

**From:** [Dale Galusha](#)  
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Recently a long-time friend of mine asked me to go to AA with him one evening. (I was NOT excited to go—I had a very negative stereo type in my mind about AA. I encouraged my friend to go, but certainly it was not where I wanted to spend time.) However, I agreed to go. Wow, was I surprised. Here are some of my reflections and thoughts about AA and church:

What makes AA work, and what can we as a church learn?

- Non-judgmental environment. The people are REAL—no one pretends to be something they aren't. EVERYONE knows why everyone else is there. And that's okay! Acceptance of others is evident. The "greeters" at the door make everyone feel welcome. And new people are introduced to others. And no one "points out" that you have a problem. Everyone there knows they have a problem, and that is why they are there.
- Celebrate that you are there. Everyone is excited to see their friends. Everyone is welcome.
- Congratulate successes—one month people are celebrated, and one year get a "cake"! There affirmation for reaching milestones is big.
- Everyone has the same common goal, however:
  - Everyone is at different stages—Yes, there are 12 steps. People are all at different steps, or some not even at any step, but that is okay. They have plenty in common—and not concerned that everyone is doing or studying the same thing at the same time.
  - The quest and journey never ends—a person who struggles with alcoholism NEVER thinks they are cured, or fixed or perfect—it is a lifelong endeavor to stay sober, but would never say "I've arrived."
- Upbeat and positive. They don't dwell on the negative. Oh yes, there are "testimonies", but success and HOPE are what move the program.
- Strict adherence to ONE hour. The program includes testimonies, a presentation, an offering, a prayer, etc. BUT, everything is exactly contained in one hour. (partially due to many are also smokers, and I don't think a lot of them could sit for much longer without going outside to smoke—which is another point—AA doesn't try and fix everything. It is very focused.)
- Everyone "pitches in" and helps—there is no single person in charge. People volunteer to do certain parts. But, everyone moves chairs, etc. . .
- Intrinsically built in is the concept that the greatest indicator that you are progressing and best help for yourself is reaching the point of being a sponsor (i.e. helping someone else)—the program is not so "inward focused" that I have arrived when I don't drink anymore—but I have arrived when I am at the place where I can reach out and help someone else!
- One of the "incentives" that many look forward to is the time they are allowed to "share their story"—(i.e. testimony)—for many it is the first time they have been able to do such a thing—and get positive feedback.
- People think nothing of attending multiple times a week—it is not a burden, it is seen as "this is what I need—and this is what is helping me—I want to go." (Some even go to

multiple programs a day!)

I recognize that AA programs are unique to each group, and the dynamics. Most likely there are groups that aren't upbeat—just like there are a variety of churches. But this experience is what I see church should be!

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