

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

(Last Week) 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**

Most certainly **our lives had become unmanageable**, if not ... we just keep on drinking and after a while it will be for sure.

(Tonight) ...we're going to look at an example of a guy that had that problem. A good textbook never tells you anything that it doesn't back it up with more information. We are going to look at Bill's Story ... Bill's Story is a classic example of an alcoholic who had the allergy and who had the obsession of the mind. Now we have to remember back in the 1930's, 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 Dobson and they shared their stories with Bill Dobson. Bill Dobson **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.**

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. **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... if he could recover from that condition then just maybe we could too.** Now a lot of you have said we have trouble identifying with Bill Wilson cause 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't identify with Bill Wilson.** So as we go through Bill's Story... we'll look for:

1. Identification,
2. The progression of alcoholism
3. Bill drinking finally for the sickest reason of all, complete oblivion

Then we will 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 it too.

Identification:

**The Beginning of Believing...
The Beginning of Hope**

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

I too did not think I could identify with the “Bill Wilson” that I’ve seen pictures of... he was an old man, I thought. Turns out, **he was 43 years old when this 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 optimist person, hardworking, and had lots and lots of willpower. He was a self-made man who became very successful in his own right. Through Bill’s story we’re going to see:

- 1) **What he was like**
- 2) **How he learned that he was sick**
- 3) **How he affected a recovery**

The total story of Alcoholics Anonymous is contained in Bill Wilson’s story.

Let’s go to page one (1), “Bill’s Story”.

Big Book p. 1, par. 1

“War fever ran high in the New England town to which we new, young officers from Plattsburg were assigned, and we were flattered when the first citizens took us to their homes, making us feel heroic. Here was love, applause, war; moments sublime with intervals hilarious”

J & C Anybody ever have any moment’s sublime with intervals hilarious? I have. I love the way Bill writes.

Big Book p. 1, par. 1, line 6

“I was part of life at last, and in the midst of the excitement I discovered liquor. I forgot the strong warnings and the 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 wandered outside. My attention was caught by a doggerel on an old tombstone:

*“Here lies a Hampshire Grenadier
Who caught his death
Drinking cold small beer.
A good soldier is ne’er forgot
Whether he dieth by musket
Or by pot.”*

J & C Now when he says that about pot, he’s not referring to this wacky weed. He’s talking about a pot of beer, that’s the way they used to drink it over in England at that time. He said

Big Book p. 1, par. 3

“Ominous warning which I failed to heed.”

“Twenty-two, and 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 a special token of appreciation? My talent for leadership, I imagined, could place me at the head of vast enterprises which I would manage with the utmost assurance. I took a night law course, and obtained employment as investigator for a surety company. The drive for success was on. I’d prove to the world I was important.”

J & C I already identify with Bill Wilson. That seems to be one of the main characteristics behind every alcoholic I’ve ever known. **The great drive for success was on; I’ll prove to the world that I’m important also.** It seems to be the driving force behind each one of us.

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

Big Book p.2, par 1, line 4

“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. 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 write. Though my drinking was not yet continuous, it disturbed my wife.”

J & C I can identify with Bill.

Big Book p.2, par. 1, line 11

“We had long talks when I would still her forebodings by telling her that men of genius conceived their best projects when drunk;”

J & C I have no trouble identifying with Bill Wilson.

Big Book p.2, par. 1, line 13

“that the most majestic constructions of philosophic thought were so derived.”

J & C I can identify with Bill. ...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 that Lois didn't buy that. He said

Big Book p.2, par. 2

“By the time I had 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 ally of drink and speculation, I commenced to forge the weapon that one day would 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 some day 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.”

J & C Now Bill is referring to a time back in the 1920's 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 onto 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 really 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, no, 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 another. He said the hell with them, I don't need them anyhow. I'll just go do this on my own.

Big Book p.2, par.3

“We gave up our positions and off we roared on a motorcycle, the sidecar stuffed with tent, blankets, a change of clothes, and three huge volumes of a financial reference service. Our friends thought a lunacy commission should be appointed. Perhaps they were right. I had had some success at 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.”

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

J & C 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 sending them to New York City. The guys that had the money saw them and say oh yeah man this is great information and immediately they put Bill on the payroll, gave him a large expense account, the exercise in 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

Big Book p.3, par.2

"For the next few years fortune threw money and applause my way. I had arrived."

J & C God how many of us have done the same kind of things Bill did.

Big Book p.3, par. 2,line 2

"My judgment and ideas were followed by many to the tune of paper millions. The great boom of the late twenties was seething and swelling. Drink was taking an important and 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 fair-weather friends."

J & C 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 heap. He said,

Big Book p.3, par. 3

"My drinking assumed more serious proportions, continuing all day and almost every night. The remonstrances of my friends terminated in a row and I became a lone wolf."

J & C How many of us have done the same thing. People began to say 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.

Big Book p.3, par. 3, line 4

"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 scrapes."

J & C Now I've always believed about everything Bill wrote, but I'm not sure about that. You see we have a book in A.A. called, As Bill Sees It, and in AIAnon they have a book called, "As Lois Remembers"... A whole lot different! They're not exactly the same either. Let's go over to page 4, 1st paragraph. Now 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 it says,

Big Book p.4, par. 1

"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 eight o'clock five hours after the market closed. The ticker still clattered. I was staring at an inch of the tape which bore the inscription XYZ-32. It had been 52 that morning. I was finished and so were many friends. The papers reported men jumping to death from the towers of High Finance. That disgusted me. I would not jump. I went back to the bar."

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

J & C Bill had a solution to that, didn't he?

Big Book p.4, par. 1, line 11

"My friends had dropped several million since ten o'clock so what? Tomorrow was another day. As I drank, the old fierce determination to win came back."

J & C How many of us have done the same thing. Just 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.**

Big Book p.4, par. 2

"Next morning I telephoned a friend in Montreal. He had plenty of money left and thought I had better go to Canada."

J & C Now Bill was a drunk, he wasn't stupid; he knew where the money was so he went to Canada.

Big Book p.4, par. 2, line 3

"By the following spring we were living in our accustomed style. I felt like Napoleon returning from Elba. No St. Helena for me! But drinking caught up with me again and my generous friend had to let me go. This time we stayed broke."

J & C Now **we see our drinking progressing** to the point where we can no longer even hold a job.

Big Book p.4, par.3

"We went to live with my wife's parents. I found a job; then lost it as the 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."

J & C 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 say, Bill, we'd rather you didn't come in here today. You're about half drunk and you don't look good and your smelling bad, you're embarrassing us in front of our customers, please move right on down the street. Certainly, **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 hold a job, **nobody wants us around anymore.** It starts to get worse,

Big Book p.5, par.1

"Liquor ceased to be a luxury; it became a necessity."

J & C 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.**

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

Big Book p.5, par. 1, line 2

“‘Bathub’ gin, two bottles 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. This went on endlessly, and I began to waken very early in the morning shaking violently. A tumbler full of gin followed by half a dozen bottles of beer would be required if I were to eat any breakfast. Nevertheless, I still thought I could control the situation, and there were periods of sobriety which renewed my wife's hope.”

J & C Remember last night Dr. Silkworth said **we really cannot differentiate the true from the false. To us what we're doing is normal.** We see that Bill's life is going to hell in a hand basket already. Bill can't see that. He thinks that he **can still control the situation.** Let's see were he goes on control. Things were real bad in Bill's life but it says,

Big Book p.5, par. 2-3

“Gradually things got worse. The house was taken over by the mortgage holder, my mother-in-law died, my wife and father-in-law became ill. Then I got a promising business opportunity. Stocks were at the low point of 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.”

J & C This is a story within itself. The people that had the money knew how good Bill was at putting these deals together. They came to Bill and said “Bill we've got a proposition for you. We've got an opportunity to not only to make money for us, but to make money for you. If you can stay sober we'd like for you to handle this thing.” And Bill said, “Don't you worry about that drinking. I'm through with that drinking! You'll not have to worry about that.” Bill worked for a matter of months putting this deal together and a few days before it was to be successfully completely, one night they are all sitting around in the hotel room talking about this and that. Somebody passed around a bottle of Applejack. This was 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...this is the finest Applejack in the world. It is called ‘Jersey Lightning’...you better have a drink.” Bill's mind said, “Hmmm, I've never tasted any ‘Jersey Lightning’”. Bill gave it no more thought than that... he reached out, grabbed the bottle, took a drink, triggered the allergy, couldn't sober up and blew the whole deal. Now the importance in it lies with the next statement. He said,

Big Book p.5, par. 4

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

J & C For the first time Bill could differentiate the truth from the false. For the first time he could truly see what alcohol was doing to him. **And he did just like all the rest of us, he trotted out his willpower and he said, “Sick him Will”.** We're through with that drinking... we'll never drink as long as we live.” Now 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 alcoholics; first time they vomit they quit drinking. An alcoholic knows there's got to be some way to drink without puking; we damn near kill ourselves! You know? We got lots of willpower. You see Bill doesn't know what we learned (last week). **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 always wins,** that's how strong it is. Let's see what happened to him on willpower. He said,

Big Book p.5, par. 5

“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 had taken it. Was I crazy?”

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

J & C You see if his willpower's not working then he begins to question his sanity. Am I crazy is that it?

Big Book p.5, par. 5, line 5

"I began to wonder, for such an appalling lack of perspective seemed near being just that. Renewing my resolve, I tried again. Some time passed, and confidence began to be replaced by cocksureness. I could laugh at the gin mills. 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. As the whisky rose to my head I told myself I would manage better next time, but I might as well get good and drunk then. And I did."

J & C Anybody in here identify with Bill Wilson?

Big Book p.6, par. 1

"The remorse, 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 collapse 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 stilled at last. A morning paper told me the market had gone to hell again. Well, 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. Gin would fix that. So two bottles, and oblivion."

J & C See Bill questioned, **he used his willpower and that didn't work, he begin 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,

Big Book p.6, par. 2

"The mind and body are marvelous mechanisms, 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 my wife and I sought escape. Then came the night when the physical and mental torture was so hellish I feared I would 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. So did I. I could eat little or nothing when drinking, and I was forty pounds under weight."

J & C Here 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 cause 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.

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.

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

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 who explained that though certainly selfish and foolish, I had been seriously ill, bodily and mentally.”

J & C Now this is Dr. Silkworth. 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 willpower.
- ❖ He knew it was not 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 (week) 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 Bill, goes back into “The Towns” for the second time.

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.”

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

J & C Bill was lying 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 Bill 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. (There was) no Step 1 written in those days, but surely this is where Bill took it (from). 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 me today, chances are we would say... "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. 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 and 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, and has 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. Bill knew about Ebby and he knew how Ebby drank. And Ebby said "*he was sober*". And if you'll notice that's in squiggly writing (*italics*); squiggly writing in the Big Book is very important. This really amazed Bill...Ebby is sober. He said,

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

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."

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 would haul us in front of a judge and 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. That's the last Bill heard about Ebby. He said,

Big Book p. 9, line 4

"I wondered how he had escaped."

J & C Bill was amazed that Ebby was out of this treatment center, err insane asylum, excuse me... Same thing.... They've renamed everything (these days). They talk about dysfunctional families today; well mine was just crazy as hell. But Ebby came from a very prominent family in Albany, New York. In fact his father was the Mayor of Albany... a very prominent family. 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. While you're there... you might as well sober up... and if you get sober... you might as well make yourself useful and paint 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. One day he finished painting this wall and he looked at it and he was admiring his work and he noticed that some pigeons were doing some things on the side of his wall that he didn't like (bird droppings all over the wall). So he went in the house, got his shotgun, and began to shoot at the pigeons, blowing holes in the side of the wall. Well the neighbors they didn't like that at all, so they called the police and had him arrested. 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. They asked the judge if he might release Ebby to their care because they were going to the Oxford Group. 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 which was the headquarters of the Oxford Group at that time. He began to stay there in that mission and after a while 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... Bill 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."

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

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 and a practical program of action. That was two months ago and the result was self-evident. It worked!"

...a simple religious idea = Step 2

...a practical program of action = Steps 3 – 12

J & C So now then Bill knows all three things. He got the **problem** from Dr. Silkworth, he got the **Solution**, referred to here as "**a simple religious idea**" from Ebby and 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, etc. were enough that it 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."

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

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."

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 are living proof that **some power greater than human power is working in our lives...** 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, who 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. They're sitting there arguing with each other about who God is and what He is... 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!" Ebby's trying to "put it on" old Bill... 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. 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.

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

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 (now) 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.

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. (There was) 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?"**

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**. You know, as I look back in my lifetime, I realize I've never had any problem with my own conception of anything! Let me believe the way I want to and I'm ready to go! Bill is now taking a Step 2. Isn't that something? (Bill was taking a Step 2) 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...he's going to start painting a picture, in our minds, using words. Eventually he'll tell us what the structure is, and show us where we'll pass through it to freedom. 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...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. (It's) a beautiful way to teach...painting pictures in our mind using words.

**If we are willing, and if we believe,
then we have already started on the road to recovery**

Bill has now taken Steps 1 and 2. Immediately Ebby starts taking him to Oxford Group meetings, but remember...**Bill is still drinking**. He triggered the allergy on November 11... he can't stop.

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

J & C On about December 10th, 1934, probably, Bill was put back in the hospital for the third (3rd) time for withdrawal from alcohol by Doctor Silkworth. Ebby comes to visit with him,

1. They begin to apply the little Oxford Group's **program of action**, and
2. Bill had his **spiritual experience**. (After Steps 3-12)

Let's look on page 13. Let's see if we can't see the last 10 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. He's taken (Steps) one (1) & two (2)... let's see if we can't see the last ten (10). He said,

Big Book p.13, par.2

"At the hospital I was separated from alcohol for the last time. Treatment seemed wise, for I showed signs of delirium tremens. There I humbly offered myself to God, as I then I 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."

J & C **The first (1st) tenet, 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 (the oxford Group's) 1st Step into our (AA's) 3rd 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 tenet, which turned out to be our **Step 3**. He's now taken 1, 2 and 3. He said,

Big Book p.13, par. 3

"I ruthlessly faced my sins..."

J & C I ruthlessly faced my sins. **Their second (2nd) tenet was EXAMINE YOUR SINS.** And Bill knew that no good alcoholic's going to do that, so he changed that into "**Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**" He's taking **Step 4** there.

Big Book p.13, par. 3

"...and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since."

J & C "... became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch". You'll notice Friend is capitalized. This is one of the words Bill uses for God. And that little statement "... became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch", later became **Steps 6 and 7. We became willing to have God remove these things and Humbly asked Him to do so.** There we're dealing with six (6) and seven (7).

Big Book p.13, par. 4

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

J & C He's taking what we know today as **Step 5**, there in the Towns Hospital with Ebby.

Big Book p.13, par. 4

"We made a list of people I had hurt or 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 right all such matters to the utmost of my ability."

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

J & C They had an Oxford Group **tenet** called **RESTITUION**. And Bill knew that no self-respecting alcoholic is going to do restitution, so he took that and made two Steps out of it, **Steps 8 and 9**, where **we made a list and became willing**, and then, **made amends**. There he's dealing with eight (8) and nine (9).

Big Book p.13, par. 5

"I was to test my thinking by the new God-consciousness within. Common sense would thus become uncommon sense."

J & C That statement later became **Step 10** where **we continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it**.

Big Book p.13, par. 5

"I was to sit 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 requests bore on my usefulness to others. Then only might I expect to receive. But that would be in great measure."

J & C And there we see all the elements of **Step 11**, where **"we sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God."**

Big Book p.13, par. 6

"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."

J & C It's 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 Towns Hospital, applying the Oxford Group tenets which later he made into the last ten steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is why he was able to say in "How It Works", **"These are the steps we took which are suggested as a program of recovery..."** Bill took them in the Towns Hospital with the help of Ebby. Now let's see what happened to him.

Big Book p.13, par. 6

"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 destruction of self-centeredness. I must turn in all things to the Father of Light who presides over us all."

J & C Poor old alcoholics have to give up the two (2) most important things in our lives...the first thing is our alcohol and the second thing is our self-centeredness. Very difficult to do...very difficult but very simple

Big Book p.14, par. 3

"These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never know. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but His impact on me was sudden and profound. For a moment I was alarmed, and called my friend, the doctor, to ask if I were still sane. He listened in wonder as I talked."

J & C You know Bill overhead Lois and Dr. Silkworth talking so he'd thought he gone crazy. He thought he'd check it out with Dr. Silkworth to see if he had gone crazy. Finally he shared with the doctor his experience.

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

Big Book p.14, par. 5

"Finally he shook his head saying, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way you were." The good doctor now sees many men who have such experiences. He knows that they are real."

J & C 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

Big Book p.14, par. 6

"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."

J & C Bill had that gigantic spiritual experience and then he immediately began to think of how he can give it to other people. Something profound happened with Bill. He said.

Big Book p.14, par 7

"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. With us it is just like that."

J & C This time you'll notice it's a small 'f'...he's referring to Ebby now. Thank God Bill knew that and accepted that fact 'cause when he was in Akron, about to get drunk, he remember 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.** Thank God it kept him from getting drunk, and Bob sobered up and from there we have the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Faith without works is dead.

(Chapter 6, Into Action, p. 76 & 88)

And you know, **just about anybody I see drink today, that's been in A.A. for any period of time, usually they have quit working with other people.** And when they quit working with other people: **1) They start thinking about self only;** and **2) after awhile, all the old problems come back;** and **3) they end up getting drunk all over again!**

Always, working with others will help us when nothing else will.

WEEK #2: Chapter 1— BILL'S STORY

Big Book p.15, par. 2

“My wife and I abandoned ourselves with enthusiasm to the idea of helping other alcoholics to a solution of their problems. It was fortunate, for my old business associates remained skeptical for a year and a half, during which I found little work. I was not too well at the time, and was plagued by waves of self-pity and resentment. This sometimes nearly drove me back to drink, but I soon found that when all other measure failed, work with another alcoholic would save the day. Many times I have gone to my old hospital in despair. On talking to a man there, I would be amazingly lifted up and set on my feet. It is a design for living that works in rough going.”

J & C We 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.

The work is really, really hard, but the pay is really, really good too.

We've managed to stay sober, isn't that something? Now if we are a brand new alcoholic out here in California, no fellowship around us, the first contact we've ever had is this book called Alcoholics Anonymous, and we have:

- 1) Read THE DOCTOR'S OPINION, we've been able to **see what our problem is**
- 2) Read BILL'S STORY, we've been **able to identify with another alcoholic**
- 3) Saw Bill go from **drinking for fun** to **drinking because of absolute necessity** and going finally, to the sickest of all reasons, **drinking to achieve complete oblivion.**
- 4) Saw him **recover from that condition**

Surely, we can say to ourselves...

**We are enough like this guy, that if he can recover,
just maybe we could too!**

The Beginning of Belief

The Beginning of Hope