

Working Step 3

This portion of Step Three usually follows the "How It Works" reading in Chapter 5.

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

If the writer of a textbook has an understanding of a word, but the reader of the book has a DIFFERENT understanding of the SAME word, then the information that comes through will be garbled and incomplete. There are three words in the "lampshade on the wall" version of Step Three that are important to understand.

Most people think that the Third Step says that we turn our will and our life over to the care of God. But it doesn't say that. What it says is that we **MAKE A DECISION** to turn my will and life over to the care of God. So the first word that needs to be understood is the word **DECISION**, which is defined as "making up one's own mind." Let's say my car breaks down. Although the **DECISION** to get my car fixed is a vital and crucial step, that decision alone does not get the car fixed. I will **ALSO** need to take the actions necessary to get it fixed. **For any decision to mean ANYTHING, it ALWAYS requires further action.**

If we decide, or make up our own mind, to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand God, **that decision ALONE will not turn it over.** We will have to take the actions necessary to turn it over. The first three Steps are designed to bring us to the point where we become **WILLING** to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power, **Steps Four through Nine are HOW we turn our will and our life over**, by removing the blocks that prevent us from actually doing so; and **the last three Steps are how we KEEP our will and our lives turned over to God indefinitely.** After a period of time though, our ego (or self-will) begins to reassert itself again; and because of our "human-ness", we fall short in maintaining perfect spiritual focus in all of our thoughts and activities. That is why, even if we have worked the first nine Steps to the best of our ability once and are living in Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, we will still need to eventually go back to Step One and begin the Steps cycle again and again for deeper awakenings and further growth in other areas where we have God blocked off that we may not be currently aware of.

The other two words that are important to understand are the words **WILL** and **LIVES**. The words "will" and "lives" are concepts way over our head and are way too large to relate to or comprehend. But these words can be better understood by explaining that **our will is our thinking and what motivates us, and that our life is all the actions that we've taken up to this moment.** That explanation makes the words a little more down to earth and easier to comprehend. So the Third Step can then be reworded as saying that **I decide to take the actions necessary to turn my motivations, my thinking, and my actions over to the care of God as I understand Him.** Also, what motivates me drives my thinking and my thinking directs my actions, so I need to go deeper than just acting my way into right thinking. If my motivation and thinking is God-directed, I will make the right decisions (whether it seems that way at the time or not), then the actions taken will also be right. But if my motivation and thinking is self-directed, I will usually make the wrong decisions (even though I may not realize it at the time), then the actions taken will probably also be wrong.

The Third Step in the "Big Book" begins just below the middle of page 60. How do we know that? Well, in this case, the "Big Book" authors tell us:

"Being convinced, we were at Step Three..."

Convinced of what? If we've taken Steps One and Two, we are convinced that we are alcoholics and that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. Sometimes the word "sanity" is misunderstood. Other words that capture the essence of what is being said here are restore us to reality, or restore us to honesty, or restore us to peace of mind or restore us to balance; whichever you prefer. Now we need to get out of the way and let God direct our lives.

On pages 60 through 63, the 'Big Book' authors discuss self-will and God's Will in great detail. At the bottom of page 60, paragraph 4, they explain we are like actors trying to control every detail of a play:

"The first requirement (please notice that it says "requirement" not "suggestion") 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 (not just alcoholics but MOST people). Each person 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. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits."

"What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be SOMEWHAT at fault, he is SURE that OTHER people are MORE to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest (which means "take away by force") wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages (or manipulates) well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his BEST moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?"

Does anyone here NOT relate to this page?

We seem to be always trying to prove to everyone else that they would be better off if they just did things OUR way. I'm sure you'll agree that that's a bit of self-centeredness and a form of playing God. I think the word that comes to mind is "manipulation", but you can call it whatever you want.

In the first paragraph on page 62, the authors declare that it is this selfish and self-centeredness that has gotten us into trouble. We need to take responsibility for our selfishness and ask God to remove this shortcoming from our lives. Page 62, paragraph 1:

"Selfishness-self-centeredness! That, we think, is the ROOT of our troubles. (And I always thought that ALCOHOL or other people were my problem.) Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably (which means "constantly") find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt."

"So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. (This brings a message of hope because it is neither necessary nor possible to change others. But if we, **with God's help**, can change ourselves, we will find that no other changes are needed. If other people or life were to blame for our troubles, there is absolutely nothing we can do about that. But if I am to blame for almost all of my troubles, there is something I can do about that because I am the only person that I can change. Like a wise man once said, "It is easier to put on slippers than to carpet the whole world." The book continues.) They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. (It's important to know that this includes before we started drinking, while we were drinking, and even prior to taking Step Three since we've STOPPED drinking.) ABOVE EVERYTHING, we alcoholics MUST be rid of this selfishness. (Please notice that it says, "above everything" and "must.") We MUST, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We HAD to have God's help."

So it's saying that the ONLY thing that we have going for us, which is self-will and self-knowledge, or MY life run on MY will, is the VERY THING that will lead us back to drinking (at best) or progressive misery as time passes (at worst). Let me repeat that. So it's saying that the ONLY thing that we have going for us, which is self-will, or MY life run on MY will, is the VERY THING that leads us back to drinking and/or progressive misery. If we are trying to make ourselves "un-self-centered", we are STILL being self-centered. A self-will problem cannot overcome self-will, a sick mind cannot heal a sick mind, we cannot USE the problem to SOLVE the problem. That gets rid of any hope we have of not pursuing this Higher Power stuff. Now what? Since Step One says that we are powerless over alcohol, what we need is the Power with a capital "P". And since our lives are unmanageable (especially our mental/emotional/spiritual life, whether we are drinking or not), what we need is a new Manager with a capital "M". Because anything at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all that I will EVER have in mind for me!

So the AA program ultimately asks us to make TWO surrenders, not just one. We need to surrender to our drinking alcohol (we do this in Step One), but we also need to surrender to our self-will (or "my life run on my will", and we do THIS in Step Three). Unfortunately, many members of AA only make the first surrender and inevitably do not experience all the freedom, joy and serenity that the AA way of life promises. Because of not surrendering their self-will, they are often miserable and/or go back to drinking.

Then at the bottom of page 62, the authors tell us what we have to do in order to rid ourselves of selfishness:

"This is the how and why of it. First of all, we HAD to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His Children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom."

For those who do not know, the keystone is the supporting stone for the ENTIRE structure, so the Third Step decision is the supporting Step for the rest of the Steps. Now this decision is starting to sound important. The Big Book just stated that we need to let God become our Director, so we need to be doing what we think our Higher Power would have us do. In other words, we need to be staying in the moment, being directed by unselfishness and love, and doing the next right thing. It also says that we need to move in the direction of being God's agent, and since an agent is given the power to represent the Principal, we are deciding to start acting in a way that would represent our Highest Power. It then mentions being God's children, and if we are all God's children, we need to start acting as if we are ALL equal brothers or sisters. So you can see that this paragraph says a lot, and actually contains the essence of what the Third Step decision is all about. The book continues and this next paragraph contains the Third Step Promises.

"When we SINCERELY took such a position (the position of God being our Director, our Principle and our Father), all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, IF we kept close to Him AND performed His work well."

So, now we know our place in God's Universe. Contrary to what we may have thought in the past, the whole world does not revolve around US. Once we step aside and put GOD in the center, we are amazed at how much better our lives become.

In the Second Step, we are told that we need to come up with some sort of "God of our understanding" or "Power greater than ourselves." A.A. gives us a lot of respect by allowing us to believe whatever we wanted to believe about this Power. But there is a little unseen footnote next to Step 2 that states, "So long as WE are not it!" The Big Book says again and again that my belief that the universe revolves around ME is a big part of my problem, so this "center of my universe" needs to be replaced with some belief in a Power greater than human power. Then in Step 3, it introduces us to an important attribute that this Power needs to have when it says, "...the CARE of God as we understood Him." So our concept of the Power now needs to include the fact that this "God" cares and is caring. This may be difficult for many of us because our original concept of our Creator

may have been more along the line of a "judgmental, harsh, He's going to get me, something to be feared" kind of God. We may need to completely scrap these old ideas and start over because this isn't the kind of Higher Power that one turns to for help.

By now, we have moved toward becoming more aware of the presence of God. Starting with line five on page 63, the authors explain this awareness. These are also more Third Step Promises:

"Established on such a footing, we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn."

We have been delivered from the gates of Hell, and we have come back to tell what it was like. It isn't a pretty picture. But, now we realize we never have to go back there again, as long as we don't forget to allow God to be our Director.

It is decision time once again. "The Big Book" authors tell us we are now ready to take Step Three. The middle paragraph on page 63 contains the Third Step Prayer. This prayer is an affirmation of the decision we are making at the bottom of page 62. Before we say this prayer together as a group, there are some considerations we need to look at first. About 2/3 of the way down page 63, beginning with the last line of paragraph 2, they provide us with the directions and a warning:

"We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly (or completely) to Him.

We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our wife, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand. The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once."

We are so fortunate that, in the years since the Big Book was written, the fellowship has grown to where very few, if any, newcomers have to take the Third Step alone. We're here tonight to take this monumental Step with you.

Because it says, "We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready, that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly (or completely) to God"; we would like to take a moment for personal reflection for those of you taking the Steps with us. Could we please have a moment of silence, for about 10 seconds, to think about whether or not you are ready to decide to turn your will and your life over to the care of the God of your own understanding.

Thank you.

At the bottom of page 63, we can find the last point made about Step Three. The Big Book authors tell us what we need to do after we've made our Third Step decision. It is perhaps the MOST important point made about the Third Step, yet it is rarely discussed at meetings and usually overlooked. It states, "NEXT we launch out on a course of VIGOROUS action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had NEVER attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have LITTLE PERMANENT EFFECT unless AT ONCE followed by a STRENUOUS EFFORT to face, AND to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions."

Please note the authors say AT ONCE. It's telling us that this Third Step decision will have LITTLE permanent effect unless we IMMEDIATELY follow it up with a strenuous effort to face (and where we face these things is in Steps Four, Five and Six), and to be rid of (and where we get rid of these things is in Steps Seven, Eight and Nine), the things in ourselves which had been blocking us (and what we're being blocked off from is the ability to turn our will and lives over to BEGIN with). So after working the six middle Steps, then and ONLY then, will we be able to turn our will and our lives over to God with any kind of consistency, or else our initial contact with our Creator won't last.

Let's see who is ready to proceed.

Please keep in mind that, like we just said, the actions necessary to bring about the Step Three decision are Steps Four through Nine, because Steps Four through Nine are how we remove the blocks from turning our will and life over to God.

This is the Third Step question:

"Do you now decide to take the actions necessary to turn your will and your life over to the care of God as you understand Him?"

Please answer yes or no.

Thank you.

Although they say the wording is quite optional, the authors do provide us with a prayer that can be used as a daily affirmation of this Third Step decision. Let's say it out loud, together with at least one other alcoholic. Starting with the second line in the second paragraph on page 63, it reads:

"...God, I offer myself to Thee - to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy Will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy Will always!"

Please begin to include saying this Third Step Prayer as part of your daily time with God, and when needed throughout the day.

This attachment has an exercise for coming up with your own Third Step Prayer. Since Step Three says that "the wording is quite optional," why not come up with your own prayer, from your heart & in your own words, as your commitment to God:

We have now completed all the information that the "Big Book" authors provide for Step Three. What follows has been called "The Step Three Parable" because it captures what we think is the essence of the Third Step:

A drunk is staggering along the street and he meets God.

"God, I can't do this anymore," he says. "Please, please, will you give me sobriety?"

God says, "Sobriety isn't free, how much money do you have?"

The drunk reaches into his pocket. "Fifty bucks."

"I'll take it," says God, "you're sober."

The man stands up straight, drunk no more. It feels pretty good. "Yeah but, God?" "Yes?" "I know I gave you my money willingly. But, you see, I need to get gas for my car."

God says, "You have a car?"

"Well, yes."

"You didn't tell me that. I'll take the car."

"But..."

God interrupts and says, "I'll take the car. It's part of the price for your sobriety."

"But how will I get to work?"

"You have a job? I'll take the job, too."

"But God, how will I pay my mortgage?"

"Mortgage? You have a house? I'll take that too."

"But God, my family. How will I take care of them if You have my house and my job?"

God says to him gently and lovingly: "In order to keep your sobriety; you must give Me these things. But I will let you drive My car, as long as you remember it's MY car. You can have the job, but remember you're working it for ME. It's My house but I will let you live in it. And as for the family, they are MY family but I will trust you to take care of them."

Even though we have taken a considerable amount of time on the first three Steps, all we have done is make decisions. Now we are going to begin to take some specific actions that will carry us the rest of the way to God.