

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AL-ANON: JUST FOR TODAY

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As a preface to understanding Al-Anon, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with Twelve Step recovery programs, it may be useful to review how Al-Anon works. The “Suggested Al-Anon Preamble to the Twelve Steps” provides this brief description that is read at the opening of almost all meetings:

“The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems. We believe alcoholism is a family illness and that changed attitudes can aid recovery.

Al-Anon is not allied with any sect, denomination, political entity, organization, or institution; does not engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any cause. There are no dues for membership. Al-Anon is self-supporting through its own voluntary contributions.

Al-Anon has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps, by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics, and by giving understanding and encouragement to the alcoholic.”

(Al-Anon Family Groups, 2022, p. 12)

One of Al-Anon’s most frequently used and least expensive items is the very popular “Just for Today” bookmark, which is also known as the “Blue Bookmark.” The original paper version of the “Blue Bookmark” has a stock number (17-300M-85-12/1.00) at the bottom of the bookmark and the copyright is listed as Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. 1972.¹

According to Dale Carnegie (1944), “Just for Today” was written by the late Sibyl F. Partridge (whose first name Carnegie spelled incorrectly as “Sibyl” rather than Sybil). With the exception of the Prayer of St. Francis, the Al-Anon bookmark [M-12] titled “Just for Today” was originally written by the same title by Sybil F. Partridge and is printed in *How To Stop Worrying And Start Living* by Dale Carnegie (1985, pp. 126–127). Although “Just for Today” has been more reliably attributed to an earlier author (i.e., Frank Crane’s 1921 article in the *Boston Globe*), the words in sheet music published in 1928 are identified as “A Prayer by Sybil F. Partridge.”

The earliest appearance of the “Just for Today” text actually appears to have been a 1921 piece titled “Just for Today” published in a *Boston Globe* newspaper column titled “Dr. Crane Says” written by Frank Crane. Crane’s 10 suggestions were titled “Just for Today” and were prefaced by this introduction:

“Here are ten resolutions to make when you awake in the morning. They are Just for One Day. Think of them not as a life task but as a day’s work. These things will give you pleasure. Yet they require will power. You don’t need resolutions to do what is easy.” (Crane, 1921).

Forty years earlier than Crane’s “Just for Today,” an 1880 periodical called “The Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” printed a piece titled “To-Day” that included the recurring phrase: “Just for to-day.” This 1880 piece was written by an English governess, Sister Mary Xavier, S.N.D. (Sisters of Notre Dame), who was posthumously identified as Sybil F. Partridge (1856–1917). Sr. Xavier’s work differed substantially from the “Just for Today” essay published by Frank Crane in 1921. The 1880 piece ended with the identifier “S.M.X.” It basically became a Protestant hymn attributed to a Catholic nun known as Sister Mary Xavier, who was actually Sybil F. Partridge. It was sometimes called “Just for Today,” which may have led to a misunderstanding by Dale Carnegie, who incorrectly ascribed the piece to Sybil Partridge.

Although not contained in Crane’s (1921) original piece, the back side of Al-Anon’s “Just for Today” bookmark contains a “Prayer for Today.” The prayer has also been described as an Eleventh Step Prayer.² In reality, Al-Anon’s “Prayer for Today” is also known as “A Simple Prayer” and most commonly known as “The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi” (1181–1226). The prayer was not written by St. Francis in the 1200s. Some scholars (Galli, 1994) have stated that it may have been composed at a Catholic congress in Chicago in 1925.³ More likely, the actual author was Fr. Esther Bouquerel (1912), who published it in the French clerical magazine *La Clochette*.⁴

Just for Today

Here are ten resolutions to make when you awake in the morning. They are Just for One Day. Think of them not as a life task but as a day's work. These things will give you pleasure. Yet they require will power. You don't need resolutions to do what is easy.

1. Just for Today, I will try to live through this day only, and not tackle my whole life-problem at once. I can do some things for twelve hours that would appall me if I felt I had to keep them up for a lifetime.
2. Just for Today, I will be Happy. This assumes that what Abraham Lincoln said is true, that "most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." Happiness is from Within; it is not a matter of Externals.
3. Just for Today, I will Adjust myself to what Is, and not try to Adjust everything to my own desires. I will take my family, my business, and my luck as they come, and fit myself to them.
4. Just for Today, I will take care of my Body. I will exercise it, care for it, and nourish it, and not abuse it nor neglect it; so that it will be a perfect machine for my will.
5. Just for Today, I will try to strengthen my mind, I will study. I will learn something useful, I will not be a mental loafer all day. I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.
6. Just for Today, I will exercise my Soul. In three ways, to wit:
 - (a) I will do somebody a good turn and not get found out. If anybody knows of it, it will not count.
 - (b) I will do at least two things I don't want to do, as William James suggests just for exercise.
 - (c) I will not show any one that my feelings are hurt. They may be hurt, but Today I will not show it.
7. Just for To-day, I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress as becomingly as possible, talk low, act courteously, be liberal with flattery, criticize not one bit nor find fault with anything, and not try to regulate nor improve anybody.
8. Just for Today, I will have a Programme. I will write down just what I expect to do every hour. I may not follow it exactly, but I'll have it. It will save me from the two pests Hurry and Indecision.
9. Just for Today, I will have a quiet half hour, all by myself, and relax. During this half hour, some time, I will think of God, so as to get a little more perspective to my life.
10. Just for Today, I will be Unafraid. Especially I will not be afraid to be Happy, to enjoy what is Beautiful, to love and to believe that those I love love me.

(Copyright, 1921 by Frank Crane)

Rev. Dr. Frank Crane (1861–1928)

Frank Crane was a Methodist Episcopal minister who was ordained in 1882. After he had served in the ministry for several years he attended Illinois Wesleyan University, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy in 1892. Nebraska Wesleyan conferred upon him in 1894 the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He served 25 years in the ministry in several churches. In 1909, he turned to journalism, reaching thousands through magazines and newspapers throughout the country. His message always was one of uprightness of living, sincerity of thinking, and “sweet reasonableness.” He published at least a dozen books. It has been said that Crane had 5,000,000 daily readers and that his essays and little “sermons” have been printed and widely circulated in 18 countries. In 1921, Crane wrote a piece titled “Just for Today” that was published in *The Boston Globe* newspaper column “Dr. Crane Says.” Crane’s piece has been widely distributed—and even sold—by various 12-Step groups without any attribution to the author.

The Boston Globe

The Boston Globe was founded in 1872 and was mainly controlled by Irish Catholic interests before being sold to Charles H. Taylor and his family. After being privately held until 1973, the newspaper was sold to *The New York Times* in 1993 for \$1.1 billion, making it one of the most expensive print purchases in U.S. history. Having lost over 90% of its value in 20 years, in 2013 the *Boston Globe* was sold by The New York Times Company and purchased for \$70 million by Boston Red Sox and Liverpool F. C. owner John W. Henry.

Notes

1. At the time of the first publication of Al-Anon's "Just for Today" bookmark in 1972, Al-Anon's headquarters was listed as P. O. Box 182, Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159-0182. Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters moved its office from New York City and opened its office for business in Virginia Beach on June 1, 1996. All CAL published in 1996 and later refers to Virginia rather than New York. For this reason, current versions of the "Just for Today" bookmark contain the Virginia address.
2. Although the St. Francis Prayer is also known as the "Eleventh Step Prayer," there are other shorter variations of the Eleventh Step Prayer that are usually derived directly from Step 11: "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."
3. Al-Anon's increasing trend toward secularization of content and elimination of religious prayers can be witnessed in Al-Anon District meetings and World Service Organization (WSO) discussions of removing the "Prayer for Today" from CAL materials such as the very popular "Just for Today" bookmark (Doverspike, 2024, p. 3). Commonly known as the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, the last phrase of the second paragraph of the prayer contains an unmistakably Christian theme: "...and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."
4. St. Francis of Assisi had been dead almost 700 years when the prayer may have been first printed—anonously—in 1912 in the French clerical magazine *La Clochette*. The actual author was probably the magazine's editor, Fr. Esther Bouquerel. The wide appeal of the prayer may have been related to the horrors of the Great War. By 1916, the prayer was so well known that it was reprinted on the front page of the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, which gave the prayer a measure of official standing. Up to this point, no one had attributed the prayer to St. Francis. The Assisi connection may have arisen from a widely-circulated postcard version that was produced in 1920, which had a picture of St. Francis on the back, following which it became known as "The Peace Prayer of St. Francis." Although the connection was formed purely by association, confusion as to authorship was inevitable and perhaps not accidental. The first well-known English translation dates from 1936 in the United States, by the work of a pacifist Protestant minister, Kirby Page. The prayer was taken up by the much more powerful figure of Cardinal Francis Spellman, the Archbishop of New York, who gave it new fame during World War II and afterward at the beginning of the Cold War. Cardinal Spellman was a central figure in Irish America, a long-standing friend of Joe Kennedy, a close ally of Pope Pius XII, and later an acquaintance of Richard Nixon.

Resources

JPG image file of “Just for Today” column by Frank Crane (1921) that was published in *The Boston Globe*:

Use Ctrl + left Click to open this file:

https://drwilliamdoverspike.com/files/just_for_today_-_frank_crane_-_1921.jpg

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PDF document file of Al-Anon’s “Just for Today” bookmark containing the “Prayer for Today.”

Al-Anon still provides a downloadable version of this prayer (<https://al-anon.org/pdf/M10.pdf>). In the event the “Prayer for Today” is removed by Al-Anon, the bookmark card is also stored at the links below for others who are interested in the history of the program:

Use Ctrl + left Click to open this file:

https://drwilliamdoverspike.com/files/al-anon_-_just_for_today_-_m-10_-_bookmark_card.pdf

Copy and paste this link in browser:

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- Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters. (n.d.). *Just for today* [Bookmark, M-10]. Virginia Beach, VA: Author.
The numerals 14-75 are imprinted on the lower left side of back side.
The "Prayer for Today" is also known as the "Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi." Although it is also sometimes known as the "Eleventh Step Prayer," other shorter variations of the Eleventh Step Prayer are usually derived directly from Step 11: "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."
A downloadable version is available at this link: <https://al-anon.org/pdf/M10.pdf>
- Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters. (n.d.). *Just for today* [Bookmark, M-12]. Virginia Beach, VA: Author.
A digital version of the "Blue Bookmark" has a stock number (37-400M-04-12/100) at the bottom of the bookmark and the copyright is listed as Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617.
- Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters. (1972). *Just for today* [Bookmark, M-12]. New York, NY: Author.
- Carnegie, D. (1936, 1981). *How to win friends and influence people* [Revised edition]. New York, NY: Pocket Books.
- Carnegie, D. (1944, 1985, May). *How to stop worrying and start living: Time-tested methods for conquering worrying* [Revised edition]. New York, NY: Pocket Books.
Written by Dale Carnegie, the author of the famous *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Carnegie, 1936), this book is also published by Pocket Books, which is a division of Simon and Schuster. Pocket Books first printing was May 1985. Copyright 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948 by Dale Carnegie. Copyright © 1984 by Donna Dale Carnegie and Dorothy Carnegie. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of the Prayer of St. Francis, the Al-Anon bookmark [M-12] titled "Just for Today" was originally written by the same title by Sybil F. Partridge and is printed in *How To Stop Worrying And Start Living* by Dale Carnegie (1985, pp. 126-127).
- Crane, F. (1921, May 29). Just for today [Dr. Crane Says, Column] *Boston Globe*. Boston, MA: Charles H. Taylor.
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- Galli, M. (Ed.) (1994). Did you know? Little-known or remarkable facts about Francis of Assisi. *Christian History, Issue 42*, Vol XIII, No. 2, p. 3. Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today.
Mark Galli was Editor of *Christian History*. Issue 42 is available at this link:

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/christian-history/1994/issue-42/>

Partridge, S. F., & Seaver, B. E. (January 1, 1928).
Just for to-day: Sacred song [Sheet music].
Rochester, NY: Sam Fox Pub. Co.
Originally priced at 50-cents, this sheet
music includes "Just for Today," which is
identified as a prayer by Sybil F.
Partridge (Words) set to music by
Blanche Ebert Seaver (Music).

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