to set their dates back with a decision to stop acting in. Let's encourage and support one another in breaking through the Lust Barrier. Maybe that's the SA equivalent of AA's statement of "separating the men from the boys."

It's Impossible

This is where we'll discover that true sobriety from lust by our own doing is impossible. This is where we're up against our real powerlessness and have no recourse but to One who can restore us to sanity in the very temptation. I wonder if it would not be better to challenge people right up front with the fact that recovery is impossible without victory over lust. Once we discover we're powerless over lust, let's challenge each other so we don't hide it. Let's keep bringing it into the light.

For myself today, I am absolutely powerless over lust in some form or other. But there is One, who himself is my victory over it, whenever I go through that fear of death, die to the temptation, upward to him, and bring him in, personally, savingly. It works. He works!

We should honestly face this impossibility of a "lust cure" so people will be forced to find their saving connection with God before settling into either the Slipper Syndrome or the Calendar Sobriety Syndrome or shifting from acting out to acting in. Why not state the nature of this problem as it really is, right up front: True recovery—joyous victory over lust—is utterly impossible without finding God, cleaning house, and working with others. That is the distilled essence of the original Twelve Step program. Have you found God in your lust?

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Fear of dying to lust holds us in bondage to the slavery of impossible addiction. And the longer we're in the fellowship of recovery, the clearer we see the true spiritual nature of our addiction and our utter dependence on a Power greater than ourselves, greater than our lust. But in each temptation—over and over again—we, you and I, must be willing to go through the threat of death to discover that there really is life after lust.

. . .

The whole point here is that we don't have to lust at all. We can and will be tempted—by triggers, memories, and fantasies—but we don't have to drink at all. We can have total victory over lust in that next temptation, which is all we ever need. There is no victory over lust before the fact! No magic bullet that makes us immune. The victory is in the prior attitude before we're ever tempted—an attitude issuing from unconditional surrender to God. The victory is in the prior disposition of our heart. We either have it or we don't. And it's our choice, either for the god of Self, the god of Lust, or for the One who is eager and able to deliver us in the trial. The choice is ours. The choice either to give up, to die to self, to die in that next temptation, or to drink.. Thus, victory over lust, our Great Impossible, becomes The Great Possible! We can discover and experience the expulsive power of a new affection. This is our calling, our hope, and our great joy in fellowship.