

It was April Fool's day. Gerald began by telling his wife that he was sad that her speech was slurred. Mike told his mother she wouldn't live long enough to see her grandchildren. Steve told of his deep disappointment when he and his girlfriend made a special dinner just for her. She ignored their efforts and watched TV in an alcoholic haze. Jack said he was always concerned about what kind of mood his mother was in. Susan began to cry as she recounted how her graceful mother, the trained dancer, kept on falling down.ⁱ

If your mother sins against you, go and tell the woman her fault between you and her alone. Susan had tried. But her mother didn't listen. She did not win her over. Since her mother failed to listen, Susan gathered her brothers and her father together. They went to Betty to establish all the facts based on the painful observations of each family member. They also had a doctor on hand to help the former first lady understand the gravity of the situation. It was life or death.

Confronted by the power of love, Betty saw the wickedness of her ways. All along, she had deceived herself, one lie after another. "I never finish off a bottle, so how can I be an alcoholic?" I'm not a drug addict, all the pills I take are prescribed by a doctor. One for sleeping, one for pain, another to relax me, more pills to counteract the side effects of other pills. This was no April Fool's joke. The Ford family intervened because they cared and they knew that without the help of everyone, life would only get worse for Betty.

Treatment was lengthy and involved. First there was medically supervised detoxification. Then Betty went to the hospital to begin the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. She learned how powerless she was on her own. She recognized that she needed God to help her. With the help of God, her family, and the 12-step program, she began to take accountability for all the ways she hurt herself and others. She made a good confession and asked God to transform all that was weak. She apologized to everyone she had hurt. Through prayer and reflection, she worked on improving her relationship with God. Grateful for all who had helped her, she in turn wanted to give back and to help others.ⁱⁱ

Former First Lady Betty Ford could have saved face and kept her struggle private. But like the watchman that the Prophet Ezekiel speaks of, she knew the right thing to do was to share her story to alert others. "By making hers a public rather than a private struggle, straight-talking Betty Ford transformed the image of a drug-abusing alcoholic from a nameless, faceless loser into a noble and likable survivor. She helped diminish the stigma long associated with addiction and treatment, especially for women."ⁱⁱⁱ Countless lives have been saved because Betty Ford had the courage to do the right thing. She lent her name to the Betty Ford Treatment Center to help others heal from the self-destructive behavior that nearly claimed her own life.

When we are at fault, it is often hard to admit our mistakes. We are blinded by our own sins. And even where we recognize the error of our ways, pride can keep us from asking for help. Such is the human condition. Without help, we will continue to do wrong. We will blame others for our own mistakes. We will transmit our own brokenness and blame others.

There is a better way. In the paschal mystery, Jesus suffered and died for us. The nails that held his hands and feet to the cross, were our sins. Through his death and resurrection, he has redeemed us. We must allow Jesus to enter into the darkness of our lives and heal us ... transform us ... make us anew.

An odd fact sticks in my mind from a dozen years ago or better. One church used to publish the sins of its members on the front of the bulletin. They were not pointing the finger at people. They were acknowledging the saving power of God. Each sinner had been saved. Their lives had been transformed by the grace of God and they wanted to share that Good News with

others so that they could help others in return. They wanted to remove the stigma of their past and help others be open to God's awesome grace.

Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides. **If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.** (Psalm 95: 6-8)

ⁱ palmsspringslife.com/betty-fords-intervention/

ⁱⁱ alcohol.org/alcoholics-anonymous/ The 12 steps of AA

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid ⁱ