

Fall Conference

1998 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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I warned him that I had the last word. My name is Don and I am an alcoholic, but I'm a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. My home group is known as an AA group. The long form of the third tradition says that only two or more alcoholics gathered for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, so we do. We're not bright, but we're there at six o'clock every Friday morning in the basement of the Community Corrections Center. I'm touched. I have history with some of them.

And we all have history with each other even though we've never met. So you all are a gift to me. We try to put it in perspective for you six years ago. Hepatitis took me down and they put me on an interferon and told me I was dying. They don't know. I'm doing pretty good. My doctors aren't looking at all today. But in the midst of that, and it's a very difficult time. I had a big book workshop, but I did every Tuesday morning at six o'clock. And I'd wake up at five and I'd be fine. And I'd get that done, get home, and I'd be fine an hour later. I couldn't tell my shoes. And I had these things to do and I'd come and do them anyway. In the midst of that, at the workshop, one morning my friend Chuck showed up and I was shocked because Chuck was dead. He had died of cancer. That's what I'd been told.

And he looked pretty good. It was at a time when I was wondering because I know everything in my life since I met you as a gift from God. And I was wondering how can this be a gift? This kind of pain, this kind of sickness. How can this be a gift? Well, Chuck had survived his cancer and he had survived the interferon treatments, which make you really sick. And if you have survived any serious, serious illness, you must tell someone. You don't have any choice.

You can't just tell anybody. So he had come to tossed out me through the interferon treatment, so that I could teach me how to survive that. And I recognized that I was a gift for him that morning. He became useful. He was able to tell me something and I was his gift to me, obviously, but I was a gift to him. So you're a gift to me. Since you first came into my life, I have been touched by the hand of God. And when that happens, you cannot sit still and not tell somebody about it.

And I have been continuously sober since December 26 of 1967. And I tell you that so you'll be impressed. Not with me. I want you impressed with the fact that if you're alcoholic, you don't ever have to drink again. Relapse is not a necessary part of recovery. It will occur that it's not necessary. I owe some thanks to a couple of people in the room. The coat is the reason I look good is because Mike Manner gave me a coat.

And Tanberg gave me a tie. I picked out the pants myself. I've really enjoyed today. I've been active in service to and with Alcoholics Anonymous since my sixth week in the program. And for you folks who've been around service for a while, I want to tell you what a joy it was. I have never been through a smoother election process ever. For you new people, I'm sorry that's the best it's going to get. If you think that's tiresome, stick around. I am impressed with you. I really truly am.

I didn't know I was alcoholic when I got here, so I owe you that. When you found me I was certified by one

government agency as an associate path type 2. The federal agent said that I was a psychopath and the doctor said I was a manic-depressing drug addict. But I can tell you all I was was just boom, we're retired. I'm an alcoholic who didn't know and so you brought me that gift. You taught me what alcoholism was and helped me bring my memories to it so I can find out if I was one or not.

And I think that's what our real job is. Because once I find out I'm truly alcoholic and what that means, my ego is finally completely deflated. Here's one thing I can't deal with. I've got the kind of ego that thinks it can deal with anything. I drank alcoholically from the very beginning. I know some people catch it on a bar still, I didn't. And what I know about alcoholism, all that means is that from my first drink I've had no control over the amount of alcohol I drank when I started.

What happened to me my first night was very much like what Carl Jung describes when he was telling Rome about the only thing he'd ever seen work for alcoholics at his time. He called it a spiritual experience. Ideas and conceptions used to rule the lives of these men are suddenly cast to one side. An entirely new set of motives and conceptions begins to dominate. That's what happened to me when I took a drink. I went into the evening stupid and short and ugly and frightened and angry.

I was 15 or 16, I don't know. We got an Obama whiskey and went out east of Denver and drank it and got drunk and had fun because that's what the older guys said happened. It transformed me. It changed me entirely. I can tell you it made me taller and cuter and all that. That's fine. What it really did for me is it changed me inside to the point where all of a sudden I had plans. Up to then I hadn't had any plans. I reacted off of life.

I was busy building my scripts. I had to have a script for everything so whatever the circumstances I would look at. Or at least be able to put you off so I didn't look bad. I had some plans. There was a guy in my high school class that had not been treating me very well. The plan was that I was going to meet him back on Bon Sid's drive. I was going to whip him in front of everybody. I could have done it. There was a little girl in my class who hadn't been treating me at all.

She and I were going to have a visit. I could have visited that night. That's not a bad thing. That's all I did. I'd buy you all a drink to take a misfit and put them into the heart of life like that. But that isn't all it does for me. It is in my very nature that if one works, take ten. Anything worth doing is worth overdoing. The definition of alcoholic insanity in the book Alcoholics Anonymous is lack of proportion of the ability to think straight.

That's me. When I think about lack of proportion, I just have to go back to high school. I didn't have a car. I got my dad to buy me a 49 mercury convertible. He was maroon and had leopard skin seat covers. The reason for that car is that I knew it would put two blonde ladies in the back seat. It did. It was my identity. On the second day they broke the top and I didn't want the car anymore. I abandoned him and let him worry about him.

That's kind of how I approached life. My dad told me once that one of the worst pains for him was the regularity, which my land ladies would call and say, could you come by and pick the boy's things up. He's obviously gone because I'm a traveler. It's also in my nature. If there's anything that comes up that hurts, leave town. Got people looking for you, leave town. Pressure's on, leave town. Start over somewhere new.

I was really good at starting over. I joined the Navy when I was 17 to save America from the Communist

menace and to become a hero. I wanted so badly. I needed to be a hero. You know, there's a picture that goes with that. I would come home after a couple of years or foreign wars and my little blue suit and my little white hat, cocked it. Just enough of an angle so that you'd know that you don't mess with me. The rhythm's on my chest, particularly that purple one because I walk with just a little limp so that you'd know that that's what that meant.

I'd been wounded in the war. And I would hear the voices. The guys would say, that's him, you know. There he is. He lets me talk to him. He's my friend. I'd walk by that little group of girls and hear that sound that every boy wants to hear. It's him. And that's the dream I went in with in two years later I was in federal penitentiary in Japan because of alcoholism and didn't know that's why. I came home with my dreams all broken and started over.

And I could spend an hour telling you how often that happened. I'd run out of dreams and be spoiled. Bottom is a simple thing. Bottom is any morning that I wake up fully aware that whatever I had in mind for my life is not going to happen. So I just grab it and start over. Well, Christmas week in 1967 there was no starting over. I was tired. Part of the cough there. I don't know if you're smoking on the dry air. I come from a functional home.

I apologize to those of you who don't, but I do. My folks were married 66 years when dad died. In fact, he stuck around. The university was on Saturday and he went to the coma and left us on Tuesday. He stayed for the party. My younger brother is a professor of music at the University of Colorado. Probably one of the finest synthesizer musicians in the world. Each year for the last three or four years. Every summer they take him to Moscow and in Scandinavian countries to teach for the summer.

They try to figure out what it is he does, because what he does, he does better than anybody. He was writing music with Stan Kenton when he was 19. He grew up right down the hall for me, an extreme over. My little sister, whom I loved earlier, retired from IBM as one of their top executives. And I'll sell his real estate just for fun. Make good money and great babies. Her babies have been busy making babies. I was in a family deal a while back.

I saw a whole bunch of little kids that looked kind of like me. I have no idea who they'd long to. Their family. Since you young guys are about half nuts, we're having trouble finding husbands to go along with these babies. But in my family, the attitude one of babies shows up is, oh, isn't that nice? There's another little prince baby, let's raise it. And then there was me. Nobody could figure out what was wrong with me.

If you'd ask me to write down on paper the qualities of the home that I wanted to grow up in, that's the home I grew up in. And I didn't fit. I honestly can remember laying in bed 13 years old crying, wondering why my people didn't come back from Mars and took me up. They'd obviously left me here with you strange folks. But I wasn't one of you. I look like you. But I didn't think like you or feel like you. I'm talking about pre-alcohol.

I was inappropriate in my feelings. I tend to laugh at funerals and cry at hockey games. Inappropriate. I say stupid things at the wrong time. And smart things when there's nobody around. Alcohol, I raised that. What happened to me that first night instead of going back to put the bully in top of the girl, is that I drank so much bonded bourbon that almost died. Alcohol poisoning me. They carried me around driving by my elbows while I puked.

That's the picture they saw. That's how I drank. Christmas week in 1967, I finally ran out of lies. I'm not sober because of the truth. If you're new here, don't worry. You're wondering, can I do it right? No, you can't. Can I get honest enough? No, you can't. Do I have a chance? No, you don't. The best news I have for you if you're fresh and new in this room is you are doomed. That's true. On your own, you're doomed.

You don't have a chance in hell. Neither did I, but we're not on our own in this room. That's what's so nice about it. Anyway, I was now on federal parole for a little mistake I made in 1966. For some ungodly reason, they kept giving my children back to me. Their mother abandoned ship. When Terry was two and a half and Sean was one, she's also alcoholic and she just left. Ran off of my brother-in-law. That's stunned a little bit.

I've been trying to raise these kids on the road. I promise you, the desire of my heart has always been to be a good father and a good husband. I wanted more than in the world for me and those kids to be okay. I just couldn't seem to pull it off. We'd get started and then I'd get restless and irritable and discontent. And I tried everything. I was super straight at one point. I'm not a stupid man. I just make bad decisions sometimes.

And when the boys were real little, I'd gotten a job on a debit, an insurance debit. I don't know what that is, but that's where you go around and collect the \$4 or \$5 premiums because that's the only amount they can afford if you don't collect it, you won't get it. I sold over \$800,000 with a new premium in seven months. It was on the way to getting into the millionaires club the first year because I didn't know you couldn't do that.

But I hadn't learned yet that the money wasn't mine until it went through their books. So I had to take my last paycheck and get the bucks to balance and then quit and leave town. And we moved to Kansas City and I went to work for an IBM training school and three months I was sales manager. And six months my family was gone. I'd drink my way out of everything worthwhile. Anyway, the kids and I'd been on the road for a while.

I'd finally quit trying to be Superman and tried to become super free. I am one of the freaks that came out of Berkeley, California in the early 60s, throwing LSD around and screaming out where there's dope there's hope burned down city hall. I am not a drug addict. I have a number of years of drug use but I'm not an addict. Don't need to say any more about that except please find out what you are. This thing will work for anybody as long as the foundation is truth.

You may be one, you may be the other, you may be both please find out. I'm an alcoholic. I was on federal parole on ADC I weighed 133 pounds and I began to take a look at my life one more time. Coming from a functional home I know what Christmas is supposed to look like. We had great Christmases in our house. They'd bring a real tree from the outside. Smelled good. We decorated with lights and tinsel them. Used to sew popcorn and string it all over.

We had mold cider with cinnamon in it. Hot chocolate marshmallows. Not them sissy things marshmallows. Covered the top of the cup and you had to go get it off where you could even drink the stuff. People would come by during the Christmas season and visit with my parents. People would love to visit with my folks. My dad was a rock on tour. That means a great storyteller. I just learned the words of other practices. I had a few lives left.

Nobody would come by and visit with us. Even my parole officer made us come see him. I would tell you that the kids and I are fine. The family is intact. We have a place to live. Food were warm and clean and that was

a lie. I saw the lie. We lived in a basement beneath an old lady that raised cats. She raised cats everywhere. Her place was cleaner than mine. I saw that. This structure I had just began to fall apart. I had prided myself that I had never turned on young people.

Only consenting adults. I couldn't get out of bed that week until this 16 year old kid that I had turned on to amphetamines came by to give me enough to get me up so I could go steal something and get enough booze to go back to sleep. That was my life. I saw that. We didn't have a Christmas tree. The welfare check hadn't gotten her yet. I would have sworn I was a good father. So we took a walk. When you restless you walk a lot.

On that walk we found a dollar laying in the snow on the 24th. Went to the tree lot to see what you can get for a dollar. On the 24th you can get the biggest tree on the lot. I'm alcoholic. That's the one I bought. We had a 9 foot tree in the 7 foot ceilings. I keep the image fresh because it hurts from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. It hurts to remember that tree. I think it's a fine thing to remember how it hurts.

When you come to me, if I have forgotten how it hurts I'll say something stupid to you like get over it. You can't get over that ever. You just get to live with it. We decorated it. If you cut the bottom off a little old milk carton it looks like a bell. Crinkle up some aluminum foil and junk. It was a place called the Denver Merchandise Mart, I think it was, never mind. This fine man gave me Denver Merchandise Mart.

He gave me a pair of cowboy boots and little shirt for \$10.95 on credit that day. So each of my kids would have one present. My little boys had wrapped up everything that would fit into blue paper towel and put it under the tree for me. Some more of me died. On Christmas Day we went down to the folks place. It would never occur to me not to go to our folks place on Christmas. And my dad noticed at the door and said, Don, I'm sorry that your mother said I can't let you in here anymore.

She can't stand watching you die. And the lie I had been carrying with me was that leave me alone. I'm not hurting anybody but me. And by God's grace I saw that day I was hurting everybody, particularly the people I loved the most. It was clear. So the lie went away. And then my dad broke my last lie. I really believe that nobody cared. Nobody loved us. He snuck us into the basement of the house anyway. Because he did.

He made a lie out of that. So I went home without any lies. Just a gut full of self pity. I'm going to walk past the self pity and enter the truth. And sad to say the truth that day was, there was no reason for me to be here. I was truly useless. The kids would be better off in a foster home than they were with me. Everybody would be better off without me. And I know that's a very painful place but I hope that God either found that place.

Because if that's the point of departure, you either surrender or you die. And I had nothing left to surrender to. So I took a two month supply of the garbage I was using and pushed it up my arm and drank everything in the house and laid down and died. And I truly believe I died because I haven't had a drink since. I woke up the next morning and I didn't feel good. If you know here and we talk about these spiritual awakenings like they feel good, don't kid yourself.

They don't. Okay. Getting born never feels good. So I believe that the power of God went to work in my life before I ever heard the name. I'm on the belief that this whole thing is about mercy. There isn't a person in this room deserves to be here. Okay. If there's any mercy or justice the way I understand it, I couldn't be here. It must

be about mercy. The police were at the door so I knew I wasn't dead. I want to tell you about the power of God as I've experienced it.

They had nine charges on me. The first one called for three years to life in the penitentiary. The Denver District Attorney told me that he would bring the rest of them one at a time if I beat that when I was finished and I still owe the federal government five years because I was on parole and that's a violation. And I truly didn't care. I finally reached the only sane state I'd ever been in. I was wanting to go anywhere anyone said and do anything anyone said if it meant I didn't have to be me anymore.

So I detoxed in the Denver County Jail five and a half months later came to trial and the power of God went to work. He took me in with my lawyer and said we've been talking to the federal people and we've all concluded you are really sick. And I'm waiting for news. I knew that. I don't since I was little or something really wrong with me. They said we've agreed. The feds have agreed that if you'll plead guilty to a reduced charge so we don't have to have a trial here.

They will give you a one and a half to three year sentence. We'll suspend that, give you back to the feds. I've agreed to take you and they'll take you to the hospital in Fort Worth, Texas and fix what's wrong with you. And I signed on the spot. I'm not an idiot. If you put me in a hospital with doctors and books, I'll be on the street in six months. They will tell me what's wrong with me. They'll tell me how long it's going to fix that.

And they'll give me all the symptoms I need to show them to convince them I'm getting better. That's my very best game. I've been playing it since I was little. Now if you know about power, you know, but when the state of Colorado and federal governments as Don Goshen Denver to Fort Worth, Texas, Don Goshen, they've got that kind of power. Five days later, I'm in the Colorado State Penitentiary Fish Tank. I believe God intervened because he brought me to you instead.

He said, you're who I needed. I didn't know that. I didn't know it was alcohol. My alcoholism, my drinking was such a part of my life no one ever saw it. It was just routine. It was there, whatever I did. So you came to me. You didn't look pretty neat to me. You were not angelic. They sent three guys over, three convicts with numbers on their chest over to the fish tank to talk to us. They were doing what Alcoholics Anonymous is about.

They had convinced the administration that they needed to make 12 step calls so they let them in to see us. And they called us down and I can still hear it. You people will come down and you will listen. And I came down because I didn't have anything else to do. And I did the first thing I've ever done right in my life. I listened. If you're new here, I promise you. All you have to do is listen. Don't pay attention to some of us, but listen.

There were three of them. I remember Doc got up and he said, My name's Doc and I'm an Alcoholic. And that means that I'm powerless over alcohol and guards and drugs and all of the circumstances of my life and my life has become unmanageable. And if any of you smart bastards think you can still manage your lives, look at the reward the state just gave you for the nifty job you've been doing. That's real love. He cared more for my life than he did for how I felt.

He said, You're very best thinking. Got you the penitentiary. You're just not doing too good are you? True. But then he said, We can show you how to learn a way of life or a way of thinking that will allow you to live a

way of life. It'll make sense to you. And there was a brand new thought for my sick mind. I've been living my life trying to have it make sense to you. It never made sense to anybody. Today my life still doesn't make sense to a lot of people, but it makes sense to me.

And to my wife, to my children, to my granddaughter, and to my boss. And if it doesn't make sense to you, I'm sorry. Until you put the bread on my table, I don't care. And if you put the bread on my table, please ask first. Anyway, we were not allowed to go to Alcoholics and Alcoholics right off of that. We had one meeting a week where they let real people in from the outside and we'd take an hour and they'd take an hour.

We couldn't go to that meeting until we qualified. We weren't good enough for you yet. We had to go through a 12-step study school. For five weekends we gave up our yard privileges and our movies and we went to school. While they carried us through the book, Alcoholics and Alcoholics, they read it right out loud to us and showed us how to do what it says. And we weren't even allowed to talk. First thing they said was you knew guys have nothing to say.

If you knew anything at all, you wouldn't be here. We got to talk after the meetings. We got to talk with them. What brought me here tonight, what kept me in Alcoholics Anonymous is that I watched the people. There were three of them I watched. My original sponsor had committed a double murder one morning when he was 17 years old and had drunk him rage and shoot out with the police in a robbery. Hell, I'd never done that.

I'm a paper bandit. I'm a smuggler. I don't put guns in my hand. I'm checking her. So I couldn't identify with that, but he talked about the morning he did it. He said I woke up feeling that nobody cared whether to live or die. My pain was such that I started to drink, took my medicine to kill the pain. And only this morning it didn't kill the pain. It intensified. And when nobody cares whether you live or die, there's only one honest human response to that, outrage.

And in his outrage he went to hold up a liquor ground, a jewelry store, and killed some people on the street. The man telling me that story was incapable of committing that act, and that's what I saw. And I asked him about that. He wasn't that kind of guy. He said that's right, I've been changed. God changed me. The promise of Alcoholics Anonymous is that you get a whole new mind, a whole new life. Thank God you didn't offer to teach me how to cope with life.

My coper broke years ago. To cope means to fight to good fight. I don't have an ounce of fight left in me. I'm tired. I get through life pretty good because I learned how to do this. You're right, man. You want to fight? He still got some fight left in it, but I don't. Phil Gutierrez was a fellow who came from Guam. And I loved Phil to this day. Phil's gone. I died sober back in Guam. But he was in our penitentiary because when he was 17, they threw him off of Guam.

He was too violent. And a few years later, this state of Colorado wanted him to send him back to Guam because he was too violent and they wouldn't take him back so they locked him up. When Phil drank, he really hurt people. He was doing some time this time for throwing some people out of a three-story window. And a drunk. Phil was the softest, most gentle, loving human being I have ever met. Phil Gutierrez taught me how to touch physically in a penitentiary.

And no one ever questioned Phil's touching. See, we're all a bunch of puppies here. I've never gotten on my knee to be touched in a pen and told I'm cute. I'll wag my tail anytime you do that for me. Phil loved his family more than life itself. But he said, I don't do this for my family. When I did that, it didn't work. I do this for me. Because if I don't, my family has nothing. And they taught me about alcoholism. I have a disease.

I have an allergy to alcohol. If I have a drink of alcohol, I will have another drink of alcohol. I don't have any choice in the matter. Everything about me changes when I drink. I was able to tie up because of the doctor's opinion what happened to me when I was 19 to put me in a penitentiary. Because I loved the Navy. I really did. I was going to be a 30-year singer. But they'd give me a 24-hour liberty. And I'd go ashore and have a drink.

I'd be back in 28 or 30. And the last time I was 23 days. And I finally tied that to a drink. The reason I went to prison is my ship went to the war zone in Korea. While I'm in Los Angeles drunk. That's a very bad thing to do. I took a drink in Long Beach, California. Fully intending to go back to my ship and go on to Korea with the rest of them. And 23 days later, I was in Persian Square in Los Angeles. I had not been able to stop drinking.

I could not go back to the ship. I did things that are contrary to who I am. See, when I really need a drink, I will do absolutely anything I have to do to get that drink. That's just the fact. On day 23, the madness was gone. I turned myself and went back. And I finally got that tied up. The insanity is no problem. I got that from the story of the current salesman named Jim. Lack of proportion in the ability to think straight.

I do not live life in proportion. I don't do it today. I have to have a leash thrown on me from time to time. And I can't think straight. By myself, I'm too self-centered. I remember Bruce saying one day down, we don't even think the truth is going to work for you. So you take it into your head and your ego catches it and says something like that. I can use that later. By the time I get around to it, it's not the truth anymore.

I wonder what you had so badly that I took a great risk one day and went back to my cell and said the third step prayer. Set it with every ounce of yearning in my body. Weathered from a flash of light. And when it didn't come, it frightened me and made me very, very angry. I went back to Bruce and complained about that. If you do something that you sponsor, touch in a shoe and you don't get what you think you ought to get, go get you out of it.

He laughed at me. He said, you dummy. Now, you got to understand that was a step up. I was thirty, eight, nine, any four in the morning. Now I'm dummy. I got a name back. I'm on the way. He says, you dummy. You ought to be grateful you didn't have a flash of light. They didn't really kill you all your life. And we talked about the flashes of light I've had. Southern comfort on a roof in Phoenix, Arizona in September is guaranteed to give you a flash of light.

I've had visions, peyote visions and other visions. I've had flashes of light. He's right. They didn't really kill me all my life. And he took time that day, which is something that I'm trying to learn how to do. The most precious thing we have is time. And he gave me his time and helped me walk through. He said, non-God knows in your shape you probably can't stand one more big shock anyway. It will probably come to you gently as he did for me.

And he described how it would come for him. And that's how it's been for me, very gently. My entire

experience of God has been gentle. God never yells at me ever. In fact, the voice is so tiny. I have to clear my mind and get very, very quiet or I'll miss it. And he generally talks through you. But if I'm busy wondering what my response to you is going to be, I don't hear the message. So anyway, that's philosophical.

I went back and took an inventory because I wanted what you had said badly. I didn't bother with the any directions. I just went back and spent two hours writing down some of the worst things I'd ever done. Went back to him at the end of that two hours and he took one look at it and he said to impress me. And it was. Just get away. And saved my life. I'm alcoholic. I'd worked two hours and attempt to be honest. I found somebody who would listen and had a series of spiritual awakenings.

And please understand, when I talk about a spiritual awakenings, that's really simple. Anytime any alcoholic, anywhere, understands any part of the truth, that's a spiritual awakening. I found this guy and I would, and he listened and I'd tell him one of these things I'd done and he'd say, well, that wasn't that bad. I'd tell him something else. He said, it wasn't that bad. Pretty soon I woke up because some of it was that bad.

And I woke up to the fact that once again, I was picked somebody who'd tell me what I wanted to hear, so I didn't have to do anything. And if I didn't stop that, I would die a very ugly death. I am not afraid of death. I'm died three times that I can remember. But to die an ugly death means that for some period of time just before that, I'm going to have to live a very ugly life. And that's what I can't tolerate. I can't even think about it.

Anyway, we finally got through the thing. Got through a real inventory and a real fist dip and had some awakenings there. And I got at the end of my fist dip. I had a glorious experience. I finally finished something. And it was a shabby little inventory that it was all I had. And I'd finished it. I stopped being alone during that fist dip. See, up till then, none of you had ever existed. No wonder I was alone. It was me and who I needed you to be.

And after that fist dip and my friend, Jim, there were two people in the room, me and Jim. And I hadn't been alone since. I went back to myself and reviewed that thing. And realized I've got a lot of work to do. And asked God in the seven step in addition to what it says in the big book. Please don't let the stuff I hadn't found yet kill me before I get to it. And I'm still here. And I just found some more last week.

And I got to tell you, it's shabby stuff. A friend of mine in Denver says he went into the inventory looking for a till of a hunt. And what he found was a little boy who wet his pants. And that's me. I went into my evangelistic stage and they wouldn't let me out. I wanted to get these amends made. And they wouldn't let me out. And I must tell you, I don't believe that you get free making amends. I got free getting willing to make amends.

My sponsor took me aside after we went over this deal. And he said, look, Don, you know what you did to these people but you are so insensitive. You have no idea what it did to them. So here's what I want you to do. Go back to yourself and I take each one of them, close your eyes and picture them in your mind. And see if you can feel a willingness to say to each one of them. I have been wrong and I've harmed you. Would you please tell me what I have to do to get these books to them.

And as I went over the list that night, I had that remarkable experience. I felt as if I had been lifted from that steel chair and set free. And I've been free ever since. And you know what that does for you? If I'm willing to say

to you, what do I have to do to get it squared? Then all I have to do is listen to how you tell me. I had some tough amends to make. Some are more easy. But how do you make amends to a mother that you put in a position on Christmas day to say you and your children can't come to my house?

I can't, to this day, conceive of anything I could do that would square this. So after I was out, I gave it some time. I've been talk, take time. People are still smarting from their injuries. Don't go sticking a sharp stick in their eye. Eventually she allowed me to come by. And I found a gentle way to ask the question. The principle is to be hard on me and easy on you. And I found a way to ask go. What do I have to do?

She said, honey, all I've ever wondered for you was that you'd be happy. So for a little over 27 years now, I've been going by my mother's house on a regular basis. Happy. It worked. She told me it was six years before she believed I was going to mount anything. But I've never gone by to prove anything to her. I'm going by to give her what she needs for me. And you know how you show your mommy happy? I showed her my new wife.

I could buy and tell her about this wonderful job that I have and how the kids and the grandkids are doing. And is there anything I can do for you? She just likes me to combine and visit. In my self center state, I don't know how to visit. You know, visiting is an art. It's hard for alcoholics because in order to visit, you have to be at least interested in the other person as you are yourself. I went to make a match to my dad, started down that list.

I had this stuff in my hand. He said, please stop. I said, I know all that stuff. All you can do by telling me the details hurt me all over again. You and I will have to start from here. And we did. And what a glorious thing that was. My dad and I built a relationship. In the early thirties, my dad and grandpa were the head of the Colorado Ku Klux Klan. So we had some pretty funky ideas in our house. I've always known they were funky, but you know, and then he awakened and changed.

And I got thinking the other day, it wouldn't have been terrible if I left the robes on him after he took them off. But a terrible thing that would have been. So we began to build a relationship. And we had some fun with it. Especially they wouldn't let him drive. He got old and he couldn't see. They wouldn't let him drive. And I had become a very important businessman by then. Ramone company, busy busy busy. I was either your delegate or your chairman when this happened, busy busy busy.

And dad called me one day and says, can you spare me a couple hours? I've got Samaras to run. And I was, yeah, of course I said yes, but I wasn't feeling right about that. Because I know what dear is where he had a card from Radio Shack. And if we would drive out to the mall, they'd give him a DCL battery free. And then we could take that same card for another 20 minute drive and get another one from Radio Shack out of Cinderella City.

We're looking at two hours of getting to DCL batteries. And I'm a little grumpy. I got things to do. I'm a little driving around visiting and it suddenly hit me. What a glorious thing. I get to spend two hours visiting with my father to spend time with him. And since I believe God makes everything fall circle and complete, I got to see that picture too. I can remember days when he wouldn't let me drive either. I was eight, nine, ten years old.

My red rider decoded a ring needed fixed and he would drop whatever he had to do. He would drive me around in his stupid lures. We got to build that. My dad was not a demonstrative man. He came out of the depression. He was a nice little man and a loving man. He just wasn't touching him. You all made me a touching

person, which made him really nervous. But I believe in going one step past. We got square, but I want to get one up on him.

He got this little office or had this little office. He was very little, narrow and long. I got him in there and I got in such a position he couldn't get out. He couldn't get past me. I said, pop, I need to tell you something. I have three heroes left and you're one of them. We hugged and cried and it was good. The next time I came by the house I was hugging my mother, and he looked at me and said, you suppose I could have one of them.

I told you dad died. He just came to the end of the road and said, that's enough. He was 86 years old and he'd had enough. It was a wonderful thing because there was nothing left undone. I don't have to go to his grave and say, Dad, I wish him said this. Do you ever done this with you? There was nothing left undone done. It was a complete deal. Because of what you've taught me. One day at a time is not the way I trust.

It's the reality of my life. This is it. Anything you and I are going to do has to be done now, because I'll never be by this way again. We may see each other again, but I'll never be this way and neither will you. It'll be a new person or a new thing. If we're going to get it done, let's get it done. Straightening things up with my brother was tough. It took 22 years. See, I had betrayed my brother beyond belief. He's an absolute straight arrow.

He put together bands and I sold dope to him. I did. He watched me hurt the family and the folks and destroy everything worthwhile. I was his hero and he watched me go to the penitentiary. And so he wasn't too sure he wanted anything much to do with me. And it took a long time and I never tried to do anything. I just put my life in order and did what I do. Twenty-two years of sobriety, he had my wife and I over for supper.

And after supper, he said, Don, I don't know if you and I can ever be friends. But this was nice. We can do this again. We began that little trudge. Well, one of the secrets that I've learned is regularity. I go by the folks house regularly. If you do it over and over and over and you're complying with the conditions here. When I had a chance to go down to North Carolina and go to work for the department of corrections, you don't think that wasn't weird when that captain handed me the key to the play.

I still came home regularly and visited with the folks and with my wife. I had to leave everything at one point. I hope you don't have to go through this. Part of my journey is that I had to leave everything and take a spiritual sabbatical and get the whole thing changed again. But I was visiting the folks, visiting with them. My brother came here and I had my leg crossed and we were talking. All of a sudden he reached out and kicked me on the bottom of the shoe.

He said, Don, I'm really glad to see you. And he was surprised because he really was glad to see me. There was a shock to him. He said, look, next time you're in town, why don't you and I go up to the cabin and do a little fishing. We got a little cabin above Bailey, Colorado. So I came back in so he and I could go fishing. We didn't fish much. We scared a few brookies and then we went to the cabin and played cribbage and talked and talked and talked.

And when we were through he said, look, there's one more thing I want to tell you. He said, I'm 58 years old now and I believe I've made a decent contribution to life and my heart soared. See, you don't just tell anybody that. He told me the depth of who he thought he was. He gave me all of it. I think I made a decent contribution to

life. He wanted me to know that. What a glorious gift for just showing up. Almost 22 years ago, he met a sane lady.

It wasn't there weren't any, it's just I never picked any. I much preferred the ones that have chaos so I could get on my white horse and ride him and save him. Life was much more exciting that way. War me up. Jackie and I have been married now for 21 years. We haven't had a fight yet. It's absolutely unnecessary to fight with the people you love. It doesn't mean we completely agree on everything. We just don't fight.

She's right most of the time anyway. She thinks I'm the cutest thing she has ever seen and I agree. Almost missed her. She had two little girls and I had already raised seven children. My boys and I were living in Buena Vista, Colorado at the base of a 14,000 foot mountain. That was our backyard. The Arkansas River was the front yard. I worked at the reformatory six hours a week or six hours a day loving every minute of what we were doing.

I'm supposed to give all that up and come back and raise some more kids. I'm so glad I did. She's far more important than I am. I'll go where God asks and do what God asks. I don't have any ambition left. Why should I? I've had more fun since I gave up ambition than when I had ambition. I told her one time that this is the most fascinating planet I've ever lived on. I think I made come back one more time rich just so I can travel around and see it.

She laughed at me. She says, you're already traveling around and seeing all of it on somebody else's money. What's wrong with you? It was two little girls. Their real dad is a Denver detective. God has a real sense of humor. We're going along the way and I'm raising them and I love them. They're my daughters. They're not my step-daughter. They're my daughters. Kelly made me promise to tell my story. In my house we understand some spiritual principles.

We live by the traditions in my house. One of the principles that's important if you're going to live a spiritual life is you need a certain amount of solitude. The world won't give it to you. You created it. Privacy and solitude are really important for certain parts of the day. So doors are important in our house. If your door is closed, we will not bother you even if the house is on fire. It's up to you to smell the smoke.

I know what it's like to be in a meditative state and be suddenly brought back. It hurts and I won't do that to anybody. So anyway, this particular morning, they were, I don't, 12, 11, 12, 13. My meditations that morning had gone so well that I was no longer walking. I was just sort of gliding through the house. It's peaceful and quiet. I don't know if you've been around little girls or not, but it doesn't stay that long.

They're out in the kitchen putting their breakfast together and Lisa says to Kelly, you need to get a bitch. And my feet hit the floor. I did a very stupid thing. I said, hey, knock that off. Which in little girl language means, oh, dad wants to play. So the volume went up. Kelly's shrieked. I did another stupid thing. I said stop that. Which means, we got him now. Day went Missouri. I went Missouri. I go from St. Hood to insane that quick.

Get to your rooms. I don't want to do them. Get to your rooms. And they're laughing all the way up the stairs. And as they go in the rooms, they slam their doors. And that did it in a single bond. I was up those stairs. Screaming at the top of my lungs, if we're going to slam them, we're not going to have them. I'm taking the doors

off the hinges. And they're laughing at me. They get out of school. I carry the doors to the basement.

And they were light upstairs. By the time I got to the basement, they were heavy. I have a person in here who says things like, well, dummy. You know what you've got to do now, don't you? Yeah, I carry them all the way back. I re-hang them. And then I apologize to those little girls when they get home to be in such a jerk. And I hadn't even done anything. So I did what you taught me. Through prayer and meditation and some inventory, I looked at why would their behavior threaten me?

Because that's all it was. And I found it. And the girls and I had a talk. I just sat them down and said, honey, here's the deal. Here's the spot you got me in. Lisa, if anybody ever treated you the way she just treated you, I would stand before them and die before I let them do that. I'd protect you from my very life. I'd pull an arm out by a stump and beat him in the head with it. And kill me the same thing. And you got me in the bind.

I love you both so much. You can't do that. And you got me in the bind. And I don't think they ever stopped calling each other, bitch. When they stopped doing it around me. Okay. Because they knew it hurt me. Talk about precious. Kill their own little piece one time when her dad from school. And mine, mine, mine, mine, mine. Well, it's seven pages of my picture on it. I was glad I knew me that day. This was one hell of a guy.

And in her last paragraph she said, if I would have had a choice, I would have picked on from my dad. But I didn't have a choice. So God picked him and brought him to me. So I feel about you. I didn't have a choice or I'd have picked you. So God picked you and brought you to me. So I belong to you. I truly belong to you. Whatever you ask of me, I will do. Mainly I will love you. And I will care about you. Wesley Parris gave us a definition of love on time that struck my heart.

It's the active concern for the welfare and the growth of that which you love. I'll get right in your face if you ask me to. But since God comes by invitation only, I will never get in your face unless you ask me. Don't ask me to sponsor you unless you really want sponsor. Okay. I have no mercy whatsoever. Your life is more important to me than how you feel. I get frustrated doing this anymore and while I thank you, I'm frustrated.

I've been living in the presence of God for 30 years and that means every single day of my life for the last 30 years, the extraordinary has occurred and I want to tell you all about it when I'm out of time. So we're just going to hang out together and meet along the trail and support one another in ways that go beyond anything the psychiatrist can talk about. I know you're a crazier now and so am I and I love you for that.

Okay. We get to live on this planet just like we belonged here. I'll tell you something. I'm 64 years old now and because of you, I believe I've made a good contribution for life.