

WESTBORO BIG BOOK STUDY TAPE GROUP

All Saints Anglican Church

Saturday Morning 9:00 a.m.

347 Richmond Road (near Churchill)

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We Agnostics

(Tape 4 - 00:00:31.6)

J & C People come to me today and say “Charlie do you think I might be alcoholic?” I say, “I have no idea. Let me ask you a couple of questions.” Have you been able to quit drinking entirely left on your own resources? If they are a real alcoholic, they’ve got to so no. And then I say, “Do you have any control over the amount you take after you’ve once started drinking?” If they are a real alcoholic, they’ve got to so no. And then I say, “Well you’re probably an alcoholic”. That’s about as simple as you can make it. Now if that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.

You know we are very unique people. We number amongst **few people in the world today who suffer from a two-fold illness that can only be overcome by a spiritual experience.** We also number amongst a few people in the world today who have a terminal illness that we can come out of it in better shape than we were when we went into it, if we can have this spiritual experience. We are unique people.

Big Book p. 44, par. 2 "To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster, especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death "

J & C Step 1

Big Book p. 44, par. 2 "or to live on a spiritual basis "

J & C Step 2

Big Book p. 44, par. 2 "are not always easy alternatives to face.

But it isn't so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we must find a spiritual basis of life or else. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted."

J & C And I had to stop right here. And see what is my belief as far as this God thing is concerned? And today we find there is only one of three ways that you can believe as far as God is concerned.

One way is to be an atheist. Now an atheist says, “There is no God”. Therefore they have no power greater than human power to turn to. The atheist would have to stand on their own two feet, run their own show. And I said “Charlie, are you an atheist?” I said “No”. I’ve always believed in some kind of God, so I’m not an atheist.

I said, “Well then maybe you’re an agnostic”. So I had to go to the dictionary and look that word up. And like Joe said the word **agnostic means without knowledge**

An agnostic believes that there is a God. But since we’ve never tried to use God’s power in our life, we’ve run our own show, stood on our two feet, we’ve never received God’s power so we don’t know that God exists. We believe in some kind of God but we don’t really know whether that’s true or not.

And I think that’s what most of us are when we get here. Most of us get here with some belief in a God, but we have never turned to that God and we’ve been running our own show and standing on our own two feet and doing our own thing. Even though we believed in God, we acted as if we did not believe in Him. An agnostic is one without knowledge of God, just belief.

Now if you’re an atheist or an agnostic, then the question becomes “**How do you become a true believer in God?**”

A true believer is one that knows that God exists, don’t believe it, knows it.

A true believer is one who has experienced God’s power in their life and God has given them whatever they need to have a successful life.

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I don't think any of us get here as a true believer. Cause if we knew God and experienced God's power, then we wouldn't have to come to AA to solve our problem. Most of us come here as agnostics.

Now whether we be atheist or agnostic, the question becomes **how do you get from that stage to the stage of one who is a true believer and can receive Gods power in our life.**

Big Book p. 45, par. 1 "Lack of power, that was our dilemma. "

J & C You know if we wasn't powerless we wouldn't be here would we.

Big Book p. 45, par. 1 "Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

Well, that's exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem. "

J & C It doesn't say which will enable you to solve it. Or will help you solve it. It says the main object is to enable you to find the Power greater than yourself and then that power will solve the problem. And I find interestingly enough from page 45 on in the big book Alcoholics Anonymous we don't talk about alcohol anymore. We're through with that. We talk about one thing and one thing only. If you are powerless, whether you be atheist or agnostic, if you are powerless,

How do you find the power? And if you can find the power, then the power will solve the problem.

So right after lunch when we come back we're going to start looking at **How do we find that power?**

Ok we're going to go to page 46, in chapter We Agnostics. And the book says

Big Book p. 46, par 1 "Yes, we of agnostic temperament have had these thoughts and experiences. Let us make haste to reassure you. We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God.

Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. "

J & C You know my sponsor at the time, George, saw that I had a real problem with this idea about God and he asked me about it. And I said I am I'm having a hard time trying to understand. And he said, well I've noticed that. He said why don't you do something that helped him and maybe it would help me. He said why don't you go home tonight and write down on a piece of paper what you would like God to be laying aside all that stuff that you think that you know and just write down on that piece of paper what you would like God to be. And so I went home that night and I wrote down some things and I'm not going to tell you what it is, it's up to you. And I wrote down some things that I wanted God to be and I showed them to George and he looked at them and he said that's good Joe. You can begin with that. See I didn't know you could do that.

Down in the south you go to hell for making up your own God. It's true. You had to believe as they believed. You had to have faith in what they had faith in. If you didn't you was going to go to hell. But George gave me permission and I needed that permission to sit down and to say that I would like God to be these things. And he said that's good. You can start with that and you can begin with that. And that's exactly what I did. Where it says

Big Book p. 46, par 2 "Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider another's conception of God. Our own conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. "

J & C Now here is where we can cast aside the first old idea. The old idea that I had was that you had to believe as they believed. And they had me convinced that if you didn't believe as they believed there is no way that you're going to get anything good when it comes to God. So I was real pleased to find out that I can cast aside that old idea and then I can have my own conception of God.

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And like we said yesterday or last night that I find I have never had any problem with my own conception of anything. And you let me start believing in God the way I want to then I've got an entirely different idea. An old idea cast aside replaced with a new idea begins right here. And the book says

Big Book p. 46, par 2 "As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps. We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men."

J & C See all I had to quit doing was saying no, there is not, no and start seeking saying yes maybe and I started seeking. I said "George you mean I need to find God?" And he said "Joe, God's not lost." Didn't take me long to figure out who was lost. He said it's just like the book says **It's in the seeking it's not in the finding.**

All I had to do was seek. And you know, that's all this book is asking me to do and this chapter is asking me to seek with an open mind and to wonder and to think and eventually God will disclose himself to me. And that's exactly what's happened.

I was taught as a kid growing up that the way to God was a very narrow path, that if you strayed off either side of it you were going to get in to a hell of a shape. I was taught that God was very, very exclusive. That only those that believed, as they believed, would be able to make any contact with God. Those were old ideas. Now my book says

Big Book p. 46, par 2, cont. "We found that God does not make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. "

Old ideas cast aside replaced with some new ideas. Beginning to find this power greater than human power by changing of the old ideas to new ideas.

Big Book p. 47, par 1 "When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. "

Prejudice is nothing more than old ideas. Do not let any old ideas you may have against spiritual terms deter you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you.

Big Book p. 47, par 1, cont. "At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So we used our own conception, however limited it was."

And that was a beginning for me, I needed a beginning place and that's where I started.

Big Book p. 47, par 2 "We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. --"Do I now believe, "

J & C The agnostic has always believed in some kind of God.

Big Book p. 47, par 2, cont. "or am I even willing to believe, "

J & C The atheist can become willing to believe that there is some kind of God

Big Book p. 47, par 2, cont. "that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, "

J & C The agnostic

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Big Book p. 47, par 2, cont. "or is willing to believe, "

J & C The atheist

Big Book p. 47, par 2, cont. "we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built."*

J & C Again they want to make real sure that we understand what they mean by those terms.

He says **It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built.*** So the wonderfully effective spiritual structure we're building is the spiritual experience or the spiritual awakening.

And he said the cornerstone of that is to believe or to be willing to believe that there is power greater than human power. We referred to that once before. The foundation of that structure was step one, which is willingness. Now then he tells us the cornerstone of that structure, step two, believing. So we've already put two stones in place if we can say we're willing and yes we believe or we are willing to believe either one of the two. And he said

Big Book p. 47, par. 3 "That was great news to us, for we had assumed we could not make use of spiritual principles unless we accepted many things on faith which seemed difficult to believe. "

J & C And there has always been one of my great problems with this God thing. Faith indicates surety. Faith indicates knowledge. Faith indicates after the fact information.

And one of my problems has always been, the minister would say, "Son all you have to do is have faith and everything will be alright". Well I never could have faith because I had no knowledge of God. I didn't know for sure that God would do anything for me. The best I can possibly do is to start with belief. And there is a big difference between belief and faith, believe me there is.

A good example of that...let's say I moved into this area here and 3 or 4 months later I've got a problem with my automobile. I don't know a good mechanic anywhere in this area. But we'll say that you've lived here for a long time. And I assume you will know somebody so I come to you and I say, "Can you recommend a good mechanic for me?" And you say "Why sure. Take your car over there to John, he'll do you a good job and he'll charge you a reasonable price." Well I don't know whether that's true or not. The best I can do with that information is if I believe it strong enough, I'll take my car over there to John. And sure enough he does a good job; he charges me a reasonable price. When I leave there **I know** that he will do that. When I went there **I believed** that he would do that. Now six months from now I have trouble with my car again. I don't ask you or anybody else where to take it. I take it right back to John. This time I took it on faith took it on knowledge.

You can't start with faith; you can only start with belief. And that's all we have to do. We either have to believe or we become willing to believe that there is a power greater than we are and we're on the road to spiritual recovery. We don't have to know anything. Thank God step two says we came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Didn't say we came to know. Didn't say we had faith in that, we just came to believe. And I came to believe based upon what I'd read in the book and what you told me. That there is a power greater than I am can restore me to sanity. I didn't know that I just believed that. And if I know that the beginning of this thing, the finding of the power is just to believe, or be willing to believe then the next thing I'm going to have know is what procedure am I going to follow in order to find that power. Let's go over to page 51 for just a moment.

Big Book p. 51, par. 1 "This world of ours has made more material progress in the last century than in all the millenniums which went before. Almost everyone knows the reason. Students of ancient history tell us that the intellect of men in those days was equal to the best of today. Yet in ancient times, material progress was painfully slow. The spirit of modern scientific inquiry, research and invention was almost unknown. In the realm of the material, men's minds were fettered by superstition, tradition, and all sort of fixed ideas. "

J & C And I used to wonder why it is that we today have cellular phones and TVs and automobiles and airplanes. Why those people a hundred years ago or two hundred years ago or five hundred years ago didn't have or invent those things. I thought we were just smarter than they were. But I've come to find out that they had the same intellect as we do. Intellect means the capacity to learn.

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They had the capacity to learn as we do. But the one thing that kept them in those dark ages so to speak it was **superstition, tradition and all sorts of fixed ideas**

That's why I say I need an open mind more today than I've ever needed an open mind and I think we as a society have done that. Right here in the Northeast corner of the United States some 225 years ago or so people came over here for religious freedom. They wanted to practice a religion as they saw as they understood it. And as long as you agreed basically with their religion and you practiced your religion somewhat like they did you were OK. But if you had any thoughts or ideas that were different and you expressed those thoughts and ideas openly and it didn't agree with what they had and what they agreed with they would burn you at the stake as a witch. Right here in America they did that. So if you had any ideas like that you certainly didn't express them, you kept them to yourself.

So superstition, tradition and all sorts of fixed ideas kept people from growing.

And I think we as a country have gotten over that today. Our minds are open to many, many things.

(Tape 4 - 00:18:31.0)

18 minutes