

**The “Work” of the Twelve Steps in *Alcoholics Anonymous*.
From “Admitted We were Powerless” to “Abandon Yourself to God”.**

A Workshop on “How the Twelve Steps Work” in *Alcoholics Anonymous*,
from October 7 through December 30, 2024.

Facilitator: Bill H., St. Louis, Mo. USA

(All page numbers cited from *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Fourth Edition, unless otherwise noted.)

Summary: From “Powerless” to “Liberating Abandon”.

Our spiritual program of recovery begins with *admitting powerlessness*: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.” (p. 59)

Our spiritual program of recovery uses “*abandon*” as *the fundamental requirement for our spiritual recovery*: “Abandon yourself to God as you understand God.” (p. 164)

We admit we are “**powerless**” over alcohol as part of the First Step in our recovery. And, in Steps Two through Twelve in our text book, we discover that *we are often “powerless” over more than merely the physical allergy and mental obsession of alcohol.*

Consider the term “**abandon**”. To “abandon” in the Big Book means more than simply “admit” or even “surrender”. *With our choice to abandon, there are no “ifs, ands or buts”.*

Consider the term “**liberation**”, the “act of setting someone free from imprisonment”:

“... a spiritual liberation ... rose above their problems.” (p. 55)

We ask God as *we understood God* in Step Three to “relieve me of the bondage of self”.

We decide to “abandon ourselves utterly” to God. *We seek “liberation” from our own self-will!*

*In this study, we see how the Twelve Steps in *Alcoholics Anonymous* “work us” with the “Thread of Recovery” from “Powerless” to “Liberating Abandon”. We participate in the work of our spiritual awakening—we learn to let God be in charge of our spiritual awakening. We seek to understand the “liberating” effect in, and on, our lives of the harder-to-grasp, spiritual aspects of our Twelve Step process of “restoration”, such as “fourth dimension”; “sixth sense”; “Spirit”.*

.....
Step Three: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.” (p. 59)

“Made a decision ...”

I have been making better decisions—letting my mind be changed—with the information that I have received about myself and my alcoholism illness in Steps One and Two:

“... unwilling to admit that he cannot take a drink ... entire abstinence.” (p. xxx)

“... for him there was no hope ... accepted the plan outlined in this book.” (p. xxxi)

“*Why don’t you choose your own conception of God?*” (p. 12)

“Belief in the power of God, plus enough willingness, honesty and humility ...” (p. 13)

“... *most alcoholics ... have lost the power of choice in drink.*” (p. 24)

“*There is a solution ... to accept spiritual help.*” (p. 25)

“... unwilling to admit ... great obsession ... illusion ... insanity ... delusion ...” (p. 30)

“To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis ...” (p. 44)

“We had to ask ourselves ... was not a basis solution to these bedevils ...” (p. 52)

“God either is, or He isn’t. What was our choice to be?” (p. 53)

“... alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot ... he ... doesn’t think so.” (p. 62)

“... must be rid of this selfishness ... or it kills us! God makes that possible.” “

In Step Three, I decide to seek for God’s “protection and care with complete abandon.” (p. 59)

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“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to ...”

*This is a life-changing decision of “self-liberation”. I finally know my “self-will” has “run riot”.
I know my selfishness is my real problem and I cannot change that without help—first from
others and then from a Power greater than myself that I have come to believe could help me.*

*I decide to learn how to “turn over” my will (my decisions) and my life (the consequences of
my choices) to a spiritual Power greater than myself. I make a decision to “abandon [myself]
utterly to God”, even though I do not fully understand what that means.*

*I review the decisions I make in the opening pages of Chapter 5 in *Alcoholics Anonymous*:*

“Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path.” (p. 58)

Others have gone before me to “make a trail”. I decide to trust their experience.

“...manner of living which demands rigorous honesty.”

I am uncomfortable with “rigorous honesty” but my pain helps me decide to try it.

“... want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it ... take certain steps.”

I wasn’t sure what you have ... but I decide that it looks a lot better than what I have!

“... be fearless and thorough from the very start ... let go [our old ideas] absolutely.”

I admit my need to do this. I decide to learn how, because I don’t know how.

“Without help it is too much for us ... may you find [God] now!” (p. 59)

I decide to accept the encouragement of those who have gone before me.

*“Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked [God’s]
protection and care with complete abandon.”*

“Half measures”: Step One. “Turning point”: Step Two. “We asked”: Step Three.

*“Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided to turn our will
and our life over to God as we understood [God].” (p. 60)*

My “being convinced” is the sum of all the decisions I make in Steps One and Two.

“... first ... be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success.”

Pages 60-62 confirm my decision to seek spiritual help with my “self-will run riot”.

“... the care of God as we understood Him.”

“First of all, we had to quit playing God.” (p. 62)

Now, I understand two things for sure about God—God exists, and I’m not God!

I will understand more. I will believe more about God, even when I can’t explain God.

I learn to understand more, and believe more, about God in the Step Three Promises.

Step Three Promises: “... took such a position ... remarkable things followed.

We had a new Employer ... etc .” (p. 63)

Step Three Prayer: “God, I offer myself to [You] ... Power ... Love ... Way of life.” (p. 63)

“We thought well ... were ready ... could at last abandon ourselves utterly to [God].”

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Observations on “Powerless” to “Liberating Abandon” in Steps One, Two and Three.

1. To be powerless over alcohol is not a defect of character. *Denying that I am powerless is! An unmanageable, selfish, self-centered, “self-will run riot” life is a defect of character.*
2. I thought “powerless” and “unmanageable” were the end of everything worthwhile in my life. I now know that “powerless” and “unmanageable” open the door to “liberating abandon”.
3. To abandon myself to live in God’s care, I must first suffer the pain of denying God’s care.
4. The first thing I “abandon” is the *action* of the first drink. The second thing I “abandon” is the *idea* that I can take one or more drinks and control my drinking. I utterly “let go” of this idea.
5. God discloses to me that “abandon” in the context of Step Three is positive, not negative.
6. I now know that I am physically and mentally powerless over alcohol. I now know that at least some parts of my life are unmanageable by me. I now know that I am powerless over my “self-will run riot”. I begin to know the limitations of self-reliance—to accept human limitations in my life. *I come to believe I need the liberating abandon of the spiritual life.*
7. The information from Alcoholics Anonymous that “works me” in Steps One and Two helps me begin to learn the difference between *not-knowing*, *knowing* and *believing*.
Before Step One, I did not know I was powerless over alcohol. Now I know.
Before Step One, I did not know my life was unmanageable. Now I know.
Before Step One, I did not know how obsessive I was about control. Now I know.
Before Step One, I did not know about my illusions and delusions. Now I know.
Before Step One, I did not know I needed spiritual help to change myself.
Before Step Two, I did not know I could seek and try to find spiritual help. Now I know.
8. In Step Three, I more fully “come to believe”. I decide to seek spiritual help, even though I don’t fully know or understand God—and what I think I know is confused by old ideas!
9. As I begin to move from “powerless” to “liberating abandon” in these first three steps, my hope changes. I know I cannot hope to control my drinking nor all of my unmanageable life. I believe I can hope for help from my Higher Power, even though I don’t fully understand.
10. My hope begins when I know I need help and believe that AA can help me. My hope grows as I begin to have *faith* that my home group and my sponsor have my best interest at heart. My hope grows further when I begin to believe and *trust* the promises of Step Three.
11. I *submit* to new information. I *surrender* my obsession to control. I *abandon* myself to God.

Next Time: Step Four, Part One — “We made a ... Moral Inventory”-Resentments.