

Big Book Comes Alive Study Group

Joe & Charlie Audio Workshop

WEEK #13

Step 3 - How It Works

(Session 17 -0:17:37.)

J & C Now then am I ready to make a decision? You betcha. When he was the God of justice, when he was hellfire and brimstone, I wasn't ready to make that decision. But throughout this chapter my concept of God has changed entirely and I'm beginning to believe he just might be a kind and loving God. And just maybe he'll start doing some good things for me, not hellfire and brimstone, and now I'm ready to make a decision. And I don't think it's by accident that the very next chapter is entitled How It Works.

You know back on page 45 it said the main object of this book was to enable me to find a power greater than myself which would solve my problem. And Bill's going to sit down here now and he's going to right some of the best spiritual information the worlds every seen a little formula, or proposals he called them, the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. And I can just see Bill with the problem that he has. You know we've got Protestants in AA and we've got Catholics in AA, we've got Jewish people in AA, we got a sprinkling of Muslims in AA, we got some Buddhists come into AA at that time and how are you going to write a set of steps or proposals that's not going to offend these people, quite a chore for a guy like Bill or anybody, to tell you the truth. The Oxford Groups were coming from 1st Century Christianity, they had those 4 absolutes and they were really, really strong. They wouldn't give you any slack at all. They were more interested in the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. Bill was interested in the spirit of these things rather than in the letter of them, that's why it's a spiritual program. So Bill had one gigantic problem here try to write these steps in order to in such a manner they wouldn't offend anybody. And he accomplished that through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

These 4 absolutes that the Oxford Group had said you were to practice absolute love, absolute purity, absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness. And these alcoholics were having a hell of a time being absolute anything except drunks you know. And they said Bill we need to get rid of that kind of stuff. Also they had made their own little steps, six of them which came from the Oxford Group tenets.

And Bill could see loopholes in these steps that the alcoholic mind was slipping through and he knew they were going to have to have more strength, and he knew they were going to have to be expanded, but he didn't know how far. And in trying to satisfy that bunch, in trying to satisfy the people from all different religions, and trying to satisfy those that didn't want God in here, Bill had a terrible time with it. By that time AA had really divided into you might say three factions.

In Akron where Dr. Bob was they didn't have any problem with God. Dr. Bob was a highly religious man, he used the bible and he insisted that everybody he worked with use it too. God was no problem there.

But the New York City people were an entirely different breed of cat. They really didn't want anything to do with God if they could avoid it. They would have preferred a book dealing with the mind rather than spirituality period. There was finally a third faction that said, let's talk about God, but let's not talk about him too much, let's come down somewhere in the middle of this thing. So Bill's trying to satisfy them all, and he said he tried, and he tried, and he tried and he tried to get started on Chapter 5. This is going to be the **directions** on how to recover. And he said I simply could not do it. He said one night while in bed leaning with a pillow behind his back leaning against the headboard, pad and pencil in hand trying to start Chapter 5 he said I finally just gave up. He said I put down the pad and the pencil and said I prayed and asked God for help and direction and said I meditated for maybe 10 or 15 minutes and he said after a while I reached over and picked up the pad and the pencil and he said it felt as if the pencil had a mind of its own as it raced across the pages. In less than 30 minutes he had written How It Works.

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One of the greatest pieces of spiritual information the world has ever seen. After he had written it he went back and numbered these proposals and he found out there was 12. He didn't set out to write 12. He went back and numbered them and there was 12 of them there. Now almost immediately after having done that somebody knocked on the door. One of the guys in the New York City group had one of his sponsees with him, they knew that Bill stayed up late working on the book anyhow so they had come by to see Bill on the way home. Bill could hardly wait to show this to this old older member. Look, look, look, at the new 12 steps, and the older member said what in the hell is this.

He said we only had Ten Commandments and now you got twelve. Six has been sufficient until everything up till now. And he said, I don't like it at all, and the fight was on. And they fought and they fought and Lois finally came in and gave them a cup of coffee and settled them down. Then Bill presented this How It Works to the other members and that's when the crap really hit the fan. Cause they began to say to Bill, this sounds too much like the Oxford Group absolutes. You're going to have to get some of that stuff out of there. And they said, Bill you're trying to give directions to people and you don't have the right to tell anybody what they have to do. And Bill this, and Bill that, and Bill this and Bill that. And they almost destroyed, not only the book project, but the little fellowship in its entirety. Now Joe is going to read How It Works from the original manuscript which most of you have probably heard before, and if he reads through there I think you'll be able to see the differences between what Bill wrote that night and what the fellowship forced him to change in order to have what we have today. Let's go through it for just a moment and see the differences.

Can you imagine what kind of fight you would have if you left here today went back to your group and you had 12 steps when you left but now you had 24? They're be a little fightin' going on wouldn't it? That's what Bill was up to. And here's how it works

Chapter 5 - Original Manuscript

“Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our **DIRECTIONS** (path). Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a **WAY OF LIFE** (manner of living), which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it--then you are ready to **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS** (take certain steps). At some of these **YOU MAY BALK** (we balked). **YOU MAY THINK YOU CAN** (we thought we could) find an easier, softer way. But **WE DOUBT IF YOU CAN** (we could not). With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that **YOU ARE DEALING** (we deal) with alcohol--cunning, baffling, powerful! Without help it is too much for **YOU** (us). But there is One who has all power--that One is God. **YOU MUST** (may you) find Him now.

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Half measures **WILL AVAIL YOU** (availed us) nothing. **YOU STAND** (we stood) at the turning point. **THROW YOURSELF UNDER** (We asked) his protection and care with complete abandon. **NOW WE THINK YOU CAN TAKE IT.**

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as **YOUR** (a) program of recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care **AND DIRECTION** of God, as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely **WILLING THAT** (ready to have) God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly **ON OUR KNEES** asked Him to remove our shortcomings- **HOLDING NOTHING BACK.**
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make **COMPLETE** amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our (conscious) contact with God (as we understood him), praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual **EXPERIENCE** (awakening) as the result of this **COURSE OF ACTION** (these steps), we tried to carry this message to **OTHERS, ESPECIALLY** alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs

NOW YOU MAY EXCLAIM (many of us exclaimed) "What an order! I can't go through with it." Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection. Our description of the alcoholic

.....that's The Doctor's Opinion, Bill's Story, Ch. 2,3
the chapter to the agnostic
.....Chapter Four.
and our personal adventures before and after
.....Bill's Story, and those in the back of the book.

HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO SELL YOU (make clear) three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That **YOU ARE** (we were) alcoholic and **CAN NOT** (could not) manage **YOUR** (our) own **LIFE** (lives) Step One.
- (b) That probably no human power **CAN RELIEVE YOUR** (could have relieved our) alcoholism. Step Two.
- (c) That God **CAN AND WILL** (could and would if He were sought)..... The rest of Step Two.

IF YOU ARE NOT CONVINCED ON THESE VITAL ISSUES, YOU OUGHT TO RE-READ THE BOOK TO THIS POINT, OR ELSE THROW IT AWAY.

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You could see that Bill, his intention was not suggestions; he was going to give us **real directions on how to work the steps and when to work the steps**. And he's going to give us **precise, specific, clear-cut directions** on how to do that and he was very adamant about that. But the crap hit the fan and they asked him and they made it through the argument to make some changes in this original "How It Works" and so today's How It Works that we have in the book and the changes that were forced upon Bill. And Bill said he would compromise with them in this area, but he made a deal with them and I can imagine through all the arguments that they had up to this point back and forth in this program the kind of arguments that they had and they were almost ready to disband and run the little fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous at that time. So Bill made a little compromise. He said I will make these changes but from now on I will complete the rest of this book or else you can do. Well they didn't want to complete the rest of the book; they wanted Bill to continue to do that, so they agreed to continue to let Bill write the rest of the book without much interference on their part

I can just see old Bill when he wrote this and gave it to them and they begin to fight and argue over it and they begin to tell him he's going to have to change it. Remember Bill's stubborn and bullheaded just like the rest of us. And he said no, I'm not going to change this and they said, well Bill you are, don't you remember it's not your book it's our book. That's the deal we made to begin with. He said that doesn't make any difference, I'm not going to change this part of the book. And they said, well you are going to change it. And he said what you guys don't realize is **these aren't my words anyhow, these are Gods words. They came after prayer and meditation**. And they said, we don't give a damn whose words they are, it's our book, and you're going to change it.

And finally, finally Bill realized that if he didn't compromise, they would destroy this project and maybe the whole fellowship. And there was a non-alcoholic psychologist around in those days and he made some suggestions. He said, why don't you change it from directions to suggestions, you'll still get your meaning across and probably more people would accept it.

And he said, where you're saying you, you, you, he said don't do that; don't tell them what they have to do, change that to we.

Say this is what we had to do. You'll get your message across and more people will probably accept it. And he said, where you're saying must, must, change that to ought, ought and it will be more acceptable. Now Bill very, very reluctantly made those changes. Now today we don't know if they hadn't made the changes, if they'd left it like it was originally maybe instead of two million world wide (1988), we'd have 10 million. But also if they hadn't made the changes instead of 2 million world wide we might only have ten thousand. Who knows? Nobody knows, we just know this is the history behind this particular part of the book.

Bill was cunning, baffling and powerful also. Cause he said okay, I'm going to compromise with you, but you're going to have to compromise with me. And they said what do you want? He says, I'm tired. I've fought with you all I'm going to fight. He said, If you want me to finish the book, give me the authority to do so. If you don't want to give me the authority, then you finish the book. Well they didn't want to give him that authority, but they didn't want to finish the book either. So they very reluctantly agreed to that.

What Bill knew that they didn't know, is two pages later he's going to put **DIRECTIONS**, and **YOU**, and **MUST** right back in the book. He's had it in the book all the way up to How It Works, they jerked it out,

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then he puts it back, and that ruins some of the continuity of the book. But know that we see what happened it makes more sense.

The other thing that is so apparent is when he says back here about the three pertinent ideas

“Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after have been designed to sell you (make clear) three pertinent ideas.”

He’s talking about the Doctor’s Opinion and the first four chapters and the stories in the back of the book.

Now if we’ve been sold on those three pertinent ideas

(a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives."

Then we’re through with Step 1

If we’ve come to believe that no human power could relieve our alcoholism and that God can and will.

Then we’re through with Step 2

Now the very next statement says if you are convinced then you are now at Step 3.

You see the fallacy of trying to start somebody in Chapter 5 is that it starts at Step 3. And it’s hard to start with Step 3 unless you’ve got 1 and 2 behind you.

People come to us today and they say, well how do you work **Steps 1 & 2**

You don’t, they are not working steps. There is **no action involved** here. **These are conclusions of the mind** that we draw based upon information presented to us in the Doctors Opinion and the first four chapters.

I’ve always been powerless over alcohol and my life has been unmanageable because of that. I just did not know that, nor did I know why until I read the Doctor’s Opinion and the first four chapters.

There’s always been a power greater than I am could restore me to sanity, I just did not believe that he would nor did I understand the insanity until I read the Doctor’s Opinion and the first four chapters.

Now if I can say to myself today, you betcha, I’m powerless over alcohol, my life is unmanageable I’m through with Step 1

If I can say to myself today, I have come to believe there’s a power greater than I am can restore me to sanity I’m through with Step 2

Now then I’m ready to look at Step 3. Now I might make a decision.

Step 3 - How It Works

(Session 18 -0:12:50.)

Big Book p. 60, par 3 "Being convinced, we were at Step 3"
we haven’t took Step 3 yet we were just there

Big Book p. 60, par , cont. "which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Him. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?"

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Well that's a very good question now isn't it? What does Step 3 mean? Well, **we're going to make a decision**, that's part of it. To do what? To turn our will, and what is our will? Our will is our thinking, and our life is our actions. We're going to make a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care and direction, is what the Step used to say, to God, as we understand him.

**Our will is our thinking
Our life is our actions**

We're going to make a decision to let God direct our thinking and direct our life in Step 3. We haven't done that yet, but we're getting willing to do that.

I've always heard a lot of people say one of the most misunderstood steps in the Big Book is Step 4, and I'll agree with that. But I don't think Step 4 is any more misunderstood than Step 3 is. I hear people today say, I've been in AA about 5 years, my life's still all screwed up and I don't understand why cause I turned it over to God three years ago when I took Step 3. Now

**We don't turn anything over to God in Step 3.
We make a decision to do something in Step 3,
and the decision itself implies we're going to take some further action to carry it out.**

Now one of the greatest examples I can think of is probably 4,5,6 years ago now Barbara and I made a decision to come to Los Angeles, California to visit some of our relatives. But we didn't do anything to carry that decision out, and sure enough we didn't get to Los Angeles that year either. Second year in a row we made a decision to come to Los Angeles and visit our relatives. Again we didn't do anything to carry that out and we didn't get to California either. Third year in a row we made that decision. Only this time it was a little different. This time I took the car down and had it serviced. Barbara packed the clothes and a little food, and we got in our car and we drove from our home to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Then we drove to Oklahoma City. Then we drove to Amarillo, Texas. Then we drove to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Then we drove to Flagstaff, Arizona. Then we drove to Barstow, California. Then we drove to San Bernardino, and then we drove to Los Angeles.

And by golly one day we ended up visiting our relatives in Los Angeles. Not because we made a decision, but because we took the action necessary to carry out that decision.

Now what is it we're **deciding** to do?

Well, we are making a decision to turn **our will** over to the care and direction of God as we understood him.

What is our will? Well, our will is nothing more than our thinking apparatus. Our will is nothing more than our mind. Our will is nothing more than this thing up here that tells us what to do, and what not to do.

A good example of the word will, tying it together with mind. Let's say that some of us are beginning to approach the end of our lives, which a few of us in here are. And we've gathered up a few material things and we've become concerned about what's going to happen to them when we pass on. We'll go down and sit down with an attorney and we'll tell that attorney what we want done with those things. I want this to be my spouse's, this to go to my daughter, I want this to be my sons, and etc.

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Now that attorney will take my thinking coming from my mind that day, write it down in legal terms on a piece of paper. I'll sign it, the attorney will sign it and we'll put it in a safe. Now a year or two or three later, sure enough I kick the bucket. If my family's like most of them they're going to call the undertaker and say come and get him, get him ready and let's get him out to that cemetery about as soon as we can.

A couple of days later they all gather out at the cemetery, they have me suspended over a hole in the ground, they're all standing around that hole. Somebody says a few words and gives a little prayer. And I hope it's somebody from AA that does it. And when the ceremony's over they start dropping me down in that hole. If my families like the rest of them they're not going to wait until I get to the bottom of the hole. As soon as I start down they jump in the car and they head for that attorney's office. And that attorney gets out that piece of paper and reads to them what my thinking was two or three years prior to that time when I was sitting there in that office. We know they call that piece of paper a will. It's not by accident.

Will, thinking, mind are all synonymous.

I'm making a decision to turn my **thinking apparatus** over to the care and direction of God as I understand him. What else am I deciding to turn over? Well I'm deciding to turn my **life** over to the care and direction of God as I understand him. And what is my life? My life is nothing more than my actions. What I am right now as of this moment is a sum accumulated total of all the actions that I've taken throughout my entire lifetime has made me what I am today.

All action is born in thought

You can say that again please. All action is born in thought. Sometimes we react to a situation so fast we think that we do it automatically but we don't. I can't even reach out and pick up this cup of water unless my mind tells my body to do so. So if all action is born in thought then it stands to reason my **life is going to be determined by how I think.**

If my thinking is okay, chances are my actions will be okay, chances are my life's going to be okay too.

If my thinking is lousy, chances are my actions I take will be lousy and chances are I'm going to have a fouled up life too.

When I got to this stage of the program I went to my sponsor and I said I don't think I'm going to be able to take Step 3. And he said Why? And I said because if I turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand him, I have no idea what he would have me be. And he may want me to be a missionary, and he may send me to China, and I sure as hell don't want to go there. And he just laughed and he said let's look at it this way, at least it wouldn't be in the hands of an idiot would it? He said let's look back through your lifetime. He said you've always been a selfish, self-centered, self-willed human being. You've always done what you wanted to do whenever you wanted to do it and to hell with the rest of them. Is that right? We'll you know it is. He said the end result of that is that you almost destroyed your life and just as importantly, you've almost destroyed the lives of those around you that care for you. He said just think,

If God could direct your thinking it might become better.

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If you're thinking becomes better, then your actions and your life's going to become better. And just as importantly, the lives of those around you that care for would probably become better too.

Left on your own resources, you're always going to do the same things you've always done.

You're going to remain restless, irritable and discontented.

You're going to stay filled with shame, fear, guilt and remorse.

Sooner or later under those conditions, you're going to go back to drinking again.

If you don't find someway to be sober and have a little piece of mind, serenity and happiness, you'll never have any long lasting sobriety and you can't do that on self will.

And he made it clear to me in such a manner that I was able to make the decision to turn my will, which is my thinking apparatus, and my life, which is my actions, over to the care of God as I understood him. Absolutely amazing what has taken place since that time. Joe?

Remember last night in the area of the Foreword to the First Edition they said that "precisely, specifically, with clear-cut directions". You know Bill wrote down those precise, specific, clear-cut directions in the original "How It Works", but they forced some changes on him. And when these changes came out, what we see in the book now, those are the changes that we're making so a little continuity of the book kinda got mixed up here. Bill's precise, specific, clear-cut directions were altered a little bit but later on he puts them back in the book.

By the way, as far as we know, we're the only species on earth that's ever faced with this decision. It seems as though all the other species on earth don't have self-will. Whatever they do, at any given time, is always done on God's time at God's direction. It seems as though we human beings are the only species that God gave this thing called self-will to. Therefore you see very few of the other species here on earth in trouble. I've never seen a tree hit a car yet.

The one thing wrong with self-will is everybody's got one, that's one of the things wrong with it.

So our book says and he gives us these little instructions now and there going to come short and sweet and we have to be prepared to see them. And he says,

Big Book, p. 62, par 3 *"The first"*

he's going to tell us what to do first.

Big Book, p. 62, par 3 *"The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful."*

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Wouldn't that be nice if everybody would mind? They won't mind me they just won't do it, because they have self-will. My will for my wife and my children is one thing. Their will and their life is another. They have self-will and their thoughts are different from mine. Sometimes and most of the times they are in conflict. They just won't mind me. I know they'd be a lot better off if they would, but they won't. Now some twelve or thirteen years after Bill wrote the Big Book, and after many, many years experience with some of the great teachers and minds in the world, and after many, many years of experience with us alcoholics, Bill was forced to write the Twelve and Twelve. And he was really trying to push the Traditions on the fellowship. He was hard selling the Traditions to the fellowship and they weren't buying a lot of it, but they needed the Traditions and he knew that. So he decided to write the Traditions and he thought well I'll put some short stories or short essays about the Steps in with the Traditions and maybe if they will read the Steps they will eventually read the Traditions. So he wrote the Twelve and Twelve for us. The Twelve and Twelve again is just the short essays, short stories about the Steps. It doesn't tell you how to work the Steps it is the short stories about the Steps

The only piece of literature in A.A. that tells you how to work the Steps, is the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

But in the area of the 4th Step, in the Twelve and Twelve there is some of the best information the world's ever seen on self-will and what makes people tick. It's called, "The Basic Instincts of Life". And I always suggest to people that I sponsor that they go to the Twelve and Twelve, read the first three or four pages about the Basic Instincts of Life, get a working knowledge about the words that you see in there, and then look them up in the dictionary because they're very important words, and then we're going to use them a little later on in the third column when we get ready to do the 4th Step inventory. So I needed a working knowledge of that information, and Bill in his usual manner wrote some of the best information about the basic instincts of life. Very, very important information.....
