Paul Fisher – Tape 1 Transcript

Could you please help me open today's session with a moment of silent meditation? And please allow me to offer a prayer when I conclude that prayer I will be finishing it with the Serenity Prayer at which time feel free to join me.

**\*Silence\***

God, thank You for allowing us to come together and pray in this way and thank You for providing us a place that we can come together. We would like to thank You for those beautiful 12 steps in that book, and thank You for allowing each and every one of us for being sober during this day, and God, we thank You for that air that You give us to breathe, the food in our stomachs, the clothing on our backs and the shelter over our heads. We humbly ask for Your guidance, Your care, direction and wisdom as we walk through these 12 steps today. And God, please, set aside everything that we think we know, about ourselves, the book, sobriety, the steps and You God, and God, please, help each and every one of us to have an open mind today. So that we may have a new experience and discover the truth.

God grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

I'm Paul Fisher and I'm an alcoholic.

**\*Audience: Hello Paul\***

And I would like to welcome all of you to the Big Book Workshop, where in the next 4 weeks we will be taking the 12 steps as outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, in order to recover from alcoholism. We will be using the Big Book exclusively, I will not be using any other text during this workshop, I may make periodic reference to materials that were used to writing the Big Book. So we are going to be solely relying on the recipe outlined in this book. I will be sharing my experiences with you, with the 12 steps and I will also be sharing with you information that I've received from various AA archivists, and uhm..AA old timers during the time that I've been sober. My experience shows me that, if we follow the recipe in this book; you are guaranteed to be free from alcoholism, and basically what that means is that we are guaranteed to have the compulsion to drink, removed. And that's what's happened to me as a result of going through these steps.

In the early 40s, there *weren't* enough sponsors to go around. And what they did at that time was they put together these sessions, and they would bring people together and they would take them through these four, one hour or one and a half hour sessions and take them through the 12 steps. Now at that time they did *this* before they took them to their first meeting. Look back at what it was like when you went to your first meeting, remember all of the *Greek* that you were hearing in meetings. That's what I call it because it sounded like *Chinese*. I didn't understand what people were talking about and imagine what it would be like, having gone through all 12 steps already having done an inventory. Actively making your amends. Doing daily prayer *and* meditation, doing a daily evening review.

And you go to your first meeting and you fully understand what everybody's talking about. Now at that time, they had a 75% success rate in their meetings. Especially in the Cleveland and Akron area, my understanding is that it is nowhere near that today. The estimations that have been given range between 2 and 20%, depending on what State you go to. So basically what I'm going to be doing in the next 4 weeks is I'm simply going to be sharing with you how I was taken through the 12 steps and basically how they did the steps in the early 40s. And I was guaranteed that I would be free if I followed the recipe outlined in that book. I'm not going to stand here in the next 4 weeks and then…and challenge anybody, I'm not here to challenge you. I'm not here to tell you how you should be doing the steps, how you should be doing sobriety. I'm simply here to share with you my own experience and how the instructions are laid out in that book. That's the reason I use what's called the Set Aside Prayer at the beginning of these sessions. You will find this Set Aside Prayer in its *essence* in the Big Book you will not find it verbatim, but basically what the Set Aside Prayer does is, I…I'm asking *God* to set aside everything that I think I know.

So whether you are new or whether you've been around for a while, I can guarantee you two things: if you will approach these 12 steps with an open mind, you are guaranteed; to have a new experience and you will discover some truth about yourself. It's guaranteed that if you do that. It's very common to see people come into this workshop. People with double digit sobriety being sponsored by someone who's only been sober a couple of months, because what we're about to do in a few moments is I'm going to pair you off with someone who has already taken the steps in this way. So we're being asked to have an open mind, so it does not matter how long you've been sober, if you have not done the steps in this manner, I encourage you to have an open mind.

It never ceases to amaze me. How many people I'm approached by after these sessions. People with long term sobriety, who haven't had the experience that they experience in this workshop. It's not because what I'm doing is unique, it's simply because there is a recipe in this book and if we follow this recipe, we *will* experience what the authors (are) experience, providing we do what the authors are doing. This is not a guarantee I'm making up. It's in the book. The book guarantees it, so I'm encouraging you to have an open mind.

So the first thing we're going to do, we're going to pair everyone off but before we do, you have a handout entitled For The Newcomers And For The Sponsors, why don’t you go ahead and pull that out. The first section is entitled For The Newcomers. It says your primary obligation is to be here every week, If you do not have transportation your sponsor will help you make the necessary arrangements. We realise some of you are in no condition to read the Big Book at this time, therefore we will read the appropriate parts of the Big Book to you, for those of you have who have brought Big Books and are able to follow along, please do so. We will announce each passage by page number and paragraph before we read it. If you are unable to read the book, please participate by listening. Keep in mind that if you do what we ask you to do, which is to take the steps as described in the Big Book, you *will* recover from alcoholism.

Although a written inventory is part of the 4th step, that doesn't mean you have to do the writing. The person who is sponsoring you through these sessions can either help you write your inventory or he or she can write it for you, the reason that is put in there is because at that time that they had these sessions in the…in the early 40s there are a lot of people who couldn't read and there were people who couldn't write. OK, for the sponsors; your time commitment to the newcomer is four to five weeks. After that, both you and the newcomer will be expected to sponsor other people through the sessions. During the next month, call or visit the newcomer frequently to see how he or she is doing and to offer encouragement and moral support. Make sure you *and* the newcomer attend all of the sessions together. Offer to help the newcomer with his or her 4th step, if necessary, write the inventory based on what the newcomer tells you, remember, the newcomer is still very sick and may not be able to complete the inventory without your assistance. Make yourself available to answer any questions the newcomer may have about the AA program. OK so, Let's go ahead and pair off everybody that is here to take the 12 steps, please stand.

OK now that we're paired off, let's get started. I don't know if you're aware of this, but the authors spend 43 pages on step 1. We have heard in our meetings that we read the first 164 pages, correct? There's a lot of good information in those pages. The instructions for taking the 12 steps are contained in the first 103. So out of 103 pages, 43 of those pages are devoted to step 1. That's almost half of the book. You add the 8 pages in The Doctor's Opinion, which is primarily step 1. That makes it 51 pages. The authors spend 19 pages on steps 2 and 3. They devote 20 pages to steps 4 through 9. That's 6 steps. And then they devote 19 pages to steps 10, 11,12. Step 12 has a whole chapter devoted to it. That's pretty interesting, isn't it? Why did the authors devote half of the book to step 1? My understanding, based on my own *experience*, is because *that* is the foundation of my sobriety.

It's like construction, when you build a house, the first thing we do is lay down a foundation. Now, if I take shortcuts or use faulty materials in that foundation, I'm going to continually have difficulty with the structure. I'm going to be constantly going back repairing the door jambs and windows and walls and…etcetera, etcetera, until I go back and establish that foundation.

I didn't know that, during the time that I was going to meetings. See, I'm a retread. I'm a relapser. I bounced in and out of these rooms for 12 years, and I went to a *lot* of meetings. And I couldn't stay sober. And I thought there was something wrong with *your* program. Now there were a couple of minor details that I overlooked that I didn't feel were that important, things like the 12 steps… getting a sponsor…reading the book…establishing a relationship with a Higher Power. See, I came in here with the attitude that I was smarter than everybody else in the room., and I could get more out of the…out of the program than you and do less. I was one of those people who showed up late and left early, and I had a lot of opinions. And you needed to hear every *one* of them. Basically what happened was, in that 12 year period I was going to meetings, giving opinions on experiences I never had. Never did a 4th step, but when the topic 4th step came…Yeah. Yeah, well, this is what I think about the 4th step. Prayer and meditation - Yeah, this is what I think about that. Yeah. Making those minutes. Yeah. This is what you need to do. And blah, blah, blah. I had no experience. I had no experience.

Thing I love about going through the steps is gaining new experience and hearing your experience. Because what that does for me, is that gives me hope. And I get a lot of hope in…in conducting this workshop. I received no money for this. I do this for a couple of reasons, number one to give back what was so freely given to me, and to watch others recover right in front of me, to watch the spiritual awakening happen, and there's no experience that can compare to that. It is truly beautiful, to watch the light bulb come on, watch the compulsion to drink leave.

You know, it's pretty easy to spot who's doing step work in our meetings. They're pretty easy to spot those people, because not everybody is here to take the 12 steps. So every time I go to a meeting, not everybody in that room is here to get free. But you can always spot those people who are doing step work on a regular basis. They typically show up with new teeth. Y’know. J***obs***. Hair cuts, y’know, talking about how wonderful things are changing in their lives. I remember the first time I went to a meeting. And I talked about… I got a job! We alcoholics make such a big deal out of everything. *Well you're supposed to have a job.* But it was such a *big deal* to me. “I paid my *phone bill!*” I remember being so excited about that and my sponsor went “Uh, huh? Yeah. What else?” I was like, “Don't you get it…? I paid my *bills!*!”

There was a time before, you know, before I got sober, I didn't have any bills. That's because I didn't have anything. You know, I heard people about losing cars and losing homes. I couldn't relate to that. I didn't *have* a car. I didn't *hav*e a home. People were telling me to sleep someplace else. So I couldn't relate to that stuff. But the point is, as a result of coming in here and following the recipe in this book, my life began to change, and you see that's what happened to me when I came back to these rooms in 1981. A sponsor found *me*. I didn't find him. And he came up to me and he only asked me one question. He said, “Do you have a sponsor?” and I said “No.” And he said, “Well you do now.” We sat down and we talked. And after finding out a little bit about my drinking. He knew what direction to take after having some more information about me. And basically what he did was he took me through these steps in less than six weeks. Now the first time I went through the steps, I was convinced that they *would not work*. You see, one of the biggest fears I had when I came back to this programme in 1981, was that it was not going to work for me. Because I saw it working for you, I could see it in your faces. I could see it in your smiles. I could hear it in your laughter and the love and the camaraderie and the companionship that you shared in meetings. So I was convinced that it was working for you, but I was utterly convinced it was not going to work for me. So that was one of my biggest fears.

And then something happened to me when I came back in 1981, I had an experience that had not occurred before. I became afraid of something I never feared before. And that thing that I became afraid of, was me. I became afraid of me for the first time in my life. I was afraid I was going to screw it up. I was going to mess up this thing. So he took me through these steps and he cut me loose. Of course, I went to meetings and I got a lot of flack from people. Said “You haven't been sober long enough.”, “You need to stay sober at least a year before you can sponsor someone.” Where does it say that in our book? It has been my experience that it…if it is not in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, it is not Alcoholics Anonymous.

Can you imagine what it would have been like, when Bill Wilson carried the message of hope to Doctor Bob and Doctor Bob said, “Uh, by the way, how long you been sober?”. We wouldn't be here. You know how long Doctor Bob was over when he carried the message to the first suffering alcoholic. Two days. He was sober, two days. Doctor Bob typically took people through the steps in two days.

See, they were dealing with people who came in with the desperation of a drowning man. See, I'm the real alcoholic that we're going to be talking about today. I'm not a hard drinker. I'm a real alcoholic, what that means is, I need to get through the steps very quickly. I need to get through them *now* because I need to get to that Power because I have no power to stay sober. And my sponsor, thankfully, understood that, so he took me through the steps *very quickly* and then cut me loose and said “OK, now go out and start taking other people through the steps.” I was so afraid I was afraid I was going to kill someone. He said “You have experience.” “With what?” “On how to take the 12 steps. You've had a spiritual awakening.”

 The compulsion to drink was removed for me and for those of you that are new that are going through the steps and you keep wondering when the spiritual experience or spiritual awakening is going to happen for you, just stop and ask yourself this. Do you have a compulsion to drink? Or in your case use? That is the spiritual experience. And that's what happened to me. So that's what we're going to do. Today we're going to be covering step 1. In the second session, we're going to be covering steps 2, 3 and 4. In the third session, we'll be covering steps 5 through 9, and in the fourth session we will be covering steps 10, 11, 12. You will be doing an inventory with the person you've been paired off with, you will not be presenting your inventory *in here*. So, relax. You don't have to share it with all of us. Just some of us.

You know it's important as we as we do this work, you know, not to take ourselves seriously and that's what doing the steps’ve done for me. In addition to removing the compulsion to drink, i…i…i..it's taught me to lighten up, not take myself so seriously and there's one really important reason why we must not take ourselves seriously. And that is, because we are the joke. It says, we are the punchline OK. Alright.

OK, let's get started. You have a handout entitled ‘Questions on Beliefs in AA’. Go ahead and pull that out. Going over this, this is where arrogance shows itself. There are people in this workshop who have done this workshop before and they think they know the answer to these questions, what they don't know is that, we have a whole new set of questions. Because I'm looking around the crowd here and I see a lot of you who don't have the handout in your hand who have done this workshop before. “Oh, I know the answer to those questions. I don't need that”. Aren't we funny?

OK, what we're going to do is we're going to answer these, true or false, at the beginning of the workshop and at the end of the workshop. The purpose of this is to give you an opportunity to examine what you believe to be true. These are common things that I've heard in meetings. Some of them may be true, some of them may be false. No need to answer out loud, just go ahead and write down on your paper, you know, true or false. I'll go over them quickly.

‘If we are planning to stop drinking, all we have to do is not drink one day at a time’. I've heard that lots of times. Maybe it's true, maybe it's not. ‘Once I take the steps, I *will* have a partnership with my Higher Power.’ ‘Once I fully understand God, I *will* be free from my alcoholism.’ True or false? ‘The Big Book is the only book I need to read.’ I heard that lots of times, I wonder if it's true. ‘It is not necessary to do step 4 more than once’. Heard that one a whole lot, maybe it's true.’ We can win the confidence of another alcoholic by relating to their experiences.’ ‘Our purpose in sobriety is to get back into the mainstream of life’. ‘There are many different ways you can work this program’. Heard that one lots of times, maybe that's true. ‘Our sobriety is our greatest possession.’ ‘The authors of the Big Book encourage us to drink.’ That can't be true! This is *AA*. ‘Our main focus needs to be on the alcoholic, not on their family.’ ‘It takes a long time to recover from alcoholism.’ I've heard that one my entire sobriety, that one must be true. ‘The steps are not required, they are suggested.’’ ‘Going to meetings and not drinking is *vita*l to our recovery.’ ‘Our common suffering is what holds us together.’

OK, let's see, who wants to be free from alcoholism? Is there anybody here that wants that? Yeh? OK, we're going to start by turning to the table of contents and try finding a chapter entitled ‘The 12 promises’. The 12 promises, did you find that chapter? Are you having difficulty finding it? If you're having difficulty finding it, it's because it's not in there. I go to meetings and I see those 12 promises up on the wall and those statements give me a lot of hope. D…Do they give you hope? Yeah, me too. You know, I'm going to be able to handle situations which used to baffle me and so on and so forth. So, a promise is basically any statement that gives you hope, because that's what those statements are, they're statements of hope. Turn to the cover page of the book. The cover page where the very first thing on it, is Alcoholics Anonymous. This is what it looks like. Notice what the authors say on this page, Alcoholics Anonymous: The story of how many thousands of men and women have recovered from alcoholism.’ Does that give you hope? That gives me hope too. What I learned as a result of my sponsor taking me through this list of instructions in this book is I discovered that all the steps have promises, with the exception of step 1. The promises are not located on page 83 and 84. Those are called the 9 [th] step promises, and we'll be talking about those in the third session. So anytime you go through the book and you find a statement that gives you hope, that's a promise.

OK. We're going to go to The Doctor's Opinion. And we're going to go to the bottom of Roman numeral 25, which is xxv. If we have a 4th Edition Big Book it will be Roman numeral 27,which will be xxvii. If it's a 3rdEdition Big Book, it will be inRoman numeral 25,which is xxv. So we're on page *Roman numeral 25,* last line of the page. In here, Doctor Silkworth says, *‘…of course, an alcoholic ought to be freed from his physical craving for liquor.’* Physical… So you see, craving is not *mental* it is *physical*. What happens between my ears is called mental obsession. I find it interesting that the Big Book authors have done an excellent job of segmenting the physical aspect of my alcoholism and the mental aspect, which is mental obsession, in other words, they spend pages 1 to 23 on the physical condition of alcoholism and page 23 to 43 on mental obsession.

Now if you jump over here to Roman numeral 27 [xxvii], which would be Roman numeral 29 [xxiv] in the 4th edition. Third line from the bottom of the page*,* so I'm on Roman numeral xxvii Doctor Silkworth says *‘… they took a drink a day or so prior to the date.’*  Now notice what he's saying, he's not saying the person had a craving and drank. He said, they took a drink ‘...*and then the phenomena of craving at once became paramount to all other interests.’*

 So, in other words, in these two short lines, Doctor Silkworth is letting us know what craving is. It's physical, it's not mental. It's impossible for me to experience craving unless I put alcohol in my body. So, let's go back to the page we were on before, which is Roman numeral 26, xxvi. 4th edition would be 28 [xxviii] paragraph one. He says, *‘We believe in those that suggested a few years ago that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy,’* Well, I need to know what an allergy is. He's saying that the alcoholic has an abnormal reaction to alcohol. That's what allergy means. I looked it up in the dictionary, it means abnormal reaction.

So, what I'm going to be doing in the next 4 weeks in these sessions is I'm not going to assume that you are an alcoholic. That would be arrogant of me to do so. I'm going to give you the dignity of discovering *the* truth about your own experience. Notice I didn't say I'm going to give you the dignity of discovering *your* truth. Because if your truth is anything like mine, it's pretty distorted. So that's what we're going to do, we're going to be given the dignity of discovering the truth about our drinking experiences. Let's find out first if we are an alcoholic. Let me explain to you why it's essential that we do that. You see, if I'm clear about *my* experience with drinking, then I can transmit that. Then I can help another person gain clarity with their experience with their drinking.

Now let's assume that I haven't been given the opportunity of being taken through the book in this manner. And my sponsor just *assumes* that I'm an alcoholic. He's probably going to assume that because he wasn't given the clarity either, so you can't blame the sponsor. That's why it's absolutely essential that I be clear about my own experience, because I can't help you gain clarity if I don't have clarity about my own experience. So I found it essential for me to find out ‘what is the craving?’ This is what my sponsor taught me as a result of going through this book. OK. So let's look at, *‘having a manifestation of an allergy.’*  That's an abnormal reaction.

So what he taught me to do was to take the statements in the book and turn them into questions. So I stop and ask myself the question. ‘Did I have an abnormal reaction to alcohol?’. Well, what's abnormal? Have you ever noticed how orgasmic alcoholics are when they find their car? “I found my car!!” It was such an orgasmic experience where I was constantly losing my car. And then the following day, I would *drink* again. That does not sound like a normal reaction, most people who would lose their car, it would scare the daylights out of them and they would say, “Oh my goodness, I can't do that again. I gotta stop drinking.” I was regularly running my car into parked cars and I would get out and say “Who parked that car there?” And then drink again, that's an abnormal reaction. Or, my mother was having a gathering at her house and I *swore* I wouldn't drink, I ***swore*** I wouldn't, and I meant it at the time. “I swear I'm not going to drink. I swear I…I'll be a good boy. I'm not going to cause any trouble. No, the police are not going to be coming to the house *again.*” And I would get there and I would drink again. And what would I do the following day? I would drink again. That's an abnormal reaction. So stop and ask yourself ‘Did you have an abnormal reaction to alcohol?’ Then he goes on to say that *‘…the phenomena of craving is limited to this class.’*  What class? The person who has an abnormal reaction to alcohol. *‘….and never occurs in the average temperate drinker.’*

So what's a craving? It's a longing for. I remember the first time I was asked, “Did you experience craving for alcohol when you drank alcohol?” “No, I just wanted more.” Well, that's exactly what a craving is. I would put alcohol in my body, and I would want more alcohol. Now, through the years I've sponsored guys who would respond to that question in this manner. “Did you have a craving when you drank alcohol?” “Oh sure, I would drink and then I craved cocaine.” See I need to be real clear about something this book was written for alcohol. It was not written for other drugs. Now, if it applies to your situation, then that's wonderful, but keep in mind that it was written for alcohol. So when Doctor Silkworth is talking about the phenomena of a craving occurring after we put alcohol in our body, he's talking about alcohol. It has been my experience that that is the case with cocaine. That is not the case with heroin, it's the exact opposite. Having used a lot of heroin when I was drinking. The drug would wear off, I would get sick, I would use more heroin and the craving would go away. I would put alcohol in my body, I wanted more alcohol.

So once again, turn that into a question. ‘Did you crave *alcohol* when you put alcohol in your body?’ And what's really important in this statement, he says *‘and never (never means not one time) occurs in the average temperate drinker.’*  In *one sentence*, Doctor Silkworth tells me *how* to determine if I'm an alcoholic. It has nothing to do with the drama of my drinking. It has nothing to do with: how many cars I wrecked, how many times I was married, how many divorces I had, how many times I filed bankruptcy. It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with what was my inner experience? You see, when Bill Wilson carried the message of hope to Doctor Bob, that's what he talked about. He didn't talk about the drama of his drinking. You know what he talked about? He talked about his *inner* experience. He talked about the phenomenon of craving, putting alcohol in his body and wanting more.

Being in a situation where he had just dried up, because they didn't have treatment centres at that…at that time they had drying out hospitals where he would go in and detox, and he would get out and he was so glad that he was sober, but the thing he wanted more than anything else was *another* drink. He talked about the remorse, the guilt, the shame, the regret, the hopelessness. Being full of fear, full of anxiety, not having any purpose or meaning for life, the futility of his existence. That's what he talked about.

So you see, discovering whether or not I'm an alcoholic has nothing to do with the drama. As a matter of fact, I recall going to meetings in that 12 year period and hearing a lot of drama in meetings and not being able to relate. So let's say I'm brand new. I'm sitting in the back of the room, and this guy's going on and on about all the drama. He talks about being in prison. He talks about having three divorces. He wrecked six cars and filed…filed bankruptcy. So I'm a newcomer back there and this is what I'm hearing. Let's see. I've never been to prison. I've never been married. I've never wrecked a car. I've never filed bankruptcy. Maybe I'm really not an alcoholic. And he walks out the door and we've just lost him.

I find that drama creates a lot of distance. It does not create relatedness. That's the stuff we talk about over coffee, to amuse each other. But that's not what I do in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm there to carry a vision of hope and to share my inner experience. So keep that in mind as you're going through these steps. So, let's turn that into a question, ‘Did you experience a craving for alcohol when you put alcohol in your body?’ Now notice he says *‘...and never occurs in the average temperate drinker.* So let's say out of ten times that I drink I do not experience craving eight times. Am I an alcoholic? According to Doctor Silkworth, I am. You know why? Because he said it *never*… he doesn't say rarely, he doesn't say seldom, he says *never* occurs in the average temperate drinker. You see, what separates me from the non alcoholic, has nothing to do with how many times I've been to jail. Has nothing to do with that, it has to do with one thing and only one thing. It's called the phenomenon of craving. I've had the opportunity of going out for.. business dinners with colleagues who drink. And sitting there and watching them drink and they'll have one or two by the time they get the second drink, they push it away and they say something like.. “I better stop. I'm starting to feel it.” Well, let's go then. Come on, let's get it on!!! I cannot relate to that. I've been asked that question multiple times through the years by my colleagues, they say, “Oh but I don't understand it. What separates you from me?” I don't have to go into this big old diatribe about, you know what I experienced in the 12 years and so on and so forth and I found a sponsor who had big books of variety and blah, blah, blah, blah. I don’t have to go into that. I tell him, “Phenomenon of craving.” “What do you mean?” “I put alcohol in my body, I crave more alcohol and I can't stop.” That's how I know that I'm an alcoholic.

OK, the bottom of that page, second line from the bottom. Same page, second line from the bottom were Doctor Silkworth states *‘… they are restless, irritable and discontented unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks, drinks which they see others taking with impunity.’* Sounds like he's talking about drinking, doesn't it? Yes and no. Now check this out. They are restless, irritable, discontented. Unless what? Unless I can *again* experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks. In other words, I was irritable, restless and discontented unless I could have that experience again. What's ironic about that is I had that same identical experience in sobriety. Check it out ‘[I] am restless, irritable and discontented unless [I] can again’, I'm reading it in the first person, ‘Unless [I] can again experience the sense of ease and comfort, which comes at once by taking a few drinks.’

 In other words, I have to find something *in* sobriety, to give me the same sense of ease and comfort that alcohol gave me, and if I do not, I'm going to end up restless, irritable and discontented. You see, that's what's happened for me as a result of going through these steps. They give me the same sense of ease and comfort. I was one of those people that I would get me a *stash* because I was so afraid I was going to run out. And it didn't matter that they just turned off the electricity. It didn't matter that she just said “Go away”. It didn't matter that they just said “We don't want you around.” I would get that booze, I would get that stash and I could sit back and go “Ahh. Sigh of relief. Everything's going to be OK”. Now, I have that same identical experience in sobriety, so see, it doesn't matter what's going on around me. I know deep down in my heart of hearts, everything's going to be OK.

*‘After they succumb to the desire again…’* Here again he's telling us about craving. After I succumb to the desire, that means the desire is not a craving. That's what's happening with mental obsession I desire, I think about it. *‘...as so many do when the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful with a firm resolution not to drink again’.* And can't tell you how many times that happened. This is repeated over and over and unless this person can experience an *entire* psychic change, there's very little hope of his recovery. Do you know what psychic means? It means mind. There needs to be an *entire* change in the way*I think*. Now do I have the power to do that? If I was capable of doing that, what am I doing here with you? After 20 plus years of sobriety, how come I'm still going to meetings? If I could just pull up my boots by the straps and just say “I'm going to change my thinking…absolutely!” I would have already done it. So, let's turn this into a question. Are you willing to consider that unless you experience an entire psychic change, there is very little hope of your recovery? Are you willing to consider that? Now on that same page, go to the third paragraph, same page, third paragraph. Go down to line 3. Line 3. Paragraph 3. *‘One feels that something more than human power is needed to produce the essential psychic change.’* So here the authors are telling us the entire psychic change *must* occur or there's very little hope of my recovery *and* no human power can make that happen. Can your sponsor produce that psychic change in you? Can your wife, girlfriend, your children, your money, your car, your boat, your house, your *belief* in God, can that produce a psychic change for you? It tells me here *‘something more than human power.’*  Here I'm being told nothing human can make this happen. Are you willing to believe that?

OK, let's turn to Page 11. Page 11, paragraph 4. Before reading this paragraph, I would like to paint a picture for you. Bill Wilson is in his apartment. He's in his kitchen drinking gin. An old friend of his, Ebby T who later becomes his sponsor, comes to visit him. He shows up on his doorstep, sober, and he's got a gleam in his eye. And he looks *really* different. And Bill hasn't seen this guy sober in *years*, and he's curious, now keep in mind Bill Wilson is drinking gin he even offers Ebby a drink. And Ebby says “No, I've got religion.” But there's something uniquely different in Ebby, and he can't figure out what it is, so he's trying to consider, where did Ebby get the power to make *this* happen? And this is what he says, *‘Had this power originated in him?’* In other words, did it originate in Ebby? Then he realises, *‘Obviously it had not.’* So he realised… Now, keep in mind he's drinking. He realises that the power did not originate in Ebby. *‘There had been no more power in him than there was in me at that minute; and this was none at all.’* This is where Bill Wilson discovers he has ..**no power**.

That is the very essence of Step 1. In other words, the authors have spent half of the book on the instructions, forty-three pages to get across one point. No power. See, I thought Step 1 and I thought Alcoholics Anonymous was about not drinking. Now, don't get me wrong, it's helpful that you don't drink. But what I discovered is that AA is not about not drinking. Step 1 is not about not drinking. See if Step 1 was about not drinking, we could do away with all those words and it would say ***QUIT!*** or ***STOP!***

One thing I am clear about, with my alcoholism.  *I am going to drink, no matter what*. I am going to drink no matter what. Why? Because I have no power. If I had the power to keep me sober, it wouldn’t be necessary for me to be in Alcoholics Anonymous. But you see, the reason I came into these rooms was not because I wanted to stop drinking. Consider this for a moment, if you are a real alcoholic, why would you want to stop? I didn't. I wanted to stop suffering, but I did not want to stop drinking. Now, if you approached me, said “Paul, I can guarantee that you can drink all you want and there will be *no* consequences.” How many of you in here, would say “Let's go!” Look at all those hands, yeah.

So, maybe it's something we need to consider. Did I really come in here to stop drinking, or did I come in here to stop suffering? See I had this big hole inside of me and I kept trying to fill it up with booze, try to fill it up with women, money, jobs, etcetera, etcetera. And I just couldn't fill it up. I wanted to stop suffering, I wanted the pain to stop, I wanted the fear to go away. I wanted the paranoia to disappear. But I wasn't certain I wanted to stop drinking. See I wasn't convinced that I had no power. The authors have spent all those pages on that *one* point. We must be really *slow* for them to spend forty-three pages to drive home one little point -  ***No power. You have no.. power.*** *You are going to drink no matter what. Thank you..Thank you..Thank you..such a cup full of hope..I'm going to drink no matter what..Oh boy now I'm screwed..now what?*

See, this is what happened for me. I came into these rooms thinking; that was the problem. Thinking I made a decision. You ever heard people say that “Hey, I've made a decision.” Oh my God, the moment they say that man, we're in trouble. Anyway, I came into these rooms with this attitude: you were going to show me how not to drink one day at a time. You're going to share with me little techniques. Relapse prevention. Show me how to identify my triggers. Give me information.. That's it! Information, that's it, I need more information. That'll keep me sober. Right. I've been sober coming up on 21 years in a couple of months and I have been working in the field of addictions longer than I have been sober. Do the math. I knew..I had lots of information..I knew all about alcoholism and I knew all about the dynamics of denial, progression, the Jellinek chart. I could recite the Jellinek chart in my sleep. I could tell you where AA was. What you needed to do to stay sober. I had all the information, all the data, but I couldn't…see I had no power. I had no… no human power could keep me sober.

What the authors are saying in this paragraph on page 11, this is the very essence of Step 1, it's about *no power*. Do I have any power when it comes to the phenomenon of craving? Can I control it? Can I control the mental obsession that kicks in, you know, jumps into my head? Now, here's something to consider: if I have no power with mental obsession, if I have no power with the phenomenon of craving, how manageable is my life? It's probably going to be pretty unmanageable.

OK, let's turn to page 20. Page 20. Page 20, paragraph 5. *‘Moderate drinkers have little trouble in giving up liquor entirely if they have good reason for it. They can take it or leave it alone.’* Can you take or leave alcohol? If you can you're probably a modern drinker. I'll show you how delusional I was when I first came into these rooms. I used to say, “Well, you see what I practise is what's called excessive moderation.” “I really don't drink *that* much, just excessively.”

OK, next paragraph. *‘Then we have a certain type of hard drinker. He may have the habit badly enough to gradually impair him physically and mentally. It may cause him to die a few years before his time.’* In other words, it might even kill him*. ‘If a sufficiently strong reason - ill health, falling in love, change of environment, or the warning of a doctor - becomes operative, this man can also stop or moderate, although he may find it difficult and troublesome and may even need medical attention.’* So here's the hard drinker. They may need to be hospitalised, they may die before their time. It may cause them difficulty. Given sufficient reason they can stop or moderate. Was sufficient reason enough for you to stop or moderate?

I remember the woman I was married to when I got sober, she asked me to stop drinking. She said “You better stop drinking or I'm leaving.” I said “*Bye*.” I'm not going to give that up, uhum. I needed *that* more than air itself. And I wasn't gonna let *anybody* get in *my* way,. Get in the way of *my drinking*. So you see, stop and turn that into a question. Was sufficient reason *enough* to keep you sober?

Next paragraph, *‘But what about the real alcoholic?’* Now, before I go on, have you ever gone to meetings and you hear some guy stand up and say “Hi, my name is John and I'm a *real* alcoholic”. Do you ever hear that? In early sobriety I heard that, I thought “How arrogant, of course we're all alcoholics!” What I didn't *know* was he was talking about what we're about to read. *‘But what about the real alcoholic? He may start off as a moderate drinker; he may or may not become a continuous hard drinker;..’* I knew people that drank more than me. The difference? They're not alcoholic. Sufficient reason was enough for them to stop or moderate. *‘...but at some stage of his drinking career he begins to lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.*’ See, that's what separates me from the hard drinker. Once I start to drink, I lose all control. Sufficient reason isn't enough. I can't take it or leave it like the moderate drinker. So here, we have opportunity to further examine if I'm a real alcoholic. See if I'm clear about my drinking experience and I discover I'm a real alcoholic, I can help another person gain clarity about their experience, if I don't have that experience, I can't transmit that.

Maybe that's part of the reason we have such a low success rate in Alcoholics Anonymous today. I won't sit up here and pretend I know the reason, I don't know what the reason is. We're losing a lot of people. Maybe the message isn't being transmitted clearly. Maybe we're not giving that person the dignity. I can't tell you how many times…I sponsor guys who come right out of treatment, and I ask him “Are you an alcoholic?” “Sure.” “How do you know?” “They told me so.” I can't tell you the number of times in *this* workshop. In this workshop, I've seen members of Narcotics Anonymous come to this workshop, convinced they were not an alcoholic until they were given the dignity of discovering the truth of their experience and then come up to me after the workshop and go “My God, I'm an alcoholic.” “Wow, that's beautiful.”

And I've seen the opposite of that occur as well. I sponsor a guy like that. This person was in AA for almost 10 years. He went to treatment, he was a crack addict and the therapy staff told him “Go to AA and just tell ‘em you're an alcoholic.” “OK?” He wanted to be a good little student, wanted to be a good little AA-er and he went to meetings and every time he opened his mouth he said “Hi, I'm an alcoholic.” for almost 10 years. Couldn't relate. Couldn’t identify with our inner experience, and he used again and he tried really hard to fit in.

You see, every time he opened his mouth he was *lying*. His entire sobriety was based on a *lie*. He was not an alcoholic, and what I find is that a lot of AA members are threatened by that. ‘No, let's not be telling people they're not alcoholic. Let's not *let them* find out the truth about their experience.’ Now. I will share with you what that person is like today. Today he's sober two years, he's an active member of Cocaine Anonymous and he knows where he belongs. He is clear about the *truth* regarding his experience, and he's of great service to those people in CA. He's a free man. See, he was in the wrong fellowship. He is in the *wrong* fellowship, and he tried really hard for 10 years to make himself fit in and he couldn't fit in. Why? Because he didn't belong there. He knows that today. That's why it's imperative that we be clear about our own experience, OK?

Page 23. Page 23, paragraph one, page 23, paragraph one. Line 3. Earlier I stated that the authors segment the book, and from page 23 to 43 emphasised mental obsession and they immediately give us a clue that that's what they're going to do in line 3. *‘Therefore, the main problem with the alcoholic centres in his mind,’* That's my main problem is my thinking. My main problem is not alcohol. Alcohol is but a symptom. Did it cause problems? Of course it did. But my main problem is my thinking. Stop and ask yourself. Was your thinking distorted before you got sober? Can anybody in here say no? OK, now consider this. That's the very same mind you brought with you in here. Nothing has *changed*. That's the *same* mind. We don't remember that though, do we? We get sober and say, “Oh, my mind's different now. Now I'm going to meetings my mind's different.” No it isn't. It's the *same* mind. But you know what's really wild about that? That's the very same place we go for solutions. The very thing that has caused me more difficulty, more pain and more suffering. I'm talking about inside, right, forget about drinking, I'm talking about now. Has caused me more suffering, more pain, more humiliation than anything else, has been my own mind. It hasn't been what has happened to me, but rather my mind's interpretation of what's happening. You know the thing I love about my mind.? I'm just so self-amused, you know. I need no one to entertain me.

OK, let's go to page 24. Page 24, paragraph one, page 24, paragraph one*.* *‘The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink.’* Whoa. Turn that into a question. Have you lost the power to choose? This is where resistance comes up. How many times have you heard in meetings, “I choose to not drink today?” Really? Then what are you doing here? If I could just simply choose to not drink, I wouldn't need to come to AA. I wouldn't be here. I could just simply *choose* to not drink. “Yep, that's it, I'm just going to choose. I'm not going to drink today.” You see, if I have the power to do that, why didn't I exercise it before now? If you're having resistance to that, try to have an open mind. Try to set aside everything you think you know. See, I found that it is absolutely essential for me to remain a student in these rooms. When I stopped being a student, I stopped learning, and I stopped growing. It's guaranteed. Then the authors go on to say, *‘Our so-called willpower…’* it doesn't say our *willpower.* They have such a great sense of humour, don't they? *‘…Our so-called willpower becomes practically non-existent. We are unable, at certain times, to bring into our consciousness’* [That's my mind] *‘with sufficient force, the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago.’* In other words, remembering how bad it was will not keep me sober. This is sounding worse and worse, isn't it? I'm going to drink no matter what. I've got no power, I can't choose whether I'm going to drink, I can't even…even my memory of my suffering, it's not going to keep me sober. I'm an educated person, degree’d. I have all this knowledge and information. That's… geez, why even be here? Because it is absolutely an essential part of the surrender for me to acknowledge to my innermost self that I have no power and there's absolutely nothing I can do to keep me sober. Nothing. Because I'm going to drink, no matter what, and a little bit of information and memory of suffering is not going to keep me sober. That's what the authors are saying.

Check this out, *‘of even a week or a month ago’.* So, if that is ineffective when I'm sober one week or one month, what's it going to be like if I'm sober 20 years? My goodness, it's going to be *worse.* Because the memory has a tendency to fade. That's why it's important for me to continue to work with newcomers.

Then they say, *‘We are without defence against the first drink.’* Are you willing to consider that, that you are without defence? Once again here the authors are trying to drive home that central theme, that I have *no power.* I'm without any *defence.* I had it backwards, I thought you were going to teach me how to not drink. What I discovered was, it was…I had it completely backwards, what I needed to do was I needed to have what is called a 1st step experience. I needed to admit, to concede, that I have *no power* over…look how it's worded *‘We admitted we were powerless over alcohol’.* That means I have no power and as a result of making that admission, conceding to my innermost self, then I was in a position to find a Power greater than me.

So you see, once I have that surrender, now I have desire to *seek a Power*. Until I have that experience, I have no desire to seek that Power. Why? If I haven't surrendered and I haven't conceded, there's absolutely *nothing* I can do to keep me sober. *Why even seek a Power?* I don't need it. Bye! I'll see you later. I don't need you guys. I don't need to come here. I don't need to keep going through the 12 steps repeatedly. If I had power, which I don't.

OK, let's turn to page 34. Page 34, paragraph two, page 34, paragraph two. *‘For those who are unable to drink moderately the question is how to stop altogether. We are assuming of course, that the reader desires to stop. Whether such a person can quit upon a nonspiritual basis depends upon the extent to which he has already lost the power to choose whether he will drink or not.’*

Ask yourself that question. Can you stop on a *nonspiritual* basis? In other words, on your own power? Can you? Then you may be experiencing the same thing that I did and that the alcoholics in this book that are being described on these pages. So, if I can't quit upon a nonspiritual basis I probably lost the power to choose whether I *will* or *will no*t drink.

Consider this. You run into me at a meeting and you hear me saying “I choose to not drink today.” When I say that, who am I saying has the power to keep me sober? Me. Who am I saying deserves all the credit? Me. So if I'm saying that, why am I here? You want to find out if a person's taken the first step as outlined in the Big Book, you only need to ask one question. Only one. Can you choose to not drink today? Stop and ask yourself that question. Can you just simply choose? See the moment I begin thinking, that I can *choose* to not drink, I've *instantly* deluded myself. Because I've convinced myself *I have the power* and that I'm going to deserve all the credit.

Now back here on page 25. *Third paragraph,* page 25. Paragraph three *‘If you are as seriously alcoholic as we were, we believe there is no middle-of the road solution. We were in a position where life was becoming impossible, and if we had passed into the region from which there was no return through human aid, we had but two alternatives. One was to go on to the bitter end, blotting out the consciousness of our intolerable situation as best we could, and the other to accept spiritual help.’* So here the authors are telling me that there's only two alternatives, either keep drinking, keep living the way I am, or seek spiritual help. There's no middle of the road solution. There's a way that you can explore that within yourself. By asking yourself this question: What would happen to Alcoholics Anonymous if every single member was doing sobriety the way I'm doing it today? What would happen, if *everybody* was doing it the way *I'm* doing it? Is it middle of the road solution? Is that what you're seeking? Because if that's what you're seeking, that's what you'll receive.

Those of you that are unaware of it, we do have a food chain in Alcoholics Anonymous. At the bottom of the food chain is what we call peanut butter sobriety. I've experienced it. It's like…it's like eating peanut butter, you eat peanut butter it gets stuck to the roof of your mouth and your teeth, in other words, it's very easy to get stuck there. Peanut butter sobriety is when I'm just doing barely enough. I'm the guy who's just going to meetings. I'm not working with a sponsor. I'm not doing the steps. I don't do fellowship, if I do, I'm a wallflower, I'm back there in the corner. I'm not really getting involved.

Then you move a little further up the food chain and we have hamburger sobriety. It's a little better, not much. You move a little further and then you have *chicken* sobriety, that's a *little bit* better and then we get to the top of the food chain and then we have *filet mignon* sobriety. What do you want? Do you want peanut butter or do you want filet mignon? I want the *best of the best.* Why? Because I love my life today. I'm a free man. I don't suffer from the compulsion to drink, and *most* of the time I am free from my head. The thing that has caused me more suffering than anything else.

So, let's look at the unmanageability in our lives. What do you think…what is the most insane thing you've ever done? The most insane thing I have ever done, I've done in sobriety. *The* most insane thing, and I'll tell you what it was, it was direct result of my mind. I'm sober, I've already gone through the steps. I'm happy, joyous and free, man, I'm fat, dumb and happy, I'm having fun, and one day it crosses my mind - ‘I bet I could have a drink’. That's insane. *That* is *the* most insane thing I've ever done. Thinking, after having a spiritual awakening, after being free from the compulsion to drink and one day, my mind tells me - ‘I think I could have a drink today’. Does that sound *crazy*? Now if you doubt that, turn to page 52. Here's a great description of unmanageability. Page 52, paragraph 2. Page 52, paragraph 2, line 3. Let's turn these statements into questions.

*‘We were having trouble with personal relationships.*’ Are you having trouble with personal relationships? *‘we couldn't control our emotional natures,’* Can you control your feelings? *‘we were prey to misery and depression,’* Are you subject to that? *‘we couldn't make a living,’* This has nothing to do with making money, they said *make a living.* This is about *living*. This isn't about earning. You having trouble making a living? *‘we had a feeling of uselessness,’* Do you feel useless? *‘we are full of fear,’* Are you full of fear? *‘we were unhappy,’*  Are you unhappy? Does it seem that you couldn't be of real help to other people?

So you see mental obsession is not confined to sitting around saying, “I'm gunna drink, I'm gunna drink. I'm gunna...oh, I gotta have a drink. I gotta have a drink.” It has many different forms in the book. Switching. Only… waiting until 5 o’clock to drink. Putting whiskey in milk. Like that one story in there about that guy who puts whiskey and his milk he thinks he's got a full stomach now and he's coated his stomach with milk now he can drink. Here's another one. I've been sober a long time, my life is manageable now, I can drink now. That's called mental obsession. So, if I'm truly…if I truly have no power over a mental obsession, I truly have no power over the phenomenon of craving once I put the alcohol in my body, how can I possibly have a manageable life? So see basically, step 1 tells me this. I have no power and I need a new manager. That's basically what it's saying.

OK. Page 36. Page 36, two lines from the bottom of the page. Page 36 two lines from the bottom. *‘He had much knowledge about himself as an alcoholic. Yet all reasons for not drinking were easily pushed aside in favour of the foolish idea that he could take whiskey if only he mixed it with milk!’* Page 39. Page 39, paragraph one, line 5. *Page 39, paragraph one, line 5*. *‘But the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge.’* So stop and ask yourself, can I stop drinking on the basis of self knowledge? Maybe that's the key. Yeah, that's it, *Information, knowledge. I need knowledge.* After all, we are in an era of information. That's it, I need info! Input, input, give me more input, yeah. Now that's the ticket! Yeah, that'll keep me sober.

OK, now what we're going to do is we're going to find out who's an alcoholic. If you truly believe that you have no power, over mental obsession, over the phenomena of craving and that your life is unmanageable. Let's turn to page 30. Page 30, paragraph 2. Page 30, paragraph 2. *‘We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people or presently maybe has to be smashed.’*

You notice that the authors aren't saying that we have to fully concede to our sponsor, or the group. You will have an opportunity to examine that in a moment. In addition to that, this is what I would encourage *you* to do, this is the same thing my sponsor had me do. Go home, and sit with me, myself and my soul, and ask myself this question. Am I willing to concede to my innermost self that I have no power and that I need a new manager? Basically, if I say yes, this is what I'm saying, I'm saying, ‘yes, I had an abnormal reaction’. ‘Yes, I did experience the phenomenon of craving.’ ‘No sufficient reason was enough to keep me sober.’ ‘I lost all control once I started to drink and I have lost the power to choose whether I *will* or will not drink.’ So you see what's most important is conceding to *myself.* As long as I'm clinging to the idea that I have some power, some knowledge, some information, some *memory* that's going to keep me sober, there's no room for Step 2. Look what it says in Step 2, ‘Came to believe…’ in what? ‘A Power greater than myself.’

So you see if I'm still clinging to the idea inside of me I have some power, there's no room for that is there? And that has been my experience. That's what happened to me in that 12 years I was bouncing in and out of these rooms. I was never willing to concede to my innermost self that I have no power, I was convinced that I had the answer, that I was smarter than everyone else, that I could still choose to not drink. That self-knowledge was the key. I was convinced of it. My behaviour, my experiences illustrates that. If I truly believe that I don't have the power, what am I doing testing it?

I'm going to drink no matter what. See I'm faced with that every single morning that I wake up. “Well, gunna drink today. Today's the day I'm gunna drink.” Why? Because I'm going to drink no matter what. That's why, I've learned to resort to the spiritual principles, the spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, evening review, working with others, telling other people what's going on with me. So everybody that is here to take the steps, please stand. (general chatter from audience) We are going to consider the questions that I've just reviewed, and we'll go around the room one at a time, after you answer please be seated, and I'll begin. ‘Am I willing to concede to my innermost self that I'm an alcoholic?’ “Yes.” Congratulations!

**\*applause\***

My hope for you is that, you had a 1st step experience and what I mean by that is this. I was taking this guy through the steps and..we…we went through this, we spent a great deal of time, on these 43 pages and we got to the end and I said, “So, how's it feel knowing that there's absolutely nothing you can do to keep yourself sober?” and he says, “Oh, I feel pretty good.” I went, “*What!* We…we overlooked something here, OK? It's not supposed to feel good!” If you're feeling good, you probably did not have a 1st step experience. Consider it, if you are a real alcoholic, how promising does it sound that there's nothing you can do to keep you sober? Is that going to make me feel good? Of course not. I'm supposed to have that experience. *Now* I'm in a position to seek power. So, I'm not going to leave *you* hanging *there*. I'd like to give you a little bit of hope before you leave.

OK, let's turn to Page 46. Page 46, paragraph two, line 5. Page 46, paragraph two, line 5. This is part of the 2nd step this is what we have to look forward to. *‘As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, provided we took other simple steps.’* Check out the keyword ***new.***  It doesn't say sense of…you're not going to get sense of power. I'm going to receive ***new*** sense of power! ***New,*** that means unlike anything I've ever experienced before. *Wow, new* direction. Not direction, ***new*** direction. I'm going to receive *power* like I've never experienced it before and I'm going to have a direction to go, that I've never had before. Does that sound wonderful? How many people in here want that? Yeah, me too. That's what we have to look forward to. In preparation for next week, I would recommend that you read pages 44 to 71, to prepare us for steps 2, 3 and 4. So we’re… for…so this week, we're going to read pages 44 to 71 until we meet next week. I want to welcome all of you to the Fellowship of the Spirit. And those of you that are on your way to being *rocketed* into the 4th dimension congratulations for what you've done today and thank you.

**\*applause\***