

WESTBORO BIG BOOK STUDY GROUP

All Saints Anglican Church

Saturday Morning 9:00 a.m.

347 Richmond Road (near Churchill)

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Bill's Story

(Tape 2 - 01:03:59.0)

Big Book p. 7, par. 1 "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."

J & C This is the Towns Hospital in New York City and this is the summer of 1933.

Big Book p. 7, par. 1, line 4 "Under the so-called belladonna treatment my brain cleared."

J & C 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 Valium for today.

Big Book p. 7, par. 1, line 5 "Hydrotherapy and mild exercise helped much."

J & C Hydrotherapy is water treatment; we saw some of that in a treatment center in Australia back in the 1980's. They would put the alcoholic on a gurney, roll him into the shower room and they had showerheads all the way around the shower room alternating hot and cold water. Be in there for about thirty minutes. Doesn't cure alcoholism, but it makes a clean drunk out of you I'll guarantee you that. Those guys would come out of there and their skin all wrinkled up and shriveled up. He said,

Big Book p. 7, par. 1, line 6 "Best of all, I met a kind doctor"

J & C Now this is Dr. Silkworth.

Big Book p. 7, par. 1, line 7 "who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally."

J & C 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,

Big Book p. 7, par. 2 "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."

J & C For the first time Bill understood his problem.

**He knew it was not will power.
He knew it wasn't moral character and sin.**

**He knew it was a physical allergy coupled with the 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.

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.

Big Book p. 7, par 3 "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. After a time I returned to the hospital."

J & C Now this is the summer of 1934. A year later we go back into the Towns for the second time.

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Big Book p. 7, par 3, line 4 *“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. We would soon have to give me over to the undertaker of the asylum.”*

J & C 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, cause there's no solution for Bill. And he said,

Big Book p. 7, par. 4 *“They did not need to tell me. I knew, and almost welcomed the idea. It was a devastating blow to my pride. I, who had thought so well of myself and my abilities, of my capacity to surmount obstacles, was cornered at last. Now I was to plunge into the dark, joining that endless procession of sots who had 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.”*

J & C Bill was a very hardworking, optimistic individual and now we see Bill, he is hopeless, he is without hope. But we all know you can't live long without hope, you've got to have hope, but Bill is hopeless at the moment. Now let's look at this next statement very carefully. He said,

Big Book p. 8, par. 1 *“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.”*

J & C I've never seen a better description of Step 1. No Step 1 written in those days, but surely this is where Bill took it. He admitted completed 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'd better go to AA. But Bill didn't have any AA to go to. He's in the best facility he knows that. So even though he's admitted his powerlessness, even though he's taken what we know as Step 1, the only thing he can do is leave that hospital, try to stay sober on his own.

Big Book p. 8, par. 2 *“ Trembling, I stepped from the hospital a broken man. Fear sobered me for a bit. Then came the insidious insanity of that first drink, and on 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 into 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. “

J & C 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 3 weeks.

Big Book p. 8, par. 3, line 2 *“ With a certain satisfaction I reflected there was enough gin concealed about the house to carry me through that night and the next day. My wife was at work. I wondered whether I dared hide a full bottle of gin near the head of our 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. “

J & C Now this was Ebby Thatcher. Bill and Ebby had gone to school together when they were younger, did lots of drinking together. And Bill knew about Ebby and he knew how Ebby 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,

Big Book p. 9, line 1 *“It was years since I could remember his coming to New York in that condition. I was amazed. Rumor had it that he had been committed for alcoholic insanity.”*

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J & C The last Bill had heard about Ebby was that 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. Till you got well; you would stay there until you got well. And that's the last he'd heard about Ebby. He said,

Big Book p. 9, line 4 "I wondered how he had escaped.

J & C He was amazed that Ebby was out of this treatment center, err insane asylum, excuse me... Same thing, same thing, yeah. They've renamed everything in all these things. They talk about dysfunctional families today; well mine was just crazy as hell. But Ebby come 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 and said Ebby you're embarrassing the family with your drinking and 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, got out of town and went over to Vermont to begin to fix up the old summer place, painting and fixing it 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 shut gun out and began to shoot at the pigeons, blowing holes in the side of the wall. Well the neighbors they don't like that at all, so they called the police and 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 Rowland Hazard and the other was Cebra Graves. And they asked the judge if he 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 apply 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 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 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 have helped me. Now Bill didn't know any of this though, he said I wondered how he had escaped.

Big Book p. 9, line 5 "Of course he would have dinner, and then I could drink openly 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 an 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. He refused it. Disappointed but curious, I wondered what had got into the fellow. He wasn't himself. "Come, what's all this about? I queried. He looked straight at me. Simply, but smilingly, he said, "I've got religion."

J & C 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:

Big Book p. 9, par. 5-6 "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. Yes, 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 did no ranting. 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

J & C Which is step 2

Big Book p. 9, par. 6 line 4, and a practical program of action.

J & C Which is steps 3 through 12.

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Big Book p. 9, par. 6, line 5 *That was two months ago and the result was self-evident. It worked! “*

(here is the phrase that Joe and Charlie use: **practical program of action.**)

J & C So now then Bill knows all three things. He got the problem from Dr. Silkworth, he got the Solution here referred to here 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. Now 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,

Big Book p. 9, par. 7 *“He had 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 fold and their doings; his insistence that the spheres really had their music; but his denial of the preacher's right to tell him how he must listen;

J & C Now 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 passed that along to Bill.

Big Book p. 10, par 1, line 9 *“his fearlessness as he spoke of these things just before he died; these recollections welled up from the past. They made me swallow hard.*

That war-time day in old Winchester Cathedral came back again.”

J & C Bill's having a problem now with this religious idea that Ebby's talking about. We've seen him take Step 1. In the next couple of pages we're going to see him take Step 2. Let's see how he came to be able to accept this religious idea. Now Bill's already took Step 1, so now he's between Steps 1 and 2, he hasn't taken Step 2 yet. He begins to ponder these things. He said,

Big Book p. 10, par. 3 *“I had always believed in a Power greater than myself. I had 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 evolutionist, suggested vast laws and forces at work. Despite contrary indications, I had little doubt that a might purpose and rhythm underlay all. How could there be so much of 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.”*

J & C Now here's where I really begin to identify with Bill Wilson.

Big Book p. 10, par. 4 *“With ministers, and the world's religions, I parted right there. When they talked of a God personal to me, who was love, superhuman strength and direction, I became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such a theory. To Christ I conceded the certainty of a great man, not too closely followed by those who claimed Him. His moral teaching most excellent. For myself, I had adopted those parts which seemed convenient and not too difficult; the rest I disregarded.”*

J & C Anybody 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.

Big Book p. 11, par. 3 *“But my friend sat before me, and he made the pointblank 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. ”

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J & C **This is why 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 is living *proof* of it.

That's what you and I offer to the newcomer. When we sit there talking to the 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 **is beside the point.** We are the *proof* of it. Ebby was the *proof* for Bill.

Now I'd liked 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 don'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 the 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. He said,

Big Book p. 12, par. 1 "Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me the vestiges of my old prejudice.

J & C Bill still doesn't like this idea.

Big Book p. 12, par. 1, line 2 The word God still aroused a certain antipathy. When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt the same way."

J & C In other words Bill was saying **there's got to be a harder way to do this, what you're saying is too simple.** Now I guess Ebby finally, finally got tired of this deal. Let's look at the next statement very carefully. If you notice it's in squiggly writing,

Big Book p. 12, par. 2 "My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, "Why don't you choose your own conception of God?"

J & C 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.

Big Book p. 12, par. 3 "That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.

J & C It took all arguments away from him. He couldn't argue with that statement.

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Big Book p. 12, par. 4 "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! "

J & C Surely, this is when Bill took Step 2. No Step 2 written in those days. But here's where he came to believe in a Power greater than himself, based on Ebby's 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 in 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 2. Isn't that something? Isn't that something? When he made the statement, "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!"

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."

The foundation of this structure is willingness. That came from Step 1.

When we could see what we were doing would no longer work period, we became willing to change.

Later on we're going to see where **Believing, Step 2, 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 1 and 2. Immediately Ebby starts taking him to Oxford Group meetings, but remember,

Bill's still drinking. Triggered the allergy on November 11, he can't stop.

(Tape 2 - 01:23.44.0)

19 minutes