



From Assisi to Recovery: The Timeless Path to Wellbeing Through Prayer

A remarkable saint, a man born in the rolling hills of 13th-century Italy, St. Francis of Assisi. He embodied a life of radical simplicity, compassion, and harmony with creation. Born into wealth, he renounced material comforts to embrace poverty, preaching love for all of God's creation.

Though not authored by him, the "Prayer of St. Francis" (*often called the Peace Prayer*) captures his spirit so profoundly that it is eternally linked to his legacy. This prayer, first published in 1912, has transcended its origins to become a universal beacon of inner transformation. The prayer begins, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon..." It continues with pleas to replace doubt with faith, despair with hope, darkness with light, and sadness with joy. At its core, it is a call to selflessness. We pray, "Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love." This inversion of the ego promises profound rewards. As the prayer promises us, "For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned."

Centuries later, this attitude resonates deeply in modern recovery programs, particularly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The 11th Step stands out as a bridge to ongoing spiritual growth, as we "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." Here, prayer is not rote ritual but a deliberate practice of alignment with a higher power, fostering humility and purpose.

The connection between the Peace Prayer and AA's 11th Step is no coincidence. Many AA meetings incorporate prayer, viewing it as a practical embodiment of the step. Both emphasize surrender. St. Francis's plea to be an "instrument" mirrors the 11th Step's quest for divine will over self-will. In recovery, this shift combats the isolation of addiction, encouraging members to meditate on service and forgiveness, which are key antidotes to resentment and relapse.

But how do these ancient and modern spiritual tools foster wellbeing? Wellbeing encompasses physical health, emotional resilience, social connection, and a sense of meaning. Research from psychology and neuroscience supports this linkage. Prayer and meditation, as in the 11th Step, reduce stress by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, lowering cortisol levels, and enhancing mood via endorphin release. Studies also show that such practices improve sleep and boost immunity. Emotionally, the Peace Prayer's focus on sowing love and pardon builds empathy, reducing anxiety and depression. In AA, this translates to stronger community bonds, where sharing vulnerabilities creates support networks vital for mental and spiritual health.

Ultimately, these elements weave a tapestry of holistic wellbeing. By channeling St. Francis's peace through AA's disciplined prayer, individuals cultivate inner calm amid chaos. In a world rife with division, this path reminds us that true wellbeing blooms not in self-absorption, but in becoming conduits of light and peace.

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