

WEEK #5 – WE AGNOSTICS

Joe and Charlie Transcript

Dr. Carl Jung told Rowland Hazard about ideas, emotions and attitudes. That's what we're going to be looking at now. Ideas, emotions and attitudes, which were the guiding force of the lives of these people, are suddenly cast to one side. Most certainly the ideas, emotions and attitudes that I had toward God were that of a child. I couldn't accept it then, I couldn't accept it later, I couldn't accept it when I got here and I can't accept it today because I need new ideas and emotions and attitudes about this. I needed new information.

"We Agnostics"... lets break down the title so we can understand it better... just the word "agnostic" means something to me. The root of the word "**nostic**" means "**knowledge**", the first part "**ag**" means "**without**", put the "**ag**" in front you get "**agnostic**" or "**without knowledge**". Therefore, "**We Agnostics**" means "**Those of us who are without knowledge.**"

That's me alright, and the knowledge that I did have wasn't good. Bill had the same experiences that we did. When Ebby presented him with the solution he was aghast. Some of us are aghast at the solution also. Bill said "**When they talked of a God personal to me my mind became irritated and my mind snapped shut against such theories.**" And certainly that's the way many of us reacted. Later on in the Big Book it tells us that "**...when the spiritual malady is overcome we straighten out mentally and physically.**" Hmmm, "...the spiritual malady..."

The understanding of, "God of my understanding"

When that is straightened out we will straighten out mentally and physically. The chapter "We Agnostics", is an attempt to do that. 'Father' Bill Wilson said... (some of you know "Father Bill" said this to us many, many times, and I love it) he said that this chapter is not put here to teach me that there is any particular type of religion or type of God. Bill said this chapter is simply put here so that I might read, question and wonder... to get some ideas, emotions and attitudes... some new ones.... and **to open up my mind to the point that God might prove to me there is a God.** Now with that understanding, this chapter makes more sense to me and becomes extremely valuable in my life.

[READ: Page 44, Paragraph 1 → Page 44, Paragraph 3]

Let's look closer at the first paragraph: "*In the preceding chapters, you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, (Because of the obsession) or if, when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, (Because of the allergy) you are probably alcoholic.*"

Isn't that simple? But, people like to expand on things. They took the 2 questions out of the Big Book and some years later they made a little pamphlet that had 10 questions in it. But that wasn't enough; they made another one that had 20 questions in it. I think we're up to 44 questions today. Thank God that Ebby didn't have the 44 questions with him when he walked into Bill's kitchen. He would have said "Bill, has alcohol been bothering your reputation?" Bill hadn't had a reputation in years. Then he would have said, "Bill, has alcohol been interfering with your sex life". If he was anything like I was he wouldn't have had any of that in a long time either. One of the 44 questions asks "Do you drink alone?" Well think about it... If I'm buying, the answer is "yes"... and if you're buying, then "no".

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We had an old friend that used to live in Tyler, Texas. His name was Wino Joe. I've always felt sorry for everybody in AA that didn't get to meet Wino Joe. He was a real character. He's dead now. But Wino Joe had made up his own list to ask yourself to see if you're alcoholic. The first question on his list was "Has the roof of your mouth ever been sunburned while drinking?" He said, "If it has, you're probably alcoholic." I think the second question was "Have you ever been arrested for drunk driving from the back seat of somebody else's car?" The third one I loved was "Have you ever been arrested for public drunkenness while in jail?" He had a big list of them.

We only need the two questions Bill gave us. I use them all the time. People come to me and ask "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 have to so "no". Then I ask, "Do you have any control over the amount you take after you've 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 is your case too, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience can 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; who have a terminal illness that we can come out of in better shape than we were when we went into it, if we can have this spiritual experience. We are unique people.

Now let's look at the second paragraph again: "*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 (Step 1) or to live on a spiritual basis (Step 2) are not always easy alternatives to face.*" I had to stop right here, and ask:

What is my belief as far as this 'God thing' is concerned?

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 and run their own show.

The second way is to be an agnostic. So I had to go to the dictionary and look that word up, and like we said the word **agnostic means without knowledge**. An agnostic believes that there is a God, but since we have never tried to use God's power in our life, we ran our own show, we stood on our own two feet... we have never received God's Power... so we don't know that God exists. Agnostics believe in some kind of God but don't really know whether that's true or not. I think that most of us are agnostic 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.**

The third way is the true believer. A true believer is one that knows that God exists... doesn't just believe it... knows it. A true believer is one who has experienced God's Power in their life and God has given them what they need to have a successful life.

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I don't think any of us get here as a true believer, because 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. Whether we are atheist or agnostic, the question becomes: **How do you get from that stage, to the stage of one who is a true believer that can receive God's Power in our life?**

[READ: Page 44, Paragraph 4 → Page 45, Paragraph 2]

"Lack of power that was our dilemma." You know if we weren't powerless we wouldn't be here would we? It goes on to say *"Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem."* 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. ...Interestingly enough from page 45 on in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous we don't talk about alcohol anymore. We're through with that. We talk about one thing and one thing only, whether you are atheist or agnostic, if you are powerless, **how do you find that Power?**

[READ: Page 45, Paragraph 3 → Page 47, Paragraph 3]

"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." My sponsor, at the time, noticed that I had a real problem with this idea about God and he asked me about it. I said "I'm having a hard time trying to understand." He suggested I 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, put aside all that stuff that you think that you know, and just write down on a piece of paper what you would like God to be." So I went home that night and I wrote down some things... things I'm not going to tell you... because it's up to you what you would like God to be. I wrote down some things that I wanted God to be and I showed them to my sponsor and he looked at them and he said "That's good, you can begin with that." You see, I didn't know you could do that!

Growing up I was told I had to believe as they did, that you had to have faith in what they had faith in otherwise you were going to hell. But my sponsor gave me permission and I needed that permission to sit down and to say that I would like God to be these things. When I showed him what I wrote on that paper, he said "That's good. You can start with that and you can begin with that." So that's exactly what I did. 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. 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 very pleased to find out that I can cast aside that old idea and I can have my own conception of God. And like we said earlier, I find I have never had any problem with my own conception of anything. This let me start believing in God. Now I've got an entirely different idea. An old idea cast aside replaced with a new idea. I can begin right here. You see all I had to quit doing was saying "no, there is not", and start seeking... saying "YES"... "Maybe"... I started seeking. I asked my sponsor, "You mean I need to find God?" And my sponsor said "God is not lost." It 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. That's all this book is asking me to do in this chapter. It 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 happened.

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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 this narrow path you were going to get in to a hell of a shape. I was taught that God was very, very exclusive and 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: ***"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... we begin to find this Power greater than human power by changing old ideas to new ideas. Bill tells us more on page 47: ***"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. "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."*** That was the beginning for me. I needed a beginning place and that's where I started.

Now Bill tells us, ***"We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. --"Do I now believe,"*** (the agnostic has always believed in some kind of God) ***"...or am I even willing to believe..."*** (the atheist can become willing to believe that there is some kind of God) ***"...that there is a Power greater than myself? As soon as a man can say that he does believe..."*** (the agnostic) ***"...or is willing to believe..."*** (the atheist) ***"...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.*"***

In this paragraph Bill makes real sure that we understand what is meant 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.**

He tells us that the cornerstone is to believe or to be willing to believe that there is power greater than human power. **The foundation of that structure was Step One, which is willingness.** He also tells us **the cornerstone of that structure is Step Two, believing.** So we have two parts of the wonderfully effective spiritual structure in place, if we can say "yes, we believe" or "yes, we are willing to believe".

"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." That has always been one of my great problems with this 'God thing'. Faith indicates surety. Faith indicates knowledge. Faith indicates after the fact information. One of my problems has always been when the minister would say, "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.

Here's a good example...let's say I moved to a new town 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

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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 that I'll take my car over to John. Sure enough he does a good job and 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 later I have trouble with my car again but this time I don't ask you or anybody else where to take it. I take it right back to John. This time I took my car to John on faith... took it on knowledge.

You can't start with faith; you can only start with belief. That's all we have to do. We 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*. I came to believe based upon what I'd read in the book and that you told me that there is a Power greater than I am that can restore me to sanity. I didn't know that, I just believed that. If the first thing I have to do, to find this Power, is just believe, or be willing to believe, then the next thing I need, is to know what procedure do I follow in order to find that Power?

[READ: Page 47, Paragraph 4 → Page 51, Paragraph1]

I used to wonder why today we have cell phones, TVs, cars and airplanes and why people 100, 200 or 500 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. They had the same capacity to learn as we do, but the thing that kept them in 'the dark ages', so to speak, was **superstition, tradition and all sorts of fixed ideas**.

In the Northeast United States some 225 years ago or so, people came here for religious freedom. They wanted to practice their religion as they understood it, and as long as you agreed 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 openly and it didn't agree with what they thought they would burn you at the stake as a witch. So if you had any different ideas you certainly didn't express them, you kept them to yourself. **Superstition, tradition and all sorts of fixed ideas kept people from growing**. I think we as a country have gotten over that today, and our minds now are open to many, many things.

I think his story of Columbus is one of the greatest examples of what you can do when you are willing to change your belief. Some 500 years ago most of what they call the 'civilized world' was situated around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the western shores of Europe. They had found a place called the East Indies. In the East Indies you could get gold, silk, and spices; lots of goody goodies. But it took literally years get to the East Indies. They were trying to find a new trade route to the East Indies. Somebody asked "Is there any possibility that we can sail a ship there?" The answer was, "No dummy! Don't you know you can only sail as far as the northeast end of the Mediterranean Sea, and then you have to go by land"; Camelback, horseback, foot-back, however they traveled... that trip took years complete. "Well what would happen if we sailed in the other direction?" And they said, "Well idiot, don't you know if you sail that way you're going to fall off the edge of the earth!"

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In those days everyone thought the world was flat and if you sailed out there too far to the west you would sail off the edge of the earth. I don't know why they believed that, but I assume it was because some people sailed out there, didn't come back, and they just thought they had sailed off the edge. Wouldn't it be great if the world was flat? We could take all this environmental junk and trash out there and go push it overboard off the edge and be done with it!

Now here's Columbus, and we believe that Columbus had to be an alcoholic because if you're going to believe differently than the entire world and everybody in it and you're going to stand there and express that belief, you are going to have to be tougher than hell to do it! Many times if you express a belief different than what everybody else believes they would burn you at the stake or hang you from a tree, or cut your head off or something. But Columbus was tough enough and bullheaded enough to be able to stand there and say, "I believe that the world is round; I do not believe it's flat". Then he made one of the most drunken statements the world has ever heard, he said, "I believe we can get east by sailing west." Now if that isn't drunk thinking I don't know what is! Many of his mannerisms indicated Columbus was an alcoholic:

- When he left he didn't know where he was going.
- When he got there he didn't know where he was.
- When he got back he didn't even know where he had been.
- But what really made him an alcoholic was a woman financed the whole trip for him! Twice!

Columbus followed a formula; a little formula that the world has always known and used. To change anything at all, there are certain things that have to take place.

The first thing you have to do in order to change anything is to be willing to change.

Circumstances are what make us willing. Trying to find the new trade route to the East Indies is what made Columbus willing to change. **The second thing you have to do to change anything is to believe you can.** Columbus said, "I believe that the world is round, not flat, and I believe you can get East by sailing West." But his belief wasn't enough because he was still standing on the shore of the ocean the day he expressed that belief. Some days, weeks, months, years later he did **the third thing, he made a decision**. He said "By golly I'm going to go find out whether this thing is round or flat. Can you really get east by sailing west?" But his decision wasn't enough either, because he was still standing on the shore of the ocean the day he made that decision. Some days, weeks, months, years later he did **the fourth thing you have to do, he started taking action**.

The first thing Columbus did is he went to the King of Portugal to get the money. But the King of Portugal being a very astute businessman said, "There's no way I'm going to let you have this money because you'll sail out there and sail right off the edge of this sucker and I'll lose it all". He didn't give up and then went to see the Queen of Spain. Columbus sweet-talked her and promised that he would bring back gold, silk, spices and the 'goody goodies' of life. She gave him the money. He bought three ships, hired crew members and loaded those ships with provisions for the trip. Then they set sail and began to go east by sailing west... sailing west, day, after day, after day. Now we don't know for sure, but we have a suspicion that on that first trip he hired a special sailor and put him on the bow of the lead ship at night with a lantern and whispered in his ear, "I believe this thing is round, but if you see the edge of this damn thing you holler so we can get turned around in time!"

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Now, after sailing due west for several days, they got results. They found land on the other side, which was the result of the action that they had taken. Columbus thought it was the East Indies, it wasn't, it was the West Indies, but he had proven to himself that the world is not flat, it is round, and you won't sail off the edge of it. He turned around and went back to Europe, right back to the Queen of Spain, and she asked "Columbus, where's the gold, silk and spices you promised you would bring me?" He said, "Sweetheart I'm sorry but I didn't find any. Tell you what I'll do; if you will refinance me I'll go back. Trust me honey. Please? This time I'll find it!" She re-financed him and he got some more ships, more provisions, more crew members and began to go east by sailing west with one big difference; the second trip he didn't hire the lookout and put him on the bow of the lead ship at night. **This time he went back on faith; he went back on knowledge. The first time he went on belief.**

You can't start with faith. The only thing you can do is:

- **start with belief (Step 2)**
- **make the decision (Step 3)**
- **take the action (Steps 4-11)**
- **get the results and then you will have faith**

I would love to sit here and tell you today that the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are brand new and that the world has never seen anything like them before, but if I did, I would be telling you a lie. Because, the 12 Steps are based on the same identical formula that Columbus and any other human being has ever used to change anything.

The first thing we have to do in order to recover from alcoholism is to be willing to change, and that's what **Step 1 gives us; the willingness. As soon as we can see that what we are doing is no longer going to work, then we become willing to change. The second thing we have to do is to believe we can; that's **Step 2**. But that belief will do us no good unless we make a decision about it; that's **Step 3**. However, that decision will do us no good unless we take the action, and that's **Steps 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11**. The result of the action is **we too will get results**, just as it says in the first part of Step 12; "Having had a spiritual awakening, **as the result of these steps...**" **We now have faith. We now have knowledge. We no longer just believe.****

You see I don't just believe that God will restore me to sanity; having worked the Steps, I know He will, because He has done so (1st part of Step 12).

Those of us who have been restored to sanity and now have faith; we can go back and help:

- The next newcomer come to **believe** (Step 2)
- They can make a **decision** (Step 3)
- We take them by the hand and walk with them through the **action steps** (Steps 4-11)
- Then they will get **results**, have a spiritual awakening, and they will know (1st part Step 12)
- Then they can go help the next newcomer come to **believe** (2nd part Step 12)

There is only one thing we can't do for the newcomer:

We can not make them willing. (Step 1)

That's a job they have to work on themselves.

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How does an alcoholic become willing to change?

Very simple... drink lots of alcohol! I hear people come to AA and they say “I’ve been working on Step 1 for three years in AA” and I say “No you haven’t!” **You don’t work on Step 1 (willingness) in AA. You work on Step 1 out there... and when you have drunk enough; when you just can’t stand it any longer; then you become willing to change.** Then we can begin to help you by helping you come to believe, decide, act and have a spiritual awakening; it’s the same formula that the world has always used to change the status of anything. Now if:

- **I know I need the Power**
- **I know the beginning of the finding of the Power is just to believe**
- **I know the procedure (formula) to follow to find the Power**

I only need to know one more thing... Where am I going to find that Power?

[READ: Page 51, Paragraph 2 → Page 57, End of Chapter]

I think we get here just as confused about ‘where God IS’, as we were ever confused about anything else. As a kid growing up, somewhere I got a picture in my mind. Now I don’t know whether I dreamed it or saw it, but in my mind when I thought about God, he was a tall elderly gentleman; He stood on a cloud up in the sky and had long flowing white robes, long white hair, a golden halo around his head, and sunrays shooting out of that halo, and a big stick in his right hand. I am not sure whether I saw that or whether I dreamed it, but one of the reasons I thought God was there is because every time the minister talked about God he always pointed up there so I knew he had to be up there somewhere. What really confused me was I noticed every time the minister wanted to talk to God, he always looked down. The minister pointed up as if to show me where God was, but then looked down when talking to God... no wonder I was confused as a kid about where God is! So I looked and I looked and I looked and I looked, and I never could find God because I never did know where He was. **It took the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous to tell me just exactly where I’m going to find Him.**

Many years ago I was sponsoring this young man and one morning he told me a story that really helped me a lot; this is the story he told me: There were three wise men in the east and they took from man the crown of life, the one thing that would make us the happiest. They took it away with them. They said, “Now that we took it away from them, what are we going to do with it?” One of them said “Here’s what we will do, we will take it to the highest mountain on the face of the earth and we’ll hide it up there, and they’ll never be able to find it.” The other two said “Yeah, but you know how they are, they’ll hunt and they’ll search and they’ll eventually find it.” The third one said “Ok, I’ll tell you what, we’ll take it to the deepest crevice of the deepest ocean and hide it there and they’ll never think about looking for it there.” The other two said again, “Sure, but you know how they are, they’ll hunt and they’ll search and they’ll eventually find it.” Finally the third one said, “Hmmm... OK... Here’s what we’ll do, we’ll hide it within man himself, and he’ll never think of looking for it there!”

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A God of your own understanding is sure to come to you with an open mind.

It seems as though all human beings are born with some basic knowledge, deep down inside themselves, probably lying at a subconscious level. That basic knowledge seems to be able to tell us what we should do and what we shouldn't do. It seems to be able to tell us how we should live and how we shouldn't live. I'm sure a lot of people would like to refer to that as just plain old common sense. I think others might want to call it innate intelligence. Some might want to call it the conscious. Others might want to call it the soul. I don't think it makes any difference what we call it, as long as we **recognize the fact that it's there**. If you're anything like I am, as far back as I can remember I have always been aware of that knowledge.

There used to be times that I would be getting ready to do something, and some voice somewhere from within me would say, "I don't believe you ought to be doing this." And I wouldn't pay a bit of attention to it, and I'd go right ahead and do it and I'd get in one hell of a mess. And that same little voice would say see, "I told you not to do it in the first place". Now if that's true, and if that is God, then what that means to me today is:

If God dwells within me, then I've got my own personal God.

If he dwells within me, then he's my own personal God and He and I can come together in very simple and understandable terms.

This is some of the greatest information I have ever learned:

- **I can have my own personal God**
- **He dwells within me**
- **My knowledge comes from Him and through Him**
- **I will be able to find that Power!**

Am I ready to make a decision? You bet! When He was the God of justice, when He was hellfire and brimstone, I wasn't ready to make that decision. But throughout this chapter my concept of God has changed entirely. I'm beginning to believe He just might be a kind and loving God, and just maybe He will start doing some good things for me, not hellfire and brimstone. Now I am ready to make a decision. I don't think it is by accident that the very next chapter is titled 'How It Works'. Now Bill sits down and he writes the chapter 'How it Works' which contains some of the best spiritual information the world has every seen... a little formula... a set of proposals...

Bill called them, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.