

Third Step Prayer Commentary

I was told in early sobriety that the first three Steps are about getting right with God and that I could not go on to the next Step until I had surrendered my entire life... past, present, and future. I am sending along a post that I received several years ago that had quite an impact on my sobriety and fit with what I had been told in early sobriety. The post is quite long but well worth the reading. Enjoy. - Keep It Simple Sami

"God, I offer myself to You - to build with me and do with me as You will."

When I "offer myself to God", I'm surrendering to God's leadership in my life with regard to my actions, my thoughts, my motives, and my decisions.

I have already admitted to my powerlessness, and I also freely admit that it's been my selfish motives and so-called-brilliant ideas that have gotten me in trouble in the past time after time.

So now I'm inviting God to take the wheel and lead the way. I'm willing to change the way I do things during the day. I'm willing to try something new, and I'm trusting that God knows what to do better than I do.

When I ask God to "build with me and do with me as You will," I'm really making myself vulnerable. I'm offering to be available to God, to allow Him to work through me anyway He sees fit.

I'm saying that, if God has big plans for me today, I don't want to miss out on them by running the show myself.

But also, if God has big plans for someone else today, and He wants to work through me to bring about those plans, I'm willing to cooperate on that level, too.

And if God has a purpose for my life, I want to yield to Him so that purpose can be fulfilled. I'm placing myself in His hands. He's the potter, I'm the clay. He's the boss.

This means that humility is going to have to kick in at some point, right?

So anyway, basically this first sentence in the 3rd step prayer lets God know that I'm making a conscious choice today to play ball.

I'm in the game today. I'm joining up with God as my team captain, my director, my boss. He's in charge, and I'm not, and that's the way I choose to operate this day.

I know God definitely doesn't want me to drink alcohol today, so therefore, if I offer myself to God to build with me and do with me as He would today, there's a good chance I won't drink.

"Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Your will".

According to the Big Book Search Engine the word "self" appears 89 times in our basic text.

Most often, it's attached to another word with a hyphen:

Self-reliance
Self-knowledge
Self-pity
Self-evident

Self-centered
Self-sacrifice
Self-searching
Self-control

Self-revealing
Self-deception
Self-discipline
Self-confident

Self-sufficient
Self-imposed

Self-destruction
Self-propulsion

Self-seeking
Self-delusion
Self-esteem
Self-appraisal

Self-conscious
Self-justification
Self-respect

and my all-time favorite

... Self-will run riot!

The word "selfish" appears 16 times, and is coupled with other unpleasantly descriptive words, such as:

selfish and foolish
selfish and dishonest
selfish and frightened
selfish and inconsiderate
selfishness, dishonesty,
resentment, and fear.

On page 71, the book suggests that some forms of self-will actually block us off from God.

On page 124, we learn that a self-centered life is in direct conflict with our new way of living.

Page 116 suggests that self-centered people are afflicted with pride, self-pity, vanity, selfishness, and dishonesty.

We are challenged in our 4th Steps to see where we have been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and frightened. Not easy AT ALL.

Time and time again throughout the book, we are warned that self-knowledge, self-reliance, and self-confidence cannot be trusted, and generally amount to nothing more than self-DELUSION.

Turns out, booze isn't the problem. SELF is the problem. The theme of the big book is the process we take by which God is able to rid us of the bondage of SELF.

"Selfishness, self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. 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 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. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so.

Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kill us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid." (page 62).

I don't think there's anything more important in my recovery than my quest to be set free, little by little, from the bondage of self.

I'm quite convinced that this is not something I can accomplish on my own. I believe it's the most difficult thing I will ever do, but I'm also very certain that with every tiny bit of progress I make in this area then my life will become better.

And not only will I benefit, but obviously so will others with whom I come in contact every day. As long as SELF is running the show, God isn't, and I'm unable to be of any real benefit to anyone else.

"Take away my difficulties..."

I thought I'd address only the first part of this sentence. I think this phrase deserves special attention, for several reasons.

First, let me tell a short story. There was once a Great Man who had divine power to heal all kinds of illnesses.

One day, this Great Man was walking by a pond and he met a Sick Guy sitting there, crippled and unable to fend for himself.

This Sick Guy had been sitting there begging for money and complaining alot, for about 38 years!

He was really stuck in self-pity - perhaps rightly so. I mean, after all, he was pretty incapacitated. So people threw money to this Sick Guy, and he kept sitting there, day by day, begging and complaining and collecting money. Anyway, the Great Man approached the Sick Guy and asked him one really important question: "Do you even WANT to get well?"

The reason I tell this story is because I believe it's a fair question, and I think we need to answer it, too.

Do we even WANT to change?

Are we truly sick and tired of being sick and tired? Do we understand, at least to some degree, that we have brought many of our own problems on ourselves?

And that unless something changes in our THINKING, our MOTIVES, our ATTITUDES, and our BEHAVIORS, then nothing much will change with regard to our alcoholism?

I think some people are problem junkies. They get uncomfortable and fearful when their lives start going too smoothly! Fear sure can keep us stuck.

A lot of people say, "Sure, I know I'm powerless over alcohol, and that my life has become unmanageable. Duh!

And yeah, I guess I could also accept the fact that there's possibly a Power greater than myself that could restore me to sanity."

But that's as far as they take it. Recovery will not be forced on us. Step 3 is the part where I say, "I AM READY TO GET WELL."

This 3rd Step Prayer request ---> Take away my difficulties... <-- causes me to ask myself a few important questions:

1 - Do I want my difficulties taken away?

2 - Is Whomever / Whatever I'm petitioning (presumably "God") able to take away my difficulties?

(Note: This is where I believe the "door-knob" theory fails. Doorknobs can't take away difficulties, even if I believe with my whole heart that they can. They can't.)

3 - Am I willing to risk living TODAY without my [comfortable, familiar] difficulties?

"That victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Your power, Your love, and Your way of life".

We don't ask God to relieve our difficulties so that we can just go merrily on our own way, living our lives selfishly and self-centeredly as we have always done in the past, looking out only for our own wants and needs. If nothing changes, then nothing changes.

God knows better than to leave us stuck in our selfish egos. He knows where that will lead us, even if we don't have enough sense to figure that out for ourselves.

We are specifically stating here in this phrase that we would like our difficulties to be taken out of the way so that others can witness with their own eyes what God has done for us.

It's what's known as a greater purpose. A bigger picture. God's work in my life is not all about me!

The entire program of recovery spelled out in the big book focuses us away from our own selfish, self-centered desires and teaches us the vital principle of "the constant thought of others."

Healing takes place, not when we try harder, but when we let go and let God work through us to be of service to someone else.

It's one of those God-principles that seems really backwards to us mortals; by helping others heal, I get to heal. By helping others grow spiritually, I get to grow spiritually.

When I am being of service to someone else, I benefit because I get out of my own self-centered, inwardly-focused depression.

Helping someone else isn't that difficult -- open the door for someone, bring someone a cup of coffee, or ask someone if they'd like to sit with you at a meeting.

Give someone a ride. Take out the trash for your neighbor. Help someone pick up something they've dropped. Let someone tell you about their day and really listen. Sweep your next-door neighbor's driveway. Offer to help carry a heavy load for a co-worker. It doesn't have to be complicated.

But SURRENDERING to this way of life is so much easier to talk about than it is to accomplish! I find the idea of thinking of others before I think of myself almost impossible.

And trusting God to take care of my needs is a very scary proposition (at first). You'd think that simply relaxing a white-knuckle grip and allowing control to gently slip from my fingers would be a pretty easy thing to do, but I've discovered it's totally against my human nature.

I want what I want, and I want it when I want it, and I usually want it NOW!

By nature I put my own needs above the needs of anyone else on Planet Earth.

And I demand that I get to be the captain of my own ship, the director in my own play, the leader of my own band. By nature, I don't want anyone telling me what to do!

"So, then, tell me... how's that workin' for ya?" Dr. Phil would ask me with a cute little know-it-all smirk on his face! Well, Dr.Phil, running my own show has never worked out well for me at all.

Getting drunk was the only thing I could ever accomplish with any regularity.

So, let's re-focus our attention on the phrase once again:

"...that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Your power, Your love, and Your way of life".

When I read it, three obvious questions come to my mind:

- (1) Does the Higher Power I'm praying to indeed have Power?
- (2) Is the Higher Power I'm praying to capable of feeling and expressing Love?
- (3) What, pray tell, is my Higher Power's way of life?

I'm also fascinated by the word "victory." It's such a permanent word, isn't it? I mean... is there any such thing as temporary victory?

Either you WIN or you LOSE. Either you're a victor or you're not. Do we expect total victory? Do we only pray for partial victory?

"May I do Your will always".

The last sentence of our 3rd step prayer. The big book tells us that selfishness and self-centeredness is the root of our troubles, and that we've been trying to run the show.

Now it's time to let go and let God direct our lives.

Does God have a will? Does it play a role in my life?

I saw a bumper sticker on a car today; it read DON'T QUIT -- SURRENDER and I thought, Yeah! That's it! We can try and try and try and try to quit drinking.

But it turns out, what really works is exactly the opposite of trying harder.

What works is letting go. Letting God change me.

Letting God influence my thinking and my actions.

Letting God use me to be of service to others.