

WEEK THREE: CHAPTER ONE – BILL’S STORY

LEADER READS: The main purpose of reading BILL’S STORY is for **identification**. But, being alcoholics, we tend to look for the differences. The exercise in your assignment sheet was to mark what you could relate to as far as *drinking, thinking and feeling*.

READ: Page 1, paragraph 1 → page 5, paragraph 3

Bill put together a business deal on the condition that he would not drink. He would have shared generously in the profits. But, that evening in a hotel room, one of the men passed a bottle of Applejack around. It went by Bill the first time and he said, “No thank you, I’m not drinking”. The next time it came by, his mind told him that one little drink of Applejack wouldn’t hurt. He took a drink and triggered the allergy and he couldn’t stop, blowing the whole business deal. The importance in that statement is in the next paragraph: ***For the first time he could see what alcohol was doing to him. He could differentiate the true from the false.***

They call us alcoholics, “weak willed people”. We are not weak willed people; the problem is we are “strong willed people”. Our will is so strong we darned near killed ourselves drinking alcohol! We almost killed ourselves trying to find a way to drink and not get drunk. Weak willed people don’t become alcoholic...the third time they vomit, they quit drinking. We “alkies”, literally, kill ourselves trying to find a way to drink.

READ: Page 5, paragraph 4 → page 9, paragraph 1

The friend that came to see Bill Wilson was Ebby Thatcher. Ebby and Bill were old school friends, they drank together on many occasions. Bill had heard that Ebby had gotten into a lot of trouble. Ebby came from a great family, but, his family had a lot of trouble with him. His father had passed away and had given Ebby his summer home. Ebby was supposed to be fixing it up. Ebby’s family always kept Ebby “somewhere else”. You know how a family will “always help” you if you “stay over there”. They were trying to get rid of Ebby by keeping him up there in the little summer house.

Ebby was supposed to be painting it and fixing it up to live in. One time drunk, he set it on fire! Another time, again drunk, he was painting it and the pigeons crapped all over it, so he got his shotgun out and shot the pigeons off the roof, putting holes in the side of the house. Yet another time drunk, one day, he ran a car into a lady’s house! Now, they had him up before the judge and they were going to put him into the “nut house”. In those days, they didn’t have treatment centers, so they put you in the state hospital. Bill hadn’t heard about this. So, this is what Bill meant by ***“...recapturing the spirit of the other days”***.

READ: Page 9, paragraph 2 → page 9, paragraph 5

What Ebby told Bill was how Rowland Hazard and another guy appeared in court persuading the judge to suspend his commitment and to turn Ebby loose into their custody. They said, "We believe that we have found a way that Ebby can live without drinking." The judges then were not like they are today, they really didn't want to put us in nut houses and prisons back then...if they could avoid it...they did what they could. So, the judge turned Ebby loose into Rowland's care.

Rowland took Ebby home for a couple of weeks and then got him into the Oxford Groups. Next, he took him down to New York City, and there, Ebby went to work for Sam Shoemaker in the Bowery Mission. Ebby was attending the Oxford Group meetings and he heard about his friend Bill, so he went to see him. This, I believe, was the first Twelve-Step call on an alcoholic.

Ebby told Bill how these two guys had appeared in front of the judge, and how they took him to the Oxford Group meetings. There he learned that the **Solution to our problem** is a **Power greater than human power** and a vital **spiritual experience**.

For the first time, Bill understood the **problem** (as described by Dr. Silkworth) and now he could see the **solution** to the problem. Ebby brought to Bill, what later turned out to be, *Step Two*. Then he laid out for him a **practical program of action**. He said, "Bill, **if you will follow this program of action, you will find that Power greater than you and you won't have to drink**. That's what I've been doing and I've been sober for two months!"

Ebby laid out for Bill the **practical program of action**, which later turned out to be *Steps Three through Twelve*. Now we see that Bill has access to the first three Steps. We saw him take *Step One*, when **he admitted he was powerless**. There was no "Step One", when he admitted he was powerless. There was not a Step One written in those days, but we could see that he made that admission. So, for the first time, Bill knew all three things...

- 1. The PROBLEM**
- 2. The SOLUTION**
- 3. The PRACTICAL PROGRAM OF ACTION**

READ: Page 9, paragraph 6 → page 12, paragraph 4

Now we're going to find as we go through *The Big Book* that Bill, like so many writers, builds in your mind by the painting of pictures with the use of words. He's going to be talking all the way through the book about **a wonderful effective spiritual structure**. Later on, he's going to tell us what that structure is, and says, "...**we are going to pass through it to freedom**." That last statement is his first reference to this.

He said, "**Upon a foundation of complete willingness, I might build what I saw in my friend**". The *foundation of our recovery is based on willingness* and that really

comes through in Step One, where **we admit we are powerless over alcohol**. If we can make that admission 100%, then we can **begin to believe in the Power greater than ourselves**.

Until we can make the admission that alcohol is the power, it is, and always will be, the power greater than ourselves. Our real growth and spirituality will start with **Step One** and **willingness**, which is the **foundation**. Then later on, with **Step Two**, we are going to see where **believing** becomes the **cornerstone** of the **spiritual structure**.

Bill has now taken **Step One** and **Step Two**. No Steps were written in those days. But, we can see Bill doing those two things; the **admission of powerlessness** and the **coming to believe**.

READ: Page 12, paragraph 5 → page 16, end of chapter

The Big Book was originated in textbook form as a Twelve-Step call to reach people that were not in Akron or New York so that anyone who picked up a copy of it could read and identify with the book. BILL'S STORY fits in exactly where it should in the standard textbook theory.

I can almost see Bill as he finishes up this chapter saying "I have described the vital **spiritual experience** and it's going to seem, to many of them, like some great happening way out there in the sky. It probably sounds a lot like religion and theology. Maybe I'd better get down to brass tacks and tell them exactly what took place in my life".

In the next chapter, "There is a Solution", Bill tells us exactly how this happened. Remember, in the beginning there was Bill and Ebby... that was the fellowship. Ebby brought to Bill the answer; the **Solution** to our **problem**.

Bill applied the Solution and recovered through a vital spiritual experience.

So, two things had to take place here:

- 1. first, the fellowship with Ebby, then,**
- 2. the vital spiritual experience**

As a result of this course of action, Bill got sober.

The next chapter explains exactly what these two things are all about.

BIG BOOK WORKSHOP HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

*****NOTE:** It is suggested that the homework be done soon after this workshop meeting and then reviewed with your sponsor before the next workshop meeting.

- 1) Read “**STEP TWO**” in *The Twelve and Twelve* book – USE HIGHLIGHTER!!!
- 2) Read Chapter 2 “**THERE IS A SOLUTION**” in *The Big Book* (1st Time) -- USE HIGHLIGHTER!! (Just read and highlight the 1st time you read through the chapter.)
- 3) Read Chapter 2 “**THERE IS A SOLUTION**” in *The Big Book* (2nd Time). Answer the “Work Assignment Questions” below as you read the chapter the 2nd time.
- 4) Be prepared to discuss how you reacted to this chapter next week. Start writing what you can truly “manage” in your life. Write down your thoughts in your notebook as thoughts occur to you about whether you can or cannot manage life, and in particular, your life.

WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS "THERE IS A SOLUTION"

*Always answer in
complete sentences
and write an example !!!*

Page 17

1. Is the fellowship, by itself, enough for you?
2. Do you, on your own and without help, have a way out?

Page 18

1. Have you come to believe that you suffer from an illness?
2. Did it engulf all whose lives touched you?
3. Did you see how you can reach another alcoholic?

Page 19

1. Is the elimination of your drinking enough or only a beginning?
2. If you go on just not drinking, will the problem(s) be taken care of?

Page 20

1. Does your life depend upon your constant thought of others and how you may help meet their needs?
2. Are you curious to discover how and why these people have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body?
3. *The Big Book* answers the questions “What do I have to do?” Have you asked yourself that question? What is your answer?
4. When it comes to alcohol, can you “take it” or “leave it” alone?

WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS (Continued) "THERE IS A SOLUTION"

*Always answer in
complete sentences
and write an example !!!*

Page 21

1. Did you have "the habit" bad enough that it gradually impaired you physically and mentally?
2. If given a good reason, can you give up alcohol entirely?
3. From your examination of yourself in the past weeks and your reading of *The Big Book*, are you a "real alcoholic"?
 - a. If NOT, why not?
 - b. If NOT, be prepared to discuss this during the workshop.
4. Did you at some stage of your drinking, lose control over the amount you drank once you started to drink?
5. Did you have control? Did you do absurd things? Were you a "Jekyll & Hyde"?

Note: The questions and observations on page 21 of *The Big Book* may help you in answering the question you have been writing about, having to do with your powerlessness over alcohol.

Page 22

1. Can you control the amount of alcohol you drink once you start drinking?
2. Does your experience abundantly confirm that once you put any alcohol into your body, something happens which makes it virtually impossible for you to stop?
3. Have you discovered your own truth? What are you? What separates you from alcohol?

Note: This section summarizes our common problem, which we have covered so far as to the admission of our powerlessness over alcohol (physically) after we take the first drink.

Page 23

1. Are these observations important to know and yet pointless if you never take the first drink?
2. Did this malady of the mind have a real hold on you, and were you baffled?
3. Have you suffered from the obsession that somehow, someday, you will beat the game?

WORK ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS (Continued) "THERE IS A SOLUTION"

*Always answer in
complete sentences
and write an example !!*

4. Have you lost control? Do you believe you can assert your power of will to stay stopped?

Page 24

1. At a certain point in your drinking, did you pass into a state where the most powerful desire to stop drinking was of no avail?
2. Is it a fact that you have lost the power of choice when it comes to drinking?
3. Has your so-called "willpower" become practically nonexistent? Were you unable, at certain times, to bring into your consciousness with sufficient force, the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago?
4. Are you without defense against the first drink?
5. When thoughts of the consequences of your drinking occurred, was "thinking it through" enough for you?
6. Have you said to yourself, "It won't hurt me this time"? Were there times you didn't think at all before taking that first drink?
7. Has this sort of thinking been fully established in you? Have you placed yourself beyond human aid?

Page 25

1. Do you believe the process requires self-searching, leveling of pride, and confession of shortcomings, for a successful consummation?
2. Do you believe that nothing less than a deep and effective spiritual experience will revolutionize your attitude toward life, your fellows, and God's Universe?
3. Do you believe there is a "middle of the road solution" for you?
4. Were you in a position where life was becoming impossible? Had you passed into the region from which there was no return through human aid?
5. Do you have any other alternatives than to either, a) Accept spiritual help, or b) Go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of your intolerable situation as best you can?

Page 26

1. Do you honestly want to accept spiritual help and are you willing to make the effort?
2. Do you believe that with a profound knowledge of the inner workings of your mind, relapse is unthinkable?
3. In the mental sense (before the 1st drink), am I one of these people? Must I have this thing?