

Big Book Weekend, location undetermined

2003 | Steps 5-7 | Reading edition

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Transcript

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I'd like to wrap up a couple things before we actually, well, it's all storytelling time. Having been thoroughly rejected by my sponsor with that first funny little inventory, that's garbage, get away from me, you wrote it to impress me. When I finally did get it done right, I'm taking no chances I did not go back to him. I began to read the directions and in the Big Book we're told precisely what the person's going to look like.

We should take a first step with. It's clear we must be entirely honest with somebody if we're going to survive. So here's some of the basic principles. They were talking about parts of the story that might make parents or spouses unhappy, but there's a principle here. It says such parts of our story we tell to someone who will understand yet be unaffected. Well, the principle of someone who would understand but be unaffected is what caused me to pick my cellmate, Jim.

He'd been in the program the same length of time I had. He's the one who was doing three to five for vehicular homicide. He was the first one ever convicted of Colorado vehicular homicide in a blackout driving car. He'd killed some people. And I knew why I was in the penitentiary. I could remember what I had done. Jim couldn't. He was not criminal in the same way. He had no idea why he was there. He'd had no memory of why he was there. And I wanted things to be better for him. And I don't know how I knew it, but I knew that it was somehow talking about the garbage of my life would make his life better. And he was also as crazy as I was and would be totally unaffected by anything I had to say. So that helped me pick him. Let me look just quickly read to you the description of the person because if I sponsor you it is not as soon you will fist up with me. Because my own experience says if you assume that you will write some of that inventory to impress me. So we're not going to assume that to begin.

It usually works out that way. And when it comes time to the fist up, if you do pick me, we read this to make real sure. It talks about the possibility of postponing the fist up if you're in a position where there's nobody available like the North Pole or other than that, get with it. It's important to be able to keep a confidence and be fully understanding and approval of what we're driving at. We will not try to change our plan. That's what that person is going to look like. A lot of variations on this theme. I don't know if any of you remember Jack Brennan, but he was a strong Irish Catholic out of New York, bad at it. Got fired from being a driver for the New York mob for God's sake. Best driver they had, but in the morning he'd call and say what we do last night fellas and just made them off. In talking with Jack one time, because we used to just, when they, people like that came by, we cut them out of the pack and got them in a room and picked their brains. And in chatting with him one time he said that he did not take his fist up with a priest because he knew the priest was not able to pass that on. And he needed to learn some trust. He had to take a risk and take it with somebody whether it was a risk in order for him to get a trust factor. Not a bad thought. It suggests in here if you believe in that, in confession, then you must do that. And so there, again, we want to throw the rules out. These are principles and here are the guides to what this person is going to look like. And spending that afternoon with Jim going over that real inventory was interesting because the other guy kept saying it wasn't that bad. Jim just sat quietly and listened. And every now and then he'd make a little comment that would provoke another thought because there were things that got left

out or I need a little more expansion. But essentially he just listened. And I left that experience with an experience.

I had a brand new feeling. I had finally finished something. I'm now a long distance runner in the game of life and not a sprinter. I had done it. It was finished all the way to the end. And in making my review, I realized I've only just scratched the surface. This is really a shabby little inventory. And while I've done the best I had, there's much more to do. And so when I said the seventh step prayer, I added to it, God, please don't let the stuff I haven't found yet kill me before I get to it. And I'm still here and I found some more last week, petty crap. I mean, the big bad stuff is easy to deal with.

That's prestigious. This is petty crap. Oh, God. And we follow directions in my country and when you're all through with this thing, go home. We're not going to sit around and talk about remedial actions. You go home and you're supposed to spend an hour reviewing what you've done just to make sure it's done so you can understand. No, it's not. But it's as done as it's going to get. And it's suggesting here that taking the book down from the shelf.

Well, the guys that work with tend to carry their books. Well, I make them go home and put it back on the shelf and take it down. I know it sounds silly, but there's something in compliance that whether I understand it or not, when the spirit moves, I'm to move with it. And sometimes it really looks silly. So go home. Take the book down from the shelf, even if you have to put it back on there and review it and ask yourself, is this really thorough? Is there something I've left out of? I skipped. I think that the real hinge, the turning point into the total spiritual life comes in one word in the sixth step for me. We've emphasized willingness is being indispensable. That's because willingness is the power of God. So you got to have it. It's powerful enough that once I'm willing, it's already happened. Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things we have admitted or objectionable? And that's the word. You cannot change me by threatening me or punishing me. All you can do is change my behavior as long as you're watching. You can't cause me to change by promising me great rewards. Stop doing that. We'll give you a car. Hell, I stopped two days ago. I understand. Thank you for the car. But don't turn your head.

I haven't changed. The only time I ever change is when I object to being who I am. Surrender has a sound. I can't do this anymore. Period. What can I do different? Doesn't even show up. I just can't do this anymore. I can't be this anymore. I object to this. And so in this review, I'm supposed to look at that. And it was easy for me because I had already come to death. I objected so much I killed it. I truly object to being the kind of person who was, can't live that way. But until that happens and Bill understood, I say Bill because he authored it, our founders understood that this is a turning point. In one of the other books, I think it was the 12 and 12, he talks about this being the step that separates the men from the boys. This is the departure point. And if I'm not willing to let go of something, I'm covered. If we're still cling to something, we will not let go. We ask God to help us be willing. And I think that's the funniest thing I've ever read. Because the very minute I ask God to be willing, I've become willing or I wouldn't be asking. Reminds me just how goofy our heads are. It's over if you've done that. You're trapped here. It's too late. It may take two or three days to understand that you're willing. It's like all eight coming back with that. Precise ways in which he was needed to make amends to this person and unwilling to do so. Well, bullshit. He's wanting enough to learn to write down exactly how to go about it. He just needed to be told well and go home because there's nothing going to happen until you do this and then you did it. He was

already willing. But that's a key point there. Then as with all spiritual activity, there's the closing prayer, which is the opening prayer with teeth in it. Our seventh step prayer is very simple. I'm ready now, my creator, that you can have all of me, good and bad. I'm no longer in the judging dozens of what's good and bad. I really don't know. Take it all. Use whatever you can. Sometimes it's my weakness that helps somebody find strength. Sometimes it's my goofiness that helps people get on goofy. It's my mistakes that people learn from. You don't even understand that most of my good stuff. You have to write it down so you can go home and think about it. The whole time I talk about my jerky stuff, y'all are just not good. I pray that you now remove from me every single defective character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you.

My whole life now is no longer my business. The conduct of my life is my business, but my life is not my business. And I do not work on my character defects. What a futile exercise that is because anything I work at, I get good at. God's going to remove this. And one of the apparent natural laws is that God abhors a vacuum. If I will empty out, it will be filled. It's just the natural law. And what it will be filled with is me and the spirit. And so let them remove it. And on the way out, some of them show up again glaringly on the way out. They have to have a shooting star effect as they go. But that's fine. Now the mistake I make in my life today really count for something. They're not petty anymore. They are really noticeable. So I'm very careful because they, I thought I had a low tolerance for pain. I don't have any tolerance at all for psychic pain. And I know instantly when I've done something stupid spiritually. So I'm very, very careful. And I didn't do that because of the nobility. I did it because I didn't pay attention several times and got my ass kicked. God doesn't kick it, but I do. Grant me strength as I go out from here to do your bidding. By this time, I know the right thing to do. I know who to be. We've got it all down here. What I'm aware of now is I just don't have the strength. I just a little kid. I don't have the strength. I have the willingness and willingness somehow gives me the strength. But I ask for strength because it reminds me that my strength comes from my weakness. If I think I have power, I will not ask for any more power. If I have, if I think I have the strength, I will not make myself available to real strength. And so I'll fail near the end of somewhere. I always did. The days I'm tired, I don't want to get out of bed. Just don't want to get out of bed. I don't know about you. But as long as I live, the easier it is to get into that state. And I'm now in a position where I don't have to get out of bed. That's a bit. I'm conditioned to get out of bed. But there's days I don't want to. I really, truly don't want to face this day. I'm tired. And that's when I use that prayer. I don't want to do this today. But because of what you've done for me, I'll go do this one for you. But I learned that one day when I had gotten very busy again. I'm an active A member who sometimes gets busy too. And I was pooped. And I said to God in the morning, very clearly, I'm taking the day off. Okay. Just understand that. And the phone rang. And for about three hours, the phone rang. I finally said, okay, all right, whatever you have in mind. And I got the rest of the day off. So get willful once in a while.

It's going to happen. And you pay the price. Sometimes it's even worse the price. Because it's a fun lesson. God doesn't teach me lessons. But I do. Kelly insists that I tell you this one little story. Because from here on, we are in a spiritual state of being. And all of life then becomes spiritual. You get messages. I get messages from wherever. One of my favorite messages got to me from he-haw. Oh, yeah. Profound spiritual message. They ushered that guy into that stupid doctor's office. Doctor says, what's wrong with you? And he said, Oh, doc, every time I do this, it hurts. So the doctor hit him in the head of the rubber chicken and said, well, then don't do that, dummy. That's profound. One of my guys got me a rubber chicken. It's right by my chair because the time of time that out it comes. My daughter insisted I tell you one of my real lessons. But when I married Jackie, she

had two little girls, one three and one five. And Kelly was three when we met. And she was running a Montessori school at the time. She's one of those children that is in charge. Her daughter is also in charge. Anyway, Kelly and I had some difficulties because I had moved in. She'd been running the house since her dad left, as well as the school. I guess she was about four when this happened. A couple of things. She called home one day and she says, can I talk to mom, please? And she was a little cold and resistant to me. I said, well, who's mom? Because I learned to think by watching Evan Castillo movies. She said, my mom. I said, well, who's this? She said, this is Kelly. I said, sorry, Kelly, didn't hear. And we've been friends ever since because she learned that I can play. She called right back and I had to talk to her mother. Now raising little girls is a different deal when raising little boys. I had raised two little boys. And when the boys get practice, the deal is send them out in the backyard. And the instructions are you don't get back in here until one of you is bleeding. It puts an end to it for a while. You can't do that with girls. Girls also, God bless you, have a main streak that I really don't understand. Sisters. God. I mean, I've been around the world seven times, climbed several of the highest mountains and been in some of the worst places in the world. I've never heard talk like those two little girls did each other some time. It just tore me up. And that's one particular morning, my meditations had gone well and I wasn't walking. I was kind of floating about a half inch off the floor through the house. Cool. And then we're getting ready to, they were fixing breakfast. And Lisa said to, can I? Yeah, if you can't have that bitch. And my feet hit the floor. I'm Kelly's response. And they're starting after each other. And they're about to get into calling her mama names. And I did a really stupid thing. I said, stop that. Now, I was not aware at the time in little girl talk. That means old dad wants in the game. And the volume went up. And I did another really stupid thing.

I said, knock that off. Because I wasn't cool anymore. And I didn't understand for little girls. That means we got him. And they went berserk. And I went berserk. Get to your rooms, I said. See that? And it's important in our house. Everybody has their own room and it has a door. The privacy is a very important thing for all human beings. And for those of us who have been confined in penitentiaries where there is no such thing, it's really critical. Get to your rooms. And they're running up the stairs giggling. Just went into rooms and slammed the doors. Well, that was it. I was up the stairs in a single bound. Screaming at the top of my lungs. If you're going to slam them, you're not going to have them. And I started taking the doors off of him. And they're laughing at me. Which gave me strength. And they went on to school and I took them damn doors down the basement. We're not going to have them.

And they were pretty light upstairs while I was pissed. But I got to the basement and I heard Bruce's voice. Well, dummy. Got to take these all the way back up out and heavy and rehang them. And then when those little girls get home, you have to apologize for being such a jerk. I hadn't even done it, he's saying. But I went to our little process here so I can find out why would their behavior threaten me so much that I would behave like that. And I found it. And a couple weeks later, after everything settled down, I had to sit them both down on the front stairs. And explain to them that, you know, I'd apologize already.

But I had to explain to them why it threw me. I said, Lisa, I love you so much that if anyone ever attacked you the way she did, I'd probably break their arm. And Kelly, I love you the same way. I would protect you from that kind of meanness. At the risk of my own life. But you've got me in the bind because I love each of you so much I can't do that. You got me caught in the middle. So I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't do that around me. And they loved me enough that they quit. They didn't quit entirely. They still, they're grown women with their

own families now and every notch in the wall, I still hear me. But they stopped doing it around me. And we began to communicate. So even the frailties that come up in God's hands work to the greater good. But I'll tell you, it's really something to go from half inch off the floor. That's been a minute. And be unable to stop it. And I got to tell you, the doors get heavier and heavier. So the solution for me was very simple. I get agitated now. I send myself to my room. It's just a whole lot easier. I don't think I can top that. I couldn't touch that with a 10 foot pole. Let me just say one thing. I know Kelly Lisa. We got to go to Lisa's wedding, what a year ago in September. Had a grand time. And I've seen the famous stairs. And I know where that famous basement is. And I have this mental image of this little pet guide. And so I've heard this story 20, 25 times. And I get engrossed in it every time. And I see the little fat guy at the bottom of the stairs.

And I can't help it. And then his torture to me is now do you want to play? Hell, I can't even get back in the game at this point. I have just been to the greatest movie I can possibly go to. Oh, I tell you. But the beauty of what we're talking about and laughing about here. I mean, it brings some real stuff for all of us, because most of us here have children. And and it really truly does. It gives us an opportunity. But but the but the tradition of storytelling and sharing with one another so that you all understand that we're very real. And you're very real. I I told you my wife, Gayle is is about really only she is only about five three. And she just a tiny little thing 107. Some of you have met her and you know, she just a sweetest thing. And one night all back, we had bought a house and down in Rhode Island back in 94 and about 96. She wanted to repaint the kitchen cabinets. And I said, that'd be a grand idea. Okay, do you want to just change now, Mike? Okay.