

“We Admitted We Were Powerless” ... Over More Than Alcohol!
An Alcoholics Anonymous “Big Book” Twelve Step Study Workshop
“Threads of Recovery” on Zoom at noon CDT from July 7 to September 29, 2025
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(All page numbers cited are from Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, unless otherwise noted.)

We encounter a new “Powerless Spiritual Opportunity” in each of the Twelve Steps!

Introduction.

I have always been defiant and too self-reliant. I did not trust God, or anyone else. My “purpose”: get my way. My “code”: don’t get caught. I lived life and made choices “in control”.

The last thing I ever wanted was to feel helpless or hopeless—much less powerless!

I was first attracted to the fun and good humor of the AA Fellowship. Then my sponsor guided me through the *Twelve Step spiritual recovery program in the AA Big Book*.

The first words in the Twelve Steps are “We admitted we were powerless ...” (p. 59) I didn’t like that at all! But I grudgingly conceded that I was powerless when it came to alcohol.

In my years in recovery, God has disclosed to me that *I am powerless over more than just alcohol*. In this Big Book study, we discover how each one of the Twelve Steps guides us to *admit, accept and benefit from* various elements in our lives over which we are powerless.

Admitting and accepting our natural human limitations of powerlessness leads us to seek help from a Power greater than ourselves. *We are not helpless or hopeless. We simply have “less power” than we need to deal with life’s ups and downs with our power alone.*

“Powerlessness” is an opportunity to benefit from spiritual help—to enlarge our spiritual life, ensure our sobriety and enrich our life with more purpose, meaning and hope each day.

Step Two. “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” (p. 59)

My Mental Powerlessness over alcohol—which I SLOWLY came to *admit* and *accept*.

I finally reached the point of “a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body” (p. xiii) due to my defiant, self-centered living and drinking. I came to Alcoholics Anonymous as a last resort. I could not “picture life ... either with alcohol or without it”. (p. 152)

I had hit my emotional and spiritual “bottom”. I *felt* helpless. I *believed* I was hopeless.

I admitted, and accepted, that I was powerless over my physical allergy to alcohol.

But I still believed, even after coming into AA, that I could control my desire to drink on my own. I would not *admit* or *accept* that I was “without defense against the first drink”.

I did not believe that I was powerless over my choice to take a drink or to stop drinking.

“... lose all control of his liquor consumption, once he starts to drink.” (p. 21)

“... never took the first drink ... main problem ... centers in his mind ...” (p. 23)

“... obsession that somehow, someday, they will beat the game.” “

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

“We are without defense against the first drink.” “

I did not realize that I had mental obsessions, illusions and delusions about alcohol.

“Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics.” (p. 30)

“... control ... great obsession ... illusion ... delusion ...” “

“... nor any lurking notion that someday we will be immune to alcohol.” (p. 33)

(See “stories” about five alcoholics’ futile attempts to control drinking, pp. 32-43)

I did not realize how unmanageable my life had become. (See “these bedevilments”, p. 52)

Step Two. “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” (p. 59)

The Benefit of Coming to Believe in my Mental Powerlessness over alcohol:

I FINALLY came to believe spiritual help *could* restore my *sane choice* to not drink.

Finally, God let me “see myself in the First Step”. God also made it very clear to me that even if I kept drinking, I was not going to die. I came back to AA ... and stayed!

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

“... come to believe in the hopelessness ... of life as we had been living it.” “

“... pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet.” “

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

“Lack of power, that was our dilemma.” (p. 45)

“... a *Power greater than ourselves* ... which will solve [our] problem.” “

(“... main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind ...”, p. 23, and

“... alcoholic ... self-will run riot, though he usually doesn’t think so.”, p. 62)

I “came to believe” in my *need* for spiritual help from a Power greater than myself.

But I was still unsure *how to find this Power*, or *how to bring this Power into my life*.

I was helped greatly by my sponsor and fellow members of AA who shared their experience, strength and hope with me as suggested in the Big Book:

“... alcoholism as an illness ... hopelessness of alcoholism ... offer a solution ...

Tell him exactly what happened to you. Stress the spiritual feature freely ... believe in a Power greater than himself and live by spiritual principles.” (pp. 92-93)

They told me they got on their knees in the morning and asked God to help them not take a drink that day. They told me they got on their knees at night and thanked God for helping them not take a drink that day.

I thought praying to a God I doubted cared or would help was silly and trivial. But I did it anyway. I didn’t drink. I didn’t really understand why I was able to go a day without a drink. But I kept praying in the morning and at night. And I didn’t drink, a day at a time.

Slowly, I “came to believe” that a Power greater than me WAS restoring me to sanity, at least when it came to not taking the first drink. God was helping me “stop starting”!

“... lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results.” (p. 46)

“... am I even willing to believe that there is a Power greater than myself?” (p. 47)

“... gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than himself.” (p. 50)

“... a certain attitude toward that Power, and to do certain simple things ...” “

“... consciousness of the Presence of God ... most important fact ... faith.” (p. 51)

“... stop doubting ... God either is, or He isn’t ... our choice ...?” (pp. 52-53)

“Circumstances made him willing to believe ... offered himself to [God] ... then he knew ... God has restored us all to our right minds.” (p. 57)

**I acted as if God could help me, before I believed God could, or would, help me!
I discovered that, in my spiritual awakening, acting comes before believing.**

We encounter a new “Powerless Spiritual Opportunity” in each of the Twelve Steps!

Observations: Powerless over Alcohol—the Physical Allergy, Mental Obsession and the Spiritual Benefit of “Coming to Believe” in a Power greater than me.

1. I “lost the power of choice in drink” in 1960. I was unwilling to *admit* that until 1981!
2. My *obsession* with the good feeling, “the sense of ease and comfort”, “the effect produced by alcohol”, fed my *illusion* that I had “control” over my drinking and my *delusion* that my life was not unmanageable. (Again, see p. 30!)
3. I lived as a functional alcoholic with little or no interest in God for 21 years—having fun and success much of the time—with ever-increasing periods of “sick, sad and sorry”.
4. My first realization of God was the “**Gift Of Desperation**”.
5. I first received help from a power “*other* than myself”—my first sponsor and home group.
6. My powerlessness became *acceptable* to me as I witnessed the powerlessness of others.
7. The “phenomenon” of powerlessness: I observe it in others before I *admit* and *accept* it in myself. I see others *benefit* from it spiritually *before I try the spiritual solution for myself*.
8. I come to *admit* and *accept* powerlessness as a normal human limitation, not a weakness.
9. When I can’t get things to go my way, I get frustrated. When people don’t do things my way, I get angry. Frustrated and angry, I try harder—to control, to make things happen, to “overpower” or manipulate people to do things my way—until I feel *helpless* and *hopeless*.
Helpless is how I feel about my powerlessness in the present.
Hopeless is when I believe I am powerless over the future.
Accepting powerlessness gives me *hope* for *help*—I am no longer *hopeless* or *helpless*.
10. A spiritual *benefit*, and blessing, of my powerlessness comes when I “come to believe” that a Power greater myself exists and *could* help “restore” me to “sanity”.
11. The most effective way for me to block this spiritual help is to deny my powerlessness—over alcohol, or anything or anyone else. Every disappointment, frustration and adversity is an opportunity for spiritual growth—to accept my powerlessness and seek God’s help
12. “Lack of power, that was our dilemma” ... and also, therefore, our spiritual opportunity!

**As John C. told me in 1981, “There are only two things you need to know about God:
There is One ... and you’re not It!”**

Closing Prayer is found in AA’s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 99.

Next Time, Step Three: Powerless over our “bondage of self”.