Session #1 - Steps 1, 2, & 3

My name is _____ and I'm an alcoholic. Before we begin, let's have a moment of "quiet time" to invite the God of our own understanding into our hearts and ask for an open mind and the willingness to have a new experience… followed by the "Serenity Prayer"…

Before we get into the first three steps, I'd like to first thank a few people…

WELCOME to the Wednesday morning 7am Beginners' Classes. During the next four weeks, you will learn how to recover from alcoholism by taking the Twelve Steps as outlined in the book "Alcoholics Anonymous". The Program of AA is a spiritually based plan of action that will remove the compulsion to drink and enable you to live a life that is happy, useful, and whole.

AA instructional meetings are said to have been started in Cleveland, Ohio by Clarence S. in the early 1940's. After the publication of the "Saturday Evening Post" article about Alcoholics Anonymous, AA started growing so rapidly it became impossible for the early members to individually take new prospects through the Steps. These meetings were held for the purpose of acquainting both the old and new members with the 12 steps upon which our program is based. So that all twelve steps could be covered in a minimum amount of time, they were divided into four classifications, and one meeting each week was devoted to each of the four subdivisions.

Each group has developed its own guidelines for teaching the "Beginners' Classes." However, all these groups have

something in common. They provide a safe, structured environment in which newcomers learn the principles of AA, take the Steps, and have spiritual experiences.

The book, Alcoholics Anonymous, is our textbook for recovery. We will be using it extensively during these sessions.

As the title of the books implies, we are an anonymous society. You can be assured we will protect your anonymity at this and any other meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Big Book was first published in April 1939. It was written by several of the first 100 people to recover from alcoholism. Since then, alcoholics have used it all over the world as a program for recovery.

So that we can complete each class within an hour and still provide ample time for questions, please write down anything that you do not understand or need clarified and save it until the end of the session. Questions can be asked at that time.

The “Big Book” is the only book we will discuss during these sessions except for possibly an occasional reference to the book “Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions” or the “Little Red Book” which was at one time used in conjunction with the Big Book in meetings similar to this one in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Miami, Florida. If you cannot find something I say in the “Big Book”, consider it to be my opinion rather than fact.

I’ll do my best to keep my opinions out of these discussions. I’m here to pass on the AA program as written

and practiced by the early members. I am not here to present my interpretation of the program.

In order for this process to work during the next four weeks, certain guidelines will need to be followed by the newcomer (or the person going through the Steps) and for the sponsor.

1. The newcomers' primary obligation is to be here every week for the next four weeks. If you do not have transportation, your sponsor will help you make the necessary arrangements. It is our experience that this process works best when the sponsor and newcomer attend all four classes together.

2. Because some of us have difficulties reading when we're newly sober, I will be doing the reading from the Big Book during these meetings. If you've brought your Big Book with you please follow along as I read. Sometimes we will be going through the material rather fast. If you are unable to follow along, it's ok – just listen the best you can. Remember: we are here to take the ACTIONS that the Big Book prescribes, not just to study the book. If you take the Steps as described in the Big Book, you will recover from alcoholism.

3. It is imperative that when writing your 4th Step inventory you receive help and guidance from your sponsor and / or other members here that have been through the work. Many people try to do their 4th Step by themselves and wonder why many weeks or months later they're still not finished. It's very dangerous to go it alone in spiritual matters. That's why as part of our second week we'll be starting our inventories together in this meeting. We

understand that this phase of our development can get quite personal. That's why the 5th Step will of course **not** be taken in class (obviously) but should be completed between the second and third weeks.

4. Sponsors should call or visit with the newcomers (or those going through the steps) frequently to see how he or she is doing and to offer encouragement and assistance through the work. Make use of the phone list this meeting offers.

Can I get a show of hands of how many people would like to take the 12 Steps with us during the next four weeks? [Take a count.] Of those that raised your hand, how many do not have a sponsor. [Take a count.] It is vital that newcomers get a sponsor to guide them through the Steps during the next four weeks. If you do not have a sponsor, you will be assigned one after the meeting. Please stick around after we close.

Let's start this session by turning to the Forward of the Big Book which is on Roman numeral page 13 (xiii).

> "We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."
> (page xiii, ¶ 1, lines 1-5)

So, the Big Book tells us immediately that it's purpose is to show alcoholics how to recover from alcoholism. Until this book was written, there was no hope for alcoholics. Now,

anyone who is willing to follow the directions they have provided, can recover.

During this session, we'll be reading through material in the Big Book and drawing from our own experiences to help us answer the following questions:
1) Am I an alcoholic?
2) Do I need help?
3) Am I willing to take certain actions to receive that help?

So, let's begin our journey with the first Step:

Step 1: *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.*

Surrender is essential in order to recover from alcoholism. The first 51 pages of the Big Book is devoted to the first part of the surrender process which is to admit we have a problem. It's suggested you read through these pages to find your truth with alcohol and the illness of alcoholism.

The book begins by describing the physical and mental symptoms of alcoholism. Later the book asks us to acknowledge that we are alcoholics. Before we can do this, we need to know what an alcoholic is. We'll be using information from "The Doctor's Opinion", Chapters 1, 2, and 3, and the first page of Chapter 4. Let's start on Roman numeral page 24 (xxiv), second paragraph:

> "The physician who, at our request, gave us this letter, has been kind enough to enlarge upon his views in another statement which follows. In this statement he confirms what we who have suffered alcoholic torture must believe—that the body of the alcoholic is quite as

abnormal as his mind. It did not satisfy us to be told that we could not control our drinking just because we were maladjusted to life, that we were in full flight from reality, or were outright mental defectives. These things were true to some extent, in fact, to a considerable extent with some of us. But we are sure that our bodies were sickened as well. In our belief, any picture of the alcoholic which leaves out this physical factor is incomplete.

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account."
(page xxiv, ¶ 2 & 3)

Turn now to page xxvi where in the first paragraph Dr. Silkworth further describes the alcoholics' physical reaction to alcohol after it is ingested into the body.

We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve.
(page xxvi, ¶ 1)

Notice that Dr. Silkworth referred to our physical reaction to alcohol as an "allergy" and after one drink the "phenomena of craving" develops. At the time the Big Book was written very little was known about why the alcoholic reacts to alcohol differently than other people. Since then, science and the medical community have discovered some things. We've learned that the body of the alcoholic is physically different. The liver and pancreas of the alcoholic process alcohol at one-third to one-tenth the rate of a non-alcoholic's pancreas and liver. As alcohol enters the body, it breaks down into various components, one of which is acetate. We know now that acetate triggers the phenomenon of craving. In a normal drinker, the acetate moves through the system quickly and exits. But that doesn't happen in us. In us, the acetate is not processed out, so by staying in our body, it triggers a craving for a second drink. We have a second drink, putting in us two times as much acetate, and that makes us want a drink twice as much as the normal drinker. So we have another. Then, having three times the craving as a normal drinker, we have another. You can see from that point how we have no control over how much we drink. The craving cycle has begun. Once the acetate accumulates in your body, (and that begins to happen with the FIRST drink), you <u>will</u> crave another – IF you're an alcoholic. And how many times did we think it'd be nice to have JUST ONE drink to relax, but you had more? Now you see why. And this can NEVER change – IF you're alcoholic.

Go to the 4th paragraph on the page (xxvi)… and Dr. Silkworth describes the common drinking cycle of an alcoholic and begins to describe the second factor of the alcoholic illness – we know the first factor is the abnormal reaction of the body: the physical craving. The second

factor is the mental obsession. He's going to describe the mental state of the alcohol before we pick up the first drink:

> "Men and women drink essentially because they like the effect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. *They are restless, irritable and discontented*, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks—drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery."
> (page xxvi, ¶ 4)

If our minds didn't lie to us and tell us that it's ok to drink, we would never trigger the physical allergy which produces the craving for more and more alcohol. So, we have an abnormal reaction of the body and an obsession of the mind which dooms us to drink again. It's important to note that the body of an alcoholic can *never* recover, but the mind can. If alcoholism were solely a physical disease then we could just stop drinking and that would be the solution. But the mental factor is why just quitting is not enough…

That's why Dr. Silkworth says we need *an entire psychic change*.

On page xxvii, Dr. Silkworth says that all we have to do is follow a few simple rules and we won't have the desire for alcohol. We can never be cured. But, the problem won't exist for us as long as we remain in a fit spiritual condition. Those few simple rules Dr. Silkworth talks about are the actions we're going to take in the twelve steps to bring about that *entire physic change*. Let's go to page xxviii, paragraph 1.

This concludes our readings from the "Doctor's Opinion". During the next week, please read Chapter 1, "Bill's Story". Bill W. is the New York stock analyst who is one of our co-founders. His story is a perfect example of an alcoholic. Some people have difficulty identifying with Bill because he was such a low-bottom, hopeless alcoholic. Here, as with the rest of the book, we ask that you look for similarities rather than differences. See where you can identify with Bill as he continues to use alcohol long after it has become a problem. It was suggested to me to try to identify with the way Bill *felt*, the way Bill *thought*, and the way Bill *drank*.

The first 8 pages of "Bill's Story" give an example of the problem of the alcoholic. And the last 8 pages of "Bill's Story" describes the spiritual solution. The only thing I'm going to read from Bill's story this morning is the first full paragraph on page 8 because it describes so well what we alcoholics call our *bottom*. Bill writes on page 8:

> "No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my

> match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master."
> (page 8, ¶ 1)

If you have felt like that in the past, then you identify with Bill. If Bill says he's a *real alcoholic* then you might be too.

Let's skip Chapter 2, "This is a Solution" for now and I urge you to read it during the next week.

Turn to page 30, the first page of Chapter 3, "More About Alcoholism".

> "Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real alcoholics. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity or death.
>
> We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed.
> (page 30, ¶ 1, & 2)

So, in these paragraphs, the book confirms that we are different from the "average" / non-alcoholic drinker in both the bodily and mental sense. They restate that we continue to believe in the lie that we can somehow control **and** enjoy

our drinking. When I was trying to control my drinking I didn't enjoy it. And during the time I was enjoying drinking I certainly was not controlling it. And the books tells us again that if we continue to believe in the lie that our minds tell us and we continue to kill our bodies by drinking alcohol, then we're either going to go insane or die.

The first step was stated in the second paragraph and we'll be getting back to that statement in just a moment…

Now, let's briefly cover one of the examples that this chapter gives us describing the mental obsession we alcoholics have when it comes to alcohol. We'll start with the first full paragraph on page 35:

> "What sort of thinking dominates an alcoholic who repeats time after time the desperate experiment of the first drink? Friends who have reasoned with him after a spree which has brought him to the point of divorce or bankruptcy are mystified when he walks directly into a saloon. Why does he? Of what is he thinking?

Our example is a friend we shall call Jim. Jim is a nice guy. He's well liked by friends and family. He inherited a car dealership and was pretty successful for a time. Jim started drinking at age 35 and a few years later was committed to an asylum. He was in touch with AA and the old-timers worked with him. They shared there stories and told Jim about the first two steps. He made a beginning, but failed to go forward with the spiritual Program of action described in this book. He got drunk seven times in rapid succession. Each time, the old-timers worked with him. He described to them what happened. Basically, because he

failed to go ahead with the rest of the Program, he succumbed to the lie that he could drink whiskey safely and his trivial excuse was if he poured the booze into milk it wouldn't hurt him on a full stomach. Because Jim didn't continue with the rest of the Program and take the rest of the steps, he DID NOT have the *entire physic change* that Dr. Silkworth talks about and fell victim to the lie that he could drink safely.

On page 37, our book describes that kind of thinking as pure **insanity**. The text says in the first full paragraph of the page:

Whatever the precise definition of the word may be, we call this plain **insanity**. How can such a lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight, be called anything else?" (page 37, ¶ 1)

Isn't that a perfect definition to describe alcoholic insanity – **the lack of proportion, of the ability to think straight**. We can't see the truth from the false when it comes to alcohol. The insanity of alcoholism **is not** all those crazy things we do while drinking: like crashing cars, getting arrested, hurting other people mentally and physically. Sure, it's crazy to have done those things, but the real insanity is **thinking** we can safely drink alcohol in the first place… even after all the pain, suffering, and humiliation we've gone through. Like Dr. Silkworth said, **the main problem of the alcoholic centers in the mind rather than the body.**

Let's wrap up our discussion of the physical and mental aspects of alcoholism by turning to the first page of Chapter 4, "We Agnostics" – page 44. In the first

paragraph, four lines down, the Big Book gives us a statement that can be turned into a question for us to ask ourselves so we can **determine if we have the mind and the body of an alcoholic**. The book reads:

> "If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic. If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer."
> (page 44, ¶ 1, lines 4 – 9)

I will be asking a couple questions to each person who wants to take the first step with us. This first one is to help us determine if we have the **mental and physical symptoms of alcoholism**. Newcomers and people taking the steps with us, please stand…

[Ask both questions to each person standing, one at a time.]

> *If, when you honestly wanted to, could you quit drinking entirely (by yourself)?*
>
> *Or*
>
> *When drinking, did you have little (or no) control over the amount you took?*
>
> *Well, if that be the case, you are probably alcoholic and you may be suffering from an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer.*

Please be seated.

Now, let's take a look at a third factor involved in the 1st Step – the spiritual malady. Hence, the need for the second part of the first step: - "… - that our lives had become unmanageable":

On page 64, the Big Book says, "When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically."

Let's turn to page 52, and look in the second paragraph for symptoms of the **spiritual malady** or as this paragraph describes them as *bedevilments*, which means to be confused. And that's what we alcoholics suffered from all our lives – a "confused and baffled spirit"… Let's turn these statements into questions that we can answer for ourselves. These questions can be answered in the past tense (i.e.: when we were drinking) or in the present tense (i.e.: now, not drinking, suffering from an unmanageable spirit because of untreated alcoholism). As I read them, answer these questions for yourself to see if you had been or presently may be experiencing these symptoms:

1) We were having trouble with personal relationships (and we include ourselves here). Does that apply?
2) We couldn't control our emotional natures (ever have "up and down" days?). Does that apply?
3) We were a prey to (or had bouts of) misery and depression. Does that apply?
4) We couldn't make a living (or a decent successful life). Does that apply?
5) We had a feeling of uselessness. Does that apply?
6) We were full of fear (ever worry about things?). Does that apply?

7) We were unhappy. Does that apply?
8) We couldn't seem to be of real help to other people. Does that apply?

So, if several of those apply to you -- your life really is unmanageable and chances are you are suffering from a malady which only spiritual experience (or awakening) will conquer.

Back on page 44 in the second paragraph the book told us that we have only two alternatives: 1) to be doomed an alcoholic death… or 2) to live on a spiritual basis.

So, if your choice is to live on a spiritual basis, rest assured that not only is a spiritual awakening possible, it is a guarantee, provided we keep an open mind and take the Steps as described in this book.

We're going to begin this process of admittance with the 1st Step. Before we do that, let's review exactly what we alcoholics suffer from:

If I can't drink safely because of the allergy of the body (the first factor of the 1st Step) and I can't stop drinking because of the obsession of the mind (the second factor), then I'm powerless over alcohol – first half of the 1st Step. If I suffer from symptoms of a life run on self will described on page 52 then my life is unmanageable (third factor).

On page 30, the Big Book tells us exactly what we have to do to make the admission that we're real alcoholics. Remember we read, "We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics.

This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed."

In order to smash the delusion that we're not alcoholics, I'm going to ask each of you to answer a simple question, "Are you ready to concede to your innermost self you are powerless over alcohol?" In other words, "Are you alcoholic?" All that is required is a *yes* or *no* answer.

If you are not convinced you are an alcoholic or that your life is unmanageable, please let us know. Your "sponsor" or "spiritual advisor" or one of the members of this group is willing to spend time with you this week to discuss your reservations.

For those who are ready, let's take the 1st Step together. Will the newcomers and everyone that is taking the Steps with us over the next few weeks please stand. This is the final First Step question:

Do you concede to your innermost self you are an alcoholic?

Please answer, one at a time, yes or no and then be seated.

[Have each person answer the question.]

Thank you. Those of you who have answered yes to this question have taken Step One. Congratulations!

Now that we have admitted we are alcoholics, let's look at what we have to do in order to recover. Just in case we're not convinced that we need a Power Greater than ourselves, the authors of the Big Book wrote this statement as the last paragraph of Chapter 3, "More About Alcoholism". On page 43, last paragraph, the book states:

> "Once more: The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power."
> (page 43, ¶ 3)

Let's dispel a myth that's quite often heard in the meeting rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous. Many welling intentioned people make the statement… "When I feel like drinking, I remember where I came from… I think the drink through and I keep my memory green." Well, that's good advise provided I have a mental defense against drinking alcohol. The paragraph we just read tells us that ***at certain times we don't have a mental defense against the first drink.*** That implies that sometimes I *might* have a mental defense. So, sometimes I *might* be able to remember where I come from… sometimes I *might* be able to think the drink through… sometimes I *might* be able to keep my memory green. **BUT**, the scary thing is**, sometimes I won't**. The real scary thing is, I don't know when that "sometime" will be. And if I knew when I was going to have the mental defense, then I wouldn't be truly powerless of alcohol, would I?

So, what this paragraph is telling us is that in order for me not to drink alcohol, I must have a Power Greater than

myself and **that Power** will provide my defense and keep me safe and protected from alcohol – guaranteed… of course, provided I take certain steps.

So, since we've admitted that we're powerless and we have a need to find a Power, let's proceed to the 2nd Step which is:

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Chapter 4, "We Agnostics" gives us a lot of information and direction for us to take Step 2. Be sure to read this chapter in addition to the other chapters we've covered during the next week.

To give us a basis for taking the Second Step we're going to cover four main points.

1) Do you believe or are you even **willing to believe** that there is a Power that will solve your problem?
2) Do you have a **conception** of that Power which makes sense to you and works for you?
3) Is that Power, which the book quite often refers to God, **everything**… if not, it is nothing. At this point, we'll have to make a **choice**.
4) **Where** are we going to find this Power.

Page 46, starting with the 3rd line in the 1st paragraph the text says:

On pages 46 & 47 the book gives us certain requirements for the second step. In a nutshell, they are:

- We have to lay aside prejudice

- We have to express a willing ness to believe
- We have to come up with our own conception of God
- We have to admit the possible existence of that Power
- We have to honestly seek that Power

So, if we've met these requirements, let's look at the question on page 47, -second paragraph:

> "We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built."
> (page 47, ¶ 2)

Let's see who is ready to proceed and take the first part of Step 2. Will the people who have completed Step One please stand. I'm going to ask you the following question:

"Do you now believe, or are you even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than yourself?"

Please answer one at a time, *yes* or *no*.

[Have each person answer the question.]

Thank you. Please be seated. Now we can move forward.

If we don't have a conception of God that makes sense to us, pages 46 & 47 give us some good ideas. The following

are some of the words and descriptions the old-timers used to describe God:

- Power greater than ourselves (page 45, ¶ 1)
- All Powerful (page 49, ¶ 0)
- Guiding (page 49, ¶ 0)
- Creative Intelligence (page 46, ¶ 2 / page 49, ¶ 0)
- Spirit of the Universe (page 46, ¶ 2)
- the Realm of Spirit (page 46, ¶ 2)
- Supreme Being
- Power
- Great Reality (page 55, ¶ 3)
- The Presence of Infinite Power and Love (page 56, ¶ 4)
- Maker (page 57, ¶ 1)
- And of course, "God"

Keep in mind, these are only examples of terms found in this Chapter to describe God. Feel free to use these or any other conception you have provided it makes sense to you. Remember, use your own conception, however limited it may currently be. The important thing is that it's **your** conception.

Now that we 1) believe or are willing to believe and 2) we have our own conception of God, we have to consider the proposition that many people call "the Second Step Choice". It's on page 53 in the second paragraph:

> When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crises we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else He is nothing. God either is or He isn't. What was our choice to be?"

(page 53, ¶ 2)

Let's take a moment to consider both sides of the coin. If we believe what our book says and we believe the experience of thousands of recovered alcoholics that have gone before us, we can easily answer this question in the affirmative. But, let's consider for a second that we choose God to be "nothing" in our lives and that he "isn't" a part of us. Where do we go from here? Well, if that be the case, we won't be able to go much further. And if we're really, truly POWERLESS, we need God now, more than ever.

So, are we all ready to proceed? I know I am…

The last thing we need to look at in the Second Step is where do we find God. Well, we find our answer on page 55 when it says in the second paragraph:

> "Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured [means hidden or blocked] by calamity, by pomp, [by resentments, by fears, by guilt shame and remorse for the harms we've caused others], by worship of other things, but in some form or other it is there. For faith in a Power greater than ourselves, and miraculous demonstrations of that power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself."
> (page 55, ¶ 2)

So, now we know where to find God – **deep down within ourselves**.

At the end of the chapter, they tell a story of a man who had been relieved of his drink obsession and restored to sanity by the Loving hand of God. The book says on page 57, first paragraph:

> "What is this but a miracle of healing? Yet its elements are simple. Circumstances [Step 1: the pain, suffering, and humiliation of his drinking experiences] made him willing to believe. He humbly offered himself to his Maker—then he knew."
>
> **He took Steps 1, 2, & 3.**
>
> "Even so has God restored us all to our right minds. To this man, the revelation was sudden. [As in a spiritual experience, like Bill W. had in Towns Hospital.] Some of us grow into it more slowly. [As in a spiritual awakening as Apendix II describes as the "educational variety".] But He has come to all who have honestly sought Him.
>
> When we drew near to Him He disclosed Himself to us!"
> (page 57, ¶ 1 – 3)

We've completed the first two Steps in the Program of Recovery. In order for God to disclose Himself to us, we have to draw near to him. That means we have to move forward to Step 3.

Step 3 reads:

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

Let's clarify a couple words that confuse some of us in the Third Step.

First, the word **decision** implies that action will follow. We're all familiar, I'm sure, with the story of the three frogs on a log… one frog *decides* to jump off… How many frogs are left on the log? … Three. The one frog only *decided* to jump. He didn't take any action.

Secondly, let's look at the words… **our will and our lives**. What is my **will**? And how can we turn our **lives** over to something? Well, my **will** is my **thinking** and my life is no more than an accumulation of my **actions**.

Let's reread the step using these new words.

"We're going to **decide** to turn our **thoughts** and our **actions** over to God *as we understand Him*."

Easier to understand now?

Let's begin the reading of Step 3 on page 60 after the a, b, c's:

> "Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided to turn our will [our thinking] and our life [our actions] over to God as we understood Him. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?

Well, there are more requirements to be met. Be sure to read pages 60 – 62 during the next week. Unfortunately, we don't have time to read them together, now. Basically, the book tells us the requirements of the Third Step are:

1) I have to be convinced that my life, run on my own self-will, can hardly be a success.
2) I have to quit trying to run my life and self-will. **I have to quit playing God.** Why? It doesn't work.
3) I have to "let God be God" and let **Him** run my life.

Now we're ready to make our Third Step decision together. In the next paragraph they tell us what our decision is to be:

> "This is the how and the why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. [**Why?**] 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."
> (page 62, ¶ 3)

This means:

- We have to quit playing God.
- We decide God is going to **Direct** us.
- We decide to let God be the **Boss** and we're his employees.
- We decide that God is the **Father** and we're his kids.

Have we all made this decision, together?

Great! As the result of just making this decision, the book tells us we will receive several promises. They are listed in the first paragraph of page 63:

> "When we sincerely took such a position, 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. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested 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."
> (page 63, ¶ 1)

Let's affirm the decision we just made by saying the Third Step Prayer that's in the next paragraph together as a group:

> "We were now at Step Three. Many of us said to our Maker, as we understood Him: **"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!"** We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him."

(page 63, ¶ 2)

> "This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once" the book tells us.
>
> Next we launched 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** [3rd Step] was 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.

That ends today's session. Next week we will learn how to do the 4th Step inventory and we will begin it in class. It's not as difficult as some of the things you may have heard shared in meetings. **My experience is, we can have fun with inventory and learn to laugh at ourselves and see the truth about how we were running our own lives providing we take inventory the "Big Book" way.** We'll also cover the directions for Step 5 and we'll prepare to complete these two Steps before we meet for the third week. Please review what we've covered during this past hour and asked someone who's gone through the work before if you have any questions during the next week. Remember, you can put your name on the phone list and it will be available for next week so we can begin to call and support each other during our journey through the 12 Steps.

Are there any questions on what we've covered so far?

Remember our reading assignments for the next week:

- Review “Doctor’s Opinion”
- The first four chapters and Appendix II: “Spiritual Experience”
- Read the Third Step from Chapter 5
- And familiarize yourself with the information and directions for Step 4 in Chapter 5

Thanks and may God Bless.

We’ll CLOSE with the Lord’s Prayer.

Prepared by Mike L. for the West Orange, New Jersey A.A. “Beginners’ Classes”. This format may be used and distributed provided that a fee, except for photocopying reimbursement, is NOT charged. Please do not change, modify, or alter without prior consent from the author. For additional copies of this guide call 973-731-1073 or email mjl221@att.net. May God bless you in your journey through taking and teaching the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.