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**00:15 John S.:** Hello, and welcome to, AA Beyond Belief, the podcast. I'm your host John S. We're back this week with another episode, today speaking with Archer Voxx; author of *The Five Keys: 12 Step Recovery Without A God*. Archer is also the author of *Alcoholics Anonymous- Universal Edition*, a secular version of *The Big Book*, reviewed not long ago by our own Bob K. We'll link to that in the podcast. Without further ado, Archer Voxx.

[music]

**00:55 John S.:** Hello. Joining me today is Archer Voxx. Archer is a recovering drug addict and alcoholic and the author of two books for the AA recovery community. One of those books, *The Five Keys: 12 Step Recovery Without A God*, is the focal of our podcast today. Welcome Archer, how are you doing?

**01:10 Archer Voxx:** I'm doing great. Good morning, John. It's a pleasure to join you today. AA Beyond Belief is a world class resource for the agnostic, atheist, and freethinker communities. I like to think I'm a part of that and being able to make a contribution here is wonderful.

**01:26 John S.:** Well, thank you very much. It's really an honor to have you on. I read your book. I enjoyed it a great deal. Why don't you go into a little background about yourself, Archer. Talk about your path into AA before we start getting into the details of your book.

**01:42 Archer:** Well, I had an ideal childhood, at least maybe somebody looking from the outside, up until I was about eight years old, and then it blew up. My father developed bad alcoholism. And when he was 35, lost a great job with a fortune 500 company due to indiscretion related to alcoholism at work. He went off, disappeared, went to live in his sister's basement and practice his alcoholism. My mother, at the same time, was developing delusional paranoid schizophrenia. And within that same six month period, she was institutionalized. Now, when I say schizophrenia, it's the type of schizophrenia where she would see things, she had illusions about people following her, airplanes spying on her. She went from a very, very articulate, well-dressed, kind woman, to a dark, brooding, unkempt person; kind of the person that you see in films and movies, as depicted as somebody who's insane.

**02:51 Archer:** She would sit in the front window of the house and look out, and she really believed that the people were spying on us. And both my parents were smart, polished, articulate people, but they were very sick people in different ways. And it's linked to their upbringing and genetics, and my situation is linked to that as well. The next 10 years I spent alternating living between the schizophrenic and the practicing alcoholic. No physical abuse, no sexual abuse, just crazy, chaotic lifestyle. 12 schools between the first and the 12th grade, I went to three schools in the seventh grade, that kind of thing. And it was all divorce, moving, death, alcoholism, and schizophrenia. The outcome of that was an instant-gratifier of... I became... I'm confident, controlling person, not trusting of anything, and a whole list of character defects that we won't spend a lot of time on here. But one thing that's important to mention is that I didn't know I was like that. I look back, I can't recall thinking of myself as one of those people I just described.

**04:05 Archer:** I just adapted along the way and made it work, and that plays into my addiction later on. I was introduced to mind altering substances when I was about 13. Amphetamines, at the time they were prominently called diet pills. And I started taking drugs very young. Took every drug on the planet between the time I was 13 and when I was 20; everything

except cocaine and heroin. Hallucinogens, barbiturates, amphetamines, all the forms of smoke, anything you could think of just about, including freon, and even at one point, sniffing glue. But with these drugs, and the same thing as my character defects, I didn't know that I was picking up a coping mechanism. I was using these things recreationally, I thought. But what was happening, I was out in the world with my new character defects, and along with that I was taking on a coping mechanism. And by time I was 20 years old, it had its hooks in me.

**05:14 Archer:** And when I say it had its hooks in me, drinking was as much like breathing. And I would get up in the morning, I would say to myself, "Not going to drink today. I'm gonna have a productive day." And by five o'clock, I'd be sitting in the parking lot of one of the various party stores, drinking out of a bottle of vodka, go home, take some pills, smoke weed. And I really never knew how all that happened. I had lost my decision-making over it. There's science behind that as well if you poke around out there. I lost the decision making. I started into college very fortunately, I got a great education. I went to a top university in my field. I had the great fortune when I was a teenager, and even though I moved around a lot, I associated with a lot of nerdy kids, who liked taking drugs, kind of the philosophical sort. And for some reason, I managed to get a good education. But I started out taking drugs, alcohol, and smoking pot, as a coping mechanism, along with my career. So I'd worked 12 hours a day. I managed to keep myself pretty straight when I was in the workplace, and had a lot a responsibility. But then, every time I could in the cracks, I was drinking and drugging, and a lot of trouble came with that. And I'm not gonna spend a lot of time on the crash and burn because I don't think it's productive.

**06:48 Archer:** What got me into AA, was an intervention. And at that time, I was going insane, I think. I was losing myself, and I was willing to listen to what the people had to say. I had reached my point of desperation, and I went into a inpatient treatment. When I got out, I went in an outpatient program. I was presented with the AA material and very put off by it. I'm agnostic, I'll call myself. But what occurred is, I ran into this material... And I'm gonna call it, the God stuff, for the rest of the discussion because I think everybody listening probably know what I'm talking about.

**07:33 John S.:** Sure.

**07:34 Archer:** I was very put off by it. But I had the great benefit of having coaching from one of my inpatient supervisors, who happened to also be agnostic. He gave me some pointers on how to look though the material and to work it. I had the great fortune of benefiting from the program. Today, I'm very active in the recovery community. I've worked with some family groups who have young people struggling. I work with some adult groups, who have members in their family struggling. And I started writing and, The Five Keys is a product of that.

**08:07 John S.:** Okay. So who's the target audience for The Five keys?

**08:12 Archer:** The target audience for The Five Keys are really two out of three groups that I will describe. In my experiences in the recovery community, in terms of newcomers coming in the door, there is one group that has anchors in formal religion; that is, they have an affiliation with a religion. They have comfort with their God. And when they're presented with the AA materials... And when I say AA materials there by the way, I'm generally speaking about The Big Book, The 12 Steps, The 12 and 12, and the core of sanctioned materials that's out there. But that group, when presented with that in the program, these people are comfortable with their God and comfortable with their religion. And they're able to jump in and start working the program.

**08:57 Archer:** Then, there's a second group, people who had religion in their lives at some point, and I did. I was in Lutheran training, up until I was 13 years old, I attended church, things of that nature. But this group of people, they are comfortable, originally with the religion but lost it at some point. So they're not looking for a recovery program that's faith-based. They are looking for something that has a little more of a technical foundation, and something that will help them with their addiction. But they're not looking for another affiliation with a program that is based on religious content. Then, the third group of people are people who have no affiliation with a religion or a belief system, whatsoever. They're newcomers coming in the door. And when they see the materials of Alcoholics Anonymous, they're presented with something very unusual to them. Of course, out in general society, they hear God and prayer, and they have friends and associates who have an affiliation, but they don't have a concept of it.

**10:07 Archer:** The typical approach with the groups two and three here, the people who had religion and don't anymore, and the people who have no affiliation. The typical approach with them in AA is, "This is not a religious group, it's a spiritual group. Pick your own higher power and trust things, and it will work out for you." And as you know, many of these people walk away because this coaching...

**10:29 John S.:** It's not always working, yeah. [chuckle]

**10:33 Archer:** It's not always working, it's inadequate. And I don't blame them, I could've been one of those people, had I not had the benefit of some great coaching. And something maybe we'll talk about a little later is, as the spiritual demographic in the US is changing, this type of coaching is going to have a higher and higher failure rate. And by spiritual demographic I mean, the amount of the population that's actually affiliated with any religion whatsoever. The book, *The Five Keys* was designed to take a fresh approach to mentoring those last two groups, to mentoring the groups of people who walk in the door and are put off by the God stuff.

**11:16 Archer:** What's fresh about it? Number one, provide them information that's rarely provided when they are first introduced to AA. Number two, give them information that will broaden their view of AA, give them a deeper, richer view of what the program's history and what it does for you. And third, and very important, do it in a very short, easy to read format, that's designed for that struggling person. When I look at myself, when I first walked in the door, I wouldn't have any propensity for reading a 300-page treatise on how to work the program without a belief in God [laughter] That would've been very tough. And the difference here... Hopefully, if you have somebody who is in group two or three and they run into this, the idea was to have a book that you could hand somebody, they could read quickly, and then maybe make a different turn at the fork in the road in terms of what's in the program.

**12:16 John S.:** Yep. Yeah, that really makes sense. I think this is something that people will find very useful. I think that in our group here in Kansas City, we find a lot of the people in those last two categories that find us. And many of them are looking for a way to make the Alcoholics Anonymous program work for them. We have tried various things using different books and alternative steps and so forth. But a lot of people kinda get lost. And they just look at the steps, and they can't even begin to figure out how to make it work for them. So it's kinda nice that you had it lay out in the beginning of the book, the background of Alcoholics Anonymous, the history behind it, kinda putting things in the context for people so they can understand that, "Yeah, this is why we have this religious language. But this is what you can do with it."

**13:11 Archer:** Exactly.

**13:13 John S.:** I wonder, would you like to go into an overview of each of the Five Keys that you cover in the book, and maybe we can talk about those?

**13:21 Archer:** Sure. What I'd like to do maybe is just give you a little bit of background before I go into Five Keys. Give you a little bit of background on what led me up to writing them because I think, then you'll appreciate the content even more. There's a few things. First of all, in my personal reading outside of the program, I read a lot of great material about AA that was never brought to me as a newcomer. When I was an inpatient, I got a little sprinkling of it from some of the inpatient process, and nothing about AA's place in history, nothing about what a spiritual transformation is. You know how that's battered around. If you ask anybody what a spiritual transformation is in AA, you're guaranteed to get a different answer.

**14:11 Archer:** The second thing is that none of the information that was out there, outside of Big Book Introduction in the first 164 pages, 12 and 12, none of that material, none of that extracurricular material, I just mentioned that I ran into, got into the program in any organized way. I'd call it folklore, for lack of a better term. Some of the elders, perhaps like myself, have done some reading, and then we'll bring a tidbit to the table, and then you'll hear it being passed around. And you gotta cut the people some slack though. We are all volunteers. It's a volunteer program. There's no formal training, and so you really need to default to whatever the sanctioned material is and that tends to be the Big Book. So most people are handed that.

**15:03 Archer:** The third reason that brought me to writing the Five Keys is that AA World Services... And you and I had a brief discussion, when we were introduced to each other about the fact that AA World Services isn't making any effort to modernize the material. The approved AA literature is the same as it's been for decades, at the core. And modifying it, and modernizing it, and bringing in some of this other history, would be very, very doable. But AA World Services chooses not to do it. And I think there's three reasons for it. One...

**15:37 John S.:** Yeah, I found that... Go ahead, Archer.

**15:39 Archer:** No, go ahead.

**15:40 John S.:** I found that interesting 'cause when I was reading this, you were talking about why AA World Services doesn't make a change. And if I understood what you were saying, it's basically because they're selling a lot of books, and they don't want to, I guess, create doubt that maybe the original book wasn't right or something. Am I reading something into that incorrectly?

**16:05 Archer:** Not at all, not at all. I think one of the main reasons they don't wanna change it, they have something that seems to be working well. There's millions of copies, worldwide, in multiple languages, and I believe they don't want to introduce doubt into the process by having alternative materials out there. Materials that conflict with that or start introducing doubt about higher power in God. But it's low risk for them to take that posture, particularly when I'm going to share with you about the changing spiritual demographic in the US. It's very low risk for them to take that, but there's two other things. They don't have a motivation to do it unlike many, I'm gonna say, enterprises, corporations, and places that have actual incentives to modernize, or incentives to do product development, for lack of a better term. There's no motivation there. There's no hierarchy of things. And that also comes with the volunteer nature of the organization. And even though some

people are probably compensated in Central Office, it's not the kind of thing that's gonna motivate you to step up your product line. But last, in fact, in the organization that they have at AA Central Office, they may not have the skillset to do it.

**17:36 Archer:** I've left that out of the book because that sounds a little hypocritical on my part. But I've managed functions like that in my lifetime, and it could be that the people that are in that chair can't create the vision for doing it and seeing how to get there. There are people out there that could... I'm all in. If they decide to do it, I would be on whatever group of people they would like to invite. I would be willing to...

**18:01 John S.:** It's like AA is almost like its own government. We have a bureaucracy that we have to go through to get anything published. [chuckle] It's not like when Bill Wilson first started out where he could just write the book and bring it to a handful of people.

**18:16 Archer:** Right. That's certainly has changed. A very good point. I mean, and it is, by the way, the people holding those 30 million copies out there or whatever, 25 million copies of The Big Book... If you started toying with it in Central Office and publishing something different, you'd have 25 million different views of whether you're right or not. [chuckle]

**18:39 John S.:** You're right [laughter] That's absolutely right.

**18:42 Archer:** So the risk quotient goes up and up, the more copies that are out there worldwide.

**18:48 John S.:** Yeah.

**18:49 Archer:** So that's one of the reasons why it doesn't change and another reason that led me to writing the book. I figure I could make a contribution in my small way to providing people a little richer view. My last major reason for writing the book was that I was exposed to some information over time on the changing spiritual beliefs, in the US. And I mentioned that before. And this is real key. In a peer research study, in 2015, a comprehensive study on religious beliefs in the U.S over a seven-year period leading up to the study, of the number of people in the U.S had doubled, that didn't have any religious affiliation whatsoever.

**19:32 John S.:** Yeah. That's pretty amazing.

**19:33 Archer:** And when I say religious affiliation, in that group there might be people who do prayer as they see prayer. There may be people that have some notion of maybe, something bigger than them. But they don't belong to Christianity, Catholicism; they're not Lutherans, or Baptists, or Buddhists, or anything. That's doubled in the US. If you project out to about 20 years at that same pace, we will start looking a lot more like Denmark and Sweden and... I say that. I have no statistics on those countries except that they are much higher percentage agnostic and atheist. And we will start looking a lot more like them. And here's another interesting statistic that comes out of the research. I'm from a generation... If you ask people in my age group, kind of the baby boomer people. If you ask them, 83% of them will tell you that they have a religious affiliation. But the people born after 1990, about 36% of them will tell you that they don't have a religious affiliation. In other words, from my group it's 17%, people born after 1990 it's 36%. No affiliation. So for the young people, the younger people out there, they have people like myself potentially, mentoring people who have no religious foundation whatsoever.

21:06 **John S.:** Yeah.

**21:07 Archer:** And the trend is that the materials of AA, Big Book, 12 and 12, The 12 Steps, themselves, will become more and more obsolete over time. The Five Keys is a short book, it's designed to share this information with the recovery, community... In a nutshell, it's a book you can hand to like I mentioned to somebody who's struggling and say, "Here, try this out. Try this information out."

**21:34 John S.:** Yeah. I agree. It's a good way, I think, if a person is coming out of treatment, to get a little bit of background of how this program came to be anyway and then to figure out how they're gonna make sense of it themselves. So...

**21:49 Archer:** Exactly.

**21:50 John S.:** Do you wanna go into the keys little bit now or?

**21:54 Archer:** Sure. I'll breeze through them real quick. I'll give you an example of each one.

**21:58 John S.:** Okay.

**21:58 Archer:** That sound good?

**22:00 John S.:** Yeah.

**22:00 Archer:** Okay, good. The first of The Five keys is to give you an objective view of AA. So key number one is to give you an objective view. That is, there were 200 years of addiction treatment in the U.S prior to AA. Many successful pieces of those ended up being carried forward into the AA program, for example, the notion of mutual support groups. At one point in history, there were actually societies of people trying to recover, who had secret handshakes, and passwords, and things like that. There was public sharing, although a little aggressive; they would have people stand outside in public, and give their names, and confess their alcoholism. But there are elements of those that got carried forward. Probably the biggest difference of AA in the timeline is that they gave the person a way to stay sober, as well as a way to just get sober.

**23:02 John S.:** Right.

**23:03 Archer:** And in my personal research and reading, that's the one thing I would take to people. So the first key is to just giving an objective view. The second key is giving people a little more information on the people who actually had an impact on AA. As an example, William James is mentioned in passing in the book. And I say in passing, there's a couple sentences on him in the book. Ebby Thacher, as history goes, gave Bill a copy of what's called, Varieties of Religious Experiences. And Bill read that when he was in treatment. Well, that's all you find out about William James anywhere in AA. He's mentioned later on in the book once. It turns out, William James is a world-renowned psychologist, and is a person who's known, widely, as the father of the American psychology.

**23:53 Archer:** I believe, as I recall, he taught the first course in psychology ever taught in the U.S at Harvard. And the book, Varieties of Religious Experiences, is not about the differences

between being a Catholic or as I referred to them, a Muhammadism person, or Buddhist. As a matter of fact, William James, in the book, discounts organized religion... That's the wrong term. He puts aside organized religion and says, "There's a variety of ways that people can get a religious experience," and by that he means get empowered to get a source of new spirituality, a new notion of goodness. And a person reading the book would never know that Bill had that kind of influence, of somebody that well-renowned, and I think it's important for people to have that perspective. What I believe is that when they say, "God of your understanding or higher power," most people think that Bill stuck that in the Big Book in the Twelve Steps, at the last minute, to appease the religious faction. And it was kind of an afterthought, kind of like what's been going on with the healthcare bill.

**25:01 John S.:** Right.

**25:03 Archer:** We're gonna make some last minute revisions to help the Republicans or something. But in fact, I think Higher Power has much more meaning than that to Bill Wilson. Higher Power meant that you can have alternative sources of spirituality and it's something that... He got notions of that from William James. So the book's designed to point out a few of those people and the role they had in it. The third of The Five Keys gives you insight in to the spiritual transformation. I mentioned before that the term, spiritual transformation, and spiritual awakening is tossed around AA, pretty liberally. There are various notions of it. So in The Five Keys, what I've done is taken and associated the steps with various phases of the religious transformation or the spiritual transformation.

**25:55 John S.:** You know something, Archer, something that I liked about how when you talked about the previous key and then you come in to this one. The one thing I never really thought about... And I guess maybe I thought about it. But you were talking about the Oxford... The reason that our language is the way it is is because they had that initial experience in the Oxford Group. It's like if they would've had that experience in some other type of a thing, then the language might've been different. And it kinda gives you a nice perspective as to why we're talking about spiritual transformation. But their language was so heavy into the religious aspect because I think the Oxford Group's influence more than anything else.

**26:37 Archer:** Correct. Right on the money. And that's the only way that I am able to articulate how it became so Judeo-Christian in nature. Or the language sounds that... It's the only way that I could intellectually put a wall around it for people is to say that it's just a group that had an influence. Had it been Buddhists... What if they'd been Buddhist?

**27:01 John S.:** Exactly. That's exactly right. And so it kinda helps put things in that historical context that this is why that is that way. But then you go in... And I didn't mean to interrupt you. But then you go into the spiritual transformation. And when I read that, I really enjoyed this because I'm sometimes conflicted about my view of spirituality. But I liked the universal principles that you had laid out. And as I read through them I thought, "Yeah, I practice all of those things." And these are the actions that we actually take when we go through the program, when we work the steps. But didn't mean to interrupt you, I want you...

**27:35 Archer:** No, you didn't. This is great. This is right where we should be in the podcast, I think, is having this exchange. So the third of The Five Keys is to give a person something solid on what a spiritual transformation represents, and relate it to the steps. So that a person can look at it and understand that certain steps help you work on acceptance. Certain of the steps help you work towards surrendering, and so forth. It's covered in the book. But it gives you something solid as a

vision. And then, moving on to the fourth of The Five Keys, I wanted to provide some universal, spiritual principles for people. Something that a person could look at and say, "Well, what's my target here? My target's more than getting good with God."

**28:26 John S.:** And actually using those principles as a higher power in itself.

**28:30 Archer:** Exactly. That's exactly what they were put in the book for. I kind of refer to it as Higher Power lowercase, or higher power light.

**28:40 John S.:** Just something outside of ourselves.

**28:42 Archer:** Something outside of ourselves that we can reference. So being forgiving, being generous, compassionate and so forth, are good targets for yourself, particularly as we go through and learn about our character defects. The question is, "Well, where do I take myself?" Well, I think the spiritual transformation is part of taking yourself there. And then, last of The Five Keys, I decided that I would provide a neutral version of the 12 Steps. There's a lot of work that's been done on that out there, but Roger C. Up at AA Agnostica has put work in that field as well as some others. But what I wanted to do was be able to give a person a little bit of a history of the steps. It starts out with what was being done in the Oxford Group and with what at the time, they referred to those things as... They started out with The Four Absolutes. And then they had what's called The Five C's, which were confidence, confession, conviction, conversion, and continuance. And you can see how it morphed into the program, eventually. Then Bill and Bob worked with an informal set of steps that morphed into the formal 12 Steps. And what I wanted to do was provide the reader some neutral, 12 Steps that they could use day-to-day in their recovery. And along with that, the last of the book gives them a few tips on how to work as an agnostic or atheist out in your meetings. That's not one of The Five Keys. That's a little tip section at the end.

**30:26 John S.:** I thought it was interesting, too, when you look at the steps about where they actually came from. Because even in the Big Book it does talk about how we borrowed from psychology and religion and medicine. And as you go through the steps, you can actually see where... For example, the inventory steps, that was influenced by the Oxford group. And I guess the first step of admitting powerlessness, would that be coming from William James or from Dr. Jung?

**30:58 Archer:** I think it comes from James. Perhaps Bill's notions that he got from James. It is part of the Oxford principles, as well. There's a little spattering in each, I think, because it's so key. But William James, right up front in the book, mentions that... And by way I'd say the book, Varieties of Religious Experiences, 20 lectures that he did over in England. Very difficult to read.

**31:26 John S.:** I know. I've seen it. I've never ever tried to go through it before, though.

**31:30 Archer:** Oh, it's a challenge. What I suggest to anybody who read it is skip his annotations about who influenced him. He'll introduce a great point, then he'll have eight pages of references. If you skip those, you can do real well. I had to teach myself. But I think the notion of William James hits it directly, that you have to be struggling, you have to be desperate enough to shut your ego off long enough, to let the notions of goodness and alternative views in. And that certainly was me.

**32:06 John S.:** Yeah. Me too. You really approach AA with great respect, too, and The Big Book with great respect as you write those. I think that people... The traditionalist might be surprised, when they read the title of your book, to see just with how respectfully you approach this. Now, you



really see this as a program that works, if you work it. I agree with you, too, that so much of this... I mean, people that believe in God would be comfortable with your book 'cause these are all things that we do, and these are principles that we all have in common whether you believe in a deity or not.

**32:42 Archer:** Absolutely. And it's a great compliment that you would say that to me about the book. Because I went in to it writing it with the specific goal of not being offensive to people who have a solid religious foundation. Or to be picking on agnostics, and atheists and trying to refine their view of the world. It was to be respectful of the program and acknowledge its great contribution. It's just trying to give a little better shot to the people who walk in the door and are put off by the materials and walk out the door.

**33:19 John S.:** Yeah. I think you're really successful with that. This is actually something that would be perfect AA literature, if they were to produce something in this day and age. [chuckle]

**33:30 Archer:** Thank you.

**33:30 John S.:** Because it truly does. It draws on AA history. It explains how everything came to be. And I particularly like the universal, and excuse me for forgetting what they are, the universal principles.

**33:43 Archer:** Correct.

**33:44 John S.:** Because I was reading through those things and I almost kind of patting myself on the back because I was thinking, "Yeah, I actually do this. I actually believe in this." I'm a complete atheist, and I reject anything that's supernatural. But I can certainly agree with all of these principles and the importance of them. Humility is one of the most important for me. I think, only because I came from a group where that was stressed so heavily. Sometimes I use it as a club to beat myself up. But it's just really being honest with having an honest view of myself. My shortcomings and my talents, as well.

**34:27 Archer:** I couldn't agree with you more. I needed a lot of additional humility. When I came in the program, I was really full of myself in terms of my knowledge of the way out. And, "What are you guys doing? Who are you? And..."

**34:42 John S.:** Yeah. We don't even realize that when we come in, but it kinda make sense to me now. And I kinda figured it out after a while. As an alcoholic, I had to be pretty self-centered because I was constantly thinking about the next drink, or how I'm gonna get out of whatever predicament, or what kind of lie or excuse I'm gonna need to make up. It was always about me and solving my problem or crisis, whatever that happened to be at that time. And then when you get to that point where, "I can't do it anymore." And then you realize that my self-centeredness was extreme self-reliance, when self-reliance wasn't working.

**35:20 Archer:** I'm from the same school. We are, at the core as we find out, we're so much alike. We have the same issues. And what the program has done for me is help me with my character. I have a better character than I used to to. My interface with others has significantly improved. And that comes through... Like, you led off with the humility. I'm more focused on them and less focused on Archer.

**35:50 John S.:** And I think character building is incredibly important, and it makes life more rewarding. I go through... We all have challenges in our lives, and I've had one recently. But I look back on how I've handled it, and I handle strictly from relying on what I've learned in Alcoholics Anonymous. And I'm really glad that I'm able to say, "Yes, this is a failing of mine." Because by doing that, it gives me the challenge to somehow move beyond that. And it's a real rewarding way to live. But I can do that because of what I've learned here in the program. So, really good stuff. And you think that there is some science behind this. For example, you were talking a little bit about how when you do live this way, it does kinda make it easier for you to stay sober. Did you do any kind of research about the science behind this kind of stuff?

**36:45 Archer:** Not specifically the science as in science, biochemistry, or physiology. But I believe that having something where you are regularly attending meetings, participating in the fellowship... I have two or three guys now, who are cosponsors with me, we have lunch and things like that, and that's all an out-growth of the fellowship. And I think that type of thing provides an environment that's conducive to what the book refers to as maintenance of my spiritual condition. And having that, I believe that if you keep that in front of you, it keeps the biochemistry part in the background. Because I think that's always nipping at you. For myself, when the drugs and alcohol and things got its hooks in me, I did lose that decision making. It became, I think what they refer to as reptilian behavior.

**37:45 John S.:** Yeah, right.

**37:47 Archer:** I just did it. And what AA does is it keeps... The fellowship and the actions of the program keep the thinking part of it in front of me and doesn't allow the biochemistry part of it to creep back in.

**38:01 John S.:** Yeah. And psychologically too, as an alcoholic, as an active alcoholic, I was escaping everything when I drank. I think for a large extent, I did drink to escape, to kinda shut things out. And then, I started just even escaping all the problems that I was piling up around me because of my drinking. Now I don't escape anymore. Now I've learned to actually deal with whatever is in front of me, deal with the truth. And I think that maybe we addicts and alcoholics need to learn that, I guess, learn how to deal with the reality of our lives in a serene, calm, rational way. And I guess the program helps us with that.

**38:48 Archer:** Yes, it did, definitely. Back when I was drinking and drugging... It's much easier to lie than it is to deal with a situation that's right in front of you. And that's a way... In terms of the book that's out there, that's the way I walk around picking up the rocks. You know, the Drop the Rocks book. I went around not dealing with things, and I had this gigantic bag of rocks on my bag [chuckle]

**39:14 John S.:** So you write so well, are you planning on writing anything else? I know you've also written another book, Alcoholic Anonymous - The Universal Edition, which I still have not read. But I've got it on my kindle. I need to read that too. Actually, somebody wrote me and told me they just bought it and they enjoyed it. But is there anything else that you're working on?

**39:33 Archer:** At the present time, I'm doing some research on the subject of helping young adults with addiction, that is... It'd be work for parents. It would be a short book for parents on the things they really need to know going into helping an addict who's a young adult. Now, you would say, "Archer, there's a lot of material out there on that subject, isn't there?" There is material out there on that subject. I just read 14 books in the field. But the goal here is to write something much

like *The Five Keys*, that's a quick hit. That gives... I've been through about 400 sessions now, at one of the rehabilitation centers here where I am. I've participated in about 400 sessions with families in a room together, families, friends and loved ones of people who are struggling with addiction. And these people are looking for ways to help them out. And there are some common themes that keep creeping up. Because there are people in the room who've had success with young people, and they keep coming to the meetings as well to share that. And the reason I'm in the room is to be a resource for the people. But in the process, I started getting interested in the subject.

**40:54 John S.:** Yeah, that does sound interesting. There's a real need for that too, with the heroine epidemic that we're having, the opioid epidemic that we're having in this country. So, unfortunately, there's a big need for that right now.

**41:06 Archer:** There is. And it gives me an opportunity to weave in the benefits of a AA and kind of carry forward the message from *The Five Keys*, in an abbreviated way, as perhaps a single chapter, just to give the struggling parents and loved ones of addicts a different view of AA. Because if you think the AA community is deficient in underlying knowledge about it, if you go talk to people, parents and loved ones and even people in Al-Anon, about the transformation that's going on in AA for the addict, it's even more removed, their knowledge of it. So if I can have some input there and have an impact in any way and be of service, I'm gonna try to do that.

**41:50 John S.:** Excellent. Well, thank you very much for writing this book and for participating in this podcast. I'm really happy that I discovered this 'cause I'm gonna be reading it again and taking it out to our group. I just think it's a tremendous resource. It's a huge contribution that you've made to Alcoholics Anonymous and recovering people to put something like this together. So thank you for that.

**42:14 Archer:** You're welcome. And thank you, John. This was a great opportunity. I enjoyed it thoroughly.

[music]

**42:20 John S.:** Well, that's it for another episode of *AA Beyond Belief*, the podcast. Hope you enjoyed it. We'll be back soon enough with another episode for your listening pleasure. Until then, don't drink, go to meetings, and help others.

[music]