

Bill's Story

Joe McQ. & Charlie P. · session 3 of 9

Recap of the problem; why Bill's Story opens the book

00:00

Charlie 00:00

Last night, we spent quite a bit of time talking about the problem, talking about the physical allergy that ensures we can't safely drink, talking about the obsession of the mind that ensures that we can't keep from drinking, and the ultimate conclusion to that was: if you can't safely drink without getting drunk, and if you can't keep from drinking, then you've become absolutely powerless over alcohol, and most certainly our lives have become unmanageable. If not, at that time, we just keep on drinking, and after a while, they will be for sure. So, this morning we're going to look at an example of a guy that had that problem. A good textbook never tells you anything, anyhow, but what it doesn't back it up with more information. And we're going to look at Bill's story this morning. And Bill's story is a classic example of an alcoholic who had the allergy and who had the obsession of the mind. Now we've got to remember back in the 1930s, Bill learned very early on the value of sharing your story with another alcoholic when he went to see Dr. Bob. And immediately, Dr. Bob could see his problem also. They went to see Bill Dotson and they shared their stories with Bill Dotson. Bill Dotson could see his problem through their stories. and they learned very early on that it was necessary for one alcoholic to identify with another in order to be able to get their interest and get their attention. And when the big book was first published, they knew they wouldn't be able to sit down with the first person out here in California and share their story one-on-one. So the big book had to be complete enough to do that. So they said, we'll put Bill's story in here at the very beginning. And another alcoholic in reading Bill's story will be able to identify with Bill. And if we can identify with Bill and see his alcoholism, see him make a recovery from that condition, we can begin to believe and we can begin to hope that we're enough like Bill Wilson that if he could recover from that condition, then just maybe we could too. Now, a lot of people have said, well, we have trouble identifying with Bill Wilson because, after all, he was a night school lawyer and we were not. After all, he was a New York City stock speculator and we were not. And a lot of the women say we can't identify with him because he's a man. And many people say, Well, he was an older fellow, and we couldn't identify there either. But if we look for the way Bill thinks, and the way Bill acts, and the way Bill drinks, if we're a real alcoholic,

there's not an alcoholic in this room that can identify with Bill Wilson. So, as we go through Bill's story this morning, we'll look for identification. We'll look for the progression of alcoholism. We'll look for him drinking finally for the sickest reason of all, complete oblivion. Then we'll look and see how Bill recovered from alcoholism. And if we've identified with him, then we can begin to believe that if he could do it, just maybe we could too. Identification, the beginning of belief, the beginning of hope, Joe.

Joe on identifying with Bill; page one and the war years

03:08

Joe 03:08

See, I too didn't think I could identify with Bill Wilson because I've seen pictures of him. He was an old man, I thought. Turns out he was 43 years old when his book was written, so a relatively young man. But as I began to study and read Bill's story, I began to see that he was a very optimistic person, hardworking, had lots and lots of willpower. He was a self-made man, became very successful in his own right. And through Bill's story, we're going to see what he was like. Then we're going to see how he learned that he was sick, and then we're going to see how he affected a recovery. So, the total story of Alcoholics Anonymous is contained in Bill Wilson's story. So, let's go to page one: Bill's story. He said, War fever ran high in the New England town to which we knew young officers from Plattsburgh were assigned, and we were flattered when the first citizens took us to their homes, making us feel heroic. Here was love, applause, and war, moments sublime, with intervals hilarious. Anyone ever had any moments sublime with intervals hilarious? I have. I love the way Bill writes. He said, I was part of life at last. In the midst of excitement, I discovered liquor. I forgot the strong warnings and prejudices of my people concerning drink. In time we sailed for over there. I was very lonely and again turned to alcohol. We landed in England. I visited Winchester Cathedral. Much moved, I wondered outside. My attention was caught by a dogger on an old tombstone. Said, here lies a Hampshire gremedier who caught his death drinking cold small beer. A good soldier is ne'er forgot, whether he dieth by musket or by pot.

Charlie 04:45

Now, when he said, or by pot, he's not referring to this wacky weed. He's talking about a pot of beer. That's

Joe 04:52

the way they used to drink it over in England at that time. He said, ominous warning, which I failed to heed. 22 in a veteran of foreign wars, I went home at last. I fancied myself a leader, for had not the men of my battery given me special token of appreciation. My talent for leadership,

I imagined, would one day place me in the head of vast enterprise of which I would manage with the utmost assurance. He said, I took a night law course and obtained employment as an investigator for the surety company. The drive of success was on. I proved to the world that I was important.

Charlie 05:22

I already identified with Bill Wilson. That seems to be one of the main characteristics behind every alcoholic I've ever known. That great drive for success was on. That proved to the world that I'm important also. That seems to be the driving force behind each one of us.

Joe 05:38

He said, My work took me about Wall Street, and little by little I became interested in the market. Many people lost money, but some became very rich. Well, why not I? I studied economics and business as well as law. Potential alcoholic that I was, I nearly failed my law course. At one of the finals, I was too drunk to think or to write. Though my drinking was not yet continuous, it disturbed my wives. I can identify who they are. See, we had long talks when I would still her forebodings by telling her that men of genius conceive their best projects when drunk. I have no trouble identifying with Bill Wilson that the most majestic constructions of philosophic thought were so derived. Charlie said last night, we make our living selling fast talk to slow-thinking people, and Bill's trying to do some of that here, but we all know the lawyers didn't buy that.

Wall Street, the motorcycle trip, and arriving at the top

06:24

Charlie 06:24

He said, By the time I'd completed the course, I knew the law was not for me. The inviting maelstrom of Wall Street had me in its grip. Business and financial leaders were my heroes. Out of this alloy of drinking speculation, I commenced to forge the weapon that will one day turn in its flight like a boomerang, and all but cut me to ribbons. Living modestly, my wife and I saved \$1,000. It went into certain securities, then cheap and rather unpopular. I rightly imagined that they would someday have a great rise. I failed to persuade my broker friends to send me out looking over factories and managements, but my wife and I decided to go anyway. I had developed a theory that most people lost money in stocks through ignorance of markets. I discovered many more reasons later on. Now, Bill is referring to a time back in the 1920s when the stock market was on a roll. Just about everybody that dealt with stocks was making money. All you had to do was buy them and hold on to them, let them go up in price, sell them, take your profits, buy some more. Everything was done on about a 10% margin. Everything was pure

speculation. Bill Ready became one of the first investment counselors on Wall Street. He began to say, Look, sooner or later this bubble is going to burst. Sooner or later, we're going to have to start making our decisions based on fact rather than speculation. He went to the people who had the money and he said, I don't have the money to do this, but if you guys would back me financially, I'll leave New York City and I'll start visiting these companies and I'll look at the plants and I'll talk to the employees and I'll examine the books wherever I can, and I'll write up reports and send them back in here, and we'll start making our decisions whether to buy or not based on fact. And they said, nah, Bill, we don't need that kind of information. We're making about all the money we want to make anyhow. And you know how we alcoholics are if we get a good idea, stubborn as hell, we're going to carry it out one way or the other. He said, to hell with them. I don't need them anyhow. I'll just go do this on my own. He said, We gave up our positions and off we roared on a motorcycle. The sidecar stuff with tent blankets, a change of clothes, three huge volumes of a financial reference service. Our friends thought a lunacy commission should be appointed, and perhaps they were right. I had had some success in speculation, so we had a little money, but we once worked on a farm for a month to avoid drawing on our small capital. That was the last honest manual labor on my part for many a day. We covered the whole eastern United States in a year. At the end of it, my reports to Wall Street procured me a position there and the use of a large expense account. The exercise of an option brought in more money, leaving us with a profit of several thousand dollars for that year. Bill and Lois traveling on the motorcycle, living in the tent, went up and down the eastern seaboard of the United States, and he wrote up reports on approximately 100 of the largest companies in the eastern states, sent them into New York City. The guys that had the money saw them and they said, Oh, yeah, man, this is great information. Immediately, they put Bill on a payroll, gave him a large expense account. He exercised an option, made a good profit. for the first time in his life, he's got something. He came from a little town called East Dorset, Vermont. He had never had anything before in his life. Here's how he feels. For the next few years, fortune threw money and applause, my way, I had arrived. God, how many of us have done the same kind of thing to build it? My judgment and ideas were followed by many to the tune of paper millions. The great boom of the late 20s was seething and swelling. Drink was taking an important, exhilarating part in my life. There was loud talk in the jazz places uptown. Everyone spent in thousands and chattered in millions. Scoffers could scoff and be damned. I made a host of fairweather friends. And here's Bill now back in New York City on top of the heap. He's making money for himself and a lot of other people. He's drinking also, but drinking is not a problem right now. It's a very exciting thing, and Bill is really, really, really becoming a success at what he wanted to be. We also know, though, that if he's alcoholic, his drinking is going to get worse because it is a progressive thing. Let's see where he goes now from the top of the

Joe 10:52

heap. He said, My drinking assumed a more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night. The remonstrance of my friends terminated around. I became a lone wolf.

Charlie 11:01

How many of us have done the same thing, Bill? But people are going to say to Bill, you're drinking too much. Bill, you're costing us money. Bill, why don't you cut back? Bill, why don't you quit? And once again, rather than even consider that, Bill said to hell with them. I don't need them. He begins to operate on his own now. I have no problem identifying with Bill Wilson.

Joe 11:19

See, there were many unhappy scenes in our sumptuous apartment. There had been no real infidelity for loyalty to my wife, helped at times by extreme drunkenness, kept me out of those straps. And I've always believed about everything Bill wrote, but I'm not sure about that. You see, we have a book in AAA called As Bill Sees It, and now and on, they have a book called As Lois Remembers. A whole lot different. They're

Charlie 11:42

not exactly the same either. Let's go over to page four, first paragraph.

The 1929 crash and losing it all

11:50

Joe 11:50

Here's old Bill. He's making lots of money. He's doing well. He's got lots of willpower, lots of hope for the future. Hardworking, optimistic, a self-made man. On page 4, he said: abruptly in October 1929, hell broke loose on the New York Stock Exchange. After one of those days of inferno, I wobbled from a hotel bar to a brokerage office. It was 8 o'clock, five hours after the market had closed. The ticker still clattered. I was staring at an inch of tape which bore the inscription XYZ 32. It had been 52 that morning. He said, I was finished, and so were many friends. The papers reported men jumping to the death from towers of high finance. He said, That disgusted me. I would not jump. I went back to the bar. Bill had a solution for that, didn't he? My friends had dropped several million since 10 o'clock, but so what? Tomorrow was another day. And as I drank, that old fierce determination to win came back.

Charlie 12:41

How many of us have done the same thing? Come out of the jailhouse, the divorce court, the hospital, or wherever, low, sad, depressed, stop off in the bar, have a couple of drinks, and as the

alcohol courses through our veins, we say, We'll show them. By God, they're not going to treat us that way. And we're off and we're running again. That old fierce determination to be somebody to show them. Next morning, I telephoned a friend in Montreal. He had plenty of money left and thought I'd better go to Canada. You know, Bill was a drunk. He wasn't stupid. He knew where the money was, so he went to Canada. By the following spring, we were living in our accustomed style. I felt like Napoleon returning from Elba, no Santa Helena for me. But drinking caught up with me again. My generous friend had to let me go, and this time we stayed broke. Now we see our drinking progressing to the point where we can no longer even hold a job. We went to live with my wife's parents. I found the job, then lost it as a result of a brawl with a taxi driver. Mercifully, no one could guess that I was to have no real employment for five years or hardly draw a sober breath. My wife began to work in a department store, coming home exhausted to find me drunk. I became an unwelcome hanger-on at brokerage places. People at where he used to be the fair-haired boy, where he used to make lots of money for lots of people. He goes in there now and they're saying, Bill, we'd rather you didn't come in here today. You're about half drunk, and you don't look good, and you're smelling bad. You're embarrassing in front of our customers. Please move right on down the street. certainly, we can see the progression of alcoholism. We've gone from excitement to now, then we've gone to the point where it controls us completely. No longer holds a job, nobody wants us around anymore.

Liquor becomes a necessity; drinking to live

14:22

Joe 14:22

It starts to get worse. Liquor ceased to be a luxury. It became a necessity.

Charlie 14:27

Now we're drinking for an entirely different reason. We're drinking now because we absolutely have to drink in order to live. No fun left anymore, no excitement, drinking in order to be able to live.

Joe 14:38

Bathtub, chin, two balls a day, and often three got to be routine. Sometimes a small deal would net a few hundred dollars, and I would pay my bills at the bars and delicatessens. Now, this went on endlessly, and I began to wake in very early in the morning, shaking violently. A tumbler full of gin, followed by a half dozen bottles of beer, would be required if I were to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, I still thought I could control the situation.

Charlie 15:00

Remember last night, Dr. Silkhorse said, we really can't differentiate the true from the false to us. What we're doing is normal. We see Bill's life going to hell in a handbasket already. Bill can't see that. He thinks he can still control the situation. Let's see where he goes on control.

Joe 15:17

Things are real bad in Bill's life, but it says gradually things got worse. The house was taken over by the mortgage holder. My mother-in-law died, and my wife and father-in-law became ill. He said, Then I got a promising business opportunity. Stocks were at a low point in 1932, and I had somehow formed a group to buy. I was to share generously in the profits. Then I went on a prodigious bender, and that chance vanished.

The Jersey Lightning Applejack and the failed deal

15:38

Charlie 15:38

This is a story within itself. The people who had the money knew how good Bill was at putting these deals together. And they came to Bill and they said, Bill, we've got a proposition for you. We've got an opportunity to not only make money for us, but make money for you. And if you can stay sober, we'd like for you to handle this thing. And Bill said, Don't you worry about that drinking. He said, I'm through with that drinking. You'll not have to worry about that. And he worked for a matter of months putting this deal together. And a few days before it was to be successfully completed, one night, they're all sitting around in a hotel room talking about this. Somebody passes around a bottle of Applejack. This was back during the days of Prohibition. It came to Bill and he said, No, thank you. I'm not drinking anymore. After a while, it came back to him, and the guy next to him said, Bill, you don't understand what this is. He said, This is the finest Applejack in the world. It is called Jersey Lightning. You better have a drink. And Bill's mind said, Hmm, I've never tasted any Jersey Lightning. No more thought than that. He reached out, grabbed the bottle, took a drink, triggered the allergy, couldn't sober up, blew the whole deal. Now, the importance in it lies within the next statement. He said, I woke

Willpower fails, sanity questioned, drinking for oblivion

16:54

Joe 16:54

up. This had to be stopped. I saw that I could not take as much as one drink. I was through forever. Before then, I'd written lots of sweet promises, but my wife happily observed that this time I meant business, and

Charlie 17:06

so I did. For the first time, Bill could differentiate the true from the false. For the first time, he could truly see what alcohol was doing to him. And he did this like all the rest of us. He trotted out his willpower and he said, Sick them, Will. We're through with that drink, and we'll never drink again as long as we live. You know, they try to tell us we are weak-willed people. Don't you believe that? We are strong-willed people. Weak-willed people do not become alcoholic. Third time they vomit, they quit drinking. Alcoholic knows there's got to be some way to drink without puking. We damn near kill ourselves, you know. We got lots of

Joe 17:44

willpower. See, but Bill doesn't know what we learned last night. Anytime there's a battle going on between the willpower and the obsession of the mind. The obsession of the mind is stronger than willpower, and it'll always win. That's how strong it is. Let's see what happened to him on willpower. He said, shortly afterward, I came home drunk. There had been no fight. Where had been my high resolve? I simply didn't know. It hadn't even come to mind. Someone had pushed a drink my way and I'd taken it. He said, Was I crazy? So if his willpower is not working, then he begins to question his sanity. Am I just crazy? Is that it? He said, I began to wonder for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near being just that. Now, renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cocksureness. He said, I could laugh at the gin mails. Now I had what it takes. One day I walked into a cafe to telephone. In no time, I was beating on the bar, asking myself how it happened. And as the whiskey rose to my head, I told myself I would have managed better next time, but I might as well get good and drunk then. And I did.

Charlie 18:44

Anyone in here identify with Bill Wilson? Huh?

Joe 18:48

He said the remorse and horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable.

Charlie 18:51

Can you guys hear him from the back? Can you hear back there okay? Yeah. Okay.

Joe 18:57

My voice is a little low here this morning. Okay, where am I? All right. Laughlin, Nevada. I got a one. I got a wonderful memory. It's just short. So the remorse and the horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably, and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity. I hardly dared cross the street lest I collapsed and be run down by an early morning truck, for it was scarcely

daylight. An all-night place supplied me with a dozen glasses of ale. My writhing nerves were stelled at last. A morning paper told me the market had gone to hell again, was so had I. The market would recover, but I wouldn't. That was a hard thought. Should I kill myself? No, not now. Then a mental fog settled down. Jin would fix that, so two bottles in the oblivion. See, Bill questioned he used his willpower, and that didn't work. He began to question his sanity, and that didn't work. And then he began to contemplate suicide. And then he was drinking for the sickest effect of all, total oblivion. And that's where we find Bill at this time. He said, The mind and body are a marvelous mechanism, for mine endured this agony two more years. Sometimes I stole from my wife's slender purse when the morning terror and madness were on me. Again, I swayed dizzily before an open window or the medicine cabinet where there was poison, cursing myself for a weakling. There were flights from city to country and back as I, and my wife and I saw it escape. Then came the night when the physical and mental torture was so hellish I feared I'd burst through my window, sash and all. Somehow I managed to drag my mattress to a lower floor lest I suddenly leap. A doctor came with a heavy sedative. Next day found me drinking both gin and sedative. This combination soon landed me on the rocks. People feared for my sanity, and so did I. I could eat little or nothing when drinking, and I was 40 pounds underweight. So now we find Bill drinking for oblivion, not eating very often. I can identify with Bill. He's dying of malnutrition. And I can identify with Bill because when I was drinking those last years of my drinking, occasionally I'd eat a bologna sandwich because I knew you were supposed to eat something rather than just drink, and that's what Bill was doing at this time, dying of malnutrition.

Towns Hospital, Dr. Silkworth, and the Belladonna treatment

21:10

Charlie 21:10

My brother-in-law is a physician, and through his kindness and that of my mother, I was placed in a nationally known hospital for the mental and physical rehabilitation of alcoholics. This is the town's hospital in New York City, and this is the summer of 1933. Under the so-called Belladonna treatment, my brain cleared. Belladonna was a drug that they used to fool the body into thinking it had alcohol in it. It was used for withdrawal purposes. It's what they use value for today. Hydrotherapy and mild exercise helped much. Hydrotherapy is a water treatment. We saw some of that in a treatment center in Australia back in the 1980s. They would put the alcoholic on a gurney, roll him into the shower room, and they had shower heads all the way around the shower room alternating hot and cold water. Be in there for about 30 minutes. Doesn't cure alcoholism, but it makes a clean drunk out of you, I'll guarantee you that. Those guys had come out of there and their skin all wrinkled up and shriveled up. He said, Best of all,

I met a kind doctor. Now, this is Dr. Silkworth, who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I'd been seriously ill, bodily and mentally. Silky sat down with him and explained his ideas about the physical allergy and the obsession of the mind. And here's the effect it had on Bill. He said, it relieved me somewhat to learn that in alcoholics the will is amazingly weakened when it comes to combating liquor, though it often remains strong in other respects. My incredible behavior in the face of a desperate desire to stop was explained. Understanding myself now, I fared forth in high hope. For three or four months, the goose hung high. I went to town regularly and even made a little money. Surely this was the answer: self-knowledge. For the first time, Bill understood his problem. He knew it was not willpower. He knew it wasn't character and sin. He knew it was a physical allergy coupled with an obsession of the mind, and that's what made him absolutely powerless. And he said, Now that I know what's wrong with me, I'll not have to drink any longer. Let's see where he goes from here.

Joe 23:22

The information we learned last night about the doctor's opinion and the illness of alcoholism is very, very important information. But you know, it's just information, it will not solve alcoholism just because we know what the problem is, as Bill found out. But it was not, for the frightful day came when I drank once more. The curve of my declining moral and bodily health fell off like a ski jump. And after a time, I returned to the hospital.

Charlie 23:45

This is the summer of 1934. A year later, we go back into the towns for the second time.

Joe 23:51

He said, This was the finish, the curtain, it seemed to me. My weary and despairing wife was informed that it would all end with heart failure during delirium tremens, or I would develop a wet brain, perhaps within a year. She would soon have to give me over to the undertaker or the asylum. Bill was laying in the hospital room there, all sick. He overheard Lois and Dr. Silkworth talking. She said, Dr. Silkworth, is there any hope for him? And he said, No, I don't believe so, Lois. We're going to have to give him over to the Undertaker or the asylum because there's no solution for Bill. And he said they did not need to tell me. He said, I knew and I almost welcomed the idea. It was a devastating blow to my pride. I, who had thought so well of myself and my abilities, if my capacity to surmount obstacles was cornered at last. Now I was to plunge into the dark, joining that endless possession of solitude gone on before. I thought of my poor wife. There had been much happiness after all. What would I not give to make amends? But that was over now. Bill was a very hardworking, optimistic individual, and now we see Bill he is

hopeless. He is without hope. And we all know you can't live long without hope. You've gotta have hope. But Bill is hopeless at the moment.

Complete defeat: the description of Step One

24:57

Charlie 24:57

Now let's look at this next statement very carefully. He said, No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master. I've never seen a better description of step one. No step one written in those days, but surely this, is where Bill took it. He admitted complete defeat. Alcohol had whipped him in a fair fight. He was completely powerless over alcohol. Now, if that should happen to you and I today, chances are we would say, well, that being the case, I guess I better go to AA. But Bill didn't have any AA to go to. He's in the best facility he knows of. So even though he's admitted his powerlessness, even though he's taken what we know is step one, the only thing he can do is leave that hospital, try to stay sober on his own. Trembling, I stepped from the hospital a broken man. Fear sobbered me for a bit. Then came the insidious insanity of that first drink, and in Armistice Day 1934, I was off again. Everyone became resigned to the certainty that I would have to be shut up somewhere or would stumble along to a miserable end. How dark it is before the dawn. In reality, that was the beginning of my last debauch. I was soon to be catapulted in what I like to call the fourth dimension of existence. I was to know happiness, peace, and usefulness in a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes. Near the end of that bleak November, I sat drinking in my kitchen, and I imagine it was a pretty bleak November. He started drinking on November the 11th, triggered the allergy, couldn't stop. Been drunk now for about three weeks. With a certain satisfaction, I reflected there was enough gin concealed about the house to carry me through that night to the next day. My wife was at work. I wondered whether I'd dared hide a foot a bottle of gin near the head of her bed. I would need it before daylight. My musing was interrupted by the telephone. The cheery voice of an old school friend asked if he might come over. Now, this was Ebby Thatcher. Bill and Abby had gone to school together when they were younger, did lots of drinking together. And Bill knew about Ebby and he knew how Abby drank. And he said he was sober. And if you'll notice, that's in squiggly writing. Squiggly writing in the big book is very important. This really amazed Bill. Ebby's sober. He said, well, it's years since I remember coming to New York in that condition. I was amazed. Rumor had it that he had been committed for alcoholic insanity. The last Bill had heard about Ebby is Ebby was going to be committed to the state insane asylum in the state of Vermont for alcoholic insanity. That's what they used to do with people like us before we had

the treatment centers. They'd haul us in front of a judge. The judge would commit us to the state insane asylum for alcoholic insanity for an undetermined period of time. Until you got well. You would stay there until you got well. And that's the last he had heard about Ebby.

Ebby Thatcher's story and the Oxford Group

28:06

Joe 28:06

He said, I wondered how he'd escaped. He was amazed that Ebby was out of this treatment center, or insane asylum, excuse me. Same thing. Same thing. Yeah. They've renamed everything, you know, these days. They talk about dysfunctional families today. Well, mine was just crazy as hell. I don't know. But Ebby comes from a very prominent family in Albany, New York. In fact, his father was the mayor of Albany. Very prominent family, and Ebby's drinking was embarrassing the family. So they called Ebby in one day, said, Ebby said, You're embarrassing the family with your drinking. We would like for you to just basically get out of town and go on over there to Vermont and stay at the old summer place, and we'll be over there this summer. And while you're there, you might as well sober up. And if you get sober, you might as well make yourself useful and paint up and fix up the old summer place because we'll be using it. So Ebby went out and got out of town and went over to Vermont. He began to fix up the old summer place, painting and fixing up. And one day he finished painting this wall and he looked at it and he was admiring that. And he noticed that some pigeons were doing some things on the side of his wall that he didn't like. So he went in the house and got his shotgun out and began to shoot at the pigeons, blowing holes in the side of the wall. Well, the neighbors don't like that at all. So they called the police and they had him arrested, and they took him before the judge, and they were going to commit him for alcoholic insanity. But Ebby got real lucky. Two fellows interceded on his behalf. One guy's name was Roland Hazard, the other was Sebra Graves. And they asked the judge if they might release Ebby to their care because they were going to the Oxford group and they felt if they took Ebby to the Oxford group meetings and if he would ply the tenets of the Oxford group to his life, maybe he too could stay sober as they had. Well, Ebby began to go to the Oxford group meetings and he began to stay sober. And a couple of months later, he goes to New York, to the Calvary Mission, which was the headquarters of the Oxford Group at that time. And he began to stay there in that mission. And after a while, he decided that he'd remembered his friend Bill. He said, I think I'll go over and talk to Bill. Maybe I can help Bill stay sober, as these two fellows had helped me.

Charlie 30:11

Now, Bill didn't know any of this. He said, I wondered how he had escaped. Of course, he would have dinner and I could drink opium with him. Unmindful of his welfare, I thought only

of recapturing the spirit of other days. There was that time we had chartered an airplane to complete a jag. His coming was an oasis in this dreary desert of futility. The very thing in Oasis drinkers are like that. The door opened, and he stood there, fresh-skinned and glowing. There was something about his eyes. He was inexplicably different. What had happened? I pushed a drink across the table, and he refused it. Disappointed but curious, I'm wondering what got into the fellow, he wasn't himself. Come, what's all this about? I queried. And he looked straight at me simply but smilingly. He said, I've got religion. Now, I'm damn glad that didn't happen in my kitchen. I have no idea what I would have done. But here's what Bill did: he said, I was aghast. So that was. it Last summer, an alcoholic crackpot. Now I suspected a little cracked about religion. He had that starry-eyed look. Yeah, the old boy was on fire, all right. But bless his heart, let him rant. Besides, my gin would last longer than his preaching. But he didn't know Ranning. In a matter-of-fact way, he told how two men had appeared in court, persuading the judge to suspend his commitment. They had told of a simple religious idea and a practical program of action. That was two months ago, and the result was self-evident. It worked. So now then Bill knows all three things. He got the problem from Dr. Silkworth. He got the solution here referred to as a simple religious idea from Ebby. He got the practical program of action from Ebby. So now he knows all three things. But Bill is also, just like so many of us, he did not like this simple religious idea. You know, Bill's thoughts and his ideas about God and about religion, and etc., were enough that made him resent what Ebby had brought to him. He said he'd come to pass his experience along to me if I cared to have it. I was shocked, but interested, certainly, I was interested. I had to be, for I was hopeless. He talked for hours. Childhood memories rose before me. I could almost hear the sound of the preacher's voice as I sat on still Sundays way over there on the hillside. There was that proffered temperance pledge I never signed. My grandfather's good-natured contempt of some church folk and their doings. His insistence that the spheres really had their music, but his denial of the preacher' rights to tell him how he must listen. You know, Bill's grandfather, Grandpa Griffith, raised him from twelve years on. And Grandpa Griffith believed in some power greater than human power, but he wouldn't let anybody tell him how he had to believe in it. His grandpa had a great problem with the world's religions. He'd passed that along to Bill. His fearlessness, he spoke of these things just before he died. These recollections welled up from the past and they made me swallow hard. That wartime day in old Winchester Cathedral came back again. And we're Bill's having a problem now with this religious idea that Ebby's talking about. We've seen him take step one. In the next couple of pages, we're going to see him take step two. Let's see how he came to be able to accept this religious idea.

Joe 33:42

And Bill has already took step one, so now he's between steps one and two. He hasn't to steps two yet. He began to ponder these things. He said, I always believed in the power greater than myself. I'd often pondered these things. I was not an atheist. Few people really are, for that means blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher and aimlessly rushes nowhere. My intellectual heroes, the chemists, the astronomers, even the evolutionists, suggest vast laws and forces at work. But despite contrary indications, I had little doubt that a mighty purpose and rhythm underlay all. How could there be so much precise and immutable law and no intelligence? I simply had to believe in a spirit of the universe who knew neither time nor limitation, but that was as far as I had gone.

Charlie 34:24

Now, here's where I really began to identify with Bill Wilson.

Joe 34:27

With ministers in the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me who was love, superhuman strength, and direction, he said, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such theories. To Christ, I could see the certainty of a great man, not too closely followed by those who claimed him. His moral teachings, most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult. The rest I disregarded.

Charlie 34:52

Anyone in here identify with Bill Wilson? Huh? You betcha. We can see that Bill's having a terrible time with this religious idea. Now let's go down to the middle paragraph. But my friend sat before me, and he made the point declaration that God had done for him what he could not do for himself. His human will had failed. Doctors had pronounced him incurable. Society was about to lock him up. Like myself, he had admitted complete defeat. Then he had, in effect, been raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known. Had this power originated in him? Obviously it had not. There had been no more power in him than there was in me at that minute, and this was none at all. This is where the identification process is so important. Bill knew about Ebby. He knew how Ebby drank. And he knew that if Ebby had been sober two months, some power greater than Ebby had to be working in Ebby's life. Whether Bill likes it or not is absolutely beside the point. Ebby's living proof of it. And that's what you and I offer to the newcomer. You know, when we

sit there talking to a newcomer, we're living proof that some power, greater than human power, is working in our lives also. Whether the newcomer likes it or not, it's beside the point. We are the proof of it. Ebby was the proof for Bill. Now, I'd like to have been there that day, sitting in a corner watching them. Bill's about two-thirds drunk. Ebby has come out of the Oxford groups, and they were a group of people practicing first century Christianity to the best of their ability. The terms they used were highly religious in nature. Ebby is on fire, and he's talking about God. And Bill doesn't like it at all. And they're sitting there arguing with each other about who God is and what He is. And Bill said, Don't give me that religious crap. Oh, yeah, I believe in a great mind, the spirit of nature, but don't give me that other kind of stuff. And Ebby's trying to put it on old Bill, and they're arguing back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Let's go over to page 12, first paragraph.

"Choose your own conception of God" — Step Two

36:53

Joe 36:53

He said, Despite the living example of my friend, there remained in me the vestiges of my old prejudice. Bill still doesn't like this idea. The word God still aroused a certain antithy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me, this feeling was intensified. He said, I didn't like the idea. I could go for such a conception that creative intelligence, universal mind, or spirit of nature, but I resisted the thought of the Tsar of the Heavens, however loving his way might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt the same way. In other words, Bill was saying there's got to be a harder way to do this. What you're saying is too simple.

Charlie 37:29

I guess Ebby finally, finally got tired of this deal. Let's look at the next statement very carefully. If you'll notice, it's in squiggly writing. My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, Well, why don't you choose your own conception of God? In other words, he said, Bill, what are we arguing about? What difference does it make what we call him? Why don't you choose your own conception of God? We're no longer dealing with religion now, we're dealing with spirituality. You see, religion says this is the way you have to believe. Spirituality says it really doesn't make any difference how you believe. The only question is: are you willing to believe? So we're through with religion. Now we're talking about spirituality. And here's the effect that it had on Bill. That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain whose shadow I'd lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last. It took all arguments away from him. He couldn't argue with that statement. He said it was only a matter of being willing to believe in a power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to

make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point upon a foundation of complete willingness, I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would. Surely this is when Bill took step two. No step two written in those days, but here's where he came to believe in a power greater than himself based on every simple little statement, why don't you choose your own conception of God? And that statement has opened the door for countless millions of we alcoholics who were having trouble with religion. And I think the reason it really works is we're allowed here to have our own conception of God. And you know, as I look back at my lifetime, I realize I've never had any problem with my own conception of anything. You betcha. Let me believe the way I want to, and I'm ready to go now. Bill is now taking a step to, isn't that something? Isn't that something? When he made the statement, I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon the foundation of complete willingness, I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would. This is Bill's first reference to a wonderfully effective spiritual structure. And he's going to start painting a picture in our mind using words. Eventually, he'll tell us what the structure is and show us where we'll pass through it to freedom. Now, his first reference to it is: upon a foundation of complete willingness, I might build what I saw in my friend, in my friend. The foundation of this structure is willingness. That came from step one: when we could see that what we were doing would no longer work period,. We became willing to change. Later on, we're going to see where believing step two is the cornerstone of that structure. And eventually he'll tell us exactly what it is: a beautiful way to teach painting pictures in our mind using words. If we are willing and if we believe, then we've already started the road to recovery. Bill has now taken steps one and two. Immediately, Ebby starts taking him to Oxford group meetings. But remember, Bill's still drinking. Triggered the allergy on November the 11th. He can't stop. On about December the 10th, probably, 1934, Bill was put back in the hospital for the third time for withdrawal from alcohol by doctor Silkworth. Abbey comes to visit with him. They begin to apply the little Oxford Group Pgrroam of Action and Bill had his spiritual experience. Let's look on page 13. Let's see if we can't see the last 10 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. He's taken one and two. Let's see if we can't see the last ten.

Towns Hospital: the Oxford tenets become the last ten Steps

41:15

Joe 41:15

He said, at the hospital, I was separated from alcohol for the last time. Treatment seemed wise, so I showed signs of delirium tremens. There, I humbly offered myself to God as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under his care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing, that without him I was lost.

Charlie 41:35

The first tenant that the Oxford group had was surrender. Now, Bill, later on, when he wrote the steps he realized that no alcoholic would like the word surrender. So he changed their first step into our third step where we made a decision to turn our will and life over to the care of God as we understand him. We see him there taking the first Oxford group tenant, which turned out to be our step three. He's now taken one, two, and three. He said, I ruthlessly faced my sins. I ruthlessly faced my sins. Their second tenant was examine your sins. And Bill knew that no good alcoholic is going to do that. So he changed that into made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. He's taking step four there.

Joe 42:18

And became willing to have my newfound friend take them away, root and branch. I've not had a drink since.

Charlie 42:23

Became willing to have my newfound friend take them away, root and branch. You'll notice friend is capitalized. This is one of the words that Bill uses for God. And that little statement became willing to have my newfound friend take them away. Root and branch later became step six and seven. We became willing to have God remove these things and humbly ask Him to do so. There we're dealing with six and seven.

Joe 42:46

My schoolmate visited me, and I fully acquainted him with my problems and deficiencies.

Charlie 42:49

He's taking what we know today as step five there in the town's

Joe 42:54

hospital with Ebby. We made a list of people I'd hurt and toward whom I felt resentment. I expressed my entire willingness to approach these individuals, admitting my wrong. Never was I to be critical of them. I was to write all such matters to the utmost of my ability.

Charlie 43:08

They had an Oxford Gourp tenant called Restitution. And Bill knew that no self-respecting alcoholic is on a due restitution. So he took that and made two steps out of it: step eight and nine, where we made the list and became willing and then made amends. There he's dealing with eight and nine.

Joe 43:24

He said, I was testing my thinking by the new God conscious within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense.

Charlie 43:30

That statement later became step ten, where we continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly explained it. I mean, admitted it.

Joe 43:41

That's the new step 10. I was sitting quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as he would have me. Never was I to pray for myself, except as my request born my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive, but that would be in great measure.

Charlie 43:58

And there we see all the elements of step 12, where we sought through prayer and medication and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, so on and so forth. There he's dealing with step 11. I'm

Joe 44:10

sorry, step 11. My friend promised when these things were done, I would enter upon a new relationship with my Creator, that I would have the elements of a way of living which answered all my problems. It's

Charlie 44:19

got to be the first part of step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps. So we see Bill in the town's hospital, applying the Oxford Group tenets, which later he made into the last ten steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. And this is why he was able to say, and how it works: these are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery. Bill took them in the town hospital with the help of Ebby. Now, let's see what happened to

Joe 44:48

him. Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty, and humility to establish and maintain the new order of things were the essential requirements. Simple, but not easy. A price had to be paid. It meant the destruction of self-centeredness, and I must turn in all things to the Father of the Light who presides over us all. Poor old alcoholics got to give up the two most important things in our lives. And the first thing is our alcohol, and the second thing is our self-centeredness. The two things are. Very difficult to do. Very difficult, but very simple. He said these were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory followed by such a peace and serenity as I'd

never known. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up as though the great clean wind of a mountaintop blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but his impact on me was sudden and profound. And for a moment, I was alarmed and called my friend the doctor and asked if I was still sane. He listened in wonder as I talked. You know, Bill overheard Lorison and Dr. Silkworth talking, so he thought he'd gone crazy. He thought he'd check out with Dr. Silkworth to see if he had gone crazy. Finally, after he told me his experience, finally, he shook his head saying, Well, something's happened to you, I don't understand, but you better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way that you were. The good doctor now sees many men who have had such experiences. He knows that they are real.

The spiritual experience and turning to help others

46:05

Charlie 46:05

Now, we don't know what happened to Bill that day. We were not there to see that. But we know this was probably about December the 14th of 1934. We do know that Bill didn't die until January of 1971. We do know that it was never necessary for him to take another drink from this day until the day that he died, something profound took place in his life that day. Bill always said, I had a vital spiritual experience as the result of these steps during which old ideas were cast aside and replaced with a new set of ideas, and I was able to live the rest of my life without drinking. Now, here's a guy that went in the hospital, selfish and self-centered to the extreme, always doing what he wanted to do whenever he wanted to do it. That was his attitude when he went in there. Let's look at his attitude now that he's had the spiritual experience. He

Joe 47:01

said, While I lay in the hospital, the thought came that there were thousands of hopeless alcoholics who might be glad to have what had been so freely given me. Perhaps I could help some of them. They in turn might work with others. Bill had that gigantic spiritual experience, and then he immediately begins to think how he can give it to other people. Something profound happened with Bill.

Charlie 47:21

He said, My friend, and this time you'll notice it's a small F, he's referring to Ebby now. My friend had emphasized the absolute necessity of demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said, and how appallingly true for the alcoholic. For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely

drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die, then faith would be dead indeed, and with us, it's just like that. Thank God Bill knew that and accepted that fact. Because when he was an Akron about to get drunk, he remembered how back in New York City, even though he'd never helped anybody else, that he himself had felt better. That's why he got hold of Dr. Bob, to try to help Dr. Bob, not necessarily to sober up Bob, but to keep Bill from getting drunk. And thank God it kept him from getting drunk, and Bob sobered up. And from there, we had the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Faith without works is dead. And you noticed about anybody I see drink today that's been in AA for any period of time, usually they have quit working with other people. And when they quit working with other people, they start thinking about self only. And after a while, all the old problems come back, and we end up getting drunk all over again. Always working with others will help us when nothing else will.

Joe 48:51

He said, My wife and I abandoned herself with enthusiasm to the idea of helping other alcoholics to a solution to their problems. It was fortunate for my old business associates to remain skeptical for a year and a half, during which I found little work. I was not too well at the time, and I was plagued by waves of self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found when all of the measures failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day. Many times I've gone to my old hospital in despair. On talking to a man there, I'd be amazingly lifted up and set on my feet. It's a design for living that works in rough going. We've took a design for living that works in rough going and turned it into a non-drinking society, I'm afraid. This is a design for living. And the work is really, really hard, but the pay is really, really good too.

Charlie 49:38

We managed to stay sober, isn't that something? Now, if we're a brand new alcoholic out here in California, no fellowship around us, first contact we've ever had is this book called Alcoholics Anonymous. We've read the doctor's opinion. We've been able to see what our problem is. We've read Bill's story. We've been able to identify with another alcoholic. We've seen him go from fun drinking to drinking because of absolute necessity, going finally to the sickest of all, complete oblivion. Then we've seen him recover from that condition. Now, surely, surely, we could say to ourselves, we're enough like this guy that if he can recover, just maybe we could too. The beginning of belief, the beginning of hope. By now, we could probably hardly wait to see what really did take place in Bill's life and how he recovered. And I don't think by accident, the very next chapter's title, There Is a Solution. There is a solution to the thing that Bill has really described in his own story here and to what Dr. Silkworth has talked to us about it. Now, if our problem is powerless, which we should be convinced of that by now, then

obviously the answer is going to lie within power. We do know that it was never necessary for him to take another drink from this day until the day that he died. Something profound took place in his life that day. Bill always said, I had a vital spiritual experience as the result of these steps during which old ideas were cast aside and replaced with a new set of ideas, and I was able to live the rest of my life without drinking. Now, here's a guy that went in the hospital, selfish and self-centered to the extreme.

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