

**Roundtable Series on A.A.'s Biblical Roots  
(November 2001)  
By Dick B.**

[Article 19c]

**Session 3**

**Akron A.A. Pioneers, their "Program," and their Good Book**

**Dr. Bob and the Good Book Answer**

In 1948, at his last major talk to AAs, Dr. Bob made these important statements about the Bible:

In the early days. . . our stories didn't amount to anything to speak of. When we started in on Bill D. [Bill Dotson was A.A. Number Three], we had no Twelve Steps either; we had no Traditions. But we were convinced that the answer to our problems was in the Good Book. . . . It wasn't until 1938 that the teachings and efforts and studies that had been going on were crystallized in the form of the Twelve Steps. I didn't write the Twelve Steps. I had nothing to do with the writing of them. . . . We already had the basic ideas, though not in terse and tangible form. We got them, as I said, as a result of our study of the Good Book (*The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous Biographical sketches Their last major talks*, pp. 13 - 14).

**The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Bible Emphasis**

A.A.'s Akron Genesis really began with Dr. Bob, his Christian church activities as a youngster, and his excellent Bible training as a youth in church and in Christian Endeavor.

Dr. Bob was born and raised in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. His parents were pillars of the North Congregational Church in St. Johnsbury. From childhood through high school, Bob each week attended the Congregational church, its Sunday School, evening service, Monday night Christian Endeavor, and sometimes its Wednesday evening prayer meeting. This was likely at the insistence of his mother. Yet, Bob continued membership in Christian churches most of his life: First, there was St. Johnsbury Congregational in his youth. Then, possibly St. Luke's Protestant Episcopal Church. Then, probably the Church of Our Saviour in Akron, where his kids attended Sunday School. Then, for sure, Akron's Westminster Presbyterian Church where Dr. Bob and Anne Smith were charter members from June 3, 1936 to April 3, 1942. Finally, a year before his death, Dr. Bob became a communicant at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Akron.

Dr. Bob told AAs he had nothing to do with writing the Twelve Steps. Nor did he have much to do with the writing of A.A.'s basic text, the "Big Book," other than to review the draft manuscripts as Bill Wilson passed them to Bob for approval prior to publication in the Spring of 1939. But Dr. Bob did make some very clear statements about the Bible and A.A. And it was in Akron where A.A.'s basic biblical ideas were honed, tried, and then later put into terse and tangible form at Bill Wilson's hands.

Dr. Bob said A.A.'s basic ideas came from the Bible. Dr. Bob and Bill each stated quite

often that Jesus's sermon on the mount contained the underlying spiritual philosophy of A.A. And Dr. Bob often read to AAs from those Bible passages. He pointed out that the A.A. slogans "First Things First" and "Easy Does It" were taken respectively from Matthew 6:33 and 6:34 in the Sermon. When someone asked Dr. Bob a question about the A.A. program, his usual response was: "What does it say in the Good Book?" He declared that A.A. pioneers were "convinced that the answer to their problems was in the Good Book." He added: "To some of us older ones, the parts we found absolutely essential were the Sermon on the Mount, the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Corinthians, and the Book of James." In fact, Bill Wilson said that James was so popular with the pioneers that many favored calling the A.A. fellowship "The James Club" (*Pass It On*, p. 147).

The Biblical emphasis in A.A.'s Akron Group Number One involved much more than the points just covered.. Akron meetings opened with prayer. As mentioned, they were called "old fashioned prayer meetings." Bible devotionals such as *The Upper Room*, *My Utmost for His Highest*, and *The Runner's Bible* were regular fare at the meetings—and also in individual Quiet Times, and Quiet Times with Anne Smith each morning at the Smith home. Quiet Time itself had distinct Biblical roots.

Almost invariably, Scripture was regularly read at meetings. In addition, Scripture passages, both from devotionals and from the Good Book itself, were often the fountainhead for topics discussed at pioneer meetings. Bible study was particularly stressed for all. Dr. Bob called every meeting of early A.A. a "Christian Fellowship;" and early A.A. was in fact a constituent part of "A First Century Christian Fellowship." As has been detailed in my many titles, every single Twelve Step idea can be traced to specific Bible verses and segments read or quoted in early A.A.. Furthermore, early Akron AAs were required to "Surrender." This meant accepting on one's knees Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Older members then prayed with newcomers in the manner specified in James 5:16.

And how did all such Bible material wind up in A.A.? Certainly not from, nor properly described as traveling through, Bill Wilson. It was the daily grist of the Akron experimental work to deliver drunks. Particularly the work in the summer of 1935 and often thereafter where Bill Wilson actually was in attendance.

There is a final point. One that really marks the beginning of the Akron Genesis. The details were only recently unearthed in my research. My focus has been on Christian Endeavor, the world-wide Christian church movement for youth, to which Dr. Bob belonged as a youngster. That movement, its practices, and principles can be seen as having great impact on many of the basic and unique aspects of Akron A.A.. These special Akron features differed substantially from the Oxford Group approaches and principles with which Bill Wilson had been indoctrinated on the East Coast. They did not involve the Four Absolutes, nor the 5 C's, nor "Restitution," nor "Guidance," nor "sharing for witness," nor other distinctly Oxford Group ideas with which Bob and Bill were both familiar from their respective Oxford Group connections.

The Akron prayer meetings, Bible studies, discussions from devotional literature, confessions of Christ, encouragement as to church affiliation and Christian outreach were a distinct characteristic of the Akron program. They were not emphasized in New York. They seemingly demonstrate a powerful Christian Endeavor influence on Dr. Bob—particularly because he specifically mentioned his Christian Endeavor membership and because that movement began as a unique product of Dr. Bob's own New England area (See Francis E. Clark, *Christian Endeavor in All Lands*; Amos R. Wells, *Expert Endeavor: A Text-book of Christian Endeavor Methods and Principles*).

### **The Basic Biblical Tools of the Pioneers' Program**

And of what did their basic program consist? They had the Bible, and they had the Oxford Group principles. These they studied and incorporated into their very simple spiritual program of recovery. They usually hospitalized the newcomer, shared their victories with him, left him with only a Bible for reading, and had him surrender to God before he was discharged, after only a few days of hospitalization. They usually handed him a copy of *The Upper Room*. Then they introduced him to others. He was counseled by Dr. Bob and by Anne. Each morning, he attended Quiet Times led quite early each day by Anne Smith at the Smith Home in Akron where there was regular Bible study, prayer, and requests for God's guidance. At these extended sessions, Anne Smith shared ideas from her spiritual journal and invited discussion of the topics. The pioneers and their families had other meetings each day. And they had a regular "Oxford Group" meeting twice each week (one as a set-up meeting). They were encouraged to attend church and have religious affiliations. Quiet Time was a "must." The Bible was stressed for reading. They opened their meetings with prayer, then read Scripture, then had discussions on how to live according to biblical principles, then surrendered to Jesus Christ if they had not already done so, were informed about newcomers still needing help, then closed with the Lord's Prayer, and fellowshiped with each other. They did observe some of the basic Oxford Group life-changing practices, known as the Five C's, usually with Dr. Bob. And they often stayed in the homes of Dr. Bob and Anne (and several others in the Akron area) until they were well enough to sally forth.

### **A Day with the Akron A.A. Pioneers**

Most of our information sources have never seen the light of day as far as the average AA is concerned. For the most part, AAs usually don't know about, and probably have never even seen, Anne Smith's Journal, or the books of Dr. Bob's Library, or the transcripts of Akron old-timer tapes that are lodged in GSO archives in New York, or the papers of old-timers like Clarence Snyder and Bob E. Most have little or no knowledge of the four AA of Akron pamphlets that have been on sale for a number of years in Akron and Cleveland. But a few of us have had the opportunity to interview some of the survivors of our earliest days, or their immediate friends or families. And the results enable a picture, albeit reconstructed by this author, of what a single day in the Akron fellowship in the period from 1935 to 1938, and even after, was really like.

### **Early Morning Quiet Time at Dr. Bob's Home**

Let's start with Quiet Time at the home of Dr. Bob and Anne Smith. And see Appendix One in the syllabus accompanying this presentation for even more details.

Dr. Bob's daughter told me in person that the "guys" who came over [to the Smith Home] often said they were coming to Anne Smith's quiet times for "spiritual pabulum." Let's start with some of the documented descriptions of Anne's early morning Quiet Times, and also Quiet Times conducted by other pioneers individually and in groups:

He [an alcoholic] must have devotions every morning—a "quiet time" of prayer and some reading from the Bible and other religious literature. Unless this is faithfully followed,

there is grave danger of backsliding (From the report of Rockefeller's investigator Frank Amos, published in *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 131).

The A.A. members of that time did not consider meetings necessary to maintain sobriety. They were simply "desirable." Morning devotion and "quiet time," however, were musts (*DR. BOB, supra*, p. 136).

*Daily Quiet Time.* This cannot be emphasized too much. Not a day should be missed. The early morning hours are best. It may be that more than one quiet time will be needed during the day. Whenever need arises one should stop and pray and listen. The method of holding quiet time varies some with each individual. All include prayer and Bible reading and study and patient listening to God (From Anne Smith's Journal: Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal, 1933-1939*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p. 61; see also Dick B., *Good Morning! Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.*, 2d ed, pp. 6-9).

At that time [when "Dad and Mom and Bill were working out the program"] I [Dr. Bob's daughter Sue] was getting involved with the quiet times they had in the morning. The guys would come, and Mom would have quiet time with them. There was a cookie salesman and he'd bring the stale cookies over, and we'd take up a collection for three pounds of coffee for 29 cents. They'd have their quiet time, which is a holdover from the Oxford Group, where they read the Bible, prayed and listened, and got guidance. Then they'd have coffee and cookies. This was early in the morning, when the sky was starting to get light. Sometimes they'd get us out of bed to do this (Bob Smith and Sue Smith Windows, *Children of the Healer*, pp. 43-44; Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal, supra*, p. 54).

Sue also remembered the quiet time in the mornings—how they sat around reading the Bible. Later, they also used *The Upper Room*, a Methodist publication that provided a daily inspirational message, interdenominational in its approach. "Then somebody said a prayer," she recalled. "After that, we were supposed to say one to ourselves. Then we'd be quiet. Finally, everybody would share what they got or didn't get. This lasted for at least a half hour and sometimes went as long as an hour" (*DR. BOB, supra*, pp. 71-72; Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 204-08).

[John R., Akron pioneer, remembered] Before one of these meetings [at Dr. Bob's home in the morning], Anne used to pull out a little book [her spiritual journal] and quote from it. We would discuss it. Then we would see what Anne would suggest from it for our discussion (Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of A.A., supra*, p. 110; *Anne Smith's Journal, supra*, p. 56)

And here's a tiny segment from Anne's journal. It's one of over 100. Now, just picture a reading from the Bible at Anne's function. Then a prayer. Then a Quiet Time, sharing what was received. Then Anne's reading the following from her journal and inviting discussion of the remarks:

Confession. Don't be shocked at any confession. It is hypocritical for you yourself have at least thought of doing something similar. A man may share many problems, but not his deepest one. You must share deeply with him, UNDER GUIDANCE; you may be guided

to share your deepest sin, and this will clear the way for him to share his. The time will come when he will begin to tell you things about himself that he doesn't tell to others. Why are people so afraid to face their deepest problems? Because they think there is no answer. When they learn there is one, they will believe it can work out for them, and they will be really honest about themselves. When we fail to share, people think their sin is unique, but sharing lifts a tremendous load. It is absolutely necessary to face people with the moral test [absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love]. Fundamentally, sin is independence toward God, living without God. Seeing one's self as God sees one, brings hatred out of sin (From A.A. General Service Archives copy, page 4).

### What Next?

I'm not sure we can state *precisely* what happened every moment in the course of a pioneer day, but we do know certain facts for sure.

**Hospital visits with newcomers :** Teams of AAs (many called themselves the “alcoholic squad of the Oxford Group”) visited newcomers who had been hospitalized at the Akron City Hospital. The visitors told their stories. They told the newcomer that Dr. Bob had the answer to their problems. Sometimes they even gobbled up the food the hospitalized “pigeon” was unable to stomach. Dr. Bob also visited the patient each day. By his own account: “I used to go to the hospital and stand there and talk. I talked many a time to a chap in the bed for five or six hours.” On the final day, Dr. Bob would make sure the newcomer believed in God and then would have him get out of bed, get down on his knees, and “make surrender.” That meant accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (*The Co-Founders of Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 12; Dick B., *That Amazing Grace*, pp. 25-27; *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed., pp 188-89, 192-97; *The Golden Text of A.A.: God, the Pioneers, and Real Spirituality*, pp. 31-32). Warren C., who came to A.A. in Cleveland in July, 1939, said of hospitalization: This was so much a part of the treatment that “there was considerable debate about whether he [Warren C.] should be admitted to the Fellowship since he had not been hospitalized” (*DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, pp. 102, 109-10).

**Daily meetings:** [Dr.] Bob said, “We used to have daily meetings at a friend's house [the home of T. Henry Williams in Akron]. All this happened at a time when everybody was broke, awfully broke. It was probably much easier for us to be successful when broke that it would have been if we'd had a checking account apiece. We were, every one of us, so painfully broke. . . I think now that it was providentially arranged. Until 1940, or maybe early 1941, we held the Akron meetings at the residence of that good friend, who allowed us to bang up the plaster and the doorjambs, carting chairs upstairs and downstairs. Then we outgrew that (*The Co-Founders, supra*, pp. 13-14). Since many lived at the Smith home itself as well as at several other A.A. homes, and since none was prospering, historian Ernest Kurtz opined that, in hindsight, most of their waking lives was a continuous A.A. meeting (Kurtz, *Not-God*, p. 56). Focused as he was on his own *not-God* thesis, Kurtz seemingly missed the more insightful observations as to the nature of these meetings by Dr. Bob, by early AAs, and by other observers at that day. But Dr. Bob specifically characterized every meeting as a “Christian Fellowship.” (*DR. BOB, supra*, p. 118; Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of A.A., supra*, pp. 219-20). Akron old-timer Bob E., both in a letter to Wilson's secretary Nell Wing and in a memo to Bill's wife Lois, said Dr. Bob referred to A.A.

as a “Christian Fellowship” (Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 220, fn 4) The Oxford Group itself was “A First Century Christian Fellowship” (Dick B., *The Oxford Group & Alcoholics Anonymous*). AAs themselves perceived this Christian fellowship emphasis where Bible study, prayer, use of Christian devotionals, and reading of Christian literature were stressed, along with breaking bread together (See Acts 1:13-14; 2:41-47; 4:32-37; 10:34-48; 12:26-49; *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, supra, pp. 135-36). For Sam Shoemaker had often written of the importance of Christian fellowship, quoting in many cases from the Book of Acts (See Dick B., *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker and A.A.*, pp. 59-60). Early AAs such as Bob E. were speaking of living “Christian fellowship” (See Kurtz, *Not-God*, p. 55). And outside observers commented on the similarity between Akron’s old-fashioned prayer fellowship and First Century Christianity (See *DR. BOB*, supra, pp. 129, 131, 135-36; *Pass It On*, p. 184; Thomsen, *Bill W.*, p. 282).

### **Other Daily Happenings in Early Akron A.A.**

**Input from Anne and Henrietta:** In addition to the quiet times, hospital visits, and frequent meetings, the pioneers were beneficiaries of the efforts of Anne Smith and Henrietta Seiberling personally. Anne was legendary in her work with new people. She acted as counselor, nurse, evangelist, and teacher; and the pioneers had great confidence in her love and advice. She often shared important Bible passages with them. She used the phone much to keep in touch with those who were not actually present at the Smith home. Henrietta Seiberling paid daily visits to the Smith home, kept in touch by phone, and shared many important Bible and Oxford Group ideas with the early people and their families (See chapter by Dick B. on Henrietta Seiberling, *Women Pioneers in 12 Step Recovery*, pp. 25-41. MN: Hazelden, 1999).

**Individual reading and study:** Individual AAs did a great deal of reading on their own. *The Upper Room* was a major guide. So was *The Runner’s Bible*. And daily Bible study, prayer and Quiet Time were important aspects of their spiritual growth and understanding. The number of Christian books in wide circulation and use is quite astounding compared to the situation in A.A. today (See Dick B., *Dr. Bob and His Library* and *The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed.).

**Religious comradeship:** There most assuredly was socialization and socializing, but such words has been used in confusing ways by recent commentators as a substitute for what A.A. Trustee-to-be Frank Amos more appropriately called *religious* comradeship. For it appears that fellowship and comradeship with *believers* was far more important in those earliest days than mere social activity. The pioneers and their families were deadly serious, and they took their reliance on our Creator very seriously and shared it in religious fellowship.

### **The “Regular” Meetings**

**The Unique Focus in Akron:** Simplicity was the watch word. And prayer was the focus. If you do as I did, and examine the kind of meetings Dr. Bob attended as a youth in Christian Endeavor, you can see how much Akron A.A. resembled the Christian Endeavor program of Dr. Bob’s youth (See Dick B., *Dr. Bob and His Library*, Appendix 1, “Dr. Bob’s Biblical and Christian Background,” pp. 111-19; Clark, *Christian Endeavor in All Lands*, supra). In an

apparent effort to stigmatize the Oxford Group's acknowledged and very clear influence on A.A. and then to develop excuses for A.A.'s departure from the Oxford Group, commentators (including Bill Wilson himself) have ignored the startling difference between Akron A.A., New York A.A., and regular Oxford Group meetings of the 1930's. *Akron was just plain different!* In Akron, there was no Calvary Church where either Frank Buchman or Sam Shoemaker called the shots. There were no Calvary House meetings adjacent to the church of the dynamic Sam Shoemaker. In fact, there was no Sam Shoemaker doing the mentoring. There were no "teams" or "houseparties" or even the kind of "sharing" that was so typical of the Oxford Group activity.

**The "old fashioned prayer meeting":** A typical Akron meeting began with prayer. And the prayer was *not* the Serenity Prayer so widely used at the beginning of today's A.A. meetings. Akron's meetings ended with the Lord's Prayer. There was usually an open Bible present, with the meeting's leader reading Scripture to the group. There were prayers during the meetings. There were announcements about newcomers in the hospital who needed visitation by the "alcoholic squadron." There often was reading from a devotional such as *The Upper Room*. There were brief group Quiet Times, but these were hardly peculiar to the Oxford Group. For such "Quiet Time" has been observed in the morning, in one form or another, from the earliest Bible days (See Dick B., *Good Morning!: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.*). Quiet Time was widely prevalent in the world-wide Student Christian Movement, the YMCA, Christian Endeavor, and the teachings of F. B. Meyer—who influenced all the foregoing movements. It was observed in the Christian Endeavor meetings Dr. Bob attended as a youth and in the practices Sam Shoemaker advocated in his books. Sam, along with other religious leaders, first called the practice *The Morning Watch*, and later, *Quiet Time*. It meant prayer, Bible study, quiet time for receiving God's guidance, confession of Jesus Christ, and focus on fellowship. It did not mean "sharing" of experience, strength, and hope—as the Oxford Group generally so often did, and as New York meetings began to emphasize. Particularly significant is the fact that early Akron A. A. meetings did not have "drunkalogs." The focus was on God, the Bible, and communicating with our Creator as His children.

**Bible reading:** Picture Dr. Bob's tall, stern figure opening up his Bible and then reading one of the following passages to the group—from portions that Dr. Bob and the old-timers considered "absolutely essential":

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. . . (From Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:43-45).

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through to steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. No man can serve two masters: for either he will

hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (From Jesus's sermon, Matthew 6:19-24).

Charity (*agape* love) suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil: Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:4-6).

Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren (James 1:12-16).

No talk of drinking, or of ninety meetings in ninety days. No psychobabble, chatter about relationships, or deadly fatalism. Just reading what God has said on the important subjects of love, service to God, walking in the love of God, and resisting temptation. What a day that would have been! What a day it could be in our time!

**The Surrenders “Upstairs”:** You had to make surrender, whether at the hospital or at a regular meeting when people were taken upstairs to be prayed over by the “elders.” New York did not have surrenders patterned on the Book of James. Nor at its meetings was there acceptance of Christ on your knees, group prayer to have alcohol taken out of your life, or group prayer over the newcomer that he might live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

**Akron A.A.’s specific focus on overcoming alcoholism:** There is no evidence I have seen that New York meetings or East Coast Oxford Group meetings, as such, involved announcements about, or actual visitation of, the newcomer in the hospital—visitation in groups as the “alcoholic squad” did in Akron. (However Bill W.’s earlier months of sobriety in New York certainly did involve visits to Towns Hospital, Calvary Mission, etc.). There is no evidence of any focus in Akron on “team” life-changing such as that in which Bill Wilson participated in New York in late 1935 when he was handling the business-men contacts in the huge Oxford Group meetings for League of Nations President Hambro, whom Frank Buchman had brought to the United States (See Dick B., *Turning Point: A History of the Spiritual Roots of Alcoholics Anonymous; New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.*, 2d ed. I am not one of those who claims, believes, or has found any evidence that either Frank Buchman or Sam Shoemaker turned his back on drunks. I’ve heard otherwise in person from long-time Oxford Group activists such as James Newton, Eleanor Forde Newton, James Houck, and T. Willard Hunter. Moreover, some of the most famous Oxford Group books were those by Victor Kitchen (*I Was a Pagan*) and Charles Clapp, Jr. (*The Big Bender*)—two problem-drinkers who were delivered from alcoholism in the Oxford Group. Well known to A.A. historians also are the stories of Rowland Hazard, F. Shepard Cornell, Ebby Thacher, and Bill Wilson—drunks who were ministered to within the ranks of East Coast Oxford Group people before A.A. began. However, the Oxford Group of the mid and late 1930’s had its focus on world-changing, on world teams, and on changing the lives of world leaders and nations. By contrast, the

“clandestine lodge of the Oxford Group” in Akron was for helping drunks (*DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 121). And its precursor became famous for helping Bud Firestone overcome his drinking problem in Akron (See Dick B., *The Akron Genesis of Alcoholics Anonymous*, 2d ed.).

**Fellowship socializing**: There does not appear to be much evidence of fellowship socializing on the New York scene. Yet this was regular fare at the home of T. Henry Williams and others in Akron on Saturday nights. No evidence on the New York path of recreational activities observed in Cleveland, not long after A.A. began—with bowling and baseball and huge picnics and lots of food and coffee (See Dick B., *That Amazing Grace: The Role of Clarence and Grace S. in Alcoholics Anonymous*, pp. 78 - 80).

### **The Frank Amos Reports to John D. Rockefeller, Jr.**

Bill Wilson wanted to raise money for hospital chains, paid-workers, and literature (*Pass It On*, pp 184-85). Bill was able to see John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Rockefeller sent Frank Amos to Akron to see what Dr. Bob and his associates were accomplishing. Amos thoroughly investigated, interviewing many in Akron, including doctors, a judge, A.A.’s non-alcoholic teachers such as Henrietta Seiberling and T. Henry and Clarace Williams, and a number of the men, their wives, and “in some cases, their mothers.” Some details are reported in *DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers* at pages 128 to 136. And I made it a point to look at the original Amos reports during research trips to New York. As we will reiterate in a later session, if you want to see the highly successful pioneer program in action, there are two basic places to look: (1) The personal stories of Ohio people in the First Edition of A.A.’s Big Book. (2) The summary of the “Program” by Frank Amos. It should be underlined that Amos would soon one of A.A.’s first non-alcoholic trustees.

Amos said of the 110 members surveyed in the Akron-Cleveland area a year after his first report, “in many respects, their meetings have taken on the form of the meetings described in the Gospels [sic] of the early Christians during the first century” (*DR. BOB*, pp. 135-136). During an earlier meeting in Rockefeller’s private boardroom with Rockefeller’s associates, including Amos, Albert Scott (chairman of the trustees of Riverside Church) said: “Why, this is first-century Christianity! . . . What can we do to help?” (*Pass It On*, p. 184).

The Amos report described the Akron “Program.” Amos said it was being carried out faithfully by the Akron group. The men in the group, he said, all looked to Dr. Bob for leadership. And these were the specifics Amos set forth about the program (*DR. BOB*, p. 131):

- ! An alcoholic must realize that he is an alcoholic, incurable from a medical viewpoint, and that he must never drink anything with alcohol in it.
- ! He must surrender himself absolutely to God, realizing that in himself there is no hope.
- ! Not only must he want to stop drinking permanently, he must remove from his life other sins such as hatred, adultery, and others which frequently accompany alcoholism. Unless he will do this absolutely, Smith and his associates refuse to work with him.
- ! He must have devotions every morning—a “quiet time” of prayer and some reading from

the Bible and other religious literature. Unless this is faithfully followed, there is grave danger of backsliding.

- ! He must be willing to help other alcoholics get straightened out. This throws up a protective barrier and strengthens his own willpower and convictions.
  - ! It is important, but not vital, that he meet frequently with other reformed alcoholics and form both a social and a religious comradeship.
  - ! Important, but not vital, that he attend some religious service at least once weekly.
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# Appendix 1

## A Look at “Meditation” in Early A.A.

By Dick B.

### The Names They Gave It

Practically none of the names for early A.A. “meditation” was a Biblical name although “prayer and meditation” (as Bill Wilson called them in the Big Book) certainly had Biblical roots—particularly as prayer and meditation were practiced by A.A.’s pioneers.

One of the earliest names was “**The Morning Watch**.” The expression was often used in prior years by the YMCA, by Harry Emerson Fosdick, by Rev. Sam Shoemaker, and by many others from whom AAs took their ideas. Sam Shoemaker was to write later that he preferred the expression “**Quiet Time**” because the principles often needed to be practiced throughout the day and also had a way of slipping from the morning to a later part of the day. “Quiet Time” was an expression widely used by Sam Shoemaker, by Oxford Group people, by early AAs, and in many religious circles. I first heard the expression at an A.A. meeting in Marin County, California, and didn’t have the slightest idea what it meant—though it seemed to involved a “quiet period” before the day’s affairs were started.

“**Two-way prayer**” became an Oxford Group term for describing prayer as “speaking” to God and “meditation” or “quiet time” as “listening” to God. Then came the word “**Guidance**.” You sought “guidance.” You asked for “guidance.” You “got guidance.” And you consulted other believers for “guidance” if you couldn’t understand the meaning of the thoughts that came. “Guidance” was a term used by Christian pro-genitors like F. B. Meyer and his *The Secret of Guidance*. Meyer’s influence extended to the Student Christian Movement, Christian Endeavor, and Oxford Group members. Hence directly and indirectly to A.A. and its founders.

The real emphasis was on “*listening*” for “luminous thoughts.” Then on the necessity for writing them down, preferably in a journal. I have in my possession copies of personal notations from Rev. Sam Shoemaker’s journal in 1931 and in 1934 to 1936. They mention the Firestone family members and their trip to Denver in 1931; and the journal entries later mention “Bill Wilson” and other Oxford Group team members by name. The stress on listening gave rise to Oxford Group expressions like “God gave man one mouth and two ears. That should tell you something!” Writing thoughts down gave rise to the expression that the ancient Chinese believed the strongest memory is paler than the weakest ink..

Oddly, though the words “prayer” and “meditation” are both used in the Bible and easily understood in the Bible and in English, they were shunned by the Oxford Group and some of the A.A. pioneers in favor of the catch phrases above. There was a growing failure to continue mention of the Bible sources. There was a new stress on non-Biblical substitute language, and the added intrusion of “New Age” and Eastern concepts. And all contributed to the kind of self-made religion, self-made meditation ideas, and self-made interpretations of what had been three very simple and clearly comprehended expressions **from the Bible: (1) Prayer. (2) Meditation (3) Revelation.**

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Our early believers prayed to our Creator. Believers meditated on (pondered) God's Word—the Bible. And, if God chose to make such guidance available, they received revelation—particularly Word of Knowledge and Word of Wisdom (See 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). The Bible is filled with examples. And, in his title, *The God Who Speaks*, the great theologian (later an Oxford Group supporter) B. H. Streeter cited many examples of these and another revelation manifestation.

### What Did “Meditation” Really Involve?

Some of our forbears had the gift of describing with simplicity the desired period they set aside for reading, praying, and communicating with God.

The Reverend Howard C. Blake, a Presbyterian, had much of the same background that Dr. Bob had as a youngster. He often went to church four times a week, belonged to Christian Endeavor, and committed himself to doing the will of God. He also was involved in Student Christian Movement activities, worked with Sam Shoemaker, and kept a close association with Oxford Group founder Dr. Frank Buchman for 32 years. *In Way to Go: Adventures in Search of God's Will*, Blake wrote this about searching for the will of God:

It is the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made when he said the Holy Spirit would come and teach (p. 64).

Every day I pray for God to guide and direct my thoughts. So I set aside a time for quiet each day in order to let it happen. My conviction is, however, that I am more likely to be receptive if I have begun the day in a disciplined way to listen in the morning (p. 65).

**We began by reading the Bible, praying, and then being quiet.** After about three thoughts had occurred to me, it became more difficult to receive a further one without forgetting those that had come before. So we found it would clear our minds for some new thought if we **made notes on what had already come** (p. 66, bolding added).

A guide book that came out of Sam Shoemaker's Calvary House (headquarters of the Oxford Group in America), said:

The more general results of the Quiet Time are: (1) A firsthand experience of God through Christ, the **Bible, prayer** and the **listening** for the voice of the Holy Spirit. . . (Howard J. Rose, *The Quiet Time*, last page, bolding added).

Very simple. Read the Bible. Pray. Listen. (Write). Sam Shoemaker described it with equal simplicity in *The Conversion of the Church*, pp. 59 to 61:

**Listening** became the dominant note. Not the exclusive note: for there was **Bible study** first, taking a book and studying it straight through; there was **ordinary prayer**, confession, petition, thanksgiving, intercession. But the bulk of the time is listening. Most of us find it indispensable to have a **loose-leaf notebook**, in which to write down the things which come to us (bolding added).

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Very simple. Read the Bible. Pray. Listen. Write! And Dr. Bob followed suit:

**Dr. Bob's morning devotion consisted of a short prayer; a 20-minute study of a familiar verse from the Bible, and a quiet period of waiting for directions** as to where he, that day, should find use for his talent (*DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 314, bolding added).

Very simple. Read the Bible. Pray. Listen!

### **How They Did These Specific Things During Meditation**

**Study the Bible:** There were many instructive books and pamphlets available to early AAs that made practical suggestions for Bible study. One of the principal ones was edited by Oxford Group leader and writer Roger Hicks (who had been with the Oxford Group team that came to Akron in 1933). Significantly, it was titled: *How To Read The Bible* and was available from "The Oxford Group" at Berkeley Square in London.

Roger Hicks provided a very specific guide to study of the Book of Acts, and covered many other topical Bible sections as well. He cited, as sources of the Oxford Group's biblical ideas, some of its most popular books of the day (*When Man Listens*, by Cecil Rose; *Life Began Yesterday*, by Stephen Foote; *For Sinners Only* by A. J. Russell; *The God Who Speaks*, by Canon B. H. Streeter; among others). Anne Smith (Dr. Bob's wife) had recommended to early AAs in her journal that they start their Bible study with the Book of Acts; follow up with the Gospels and then the Epistles of Paul; leave Revelation alone for a while; but be sure to read Psalms and Proverbs.

Sam Shoemaker strongly recommended using Donald W. Carruthers' *How To Find Reality In Your Morning Devotions*. Carruthers stated:

Regard the Bible as God's case-book, recording the experiences of various men in finding God as well as the repeated instances of God's revealing more and more of Himself to men. . . . Be sure you have some definite plan of approach to the Word. Then work your plan. Make as study of (A) The Bible as a whole, or (B) The Individual Books, or (C) The Personality Delineated, or (D) The Evident Principles set forth, or (E) The Unfolding of God's Promises (p. 1).

Shoemaker himself, his Assistant Minister W. Irving Harris, and other Shoemaker people all had a crack at how and where to study the Bible. Furthermore, either Shoemaker or Frank Buchman had Rev. Cleve Hicks lead Bible study at Oxford Group house-parties. And Dr. Buchman hired a famous Bible teacher—Miss Mary Angevine—to teach Bible to Oxford Group people to get them sharp on God's Word. Both Anne Smith and A.A.'s Big Book suggested the use of "helpful" books, and this certainly was part of the widespread use of *The Upper Room*, *My Utmost for His Highest*, and *The Runner's Bible* for pertinent verses and further study. Details can be found in Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journal*, *Why Early A.A. Succeeded*, *The Good Book and The Big Book*, *By the Power of God*, and *The Books Early AAs Read for Spiritual Growth*.

**Pray:** In *How To Find Reality In Your Morning Devotions*, Carruthers suggested “four steps in the process” of prayer: (1) Get “tuned in,” by which he suggested reading well known passages from the Word that bring God close to you; reading the words of some hymn that makes it easier for you to think high thoughts; *beginning prayers with thanksgiving and make your confession of sins and failures*, (2) Pray for the day’s special opportunities and perplexities and ask God’s blessing on your appointments, on your period of refreshment, and on the particular burdens the day is to lay upon you. (3) Pray for the progress of the Kingdom at Home and Abroad, the Problems of Your Community, The Peace of the World, The Church of the Lord Jesus, The Spread of Christ’s Message, and so on. (4) Pray for those you love most in the world, that the Truth may come home to those who have not found Him great and good and near.

There are many categories of prayer, suggested prayers and methods of prayer, and even daily prayers suggested in the Bible devotionals AAs used each day. The important thing to note is that healing, forgiveness, deliverance, guidance, strength, and needs are all appropriate (See for specific details and discussion, Dick B., *Anne Smith’s Journal*, 1933-1939)..

**Talk with God:** When we briefly look at Scripture references, we will see the ways in which we can talk with God and the ways in which He can communicate with us. Unfortunately, many of today’s discussions leave out the Bible, the sonship with God, and fellowship with God and hence do not present the full ingredients of what Sam Shoemaker called a “full-orbed Quiet Time.” But there are ample guides early AAs had available from Shoemaker’s writings and from such Oxford Group literature as Bremer Hofmeyr’s *How to Listen*, Forde’s *The Guidance of God*, Leon’s *The Philosophy of Courage*, Cecil Rose’s *When Man Listens*, Howard Rose’s *The Quiet Time*, Sangster’s *God Does Guide Us*, Streeter’s *The God Who Speaks*, and Winslow’s *Vital Touch with God: How to Carry on Adequate Devotional Life and When I Awake*.

A full and detailed description of the details of Bible study, prayer, and talking with God can be found in Dick B., *Good Morning!: Quiet Time, Morning Watch, Meditation, and Early A.A.*, *The Oxford Group and Alcoholics Anonymous*, and *New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.*

## What God Said in the Bible Was the Real Guide

We haven’t found anyone in the Oxford Group, the Sam Shoemaker circle, or early A.A. who was presumptuous enough to make up the reading to be done, the prayers to be uttered, or the listening techniques without reference to the specifics in the Bible about attaining status as a child of God and following God’s directions. The biblical references are amply covered in Dick B., *The Good Book and The Big Book*, *Turning Point*, and *Good Morning*. So there is no need to enlarge this article with lengthy citations. But there is profit in noting these conditions God laid down and which were often quoted in Oxford Group, Shoemaker, and devotional literature.

- “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

One not born again of the spirit of God could whistle Dixie before he could receive,

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understand, or witness to the Word of God, prayer to God, or communications from God.

We know God. We love Jesus. But the Spirit seems an unreal accessory in a theological formula. The Spirit giveth life. He is God's Messenger. The Spirit has been given to illumine the Word, to bring the Truth to light and to teach us how to pray. The Spirit guides men (Carruthers, *How To Find Reality*, supra, p. 7).

Rom.12, 2 "Be transformed in nature" . . . 2 Cor. 5, 14-15 "There is a new creation whenever a man comes to be in Christ". . . Eph. 2, 1-10 "God's gift" . . . Phil 3, 7-16 "Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Roger Hicks, *How to Study the Bible*, supra, p. 32)  
 The Conditions For An Effective Quiet Time: The whole-hearted giving oneself to Jesus Christ, the daily offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies in His service (Gal. 2:20; Romans 12:1-2). Howard J. Rose, *The Quiet Time*, supra, p. 2).

Some of the Scripture that called for a new birth through believing on Jesus, obedience, and a turning to God for meditation in His word, to speak to Him, and to hear from Him:

- Ye must be born again (John 3:7—frequently cited and discussed by Rev. Shoemaker)
- That if thou wilt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved (Romans 10:9—"the word of faith" discussed and cited by Winslow, *Why I Believe in the Oxford Group*, and others).
- Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people ( Jeremiah 7:23)
- Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up (Psalm 5:3)
- Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth (1 Samuel 3:9)
- O how love I thy law! it *is* my meditation all day (Psalm 119:97).
- Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)