

“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 admitted that I was powerless when it came to alcohol.

I am powerless over more than alcohol. Each of the Twelve Steps guides us to *admit*, *accept* and *benefit* from being powerless over other elements of our lives, in us and outside us.

Admitting and accepting natural human limitations of powerlessness leads us to continue 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 challenges on 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 Three. “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

(p. 59)

I admit and accept my powerlessness over alcohol. I ask God to help me stop drinking. But I am uncertain at Step Three about being “powerless” over my “will” and my “life”. I let our “Big Book” help me understand what “our will” and “our lives” mean:

“... alcoholics ... cannot start drinking without ... the ... craving ... allergy ...” (p. xxx)

“... less control ... pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization.” (p. 30)

“The alcoholic ... has no effective mental defense against the first drink.” (p. 43)

“... chose to believe that our human intelligence was the last word ...” (p. 49)

“... any life run on self-will can hardly be a success.” (p. 60)

“Selfishness—self-centeredness ... self-delusion, self-seeking and self-pity ...” (p. 62)

“... made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt.” (p. 62)

“our troubles ... of our own making ... self-will run riot ... usually doesn’t think so.” “

“... we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!” “

“Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness ... on our own power.” “

“We had to have God’s help.” “

I now *admit*, and *accept*, that I am powerless over my “will”, and my “life”, by myself.
I now admit, and *accept*, my need for “care” from the God of my understanding.

In Step Three, I pray. I ask God to relieve me of my “bondage of self”. I decide to turn my “will” (my choices) and my “life” (the consequences of my choices) over to the “care” of God. I trust that God can do this, not knowing—*uncertain—how* or *when* God will do it.

In Step Three, I will “do” in uncertainty and trust (ask God in a prayer) before I “know”.

In Step Three, God discloses to me a “Powerless Spiritual Opportunity”—*the spiritual benefit of being powerless over uncertainty AND deciding to trust God with uncertainty!*

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

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

A Reflection on being “Powerless over the Bondage of Self”.

It seems contradictory on the surface to admit and accept that I am powerless over my “bondage of self”. It is my “self”. How can I be powerless over anything to do with my “self”?

I may not be powerless over my entire self. My experience has convinced me that I am powerless over the parts of my self that hold me “in bondage” to “self-will run riot”.

The cause of my “bondage of self” is my habit to “play God”, that is , to desire, think, believe and act as if I can feel “safe” only if I am in control. I grew up believing that the only way for me to feel “safe” in a dangerous world full of threatening uncertainty was to be in control.

I spent the first forty years of my life trying to control everything and everyone around me—including alcohol. Alcohol gave me “a sense of ease and comfort”. After a few drinks, I always felt “safe”, secure and “in control”. No wonder I had a mental obsession with alcohol!

After decades of suffering losses of all kinds, I become desperate enough with “a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body”, to come to AA—temporarily, just to get my feet back on the ground and learn to “control and enjoy” my drinking like normal people .

AA teaches me that liquor “was but a symptom”, that my real problem is “self-will run riot”, coupled with the fact that I didn’t think “self-will run riot” was my problem!

My decision in Step Three begins a process of “uncovering and discovering” parts of my “self” over which I am powerless, in addition to alcohol—blocking me from God’s care. I am *uncertain* about this—*uncertain* how God can “care” for me—make me feel “safe”.

*In Step Three, I **decide to learn how** to turn my will (my choices) and my life (the consequences of my choices) over to God. I enter the **spiritual world of healthy uncertainty**. God discloses to me the spiritual benefit of being powerless over my “bondage of self”.*

I need God’s help to deal with the uncertainty of “relieve me of the bondage of self”.

“First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn’t work.” (p. 62)

“... in this new drama of life, God was going to be our Director.” (p. 62)

“... concept ... keystone of the ... arch through which we passed to freedom.” “

The Step Three Promises: an “incentive program” to **learn to live God’s Way, not my way.**

These authentic promises are grounded in the experience of those who precede us in recovery. They promise the spiritual benefits of our new “powerless” life—both when we “at last abandon ourselves” to God and in our on-going relief from our “bondage of self”.

“When we sincerely took such a position (God as our ‘Director’):

- we had a new, all powerful, Employer; [God] provided what we needed, if we kept close to [God] (Steps 4 - 9) and performed [God’s] work well (Steps 10 - 12);
- we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs (Steps 4-9) - we became interested in what we could contribute to life (Steps 10- 12).

“As we felt new power flow in ... we enjoyed peace of mind ... face life successfully ... conscious of [God’s] presence ... we began to lose our fear ...” (p. 63)

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

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

The Step Three Prayer: the beginning of my “conscious contact” relationship with God.

“God, I offer myself to [You]—to build with me and to do with me as [You will].
Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do [Your] will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of [Your] Power, [Your] Love, and [Your] Way of life. May I do [Your] will always.” (p. 63)

My “Powerless Spiritual Opportunity” in my new “conscious contact” relationship with God is for me to do one thing, and one thing only—“offer myself” to God!

God will then “build with me” ... “do with me” ... “relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do [God’s] will” ... “take away my difficulties” ... help me be a “witness to those I would help of [God’s] Power, [God’s] Love and [God’s] Way of life”.

*In Step Three, I am uncertain how God’s “care” will “build with me and to do with me”.
In Step Three, I **decide to learn how** to let God’s Power, Love and Way of life “care” for me.
In Steps Four through Nine, I will learn how to let God “care” for me—to help me feel “safe”.*

I benefit from this important spiritual truth: to “do”, trust God with uncertainty, before I “know”.

Observations.

1. I am powerless over my “bondage of self”, the parts of me blocking me from God’s care.
2. God is powerful enough to change the parts of me that don’t want to change.
3. We are never free of self. We learn to not be “slaves to self”. Self is not our higher power.
4. My will is able to choose, to decide, to learn how to let God care for me.
5. I don’t “give up” my will. I learn to let God guide and limit my will in line with God’s Will.
6. I admit I am powerless over my self—that I have normal, human limitations. *To admit to limitations is to admit my need for help.* In my need for help, I ask for help. To ask for help is to trust the “helper”. *So deciding to ask for God’s help is to learn to trust God.*
7. *Trusting God* makes me feel “safe”. *Trusting God* makes *explaining* God unnecessary.
8. I don’t “measure up” so God can use me. I let God “care” for me so I can “measure up”.
9. Human power is limited. Human empowerment is limited. God’s Power is unlimited.
10. God often seeks to teach us through adversity, so we must seek to learn from adversity.
11. To gain relief and freedom from my “bondage of self”, I become willing to risk a relationship with a God who cares for me with Power, Love and a forgiving Way of life.
12. “The effort is what we give to God. The success is what God gives to us.” Father Ed D.

The more powerless I admit that I am, the less unmanageable my life becomes.

Next Time, Step Four: Powerless over Resentments, Fears and Inconsideration.