

Unpacking Bill Wilson's Fourth Legacy

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As I mentioned in my previous blog I believe Bill Wilson left four legacies, not three. The fourth legacy is about the next frontier in our recovery. It's about emotional sobriety.

Bill left this fourth legacy by relating to us the insights he developed about emotional sobriety during his emotional and spiritual development. These insights were discussed by Bill, himself, in a letter he wrote to a depressed friend. This letter was subsequently published in the January 1958 Grapevine under the title of "**The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety.**"

Here's a summary of what Bill understood about emotional sobriety:

- Emotional sobriety is the development of much more real maturity and balance in our relations with ourselves, with others, and with a God of our understanding.
- Emotional sobriety results from growing up emotionally and spiritually.
- Emotional dependency interferes with our maturation and therefore must be addressed before we can achieve emotional sobriety.
- Because our self-esteem is dependent upon people, places and things we become highly reactive when these sources of self-esteem do not do what we need them to.
- Emotional dependency creates difficulty in soothing ourselves and staying balanced.
- Our emotional dependency moves our emotional center of gravity outside of ourselves in people or circumstances.
- Our emotional dependency creates an other validated self-esteem and a reflected sense of self.
- Because our self-esteem is dependent upon things going our way, we unconsciously try to control people and circumstances to ensure that we will be loved and accepted.
- We fabricated a self or a false-self that we believed would ensure our love and acceptance.
- Our false-self manipulated people to obey our demands by using one of the following strategies: 1) domination, rebellion or scapegoating; 2) people pleasing; or 3) emotional withdrawal.

- Bill used the first strategy to manipulate others and realized that when he tried to regulate others by dominating them and it didn't work, he got depressed.
- To grow up, Bill realized he had to “...*cut off his faulty emotional dependencies upon people, upon AA, indeed upon any set of circumstances whatsoever.*”
- Emotional dependency creates a demand for the possession and control of the people and conditions surrounding us.
- If we practice self-examination whenever we are upset we will discover that at the root of our reaction is some unhealthy dependency and its consequent unhealthy demand.
- Our paralyzing dependencies must be broken at depth and then we can know adult or mature love.
- We must continually surrender these crippling demands and then we will restore our emotional autonomy.

As a clinical psychologist I am impressed with Bill's insights and awareness. He is truly a remarkable man and has left us an important legacy. In my next blog I will begin to unpack these insights and help you see how to grow in this direction in recovery. If you want to begin to learn more about concept then please check out my book, *12 Smart Things to do When the Booze and Drugs are Gone*.