

Big Book Weekend

2003 | Part 9 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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We have a family sense here. Thomas Wolfe said that home is that place where you can go no matter what. And we exemplify that. No one has sunk too low to be able to come here and be among us. As long as they behave themselves. They can be stark raving mad. They can stink. They can say, I don't want anything you have to offer. Give me another cup of coffee. I'm not ready to go yet. And we say, have two. Somebody's always wanting to talk to our worst. And I mean wanting to talk to our very best. They're kind of dull, but I'll talk with them. Well, you've met them, haven't you? Never mind. Okay, kind of got a basic idea what that's about. Then you take that to someone and you lay it all out. You get it done. I did mine with my friend Jim. We're about the same time sober.

And I knew that nothing I said would bother him. He was as crazy as I was. And I wanted his life to be better. He'd killed some people in a blackout in a car and didn't know why I was there. I knew why I was there. And I knew somehow, but my sharing, my inventory with him, his life would get better. And I don't know how I knew it, but I knew it. And it happened anyway. I want to talk a little about a man's before we wrap up because it's such an important thing.

The freedom here at the end of this process, by the way, hinges on the sixth step. There's not a lot written about that because there's not much that needs to be written about that. It says, after my review, I look at this and see if I am now willing to have God remove from me all the things I have found objectionable. Now, what does that mean? It means I have become willing to let God remove from me all the things I have found objectionable.

It's all it means. Two very important things that it says, I do not have to work on my character defects ever again. They will be removed. I don't dare work on my character defects because anything I work at, I get good at. And the whole thing has a condition. The condition of total freedom hinges on the word objectionable. You cannot change me by threatening me or beating me or putting me in a cage. You can change my behavior as long as you're watching, but you've not changed me.

You can't change me by offering me great rewards. If you'll stop doing that, I'll give you a car. I'll take your car. Thank you very much. I just quit doing that as long as you're watching. But don't turn your head, me and the car are both going to be in California before you have breakfast. The only time I ever change is when I personally object to being what I am. And at that moment, I change. So the inventory is wonderful. I've looked at all the things that I object to, in myself, and I am now willing, and it says if you're not willing.

If there's still something you want to hang on to, pray for the willingness until it comes. And it's a really funny thing I've watched over the years. The minute I pray to be willing, I've already become willing, or I wouldn't be praying. The willingness is that powerful. Once I engage in anything and become willing, it's already happened. After a first step and a review, I send people home. It says, take the book down from your shelf, and we go to extremes where I come from.

You've probably brought it with you to the first step, go home and put it on the shelf, and take it down. Let's

just do what it says. We all laugh at it, but we all do it. My experience with making amends was different than any of you. When I become willing and ready to do that, they wouldn't let me out. They felt I still owed them some time. They had eight or nine months to go. So thank God I learned that freedom doesn't come from making amends. Freedom comes to me from the willingness to make amends.

As soon as I'm able, and as soon as I know how, I will do it. I woke up one morning and it wasn't there. I did not have that sense of the presence of God. And it didn't frighten me, and I don't know why it didn't, but it didn't. But I have a habit. I began to pray. Now I think that's funny today, if there wasn't anything there, what am I praying to? But that doesn't matter. I had to develop the habit. And the prayer was very simple.

God, I need to know you're here. I need to be closer to you. I need to know you better. And my phone rang. It's about six in the morning. It's all Billy paid. God love him. Billy said, I was seven years sober last week in a drink. And Alan was 12 years sober, and he drank. We've got another young fellow that's just about ready to drink. And the guys tell me that every now and then, if people will ask you, you'll sit down for a weekend with them and kind of go through the big book and show them what it is you do.

And they don't seem to drink anymore. Would you do that for us? I got another habit. I said, sure, Billy. And we did. There were three of us. I don't care whether it's one or a thousand. I really don't care to make any difference. Yes, Billy, of course. Then I hung up and began searching for God again. And the phone rang. Some of the doofers wanted some other thing. And I said, sure. I hung up and went into shame and continued my search for God and the phone rang again.

I was three or four of those, and all of a sudden it got me. He's calling you. You want something direct? Here it is. And the message that I was getting was, if you would be closer to me, get closer to my children. If you would know me better, get to know my kids better. And it brought me back into the fellowship and into the presence of God again. I didn't have to go look at it anymore. And part of the reason for that are the habits that I built by continual practice.

Stand in front of the bread counter and pray. In my present state of physical condition, which of these should I eat? Sounds silly, but you're practicing. In all of my affairs it says. Don't embarrass my wife, but we're talking about sex. Well, she's heard it before anyway. It had not occurred to me because of my own prejudice and biases and goofiness. One night I'm getting ready to make love with my wife. And I realize I've never taken a master by the hand and said, if I go do this, will you go with me?

It never occurred to me. So I did that symbolically. If I go do this, will you go with me? And within me, there was a, oh yeah. If I can't have God present in that activity, I'll not be doing it. In all of our affairs it says. I hope I didn't embarrass you. She doesn't embarrass you. Boy, what till she gets me home. No, it really is understood. We live a spiritual life and that's part of the spiritual life. I've never saw that before.

So part of my conduct ideal is that I will conduct myself in such a way that while I'm doing whatever I'm doing, God can be present. Not a bad guide. I will be able to have a sense of the presence of God and no shame. And that makes it so much easier than wondering, what can't I do? What can't I do? And it begins to lay out. As you go through this book, it tells you all sorts of things you can do. Where God will be present, working with others.

Family is very important here in Alcoholics and Honors. One of the reasons AA became a worldwide movement was that the world watched the restoration of family among the AA members in this country. The restoration of family. Today we've grown. It's still the same thing. Family has taken on broader implications. Sometimes two people involved can't make it, but other families develop. Bruce said we can do some of these things by mail.

Some of you are going to have to go see the people. Just wait. Make me a list of which is which he says. And I brought it back to him and he changed most of it. That same Christmas that we got the cowboy boots and the tree. I went to a drug store where I was friendly with the pharmacist. He's the one who said I don't care who writes your note as long as I have one when the cops come. So he knew and I knew that the prescriptions I was giving him were handwritten.

He really didn't care. Because of that dishonest relationship, he was more cooperative with me and he would have been ahead and not had something on him. We got a set of Christmas tree lights on credit because I didn't have anybody. Bucking a quarter, bucking a half. I don't remember exactly. That hadn't gotten paid for because I've gotten arrested the day after Christmas. I told you that I finally got to make amends to the guy with the cowboy boots because of the job I got.

This one he said, I think we can write this one. Write him a letter and tell him your circumstances. Who you are and what you did and you need to get clear. I had to write the letter and say, I owe you a buck and a half. I make 10 cents a day. And out of that I have to take my toiletries and things. I need to pay you, will you, except a quarter a month? It just takes the steam out of a big time gangster. Some I had to wait for.

How do you make amends to the mother? You put in a position on Christmas day to say you and your children can't come to my house anymore. How do you straight, I still can't think of a way to straighten that one out. But if I'm willing to say, what do I have to do to get this straight and all I have to do from that point on is shut up and listen while they tell me. It makes me a listener. I think God's marvelous. He's made of me a listener and you ask me to talk all the time.

I'm a listener. Months after I got out my mother finally agreed to let me come by. She was very hesitant and rightfully so. I live with the knowledge that I don't have any right to ever expect anybody decent to ever talk to me again. So when they do it's bonus time. For the people that I heard, I truly, if they don't want to ever see me again, that's correct. So she left me in our short visit because my mother's a truly nice woman.

I found a way to ask her that question. What do I have to do? The big book says I'm to be easy on them and hard on myself. So I have to think of ways to, I don't put people on a spot making amends. I found a way to ask it and none of the listeners. She said, honey all I've ever wondered for you is that you'll be happy. So for the last 30 some years I go by mom's house regularly happy and it works. I drag my happiness with me.

I bring her Jackie whom she adores in grandchildren and stories about you and what you've done with me and all the fun we have. There was a time you let me serve as your trustee at large on your general service board. And I was busy all the time and mom's a traveler but she can't go much anymore. She's 94 now and at that time she was still getting old. But she loved to hear about the trips I got to take. I got to go to Guatemala and Puerto Rico and the Soviet Union and Japan and she just thinks that's exciting.

And I was hearing she was talking to one of her friends once. And she was mentioning that I was the president of AA. Now I don't take heavy duty action without praying so I won't home and prayed about that. I got to straighten her out on this. And in meditation it became clearer. No I don't. And to what I put her through is she wants to think that that's cool. As long as you and I understand I'm just another girlless old drunk and just one of the folks.

So anyway with my dad when I went to him we had a different experience. I've also been taught when I approached people to kind of open the door gently. And I just dive right into all the gory details. And this was back when so I wouldn't forget I carried my little list of wrongs with me. Did you ever see people going to make amends with their little cards? I know that you think that's important but don't do that. If you're making amends to me and you're reading off a card what in the hell would I believe you're really contrary about what you're saying.

You better know what you're talking about. Keep the cards but don't take them with you. But I had my little list of things I'd done and I opened the door. I said Papa I really need to talk to you. I need to square some things from the past. Use the language and the person you're talking to. My dad's amazing. He understands what squaring the past means. I said I've lied to you and I've stolen from you and I've cheated you.

And he said I know that. I've known that for years. All you can do by telling me the details has hurt me all over again. You and I will have to start from here. Wonderful. So I get to live with the details which I can do because I'm free of them. And my dad and I began a 27-year friendship. We became father and son. We became man and man. We became friends. We developed everything. Moment by moment we built a 27-year relationship that was wonderful.

Had some fun with some of it. He called me one day. He got old enough and infirm enough that they wouldn't let him drive anymore. And I understand why. Jackie and I took mom and dad down to Epcot a couple times. And we got him one of those mobile wheelchairs. I had to take it away from him. He kept running into people. My first thing was to stand in front of it so that he'd run into me. He'd run into me first. I got tired of that.

They wouldn't let him drive. And I know run my own business and I'm important and busy. And he called me one day when I got a lot to do and he said I need a favor. I've got three little errands to run and would you mind picking me up and taking me around? Of course I said yes, but I'm a little bit agitated. I'm busy. And he had a reading important errand. He had this little card from Radio Shack. And if you went by on this particular day you got a free diesel battery.

And he had three of those. One for the Aurora Mall and one for Cinderella City. It's really important to him. We head out and we're visiting along the way. It didn't take long. The spirit said well dummy. You got two hours to visit with your dad here. And then the memory came back about how things go full circle. When I was young I remember one time my red rider BB gun broke. My dad's trying hard to support this family and keep the bills up.

And it was important to me that I have it fixed now. And he stopped what he was doing and drove me down to a friend of his who did that kind of stuff and repaired my BB gun. So we get full circle out of this thing. My family it's proper to one up each other. That's what Brian and I've been doing you know. Let's see who can say the nicest thing about the other guy. In such a way that everybody here knows it's just bullshit.

So I got him one day. My dad was not a demonstrative man. You've made a hugger and a toucher out of me and my mom is too. But dad wasn't. He had this little office that he had built. It was very narrow and with glass and a face to the south because he liked to get back in there and tinker. He was an inventor and just a brilliant man. So here's this narrow little thing with his desk at the end and he's down there and I'm behind him.

And you can't get past me. I said pop there's something else I got to tell you. I have three heroes left on this planet and you're one of them. I got him. We had a little cry. Hugged on one another and then went our manly way. But later in the week I was over visiting and as I left I hugged my mom goodbye. And he looked up and he said just suppose I could have one of those. That comes from years before being willing to say whatever I have to do.

When dad died it was truly a wonderful thing. It was his time. He had waited for their wedding anniversary. They celebrated that on a Saturday of 66 years together. And on Tuesday he went into a coma and on Thursday we convinced him he's trying to get out and take the tubes off and he left us. And I know for a fact he wanted to go months before that because he and I talked about it. He had dry gangrene in one leg and his memory was going and his stomach was ready.

But he stayed for the party. He knew how important it was to my mom. But when he died I had an experience I knew I would have and I actually had it. I've not grieved yet because there's nothing to grieve for. Everything that he and I had to do was done. Everything he and I had to say to each other had been said. It was a completed deal. And it opened a new door for me because I wasn't concerned about it during his dying.

And sometimes you will have to face not people who have died but people who are dying. And you need to be very, very kind and help them. Don't make them stay if they want out. Help them. Tell them it's okay. We're going to be fine. You can go now or hold their hand while they come to whatever they have to come to. Anyway, what happened for Mom and I both is that we became available to the grandchildren and the nieces and the nephews and the youngsters who didn't know what's going on here.

They're only a response to Grandpa. He'd always been a vital, exciting, magic man. And now here's this old man and he's dying. And we were able to say to him, you know, if you have something to say to him, he can't talk back to you. But he can hear you. Go get it said, whatever you need to say to him, go get it said. See, I don't want anybody to ever regret my death. The only way I can guarantee you don't regret my death is that you don't regret my living.

Whatever I leave you with is it. When we go home in a few minutes, I promise you you've had all of me. There's nothing left. Get it now because I'll never be by this way again. The next time we get together, I'm not going to be the same person in either of you. So let's get it done. That was a great experience. I don't have to go to my dad's grave with a letter. It's overdone with. In the spiritual realm, things happen precisely on time as they're supposed to happen and no sooner.

You get what you need when you need it, no more, no sooner. And I was about three years sober, still on federal parole. And some of my memories began to come back. That'll happen. And one of the memories I had is that the December prior to my arrest, in Cheyenne, Wyoming, on the run with the kids, I had written a bad prescription for a hundred methadrin tablets because we're getting ready to travel. When you travel, you've got to

stay awake for days sometimes.

And I'd paid for it with a check that I'd made up too. And I'm aware I have two felonies that I've committed and have not been dealt with. And I don't have any choice. I've got to do something about it. My spiritual life really means more to me than anything else. And if I go to prison, okay. But it's suggested in here that where other people are going to be involved, that they'd be consulted. Now, the only one who's really going to be involved or affected is what it says by my confessing to two felonies and doing seven years in Wyoming and St. Penitentiary was my federal parole officer.

So I got together with my sponsor and we went down to saying, now I'm a little nervous. What's going on on the surface is that I'm on federal parole and I'm about to go confess to a federal officer two felonies. A little nervous. But I needed his permission to believe the state to rectify this, and he needed to know what was going on. We talked about it. This is the same one that put me in and also let me out. He said, you're right.

You have to do something about that. I will not violate you if they arrest you. And you have my permission to believe the state to take care of this. And on the way home, Gary said, we know it also says here that we're not supposed to be the foolish martyr and just throw ourselves in. He says, you've got a job now. They're starting to let you see your kids. Beginning to build a life, it would be kind of foolish just to dash in there like that.

He said, I came from Cheyenne. I know that guy at the Rexall drug store and he's a decent man. Let's do this. Let's write him a letter and just lay the whole thing out and ask him what he would like you to do about it. How would he like it handled? Well, that's consistent with what I know. But I'm a little nervous. Now I've got to confess two felonies on paper, sign it, put my return address on it, and send it off. There's no choice.

You just do it. And I don't have a real hydraulic ending for you. I'm sorry. The letter came back. The man had died and the place had closed down. So there's nothing I could do about it. But within a day or two, it had occurred to me, don't I owe Wyoming something. So I went back to my parole officer. He said, oh, don't do that. Here's what's going to happen. You're going to go up to Wyoming and confess to two felonies they cannot prove because the paperwork's all gone.

And you're going to have to deal with confused police officers. And I don't want you dealing with confused police officers, ever. You just do what you're doing now. And he knew about the spirit. This is somewhere on the way you get this taken care of. Well, it was about four years ago, just prior to my retirement. I was doing alcohol and drug treatment programs and community corrections in Denver. And they sent me to Cheyenne to establish an alcohol and drug treatment program in the center up there, the correctional facility.

Went up, got it all done, got it up and running, came back to Denver. And about six weeks later, realized it's done. I'm clean. God knows that had I gone up there knowing that's what would do it. I would have screwed the whole thing up. But generally, I don't get the information about it for at least six weeks so that I don't get to take any credit at all. But I'm done. I'm clean. To the best of my knowledge, I'm clean today.

If this is the last day, I go knowing I don't know anybody anything. I also know that there's some things I've forgotten or done that I'm too stupid to have seen. And I'm willing if those come up to clean them up. But I'm clean. Hold a nice way to enter the day, clean. There's no guilt, there's no shame. There's hardly any energy some

days either. But I'm clean. I can look you right in the eye. I can tell you I love you and you matter to me because you do.

And if you drink again, it won't hurt me a bit. If you don't drink again, it will throw me beyond anything I can tell you. Because I will again see a demonstration of the power of God. Because you and I even together can't do this deal. So I'm going to come back here next year and I fully intend to see you running this damn thing. Well, don't laugh because Jim was in that spot five years ago stark raving mad. I picked on him just like I have you all weekend.

Just anything to keep him in that chair. Because he was ready to go burn the building down or whatever. Yeah. He's running this deal this weekend. I think he's done a great job, don't you? Do you know who really did a good job? Brian. And do you know why? He got the hell out of the way and let Jim do it. Brian and I have had a little fun this weekend. Boys run into a funny thing. Sometimes the things we feel for each other are so intense and so deep.

We can't really express them straight across. So we play mind games with each other. We make fun of the truth. He's a kind man. He really is, but we'll make a little thing. He and I have done that because the way I feel Brian is so intense and so deep. He's also a man of great perception and integrity. And I can say that because he understands that I am wise and kind. One last thing. There's a delicious little book I'm going to recommend to you.

If you're not caught up in only reading a literature, it's called the holy man. I think it's Susan Trotter. See the Susan Trotter Susan shot. It's just called the holy man. It's a little book. It came out of her meditations. It's the story of the holy man at the top of a mountain. And in the summer when the snow is grow, there's a line goes from the bottom of the mountain to clear up to the monastery waiting to get in and see the holy man.

And when you get to the door, this little guy named Joe comes to the door and asks you what would you want? What can I do for you? And then you say, well, I'd like to see the holy man. He will come on in. And he walks with you through the monastery and the next thing you know, you're out the back door. And you say, but I wanted to see the holy man. He says, you just did. If you will say, I would like to talk to the holy man.

He'll sit down and visit with you for a while. And his message is always the same and it's very simple. Now the book is about the story of the line, not about the holy man. That's what I'm recommending you read. It's the story of the line and what happens in the line. But Joe's message is the message. If you will treat everyone as if they were a holy person, your life will be fine. Namaste.