

Big Book Workshop

1999 | Part 8 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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The Essence of the 10th and 11th step and the 12th step, the Essence for me is about being on time. Before I work within three blocks is a place called Dario's. It's a place that's designed to take care of people who have severe garlic deficiencies. It's a little Italian restaurant. And we usually walk up there and have lunch because it's good. Mama still cooks. When she doesn't, she beats the cook until it gets it right.

There are days when, because of the foot problem I've been left with, I don't walk too well. And I had one of the guys that was sponsoring come by and we were going up to Dario's and it's so good there's never any place to park within three blocks. That's why we walk. But I really needed to drive that day. So we drove up and as we pulled up to Dario's, the car right in front pulled out and left and we had that spot. Now I've come to expect that.

He said, isn't that nice? God got us a parking spot. Both yet. We were on time, that's all. Had we been 30 seconds earlier that Carl wouldn't have come out yet and we'd have missed it. If we'd have been 36 later, the guy in front of me would have gotten it. We were simply on time. 10th and 11th step, keep me on time. There's only one time anything can ever happen. That's right now. If it has already happened, it didn't gonna happen.

It's the past. If it's gonna happen, it hadn't happened yet. It's the future. It can only happen now. The only time I can be conscious of the presence of God is now. That's it. It gets so bloody simple. And the continuing inventory and the checking of myself on the prayer and the meditation keep me fully aware that now is the time. Tricky stuff, but very, very simple. The only time I can help you is now. The only time you can help me is now.

If I have already helped you, it can't happen. If I'm gonna help you, it hasn't happened. The only time is now. The prayer doesn't say God. I'm about to offer myself to thee to thee. I am now ready. Now, now, now. Everything is now. Everything's immediate in the spiritual world. You want to tell somebody you love them? Do it. Get it done. You want to tell somebody you're pissed at them? Do it now. The things that block me are aspects of self.

Self-pity, self-loathing, self-interest. As a result of some chronic health problems and chronic pain, I've learned some truly wonderful, wonderful things. There's pain and there's suffering. And I used to think they went together. Because they did for me. If I'm in pain, I'm kinda sure. We're all gonna suffer. Somewhere along the way, that has changed. There's pain and there's suffering and they do not have to go together.

Most suffering is caused by self-awareness. When I got to hepatitis and they put me on the inner fear on, a strange thing happened. The inner fear on cut me off from my feelings, from my emotions. It deadened me. For about six months I couldn't feel anything. Things happened. The only sensation I had was pain, which was no big deal. I came off of the inner fear on and all of a sudden I felt everything all at once, all over again.

And it was a baffling thing to me because it all felt like the same thing. Terror. Then I began to sort out. What happens in the middle of pain is that I become aware of that pain causes pain. I become self-focused. And when I'm interested in self, I'm in pain. It's only when I'm interested in you that there's no pain. That's an experience I've had. You're looking baffled. I understand. If a problem is very difficult, the book says, we throw ourselves

harder into working with others because it takes us out of ourselves.

This way of life says that when I'm in real trouble, I'm not to go somewhere and get help. I'm to go somewhere and give help. That's how I walk on this path. There are other paths. That ain't this one. The way I overcome my problem is to help you overcome your problem. That's the easiest thing the best way. It gets me out of myself. I got it pretty good. I get to feel I'm sorry for myself. The best thing the world for me is to go find somebody that doesn't have it's pretty good and help them get it better.

I'm to practice these principles in all of my affairs. To all steps says I'm to carry the message, that's easy. Now I got to practice the principles in all of my affairs. That means first of all I'm going to have some affairs. I mean to be real careful not to have more affairs than I have principles. I stole that because it sounds good. I like it. Now what are some of the affairs that I have? I have a family. Children, a wife, grandchildren.

At one point a dog with a dog and I had some difficulty so I won. When I went to North Carolina I bought a little brown lab, male brown lab because there is absolutely nothing more vicious looking than a big lab laying at the top of the stairs looking down at you. It's a man eater. It wouldn't hurt a fly. I came home two years later and this dog thought it was his house and these were his women. We had some difficulties.

I started to put him out one day and he just wasn't going to go. And he nipped me. Then by me he nipped me. We found him another place to live. We didn't have time for him anyway and that's the truth. Anyway I have affairs. I'm to practice these principles at home. If I can't treat my children the same way I treat the people I sponsor I'm living a lie. If I'm not willing to listen to them with the same closeness and care for attention I'm living a lie.

If I'm not going to give them the same time that I give a a I'm living a lie. And it isn't the quantity of time. It's the quality of the time. When I'm here with you I am all the way here with you. And when I'm home I am all the way home. That's the only way I don't know how to do it. I practice the principles immediately. Where are you? Then do what you're going to do there. When I'm at work I am all the way at work.

And I'm beginning to realize what that means because I'm only working 20 hours a week now. I can do my whole job in 20 hours a week. Most people in 40 hours are only doing 20 hours for the work anyway. So I just need to get my compress and go home. Get it done. Everything's immediate. And I've learned about crisis. It doesn't have to be mine just because it's crisis. And quite often if it's a crisis today it'll still be a crisis tomorrow.

I don't have to do anything immediate about it. I'm to practice the principles. If I'm agitated or doubtful I'm to pause and wait for an answer. What is my contribution to be? Sometimes it's let the chaos go. I found out along the way that without chaos I don't have any idea what needs to be put in order. So I love chaos. I love to watch it. I don't like to stir it anymore. But out of the chaos I can see what needs to be put in order.

And I learn what's mine and what isn't mine. You know most of the problems that I run into are none of my business. I learn that through the practice of the principles and all of my affairs. One of the affairs I have is how I relate to my neighbor. Very important affair. I live in a neighborhood with neighbors. Now I like hedges. I have private hedges around my house. I come from the old country. My grandpa taught me good fences make good neighbors.

And there's nothing better for a hedge than a hedge to make a good fence. Nothing gets through except snakes. But I live in a neighborhood with civilized people. And it occurred to me one day while I'm putting the hedge in on my side of the property. One whole side of that hedge is facing his side of the property. He'll look at his window and see my hedge. Maybe I ought to consult with him and ask him how high he would like it and how he'd like that trim.

And in that talk he says, oh I think the hedge would be fine. However you want to trim it. But leave a spot about this wide between the hedge and the edge of the house so there's a way between your house and mine. Because when you're gone I watch your house. And when I'm gone I'd like you to watch my house. That gives us access. Hell I've never thought about that. That's one of my affairs. How do I communicate with my neighbor?

I don't have a lot of common interests but we have one interest in real common. We like our neighborhood clean and clear and safe. His kid will marijuana in my black yard one time. I mean the kid probably figured I'm too old to know what that is. I did not tell his dad why would I want to do that. I pulled it up because it was on my ground. Okay. And he noticed it was gone. We had a black lab at the time. He asked me, Mr. Priest, do you suppose if I jumped the fence that dog would hurt me?

I said no. He would eat you. I just kind of let it go at that. We had a meeting in my backyard one time. We'd do that once a year. People came over and we had a big potluck and a big man. The next day he took me aside and he said that you seem to know something about alcoholism. So me and my friends some of us have a problem. You suppose we could talk to you? I don't put my trash on the street Monday because they don't pick it up till Tuesday.

I take it down Tuesday morning. That's one of the affairs that happens in the neighborhood. I don't want my trash all over the street all night because there's cats running loose in the neighborhood. The next I know it's a mess. I learned from my neighborhood one time we have a funny phenomenon in Colorado in the winter or in the early spring. We'll get a heavy wet snow and then the sun comes out the next day and it starts to melt and that night it freezes and what you got is water that deep that freezes into ice and it makes dams of ice and the gutters fill up.

It's a mess. I was in the house getting ready to go to work grouching because the city hadn't come by to clean those gutters out yet. I hear this noise out front. Chunk. Chunk. Chunk. When I looked out and here was my neighbor with a big ice thing chopping the ice out of the gutters. It's just a big flat. So I got my little shovel out and went out and joined him. Started cleaning the gutters and we visited during the morning.

Had a good time. I learned all kinds of things about him and his life. He learned something about mine and we got our gutters cleaned. It's not the city's job. It's mine. And my kids watch all this. I am so proud of my kids particularly my two step daughters. They're ready my daughters. They watch how we live in our house. If I sponsor you I expect you to come to my house early in the morning because I want you to see how I recovered alcohol and his family live.

That's part of my message. It's not all words. How do you carry this out when you got two teenage kids getting ready for school, a wife getting ready for work, and me getting ready for work? What's the house like? Kinda chaotic. So we sit in the living room and you watch the show go on while we do our step work. One day

we got a great lesson. My daughter come down the stairs. She's about 13 at the time. She says, excuse me. This is my mouth. I raised an advocate.

Excuse me, she says. And it shocked me. He don't interrupt us when we're busy doing God's work. What do you want? She says, I live here too. You've never introduced me to this person. Whoa, she's right. So I introduced him and she's nice to me. She's gone. That's all she wanted. My daughter's real father is a Denver detective by squad. He's got some really interesting ideas and viewpoints on life. I sponsor a number of gay people because I sponsor alcoholics and I don't care whether you're male, female, or mixed.

I don't care. And one of my gay guys was here working with me and that same daughter came down the stairs. And I knew she'd been with her dad for a weekend. She's making really ugly noises about gay people. I can hear him. And Sam's watching me to see what I'm going to do here. We're talking about living by principles and not fighting anyone or anything. And I said, Kelly, something you need to know. She says, what's that then?

I said, some of the people that you love the very most are gay. Because she really adore Sam. And she said, oh, who, who? I said, I'm not going to tell you, you figure it out. And let it go. Well, then weeks she'd come back to me and she said, it's just not worth the effort. I figured out who. That's practicing the principles as I understand them. I'm not to try to warp her mind or to protect Sam. But I'm going to certainly say, get this straight.

She still doesn't know about Sam. She still loves him. Sam's done so much good for alcoholics. It's just amazing. Denver AA produces missionaries. I don't know if you knew that. You come to Denver and go through the steps and the first thing you know, you're somewhere else starting your own little group in the midst of AA people who don't want to hear about it. Old-fashioned 12-step work was fun and very dangerous. We had guns pulled on me. I made a mistake going on a call one night by myself.

Got to the door and he opened the door and he's got a gun in his hand. He's changed his mind. He doesn't want to quit. That's fine with me. Good night. Three of us one time, my sponsor and another fell and I, during our evangelistic period, we were at the state convention and the call came in there. And we took the call. Guy in a motel. We went out. We were on our suits looking good. We gave him an hour and a half of the best 12 stuff that you've ever heard. I just stayed sober already. It was incredible.

And when he looked up us and said, man, it's clear to me you guys really have your shit together. But I needed a prank. So out of four alcoholics on a 12-step call, three of the four states sober and went back to the convention. Because that's the way it works. My job is just to carry the message. And in doing that I get to stay sober. And if he does too, that's a bonus. If not, it doesn't really matter. We got a shot at him somewhere down the way. Maybe somebody else will get a shot at him.

I really appreciate your allowing me to come out. This wears me out. I go through numerous kinds of internal hell with this. Because I know I'm doing the job and I'm doing it right. I also am concerned that I must bore you all to death after a while. I wouldn't sit and listen to me this long. But I appreciate you. I need desperately to tell people about what happened to me when God became fully alive in me. And in my regular life, going to work, raising kids, getting nipped by the dog, cutting ice with the neighbor, getting to go to Russia and talk to them about, hey, whatever that may be, is all part of that same package.

It's just God's here. Let's go do it. He may be eating pancakes tomorrow and borscht the next day. It doesn't make any difference. I came here desperate because I needed to die and couldn't die. The state I'm in tonight because of you is that I'm truly willing to stick around for as long as need be. I have plans that I'd like to take carry out that are beyond my projected life. I'm not going to get down all the stuff I want to get down.

And that's okay. I'm going to take a crack at it. You haven't written into my life. So I will go back home now until the folks about you. I really will. I don't know all about you. Those of you who've been in fellowship with the spirit know what I'm talking about. They're just waiting on you. I don't know who you are because it's all a common deal we had going on. My wife will really appreciate you. When I do one of these spiritual weekends, I go home horny.

She's really like that. We're done and yet this thing is undone. It can never be done. We just need to keep getting together with each other. That's what the fellowship is about. Just kind of getting together and learning how to visit. Last time I was here, I got to stay with Alex. We had a great time. He taught me more than you can imagine about life. I just love him to pieces. Keep standing in touch with him. I'd like to get to come back out for the wedding.

What a great deal that's going to be. That's if I'm approved. So anyhow, it's time to go home. Thank you very much for having me come out. I hope to see you over the road. Remember, the fellowship of the spirit both in Colorado and up in Maine in March. It's a little four day deal. It starts on a Thursday. There's a speaker on Thursday. There's a speaker on Friday night. It'll be an on and on. There's two speakers on Saturday.

There's one on Sunday. There's ten big book workshops. The rest of the time it's just getting together. It's a family deal. Bring the kids. This is basic old-aid. They're setting it up so the folks on this coast can have what we've had for seven years and come around. Just a weekend together together and have a lot of fun. Pop luck on Friday. Everybody from different parts of the country bring whatever your favorite food is.

It's a good time. You get flyers on it. That's all I got.