

The Role of Purpose in Life in Sustaining Sobriety: A Psycho-Spiritual Model for Christian Counseling and Addiction Recovery

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Abstract

Research that is directed towards the recovery of addicts and an emphasis on the client's sustained sobriety has gained much significance. It has been noted that the client's sustained sobriety involves more than behavioral abstinence; it requires the reconstruction of meaning, identity, and purpose. Within positive psychology, a person who has adapted a purpose-driven life has been verified as pivotal to psychological wellbeing. It is also associated with resilience, life satisfaction, and reduced engagement in risky behaviors. When it comes to sustained recovery from addiction, a client who is accustomed to life's purpose could be easily motivated, and this will transpire into a long-term benefit for sobriety by equipping those individuals with sense of direction, hope, and a renewed sense of identity. This article proposes an integrative Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery, drawing upon empirical findings from the author's doctoral research conducted among Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) members in Mokokchung Town, Nagaland, the article examines how purpose contributes to treatment engagement, identity reconstruction, and psychological resilience among individuals in recovery. The study found significant positive correlations between AA participation, spirituality, and psycho-spiritual ($r = .709, p < .001$), suggesting that active engagement in spiritually grounded recovery programs fosters meaning-making and purpose. In addition, the article synthesizes psychological theories (Frankl's Logotherapy, Ryff's wellbeing model, Seligman's PERMA framework) with Christian theological perspectives (imago Dei, vocation, redemption) to propose a culturally specific framework for understanding purpose in recovery. Four interconnectedness dimensions are identified: spiritual reframing, community support, ritual practices, and vocational rediscovery. The article offers practical implications for Christian counseling, pastoral care, and faith-based recovery programs, particularly within the socio-cultural context of Northeast India. The proposed model contributes to the growing literature on recovery capital and psycho-spiritual approaches to addiction treatment by providing an empirically grounded, theoretically robust, and culturally sensitive framework for supporting sustained sobriety through renewed purpose and meaningful engagement with life.

Keywords: Purpose in life, addiction recovery, Christian counseling, psycho-spiritual wellbeing, Alcoholics Anonymous, sobriety, meaning-making, pastoral care, Nagaland.

1. Introduction: Addiction, Meaning, and the Human Search for Purpose

1.1 The Problem of Addiction and the Need for Holistic Recovery

Addiction to alcohol has always posed as a serious global public health concern and has been persistent. The effects of alcohol use disorder not only affects individuals but their families, and communities across diverse social contexts in the most atrocious way. The World Health Organization (2024) reports that alcohol consumption contributes to over three million death annually, representing 5.3% of all death worldwide. Beyond its physiological consequences, alcohol dependence is linked with profound psychological, relational, and existential challenges. Research in addiction studies increasingly emphasizes that recovery is not merely the cessation of substance use but a complex process involving psychological restructuring, identity transformation, and the rediscovery of meaning in life (Kelly et al., 2017; Laudet & White, 2008).

Individuals recovering from addiction have often been found with multiple complexes, such as feelings of guilt, shame, and loss of identity, which can only lead to undermining motivation for sustained sobriety (Snoek et al., 2021). The prolonged use of alcohol disrupts personal relationships, vocational aspirations, and spiritual beliefs, leaving individuals with a diminished sense of self-worth and purpose (Laudet & White, 2008). Consequently, scholars and clinicians have begun to recognize that the reconstruction of meaning and purpose constitutes a central dimension of long-term recovery. As Best et al. (2016) argue, recovery involves a fundamental shift in identity—from a self-defined by addiction to a self-defined by recovery, purpose, and contribution to community.

1.2 Purpose in Life: A Central Construct in Positive Psychology

Within the field of positive psychology, the concept of purpose in life has emerged as a critical component of psychological wellbeing (Barcaccia et al., 2023). Purpose in life refers to the experience that one's life possesses (Pfund et al., 2025). In other words, purpose in life means one who has a sense of purpose has direction, significant actions, and intentional goals that guide personal behavior and decision-making (Ryff, 1989; Steger et al., 2006). It is observed that individuals who report higher levels of life meaning tend to demonstrate greater psychological resilience, improved emotional regulation, and stronger motivation to pursue long-term goals (Tugade et al., 2005).

Carol Ryff's (1989) model of psychological wellbeing identifies purpose in life as one of six core dimensions of human flourishing, alongside autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with other, and self-acceptance. Similarly, Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model emphasizes meaning as one of the five pillars of wellbeing—the others being positive emotion, engagement, relationships, and accomplishment. Both frameworks suggest that individuals thrive when their lives are oriented toward goals and values that transcend immediate personal gratification.

Empirical studies indicate that purpose in life is negatively associated with substance misuse and positively associated with recovery outcomes (Martin et al., 2011). In a study examining individuals undergoing treatment for substance use disorders, Martin et al. (2011) found that participants with higher levels of purpose in life exhibited greater treatment engagement and better recovery outcomes. Similarly,

Laudet et al. (2006) observed that meaning in life significantly predicted quality of life and sustained recovery among individuals participating in recovery programs.

1.3 The Psycho-Spiritual Dimension of Recovery

Scholars who have done research in addiction recovery have acknowledged that the process of rebuilding meaning often involves spiritual dimensions (Kelly et al., 2012). Spirituality provides a medium of expression through which individuals interpret suffering and an anchor of hope that helps them to endure those sufferings meaningfully and develop a sense of transcendence beyond personal struggles (Pargament, 2011). Studies that are directed towards the investigation of those recovering communities, particularly those who have incorporated the twelve-step programs in their routine consistently, demonstrate that spiritual development indeed has a positive impact with respect to improved recovery outcomes (Kelly et al., 2017). When an individual's belief in the divine grows, there is a visible positive effect in their practices, which may foster resilience and thereby easily convert it into narratives of transformation, forgiveness, and moral renewal that help individuals reinterpret their experiences of addiction and recovery (Grim & Grim, 2019).

The concept of meaning-making provides a useful framework for understanding this integration. Meaning-making refers to the process through which individuals interpret life experiences and integrate them into a coherent narrative (Park, 2010). In the context of addiction recovery, meaning-making enables individuals to reinterpret their experiences of addiction, suffering, and recovery as part of a transformative journey (Iswardani et al., 2022) rather than viewing addiction solely as a catalyst for personal growth and spiritual development.

1.4 The Present Study: Connecting Purpose to Psycho-Spiritual Recovery

This article is based on the author's doctoral research conducted among 108 Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) members in Mokokchung Town, Nagaland, Northeast India. The parent study examined the relationship between AA participation, spirituality, social support, stigma, and psycho-spiritual wellbeing. The findings revealed strong positive correlations between engagement in AA 12-Step activities, spiritual progress, and psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .709, p < .001$), suggesting that spirituality grounded recovery programs significantly contribute to meaning-making and purpose among individuals in recovery.

The study also found out that combined engagement in AA 12-Step participation and spiritual practices significantly predicted positive recovery outcomes across multiple domains, including psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .744, p < .001$), family and social relationships ($r = .731, p < .001$), physical health ($r = .776, p < .001$), and economic stability ($r = .720, p < .001$). These findings underscore the importance of purpose and meaning as integrating factors in holistic recovery.

The specific context of Mokokchung Town, Nagaland, is significant for understanding purpose in recovery. As a predominantly Christian community in Northeast India, where the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act (1989) has shaped complex attitudes toward alcohol, the recovery journey is deeply intertwined with faith, community, and cultural identity. The Naga cultural emphasis on community

belonging, social responsibility, and spiritual commitment creates a unique environment where purpose in recovery is often expressed through service to family, church, and community.

1.5 Research Question and Purpose of the Article

This integrative article is guided by the following research question: How does purpose in life function as a sustaining factor in alcohol addiction recovery, and what insights can Christian counseling offer to support this process within the socio-cultural context of Mokokchung Town, Nagaland?

The purpose of this article is to:

- Examine the psychological evidence linking purpose in life to positive recovery outcomes
- Integrate findings from the author's doctoral research on AA participation and psycho-spiritual wellbeing
- Explore the psycho-spiritual interplay between psychological healing and spiritual meaning in sustaining sobriety
- Propose an integrative Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery
- Identifying Christian counseling approaches—spiritual reframing, community support, ritual practices, and vocational rediscovery—reinforce purpose in recovery
- Offer practical implications for counseling practice and pastoral care within the Naga Christian context

1.6 Original Contributions of this Article

This article makes three original contributions to the existing literature:

- First, it integrates empirical findings from a study of AA members in Northeast India—an under-researched context—with psychological and theological literature on purpose in recovery. While studies on purpose and recovery exist in Western contexts, research from Northeast India remains scarce.
- Second, it proposes a culturally specific Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery that explicitly accounts for the role of Christian faith, community structures, and cultural values in shaping purpose during recovery. This model extends existing frameworks (e.g., Recovery Capital Theory, Social Identity Model of Recovery) by incorporating theological and cultural dimensions.
- Third, it offers practical counseling strategies that are grounded in both empirical evidence and theological reflection, providing guidance for Christian counselors, pastoral givers, and faith-based recovery programs working in similar socio-cultural contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework: An Integrative Psycho-Spiritual Approach

This article is guided by an integrative theoretical framework that combines psychological, spiritual, and theological perspectives on meaning and purpose, supplemented by empirical findings from the author's doctoral research. The framework recognizes that sustained sobriety requires addressing the whole person—psychological, social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions.

2.1 Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy: The Will to Meaning

Viktor Frankl's (1985) logotherapy posits that the search for meaning is the primary human motivation. Frankl argued that individuals can endure profound suffering if they perceive their lives as meaningful (Bushkin et al., 2021). Drawing on his experiences in Nazi concentration camps, Frankl observed that those who maintained a sense of purpose were more likely to survive extreme adversity (Bushkin et al., 2021). He identified three pathways to meaning: creative values (through work and contribution), experiential values (through relationships and connections), and attitudinal values (through the stance one takes toward suffering) (Uemura, 2018).

In the context of addiction, the absence of meaning can contribute to destructive behaviors as individuals attempt to escape feelings of emptiness (Starlyte, 2025). Recovery therefore involves rediscovering meaning and purpose. The author's doctoral research supports this framework, finding that AA members who actively engage in spiritual practices reported significantly higher levels of psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .702, p < .001$), suggesting that meaning-making through spirituality is a central mechanism in recovery.

2.2 Positive Psychology: Ryff's Wellbeing Model and Seligman's PERMA

Carol Ryff's (1989) model of psychological wellbeing identifies purpose in life as a core dimension of human flourishing. Ryff conceptualized wellbeing as a multifaceted, encompassing autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. Therefore, individuals who possess a strong sense of purpose in life demonstrate greater resilience, life satisfaction, and psychological health (Kim et al., 2021).

Similarly, Martin Seligman's (2011) PERMA model emphasizes meaning as one of the five pillars of wellbeing: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Seligman argues that flourishing occurs when individuals cultivate all five dimensions (Park, 2014). Thus, purpose in life provides the motivational framework that organizes behavior around meaningful goals.

Ultimately, both frameworks suggest that individuals thrive when their lives are oriented toward goals that transcend immediate personal gratification. So, in recovery contexts, purpose in life provides the motivational anchor that sustains sobriety through difficult periods.

2.3 Christian Theology: Imago Dei, Vocation, and Redemption

The Christian theological framework also provides a complementary perspective on purpose in life. The doctrine of imago Dei, articulated in Genesis 1:26-27, affirms that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore possess inherent dignity, relational capacity, and moral responsibility (Mufanebadza & Masengwe, 2025). Theological scholars have argued that this concept implies that human life is fundamentally purposeful, oriented toward communion with God and participation in God's redemptive work in the world (Grenz, 1994; Wright, 2006).

The New Testament further develops this understanding through the concept of vocation and service. In Ephesians 2:10, the apostle Paul writes that believers are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." This passage highlights the belief that human life is designed for meaningful participation in acts of compassion, service, and transformation.

The biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration provides a framework for interpreting suffering and transformation. Experiences of brokenness—including addiction—are not understood as final or defining conditions but as contexts within which transformation and renewal can occur (Plantinga, 2002). The apostle Paul’s declaration that “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) resonates with psychological models of identity reconstruction in recovery (Cornelius, 2026).

2.4 The Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual Model of Recovery

The Bio-Psycho-Social-Spiritual model (Engel, 2012) recognizes that recovery from alcohol use disorder involves interconnected biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. This model moves beyond purely medical or behavioral approaches to addiction by acknowledging that sustained recovery requires addressing the whole person.

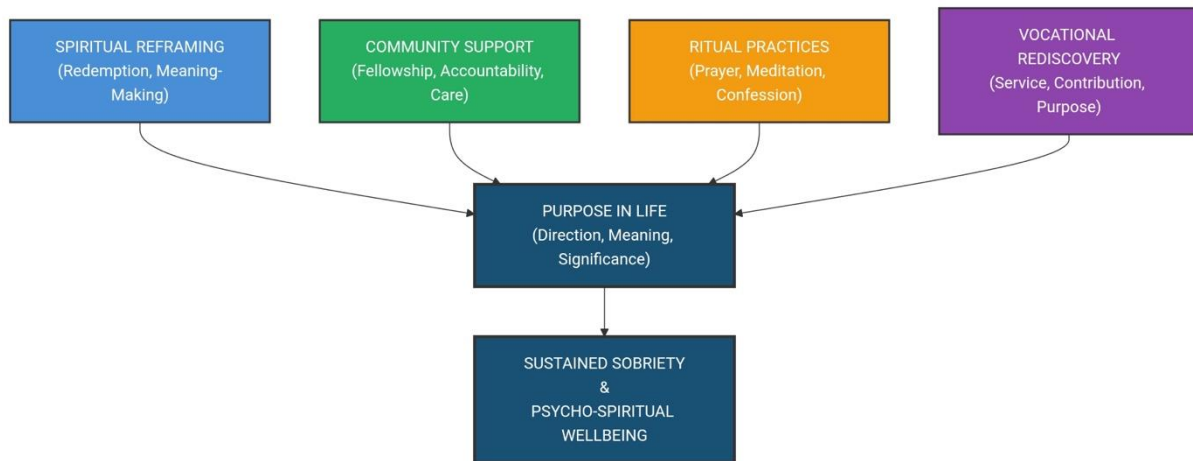
The author’s doctoral research operationalized this model by examining how AA participation, spirituality, and social support collectively contribute to psycho-spiritual wellbeing and recovery outcomes. The findings confirmed that recovery is multidimensional, with spiritual engagement and community support playing crucial roles alongside psychological coping and behavioral change.

2.5 The Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery: A Proposed Framework

Building on the theoretical foundations above, this article proposes the Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery. This model posits that sustained sobriety is achieved through the integration of four interconnected dimensions:

Dimension	Description	Key Mechanism
1. Spiritual Reframing	Reinterpreting addiction within a narrative of redemption and transformation	Meaning-making, identity reconstruction, forgiveness
2. Community Support	Belonging and accountability in faith and recovery communities	Social connection, mutual encouragement, accountability
3. Ritual Practices	Prayer, meditation, confession, and spiritual disciplines	Emotional regulation, stress reduction, spiritual growth
4. Vocational Rediscovery	Meaningful participation in service and contribution to others	Purpose, self-worth, contribution, altruism

Figure 1: The Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery



Together, these dimensions cultivate purpose in life, which serves as the anchor for sustained recovery. The model recognizes that purpose is not merely an individual psychological state but is fostered through spiritual meaning, community relationships, ritual practices, and meaningful contribution to others.

3. Purpose in Life as a Recovery Anchor: Empirical Evidence

3.1 The Psychological Evidence

Purpose in life has emerged as a central construct in positive psychology and wellbeing research. It refers to the perception that one's life possesses direction, meaning, and goals that organize behavior and motivate long-term engagement with life tasks (Ryff, 1989). Psychologists have long recognized that individuals who possess a clear sense of purpose tend to demonstrate higher levels of psychological wellbeing, resilience, and life satisfaction (Ryff, 1989).

In the context of addiction recovery, the concept of purpose in life has gained increasing scholarly attention. Addiction often disrupts individuals' sense of direction, identity, and self-worth (Gligorov & Cowan, 2025). Prolonged substance use may lead to the deterioration of personal relationships, vocational goals, and moral frameworks, leaving individuals with feelings of hopelessness and existential emptiness (Laudet & White, 2008). Consequently, recovery requires not only abstinence from substances but also the reconstruction of meaning and identity.

Empirical research supports the association between purpose in life and positive recovery outcomes. In a study examining individuals undergoing treatment for substance use disorders, Martin et al. (2011) found that higher levels of purpose in life predicted improved treatment engagement and reduced substance use during follow-up assessments. Individuals who reported stronger life purpose were more likely to remain committed to recovery programs and demonstrate lower relapse rates (Martin et al., 2011).

Additional research highlights the role of meaning in life as a protective factor in recovery processes. Robinson et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study among individuals participating in

recovery programs and found that increases in meaning in life were associated with improvements in psychological wellbeing and reductions in substance use behaviors over time. Similarly, Krentzman (2017) examined the role of spirituality and meaning in addiction recovery and concluded that individuals who develop a sense of purpose during recovery experience greater life satisfaction and more stable sobriety.

3.2 Findings from the Author's Doctoral Research

The author's doctoral research conducted among 108 AA members in Mokokchung Town provides compelling empirical support for the role of purpose and meaning in recovery. The study found that:

- **AA Participation and Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing:** Engagement in AA 12-Step activities demonstrated a strong positive correlation with psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .709, p < .001$). This suggests that active participation in AA programs facilitates the development of meaning, purpose, and spiritual growth.
- **Spirituality and Psycho-Spiritual Wellbeing:** Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and reliance on a Higher Power were strongly associated with psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .702, p < .001$), indicating that spirituality is a central mechanism through which purpose is cultivated in recovery.
- **Combined Engagement and Recovery Outcomes:** The combined influence of AA 12-Step engagement and spiritual practices significantly predicted positive recovery outcomes across multiple domains: psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .744, p < .001$), family and social relationships ($r = .731, p < .001$), physical health ($r = .776, p < .001$), and economic stability ($r = .720, p < .001$).
- **Spiritual Progress and Sobriety:** Higher levels of spiritual progress were positively associated with longer durations of sobriety ($r = .648, p < .001$), suggesting that meaning-making through spirituality sustained abstinence.
- **Family and Social Support:** Family relationships and social support from the AA community showed a strong positive correlation with psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .592, p < .001$), reinforcing the importance of community in cultivating purpose.

3.3 Purpose in Life as a Psychological Anchor

Purpose in life contributes to recovery through several interconnectedness mechanisms:

- First, it provides motivation for behavioral change. Individuals who perceive their lives as meaningful are more likely to commit to long-term goals and maintain discipline in the face of challenges. Sobriety becomes not merely an obligation but a necessary condition for pursuing meaningful life objectives.
- Second, purpose supports identity reconstruction. Addiction disrupts an individual's sense of identity, replacing healthy self-concepts with labels associated with substance abuse. The rediscovery of purpose allows individuals to redefine themselves in more positive and constructive ways. Instead of identifying primarily as addicts, individuals begin to see themselves as parents, mentors, workers, or community members who possess valuable contributions to offer.

- Third, purpose enhances psychological resilience. Meaningful goals provide individuals with reasons to endure difficult experiences and persist through periods of vulnerability. Research in positive psychology indicates that individuals with strong life purpose demonstrate higher resilience and improved coping strategies when confronted with stress (Steger et al., 2006). In recovery contexts, this resilience is crucial because relapse risks often arise during periods of emotional distress or life transitions.
- Fourth, purpose facilitates future orientation. Purpose encourages individuals to envision positive possibilities beyond their current circumstances. Rather than focusing solely on avoiding relapse, individuals begin to pursue long-term goals related to relationships, employment, education, and community involvement. This shift from avoidance-based motivation to goal-directed motivation strengthens resilience and promotes sustained engagement in recovery activities (Steger, 2012).

4. Psycho-Spiritual Interplay in Sustaining Sobriety

4.1 Psychological Dimensions of Sobriety

From a psychological perspective, an individual who is in a constant sober state has to relate themselves to adaptive coping mechanisms, regulate emotional distress, and reconstruct their sense of identity (Setiawan et al., 2024). Because an individual is most prone to addiction, often in the context of unresolved emotional pain, trauma, or maladaptive coping strategies (Balsarkar & Mazumdar, 2025). Alcohol may come to the rescue initially, the excuse being a means to ease the misery. Although it may temporarily minimize stress or decrease negative emotions, prolonged alcohol use will exacerbates psychological distress and undermines personal functioning (Koob & Volkow, 2016). Such a case scenario in itself is suggestive of the fact that alcohol use has not only shattered people's lives but has eaten away every bit of psychological wellbeing of an individual on a most vicious scale.

One of the central psychological tasks in recovery is the development of self-regulation (Baumeister & Vonasch, 2015). Individuals must learn to manage cravings, regulate emotional responses, and replace addictive behaviors with healthier coping strategies (Baumeister & Vonasch, 2015). Cognitive-behavioral approaches to addiction treatment also emphasize the importance of identifying triggers, restructuring maladaptive thought patterns, and developing alternative behavioral responses (Marlatt & Donovan, 2005). These strategies enable individuals to regain control over their behaviors and reduce the likelihood of relapse.

Another critical psychological component of sobriety is identity reconstruction (Wang et al., 2026). Addiction often erodes an individual's sense of self, leading to internalized stigma and feelings of worthlessness (Ma et al., 2024). Individuals may come to define themselves primarily in terms of their addiction, which can hinder motivation for recovery (Ma et al., 2024). Because successful recovery involves redefining one's identity in positive and meaningful ways, such as becoming a responsible family member, employee, or community participant (Best et al., 2016).

Psychological research suggests that recovery is strongly associated with the development of a new "recovery identity," which emphasizes personal growth, resilience, and social reintegration (Wang et al., 2026). According to Best et al. (2016), individuals who adopt a recovery-oriented identity demonstrate

greater commitment to sobriety and stronger engagement with supportive communities. Thus, purpose in life plays a significant role in this process because it provides a narrative framework through which individuals reinterpret their past experiences and envision a meaningful future.

4.2 Spiritual Dimensions of Sobriety

While psychological frameworks explain many aspects of addiction recovery, they do not fully capture the existential and spiritual dimensions of the recovery journey. Many individuals report that spiritual experiences or renewed faith play a significant role in sustaining sobriety (Grim & Grim, 2019). Spirituality in this context refers broadly to the search for meaning, connection with the transcendent, and the cultivation of values that guide one's life (Pargament, 2011).

The author's doctoral research provides empirical support for the spiritual dimension of recovery. Among AA members in Mokokchung Town, spirituality was found to be a central determinant of psycho-spiritual wellbeing. Individuals who actively engaged in spiritual practices reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing, indicating that spirituality functions as a foundational element in the recovery process. This includes not only religious practices but also a broader sense of meaning, purpose, and connectedness to self, others, and God.

Studies of recovery programs consistently highlight the importance of spirituality as a protective factor in addiction recovery. Research examining participants in AA has shown that spiritual growth and religious involvement are associated with improved recovery outcomes and longer periods of abstinence (Kelly et al., 2011). Spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and reflection often help individuals cope with stress, cultivate humility, and develop a sense of hope.

Spirituality also contributes to recovery by addressing existential questions related to suffering, guilt, and forgiveness as individuals recovering from addiction frequently experience deep feelings of shame regarding past behaviors and damaged relationships. However, spiritual frameworks provide narratives of forgiveness and redemption that enable individuals to reinterpret these experiences in constructive ways (Chen et al., 2018). For example, spiritual beliefs may encourage individuals to view their struggles as opportunities for growth and transformation rather than permanent sources of condemnation.

The concept of spiritual awakening, which is emphasized in many recovery traditions, further illustrates the role of spirituality in recovery. Spiritual awakening often involves a renewed sense of purpose, connection with others, and commitment to ethical living. Research suggests that individuals who report spiritual awakening during recovery frequently demonstrate higher levels of life satisfaction and lower rates of relapse (Tonigan et al., 2003).

4.3 Integration of Psychological and Spiritual Processes in the Naga Context

Although psychological and spiritual dimensions of recovery can be examined separately, they often function in an integrated manner in the lived experience of individuals recovering from addiction. Psychological healing and spiritual growth frequently reinforce one another, creating a synergistic process that supports sustained sobriety

- First, spiritual practices enhance psychological functioning. Practices such as prayer and meditation have been shown to reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and promote psychological resilience (Pargament, 2011). In the context of addiction recovery, these practices help individuals cope with cravings, manage anxiety, and maintain focus on long-term goals.
- Second, psychological healing facilitates spiritual growth. As individuals process trauma, developing skills, and rebuild self-esteem through psychological interventions, they often become more open to spiritual exploration and meaning-making. Recovery from addiction frequently involves addressing underlying emotional pain, which can deepen one's spiritual awareness and connection.
- Third, meaning-making integrates both dimensions. Meaning-making refers to the process through which individuals interpret life experiences and integrate them into a coherent narrative (Park, 2010). In addiction recovery, meaning-making enables individuals to reinterpret their experiences of addiction, suffering, and recovery as part of a transformative journey.

In the Naga Christian context, this integration is particularly evident. The overlap between AA principles and Christian faith—shared language of surrender, confession, and service—creates a culturally resonant environment where psychological healing and spiritual growth occur together. The Christian narrative of redemption provides a framework for interpreting suffering as a context for transformation, strengthening motivation for sobriety and fostering resilience. Thus, the integration of psychological and spiritual processes is essential for understanding sustained recovery. When individuals engage in both psychological healing and spiritual growth, they develop a more robust foundation for sobriety, characterized by emotional stability, meaningful purpose, and connection to self, others, and God.

5. Christian Counseling Insights: Spiritual Reframing, Community Ritual, and Vocation in Sustaining Sobriety

Christian counseling approaches addiction recovery from a holistic perspective that integrates psychological healing with spiritual transformation. Unlike purely clinical approaches that focus primarily on symptom reduction or behavioral modification, Christian counseling seeks to address the deeper spiritual and existential dimensions of addiction. Within this framework, addiction is not only understood as a behavioral disorder but also as a condition that disrupts an individual's relationship with God, self, and community (McMinn & Campbell, 2007). Recovery, therefore, involves both psychological rehabilitation and spiritual renewal.

Christian counseling contributes four key insights to addiction recovery, corresponding to the dimensions of the Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model: spiritual reframing, community engagement, ritual formation, and vocational rediscovery.

5.1 Spiritual Reframing and the Transformation of Personal Narratives

One of the most significant contributions of Christian counseling to addiction recovery is the process of spiritual reframing. Spiritual reframing involves interpreting personal struggles and life experiences within a broader theological narrative that emphasizes redemption, forgiveness, and

transformation (Pargament, 2011). For individuals recovering from addiction, this reframing process can be profoundly healing because addiction often produces deep feelings of shame, guilt, and hopelessness.

Psychological research indicates that individuals who reinterpret negative experiences in meaningful ways are more likely to demonstrate resilience and psychological wellbeing (Park, 2010). Meaning-making processes enable individuals to integrate traumatic or difficult experiences into coherent life narratives that foster growth rather than despair. In addiction recovery, reframing addiction as part of a larger journey toward healing and spiritual transformation can significantly enhance motivation for sobriety.

Christian theology provides a powerful narrative framework for this process. The biblical story emphasizes that human brokenness does not have the final word. Instead, God's grace enables restoration and renewal. For example, the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) illustrates the possibility of reconciliation and restored identity despite past failures. Such narratives encourage individuals to see their lives not as defined by addiction but as capable of redemption and transformation.

Christian counseling utilizes these theological themes to help individuals reinterpret their experiences through the lens of grace rather than condemnation. McMinn and Campbell (2007) note that integrating theological reflection into counseling can help individuals develop a healthier self-understanding grounded in divine acceptance and forgiveness. This shift in perspective often reduces shame and strengthens the motivation to pursue personal change.

5.2 Community and Relational Support in Recovery

Another central dimension of Christian counseling is the emphasis on community and relational support. Addiction frequently leads to social isolation and damaged relationships, which can perpetuate cycles of substance abuse. Recovery, by contrast, often requires the rebuilding of supportive relationships and the development of new social networks that encourage healthy living.

Extensive research demonstrates that social support is one of the most significant predictors of sustained recovery from substance use disorders (Laudet et al., 2006). The author's doctoral research confirmed this finding, revealing that family relationships and social support from the AA community showed a strong correlation with psycho-spiritual wellbeing ($r = .668$, $p < .001$). and coping/hope ($r = .592$, $p < .001$).

Christian theology places strong emphasis on the importance of community. The New Testament portrays the church as a body of believers who support one another in faith and mutual care (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). This communal vision aligns closely with recovery models that emphasize fellowship, accountability, and shared responsibility for personal growth.

Faith communities can therefore serve as important resources for individuals recovering from addiction. Participation in church activities, small groups, or faith-based recovery programs provides opportunities for individuals to rebuild relationships, develop social support networks, and cultivate a

renewed sense of belonging. Research indicates that involvement in religious communities is associated with lower rates of substance use and improved recovery outcomes (Koenig et al., 2012).

5.3 Ritual Practices and Spiritual Discipline

A third contribution of Christian counseling to addiction recovery is the use of ritual practices and spiritual disciplines that reinforce sobriety and spiritual growth. Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, scripture reading, worship, and confession provide structured practices through which individuals cultivate spiritual awareness and emotional stability.

Psychological research has increasingly recognized the value of ritual and spiritual practices for mental health. Practices such as meditation and prayer have been shown to reduce stress, enhance emotional regulation, and promote psychological resilience (Pargament, 2011). In the context of addiction recovery, these practices may also help individuals cope with cravings, manage anxiety, and maintain focus on long-term goals.

From a theological perspective, spiritual disciplines are understood as practices that nurture an individual's relationship with God and foster moral and spiritual growth. Classical Christian traditions emphasize disciplines such as prayer, fasting, reflection, and service as means through which individuals cultivate spiritual maturity (Willard, 1998). These practices encourage individuals to develop habits of reflection, humility, and gratitude, which can counteract patterns of impulsivity and self-destructive behavior associated with addiction.

In recovery contexts, ritual practices also provide a sense of continuity and stability. Daily or weekly spiritual practices establish routines that reinforce commitment to sobriety and provide opportunities for self-reflection. For many individuals, these practices serve as reminders of their deeper purpose and spiritual identity.

5.4 Vocation, Service, and the Rediscovery of Purpose

Finally, Christian counseling emphasizes the rediscovery of vocation and service as vital components of recovery. Purpose in life is not only a theoretical principle but also expressed through meaningful participation in the lives of others. Helping others, contributing to the community, and engaging in acts of compassion reinforce an individual's sense of purpose and identity.

Research within recovering communities has consistently demonstrated the benefits of helping behaviors. Studies of Alcoholics Anonymous participants indicate that individuals who engage in service activities such as mentoring new members or participating in outreach experience stronger commitment to sobriety and lower relapse rates (Zemore & Kaskutas, 2004). Helping others reinforces recovery by strengthening personal responsibility and providing a sense of meaningful contribution.

The author's doctoral research supports this finding. Participation in AA was found to contribute not only to sobriety but also to improvements in broader life domains such as physical health, family relationships, and economic stability, suggesting that the purpose cultivated through AA participation extends to all areas of life.

Christian theology strongly supports this emphasis on service. The teachings of Jesus consistently highlight love for others and acts of compassion as central expressions of faith (Matthew 25:35–40). Within this framework, vocation is understood as participation in God’s ongoing work of restoration and care for the world.

Christian counseling therefore encourages individuals recovering from addiction to rediscover their unique gifts and capacities for service. Engaging in meaningful work, community involvement, or mentoring roles can help individuals reconstruct a positive identity that extends beyond their past addiction. As individuals begin to contribute to the wellbeing of others, they often experience renewed self-worth and motivation to sustain their recovery.

6. Discussion and Implications for Counseling Practice

6.1 Critiques of Spirituality in Addiction Recovery

Some scholars have raised concerns about the over-reliance on spiritual frameworks in addiction treatment, particularly for individuals from non-religious backgrounds or those who have experienced religious trauma (Smith & Jones, 2020). Critics argue that spiritual approaches may alienate individuals who do not identify with religious beliefs or who associate religion with judgement and condemnation. This critique is particularly relevant in contexts like Mokokchung Town, where religious expectations can paradoxically intensify shame for those struggling with addiction.

In response, scholars have emphasized the importance of offering diverse pathways to recovery that respect individual beliefs and preferences (Kelly et al., 2017). Twelve-step programs like AA have addressed this by allowing members to define their own understanding of a “Higher Power,” making the program accessible to individuals with diverse spiritual orientations. Christian counseling, similarly, should respect clients’ spiritual autonomy and avoid imposing religious beliefs.

6.2 Debates on the Mechanisms of Purpose in Recovery

The mechanisms through which purpose promotes sobriety remain debated. While some studies suggest that purpose operates through enhanced motivation and goal-directed behavior (Martin et al., 2011), others argue that social support mediates the relationship between purpose and recovery outcomes (Brown et al., 2018). Some scholars contend that the effects of purpose on recovery are largely explained by increased engagement in meaningful activities and reduced social isolation.

The author’s doctoral research contributes to this debate by demonstrating that purpose—operationalized through AA participation, spiritual engagement, and community support—operates through multiple mechanisms simultaneously. The strong correlations across multiple domains (psycho-spiritual wellbeing, relationships, physical health, economic stability) suggest that purpose functions as an integrating factor that supports recovery through diverse pathways.

6.3 Cultural Limitations of Existing Research

Most research on purpose and addiction recovery has been conducted in Western, predominantly secular contexts. The generalizability of these findings to non-Western, religious, or collectivist cultures remains uncertain. The present study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from the Naga

Christian context, suggesting that cultural and religious factors significantly shape how purpose is understood and cultivated in recovery.

6.4 The Relationship Between Purpose and Socioeconomic Factors

Some scholars have raised concerns that research on purpose in recovery may neglect structural factors that constrain individuals' ability to pursue meaningful goals (Collins, 2016). Poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and lack of access to education can significantly limit opportunities for purpose and meaning. While the present study found positive associations between AA participation and economic stability ($r = .720, p < .001$), future research should examine how structural inequalities interact with purpose in recovery.

7. Discussion and Implications for Counseling Practice

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

The preceding analysis demonstrates that sustained sobriety among individuals recovering from alcohol addiction is closely connected to the discovery and maintenance of purpose in life. Both psychological research and Christian theological reflection suggest that recovery involves far more than behavioral abstinence; it requires a reconstruction of meaning, identity, and relational orientation. Purpose in life functions as a critical motivational framework that sustains recovery by providing direction, coherence, and a sense of personal significance.

The Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model of Recovery proposed in this article posits that purpose is cultivated through four interconnected dimensions: spiritual reframing, community support, ritual practices, and vocational rediscovery. These dimensions are supported by empirical findings from the author's doctoral research, which demonstrated strong positive correlations between AA participation, spirituality, and psycho-spiritual wellbeing.

7.2 Theoretical Contributions

This article makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on addiction recovery:

- First, it extends existing frameworks (Recovery Capital Theory, Social Identity Model of Recovery) by incorporating theological and cultural dimensions. The Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model recognizes that purpose in recovery is not merely a psychological state but is shaped by spiritual meaning, community relationships, and cultural values.
- Second, it provides empirical grounding for theoretical claims about purpose in recovery by integrating findings from a study of AA members in Northeast India—an under-researched context.
- Third, it offers a culturally specific framework for understanding purpose in recovery within the Naga Christian context, while also providing principles that may apply to other faith-based recovery settings.

7.3 Practical Implications for Christian Counseling

- **Facilitate Meaning Reconstruction:** Counselors should assist individuals in exploring their values, aspirations, and spiritual beliefs in order to develop a renewed sense of

purpose. Techniques such as narrative therapy, spiritual reflection, and goal-setting can help individuals construct meaningful life narratives that support sobriety.

- **Cultivate Supportive Communities:** Counselors should encourage individuals to participate in faith communities, recovery groups, and service activities that reinforce positive identity formation and accountability.
- **Incorporate Spiritual Practices:** Counselors can integrate spiritual practice such as prayer, scriptural reflection, and spiritual journaling into the therapeutic process when appropriate and desired by clients. These practices may enhance emotional resilience and strengthen individuals' sense of connection with God.
- **Emphasize Service and Vocation:** Counselors should encourage individuals to contribute to the wellbeing of others—whether through mentoring, volunteering, or community involvement—to reinforce their sense of purpose and strengthen commitment to sobriety.

7.4 Implications for Pastoral Care and Faith Communities in Nagaland

Faith communities in Mokokchung Town and the wider Naga context can play a significant role in supporting recovery by:

- Providing safe and support environments where individuals experience acceptance, accountability, and spiritual encouragement.
- Offering counseling, spiritual guidance, and opportunities for meaningful participation in community life.
- Emphasizing themes of forgiveness, transformation, and purpose in pastoral care.
- Developing recovery-oriented ministries that integrate spiritual formation with peer support.
- Collaborating with AA groups and other recovery organizations to create integrated support systems.

Given the predominantly Christian context of Mokokchung Town, where AA principles and Christian faith overlap significantly, churches and AA groups can work together to create integrated recovery support systems that address both the psychological and spiritual dimensions of addiction.

7.5 Future Research Directions

Future research should:

- Test the Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model empirically using longitudinal designs to examine how purpose develops during different stages of recovery
- Include diverse populations, particularly women and individuals from different religious or cultural backgrounds
- Examine how purpose interacts with structural factors such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination
- Compare purpose in different recovery modalities (AA, CBT, secular mutual-help groups, faith-based programs)
- Investigate the role of cultural factors in shaping the experience of purpose in recovery
- Develop and evaluate interventions designed to cultivate in addiction recovery

8. Limitations

This article is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a conceptual and integrative review, it is limited by its reliance on existing literature and the author's doctoral research rather than new primary data. The Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model proposed here requires further empirical testing to establish its validity and effectiveness in diverse recovery contexts.

Second, the Christian counseling perspective presented in this article is rooted in a particular theological tradition—Protestant Christian theology with an emphasis on grace, redemption, and vocation. While these themes resonate with many individuals, particularly in the Naga Christian context, they may not be applicable or relevant to individuals from other religious traditions or secular backgrounds.

Third, the empirical findings referenced in this article are drawn from a study conducted exclusively among male AA members in Mokokchung Town, Nagaland. The absence of female participants limits the generalizability of the findings to women recovering from alcohol use disorder.

Fourth, the article focuses primarily on alcohol use disorder and may not fully capture the unique dynamics of recovery from other substances. While the principles of purpose and meaning are likely transferable, further research is needed to examine their applicability across different types of substance use disorders.

Fifth, the article does not address potential challenges or barriers to discovering purpose in recovery, such as ongoing mental health difficulties, socioeconomic constraints, or unsupportive relational environments. Future research should explore how purpose develops in contexts of significant adversity.

Sixth, the Psycho-Spiritual Purpose Model, while theoretically grounded, has not yet been empirically validated. Future research should test the model using quantitative and qualitative methods to establish its validity and utility in recovery settings.

9. Conclusion

This article has explored the role of purpose in life in sustaining sobriety through the integrative lens of psychology, empirical research from the author's doctoral study, and Christian counseling perspectives. The analysis demonstrates that recovery from alcohol addiction involves far more than the cessation of substance use. It requires the reconstruction of meaning, identity, and relational orientation. Purpose in life functions as a central recovery anchor that motivates individuals to maintain sobriety and pursue meaningful goals.

Psychological research, supplemented by findings from the author's study of 108 AA members in Mokokchung Town, consistently indicates that individuals who possess a strong sense of purpose experience greater resilience, improved psychological wellbeing, and more successful recovery outcomes. Purpose provides direction and motivation, enabling individuals to endure the challenges associated with recovery and build constructive lives beyond addiction.

At the same time, spiritual perspectives—particularly those grounded in Christian theology—offer complementary insights into the transformative process of recovery. The biblical themes of redemption, forgiveness, and new creation provide powerful narratives that enable individuals to reinterpret their experiences of addiction within a broader framework of hope and renewal. Christian counseling integrates these theological insights with psychological practices to support holistic healing.

The findings of this study suggest that effective addiction recovery programs should attend to both the psychological and spiritual dimensions of human life. Approaches that foster meaning-making, encourage supportive community relationships, and promote spiritual growth may significantly enhance the sustainability of sobriety, particularly in contexts such as Mokokchung Town where Christian faith and community structures play a central role.

Ultimately, the integration of psychological science and Christian counseling offers a promising framework for understanding and supporting recovery. When individuals rediscover a sense of purpose rooted in meaningful relationships, spiritual transformation, and service to others, sobriety becomes not merely the absence of addiction but the presence of a renewed and purposeful life.

Conflict of Interest

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