

Session #2 - Steps 2, 3 & the beginning of Step 4

(*****Please note: if there are two leaders, the leader explaining the first three columns of the Resentment Sheets, giving examples and taking questions (later), should NOT begin here*****)

We are about to take our second journey back to the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous - back to the five Beginners' Meetings. As a group, we are taking the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous as the Steps were taken in the mid-1940's. During this session, we will provide the information for the conclusions necessary for taking Steps Two and Three, as well as provide you with guidelines for beginning the Fourth Step. During the next week, each newcomer and those working the Steps with us will be expected to begin writing the Resentment portion of their Fourth Step Inventory.

WELCOME to session number two of the "Here Are The Steps We Took" Beginner Meetings. Together, we are taking the Twelve Steps based on the directions found in the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous and the personal experiences of our A.A. pioneers.

Our names are _____ and _____ and we are members of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in our own recovery by leading these sessions. This is one way we can be of service to others and, at the same time, grow in the "Fellowship of the Spirit."

Our goal is to recover from the seemingly hopeless state of mind and body known as alcoholism. The August 1946 A.A. Grapevine contains an article titled, "Minneapolis Record Indicates that 75% are successful in A.A." The article demonstrates what can happen when newcomers attend these Beginners' Meetings, work the Steps out of the "Big Book", and then return to help others through the Steps. If you attend these Beginners' Meetings and do all that it says for us to do in the program portion of the "Big Book", you will experience the miracle of recovery from alcoholism.

Many older members have told us that the best way to understand the "Big Book" is to try to explain it to someone else. They were right. We didn't realize how little we knew about our text for recovery until we started leading these meetings and working with others.

So, we want to thank you for providing us the opportunity to learn more about our spiritual program of recovery by once again helping others go through the Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. As we have learned right here in these Beginners' Meetings, each time we take the Steps, we grow spiritually.

So that we can complete each session within 1_ hours and still provide ample time for questions, we request that you write down anything that you do not understand or need clarified and save it until the end of the session. We will answer questions at that time.

By way of a review of last week, let me describe what the Big Book says about Step One and what the differences are between the experience of an alcoholic and that of a NON-alcoholic. The book says that these differences are physical, mental, and spiritual. If you did not attend Session One of these beginner's classes last week, please pay close attention to this review and ask yourself what more closely describes your experience with alcohol, that of an alcoholic or that of a NON-alcoholic.

Physically, the difference is that the alcoholic has an allergy, or an abnormal reaction, to drinking alcohol. This abnormal reaction to alcohol is a craving for more alcohol once we take a few drinks. This craving NEVER happens to a non-alcoholic. Because of this, a non-alcoholic can ALWAYS predict how much they are going to drink, but an alcoholic CANNOT. Besides the craving, alcohol DOES something for an alcoholic that it does NOT do for a non-alcoholic. When an alcoholic drinks, they get a feeling of ease and comfort; an "IN control, get up and go into town, I like this" kind of a feeling. When a NON-alcoholic drinks, they get an "OUT of control, beginning of a nauseating, slightly tipsy, I don't like this so I don't want any more" kind of a feeling. That's why they stop after one or two drinks, and make statements like, "I don't want another drink because I am feeling that first one." Mentally, we suffer from a condition called the obsession of the mind, also referred to as alcoholic insanity or the inability to see the truth about taking the first drink. This is why when we make a decision to stop drinking alcohol for good we cannot stay stopped. As the Big Book says, "our will power becomes practically non-existent, we are without defense against the first drink." This condition is fueled by the spiritual malady. Spiritually, the difference is that because of the selfish and self-centered way the alcoholic views and deals with other people, their emotions, and life; they are filled with inner turmoil, discomfort, and anxiety. This spiritual

malady, which is the result of being spiritually blocked off by self-centered fear, exists for us as long as we are not seeking and growing toward a spiritual solution, WHETHER WE ARE DRINKING OR NOT. In “The Doctor’s Opinion” it refers to this condition as “restless, irritable and discontented.” But one of the BEST references to the spiritual malady can be found in the chapter “We Agnostics” where it describes the inner unmanageability as, “having trouble with personal relationships, not being able to control our emotional natures, being a prey to misery and depression, not being able to make a living (which includes not being able to make a successful life), having a feeling of uselessness, being full of fear, being unhappy, and not seeming to be of real help to other people.” The Big Book gives us other descriptions of the inner condition that occurs if an alcoholic does NOT deal with this spiritual malady, but page 52 probably covers it best. Since alcohol is the ONLY thing that the alcoholic has experienced, which brings relief from this inner unmanageability, we turn to alcohol again and again, even though it has caused problems for us in the past. We don’t see what alcohol is doing TO us, we ONLY think about what it is going to do FOR us. The NON-alcoholic’s relationship with alcohol is a “take it or leave it” kind of relationship, but an ALCOHOLIC’S relationship with alcohol is a “I need it to deal with life” kind of relationship. Again, please ask yourself if you can relate to the experience of an alcoholic.

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

Before we begin, we need to make sure each newcomer, and those who are taking the Steps with us, have someone to "sponsor" them through the Steps. In order for this process to work, it is essential that "sponsors" and newcomers attend all the sessions together.

Is anyone here for this second session and wish to go through the Steps with us that do NOT have a “sponsor” with them? If so, please stand.

(*****Please pause to see if anyone needs a “sponsor”. If so, ask for volunteers who have been through the Steps out of the “Big Book” to "sponsor" those who are standing*****)

Thank you. Please be seated.

Is there anyone here today who didn't have the opportunity to take the First Step with us last week, and would like to do so now? If so, would you please stand.

(*****Please pause to see if anyone stands. ONLY IF SOMEONE STANDS, PLEASE SAY THE FOLLOWING. IF NO ONE STANDS, PLEASE GO ON TO THE NEXT PARAGRAPH.*****) “After hearing the review we just did and asking yourself if you can relate to the experience of the alcoholic, here is the first of the two First Step questions: Do you concede (or admit) to your INNERMOST self you are an alcoholic? Please answer, one at a time, yes or no, and then remain standing.”
(*****Wait for them to answer. Then say:*****) “There is another question associated with taking Step 1. On page 33 at the end of paragraph 1 it says: “If we are planning to stop drinking, there MUST be NO reservation of ANY kind, nor ANY lurking notion that someday we will be immune to (or not affected by) alcohol.” So let me also ask each of you the second First Step question: Do you have any reservations or lingering ideas that one day you will be UNAFFECTED by drinking alcohol? Please answer, one at a time, yes or no, and then be seated. (*****Wait for them to answer. Then say:*****) “Thank you, you have now reached the two conclusions of Step One. After hearing the review and then answering these two questions, you have now caught up to the rest of the group and have completed Step One. If you were NOT here for Session One, please be sure to get a copy of last week’s audio CD and the handouts we provided, because we covered over 60 pages in the Big Book.”

As was explained last week, the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous contains step-by-step directions on how to recover from alcoholism, by finding a Power greater than ourselves. This Power will eliminate our obsession to drink, and lead us to a "new freedom and a new happiness, and a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes."

Last week we completed the First Step in the AA program of recovery: we conceded (or admitted) to our innermost selves that we are alcoholics, AND we stated that we have NO reservations or lingering ideas that one day we will be UNAFFECTED by drinking alcohol.

Please turn in your Big Book to page 44 and let’s now look at Step Two.

Step 2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

The chapter “We Agnostics”, which begins on page 44, starts with a good review of Step 1:

“In the preceding chapters you have learned something of alcoholism. We hope we have made clear the distinction between the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic. 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.” Let me repeat that last part: “If that be the case, you may be suffering from an illness which ONLY a spiritual experience will conquer.”

Now we know what we have to do in order to recover from alcoholism. We must undergo a life changing, spiritual transformation.

We realize this is not the answer many of you expected to find in Alcoholics Anonymous. But, please keep in mind that alcoholism IS a fatal, progressive illness. Prior to A.A., most alcoholics either died drunk or were locked up in jails or insane asylums.

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

In the middle of page 44, the authors once again tell us our options:

“To one who feels he is an atheist or agnostic such an experience seems impossible, but to continue as he is means disaster, especially if he is an alcoholic of the hopeless variety. To be doomed to an alcoholic death or to live on a spiritual basis are not always easy alternatives to face.”

So again, they are giving the only two alternatives we have if we are an alcoholic - either a lot of booze or a lot of God.

Not only is a spiritual experience possible, it is a guarantee, provided you keep an open mind and take the Steps as described in the “Big Book”.

It continues to tell us in the next paragraph on page 44, that no matter what our present beliefs are, there IS hope for us. The book continues:

“But it isn’t so difficult. About half our original fellowship were of exactly that type. At first some of us tried to avoid the issue, hoping against hope we were not true alcoholics. But after a while we had to face the fact that we MUST find a spiritual basis of life – OR ELSE. Perhaps it is going to be that way with you. But cheer up, something like half of us thought we were atheists or agnostics. Our experience shows that you need not be disconcerted (which means troubled).”

We find it amazing that the newcomer can start the A.A. program without any specific beliefs or, for that matter, without any beliefs whatsoever. All a person needs is the open-mindedness and the willingness to believe that WE BELIEVE this program works.

And let us assure you, WE DO believe. The Twelve Steps have changed our lives and the lives of millions of other alcoholics. This program WILL change your life too, IF you honestly want to recover from this deadly affliction AND are willing to go to any lengths.

Now that we have admitted we are alcoholics and that we can never safely drink alcohol, let’s look at what we have to do in order to recover. At the bottom of page 44, we learn:

“If a mere code of morals or a better philosophy of life were sufficient to overcome alcoholism, many of us would have recovered long ago. But we found that such codes and philosophies did not save us, no matter how hard we tried. We could wish to be moral, we could wish to be philosophically comforted, in fact, we could wish these things with all our might, but the needed power wasn’t there. Our human resources, as marshaled (or directed) by the will, were NOT sufficient; they failed utterly.”

So that last line is saying that our human resources (which is the ONLY thing that we have going for us), as directed by our self-will, has not worked in the past, is not enough, and will continue to fail us when it comes to combating our alcoholism. I cannot solve a self-will problem by using my self-will. Like Albert Einstein once said, “A problem cannot be solved with the same consciousness that created it.”

The book continues:

“Lack of power, THAT was our dilemma. We HAD to find a power by which we could live, and it HAD to be a POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

“Well, that’s EXACTLY what this book is about. Its MAIN OBJECT is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which WILL solve your problem. (Notice that it does NOT say that this Power is going to help US solve our problem, but that this POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES will solve our problem. The book continues.) That means we have written a book which we believe to be spiritual as well as moral. And it means, of course, that we are going to talk about God.”

Please turn to page 570 in the Third Edition Big Book, or to page 568 in the Fourth Edition. This is the second page of the Spiritual Experience Appendix in the back of the book. What is it going to take for us to find this Higher Power? The answer is mentioned in Appendix II. In paragraph 3 on page 570 in the Third Edition or 568 in the Fourth Edition, we find these words:

“Most emphatically we wish to say that any alcoholic capable of honestly facing his problems in the light of our experience CAN recover, provided (or if) he does not close his mind to all spiritual concepts. He can ONLY be defeated by an attitude of intolerance or belligerent denial.”

“We find that NO ONE need have difficulty with the spirituality of the program. Willingness, honesty and open-mindedness are the ESSENTIALS of recovery. But these are INDISPENSABLE.”

The “Big Book” authors tell us it is our arrogance and our shortsightedness that keeps us in the darkness and block us from the “sunlight of the Spirit,” which is the ONLY thing that can help us.

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

Please turn back to page 46. The Big Book authors ask us to develop OUR OWN concept of God. In other words, they want us to find a God of OUR OWN understanding. In the second paragraph on page 46 it says the following:

“Much to our relief, we discovered we did not need to consider ANOTHER’S conception of God. OUR OWN conception, however inadequate, was sufficient to make the approach and to effect a contact with Him. As soon as we admitted the possible existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things, we began to be possessed of a new sense of power and direction, PROVIDED (or IF) we took other simple steps. We found that God does NOT make too hard terms with those who seek Him. To us, the Realm of Spirit is broad, roomy, ALL inclusive; NEVER exclusive or forbidding to those who EARNESTLY seek. It is open, we believe, to all...”

They inform us that we are going to take some actions which WILL lead us to our Creator, and this Higher Power WILL guide us in the Realm of the Spirit. Our personalities will change from self-centered to God-centered; our lives will change from the material to the Spiritual.

As we said earlier, A.A. is not a religious program. We’re free to call this Power anything we wish, as long as WE are not it and it’s a Power GREATER than ourselves. The “Big Book” authors use many different names for this Power including Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind, Spirit of the Universe, Creator, the Great Reality, and an unsuspected inner resource, among others. Quite a few times they call this Power, “God”, but they use the word God merely for convenience rather than for any religious purpose. Please refer to this Power by any name you believe in or feel comfortable with.

Bill Wilson, our New York City co-founder, had a great deal of difficulty accepting this spiritual solution to alcoholism. In “Bill’s Story” he describes how he “came to believe”.

In late November 1934, Ebby T. visits Bill at his Brooklyn, New York home. It is during this visit that Bill first learns about a God of his own understanding. Let’s pick up the story at the top of page 12.

As we mentioned earlier, Ebby is one of Bill's school friends. Ebby has been sober in the Oxford Group for several months. He tells Bill his life has changed as the result of practicing the Oxford Group's Six Spiritual Activities that we discussed earlier. Please keep in mind that Bill always considered Ebby to be a worse drunk than he was, so the fact that Ebby was now not drinking carried a strong message.

Bill becomes quite distressed when Ebby starts talking about God. However, he DOES listen because he realizes Ebby's life has changed and Ebby is sober for the first time in many years. Page 12, paragraph 1:

“Despite the living example of my friend there remained in me vestiges (or traces) of my old prejudice. The word God still aroused a certain antipathy (which means a strong dislike). When the thought was expressed that there might be a God personal to me this feeling was intensified. I didn't like the idea. I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving His sway might be. I have since talked with scores of men who felt that same way.”

Then, Ebby presents Bill with a revolutionary concept:

“My friend suggested what then seemed a novel (or new) idea. He said, ‘Why don't you choose YOUR OWN conception of God?’”

“That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.”

“It was only a matter of being WILLING to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of COMPLETE willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. Would I have it? Of course I would!”

This is how Bill started on his journey to a God of his understanding and lasting sobriety. It all began with Bill's willingness to believe in a God of his own understanding.

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

Now, let's look at how the "Big Book" authors describe God. In the middle of page 46, they ask us to set aside our contempt for spiritual principles and consider OUR OWN concept of God. If we do, we will begin to realize there just might be some validity to the A.A. spiritual solution for alcoholism. Starting with line three in the first paragraph of page 46, they write:

"...We found that as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commence to get results, even though it was impossible for any of us to fully define or comprehend that Power, which is God."

Basically, the "Big Book" authors tell us it is impossible to define God. We have to stop trying to comprehend God with our mind and start accepting God with our heart. The book continues at the top of page 47:

"When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean YOUR OWN conception of God. This applies, too, to other spiritual expressions which you find in this book. Do not let any prejudice you may have against spiritual terms deter (or prevent) you from honestly asking yourself what they mean to you. At the start, this was all we needed to commence spiritual growth, to effect our first conscious relation with God as we understood Him. Afterward, we found ourselves accepting many things which then seemed entirely out of reach. That was growth, but if we wished to grow we had to begin somewhere. So, we used OUR OWN conception, however limited it was."

On the next page (page 48), the "Big Book" authors state that most of us eventually become "teachable". Sometimes we have to take our lives right to the brink of disaster and look death squarely in the eye before we are

willing to acknowledge the presence of a Higher Power. But there is hope even for the most stubborn of us. Starting with the seventh line down from the top of page 48, it says:

“...Faced with alcoholic destruction, we soon become as open minded on spiritual matters as we had tried to be on other questions. In this respect alcohol was a great persuader. It finally beat us into a state of reasonableness. Sometimes this was a tedious process; we hope no one else will be prejudiced for as long as some of us were.”

In the third paragraph on page 52, the authors make a powerful case for the existence of God. Page 52, paragraph 3:

“When we saw others solve their problems by a simple reliance upon the Spirit of the Universe, we had to stop doubting the power of God. Our ideas did not work. But the God idea did.”

So, in order to recover from alcoholism, we have to find a Power greater than ourselves. But where are we going to find this Power? Please turn to page 55, and starting with the second paragraph, the authors provide us with the answer to that question. On page 55, paragraph 2, it says:

“Actually we were fooling ourselves, for deep down in EVERY man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God. It may be obscured (or made unclear) by calamity, by pomp (which means pride), 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 the power in human lives, are facts as old as man himself.

We saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but He WAS there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the Great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is ONLY there that He may be found. It was so with us.

We can only clear the ground a bit. If our testimony helps sweep away prejudice, enables you to think honestly, encourages you to search diligently WITHIN yourself, then, if you wish, you can join us on the Broad Highway.

With THIS attitude you CANNOT fail. The consciousness of your belief is SURE to come to you.”

These are dramatic, and for some of us, revolutionary concepts. Let us summarize them for you. First, the authors of the “Big Book” tell us they have found a way to free us from the bondage of alcoholism and misery. Next, they describe the solution as a Power greater than ourselves. Finally, they tell us where to find this Power – right inside each and every one of us.

Now we know WHERE to find this Power. Most of the rest of the “Big Book” is devoted to the question of HOW to find and connect with this Power.

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

Once again we need to make a decision. We have to decide whether or not we believe in a Higher Power – a Spirit of the Universe – a God of OUR understanding.

Just like Step One, the Big Book on page 47 provides a question associated with taking Step Two. In the middle of 47, the Big Book authors write:

“We need 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 (or strongly) 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.”

Now, it’s time to choose. Are we willing to admit that there is a Higher Power? If we are, we’re ready to take Step Two.

If you are hesitant to commit right now, that’s fine. It just means you’re not ready to proceed with the rest of the program. Please take time during the next week to discuss the concept of a “God of YOUR understanding” with your “sponsor” or spiritual advisor. If after that you are then ready to

proceed, have that person take you through the Second Step and ask you to answer the Second Step question found in the middle of page 47, where we find the directions.

Let's see who is ready to proceed. Will the newcomers and those willing to work the Steps with us who have completed Step One please stand.

(*****Please pause and wait for them to stand*****)

This is the Second Step question:

“Do you NOW believe, or are you even WILLING to believe, that there IS a Power greater than yourself which could restore you to sanity?”

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

(*****Please have each person standing answer the question*****)

Thank you. Please be seated.

Those of you who have answered “yes” to this Step 2 question have completed the Second Step.

(*****If appropriate, please pass the collection baskets*****)

Let's now look at Step Three. Please turn in your “Big Book” to page 60.

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

Step 3 Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

If the writer of a textbook has an understanding of a word, but the reader of the book has a DIFFERENT understanding of the SAME word, then the

information that comes through will be garbled and incomplete. There are three words in the “lampshade on the wall” version of Step Three that are important to understand.

Most people think that the Third Step says that we turn our will and our life over to the care of God. But it does NOT say that. What it says is that we **MAKE A DECISION** to turn our will and life over to the care of God. So the first word that needs to be understood is the word **DECISION**, which is defined as “making up one’s own mind.” Let’s say my car breaks down. Although the **DECISION** to get my car fixed is a vital and crucial step, that decision alone does not get the car fixed. I will **ALSO** need to take the actions necessary to get it fixed. For any decision to mean **ANYTHING**, it **ALWAYS** requires further action.

If we decide, or make up our own mind, to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand God, that decision **ALONE** will not turn it over. We will have to take the actions necessary to turn it over. The first three Steps are designed to bring us to the point where we become **WILLING** to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power, Steps Four through Nine are **HOW** we turn our will and our life over, by removing the blocks that prevent us from actually doing so; and the last three Steps are how we **KEEP** our will and our lives turned over to God indefinitely. After a period of time though, our ego (or self-will) begins to reassert itself again; and because of our “human-ness”, we fall short in maintaining perfect spiritual focus in all of our thoughts and activities. That is why, even if we have worked the first nine Steps to the best of our ability once and are living in Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, we will still need to eventually go back to Step One and begin the Steps cycle again and again for deeper awakenings and further growth in other areas where we have God blocked off that we may not be currently aware of.

The other two words that are important to understand are the words **WILL** and **LIVES**. The words “will” and “lives” are concepts way over our head and are way too large to relate to or comprehend. But these words can be better understood by explaining that our will is our thinking and what motivates us, and that our life is all the actions that we’ve taken up to this moment. That explanation makes the words a little more down to earth and easier to comprehend. So the Third Step can then be reworded as saying that I decide to take the actions necessary to turn my motivations, my thinking, and my actions over to the care of God as I understand Him. Also, what

motivates me drives my thinking and my thinking directs my actions, so I need to go deeper than just acting my way into right thinking. If my motivation and thinking is GOD-directed, I will make the right decisions (whether it seems that way at the time or not), then the actions taken will also be right. But if my motivation and thinking is SELF-directed, I will usually make the wrong decisions (even though I may not realize it at the time), then the actions taken will probably also be wrong.

The Third Step in the “Big Book” begins just below the middle of page 60. How do we know that? Well, in this case, the "Big Book" authors tell us:

"Being convinced, we were at Step Three,..."

Convinced of what? If we've taken Steps One and Two, we are convinced that we are alcoholics and that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. Sometimes the word “sanity” is misunderstood. Other words that capture the essence of what is being said here are restore us to reality, or restore us to honesty, or restore us to peace of mind, or restore us to balance; whichever you prefer. Now we need to get out of the way and let God direct our lives.

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

On pages 60 through 63, the 'Big Book" authors discuss self-will and God's Will in great detail. At the bottom of page 60, paragraph 4, they explain we are like actors trying to control every detail of a play:

"The first requirement (please notice that it says “requirement” not “suggestion”) is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion (not just alcoholics but MOST people). Each person is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and

dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.”

“What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be SOMEWHAT at fault, he is SURE that OTHER people are MORE to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when TRYING to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest (which means “take away by force”) wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages (or manipulates) well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his BEST moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?”

Does anyone here NOT relate to this page?

(*****Please pause for the reaction*****)

We seem to be always trying to prove to everyone else that they would be better off if they just did things OUR way. I'm sure you'll agree that that's a bit of self-centeredness and a form of playing God. I think the word that comes to mind is “manipulation”, but you can call it whatever you want.

In the first paragraph on page 62, the authors declare that it is this selfish and self-centeredness that has gotten us into trouble. We need to take responsibility for our selfishness and ask God to remove this shortcoming from our lives. Page 62, paragraph 1:

"Selfishness-self-centeredness! That, we think, is the ROOT of our troubles. (And I always thought that ALCOHOL or other people was my problem.) 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 (which means “constantly”) 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. (This brings a message of hope because it is neither necessary nor possible to change others. But if we can allow God to transform us, we will find that no other

changes are needed. If other people or life were to blame for our troubles, there is absolutely nothing we can do about that. But if I am to blame for almost all of my troubles, there is something I can do about that because I am the only person that I can change. Like a wise man once said, "It is easier to put on slippers than to carpet the whole world." The book continues.) They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. (It's important to know that this includes before we started drinking, while we were drinking, and even prior to taking Step Three since we've STOPPED drinking.) ABOVE EVERYTHING, we alcoholics MUST be rid of this selfishness. (Please notice that it says, "above everything" and "must.") We MUST, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We HAD to have God's help."

So it's saying that the ONLY thing that we have going for us, which is self-will and self-knowledge, or MY life run on MY will, is the VERY THING that will lead us back to drinking (at best) or progressive misery as time passes (at worst). Let me repeat that. So it's saying that the ONLY thing that we have going for us, which is self-will, or MY life run on MY will, is the VERY THING that leads us back to drinking and/or progressive misery. If we are trying to make ourselves "un-self-centered", we are STILL being self-centered. A self-will problem cannot be overcome by self-will, a sick mind cannot heal a sick mind, we cannot USE the problem to SOLVE the problem. That gets rid of any hope we have of not pursuing this Higher Power stuff. Now what? Since Step One says that we are powerless over alcohol, what we need is the Power with a capital "P". And since our lives are unmanageable (especially our mental/emotional/spiritual life, whether we are drinking or not), what we need is a new Manager with a capital "M". Because ANYTHING at all that God has in mind for me is better than anything at all that I will EVER have in mind for me!

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

So the AA program ultimately asks us to make TWO surrenders, not just one. We need to surrender to our drinking alcohol (we do this in Step One), but we also need to surrender to our self-will (or "my life run on my will", and we do THIS in Step Three). Unfortunately, many members of AA only make the first surrender and inevitably do not experience all the freedom,

joy and serenity that the AA way of life promises. Because of not surrendering their self-will, they are often miserable and/or go back to drinking.

At the bottom of page 62, the authors tell us what we have to do in order to rid ourselves of selfishness:

"This is the how and why of it. First of all, we HAD to quit playing God. 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."

For those who do not know, the keystone is the supporting stone for the ENTIRE structure, so the Third Step decision is the supporting Step for the rest of the Steps. Now this decision is starting to sound important. The Big Book just stated that we need to let God become our Director, so we need to be doing what we think our Higher Power would have us do. In other words, we need to be staying in the moment, being directed by unselfishness and love, and trying to do the next right thing. It also says that we need to move in the direction of being God's agent, and since an agent is given the power to represent the Principal, we are deciding to start acting in a way that would represent our Highest Power. It then mentions being God's children, and if we are all God's children, we need to start acting as if we are ALL equal brothers and sisters. So you can see that this paragraph says a lot, and actually contains the essence of what the Third Step decision is all about. The book continues and this next paragraph contains the Third Step Promises.

"When we SINCERELY took such a position (the position of God being our Director, our Principle and our Father), 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."

So, now we know our place in God's Universe. Contrary to what we may have thought in the past, the whole world does not revolve around US. Once we step aside and put GOD in the center, we are amazed at how much better our lives become.

In the Second Step, we are told that we need to come up with some sort of “God of our understanding” or “Power greater than ourselves.” A.A. gives us a lot of respect by allowing us to believe whatever we wanted to believe about this Power. But there is a little unseen footnote next to Step 2 that states, “So long as WE are not it!” The Big Book says again and again that my belief that the universe revolves around ME is a BIG part of my problem, so this “center of my universe” needs to be replaced with some belief in, and conscious contact with, a Power greater than human power. Then in Step 3, it introduces us to an important attribute that this Power needs to have when it says, “...the CARE of God as we understood Him.” So our concept of the Power now needs to include the fact that this “God” cares and is caring. This may be difficult for many of us because our original concept of our Creator may have been more along the line of a “judgmental, harsh, He’s going to get me, something to be feared” kind of God. We may need to completely scrap these old ideas and start over because this isn’t the kind of Higher Power that one turns to for help.

By now, we have moved toward becoming more aware of the presence of God. Starting with line five on page 63, the authors explain this awareness. These are also more Third Step Promises:

"Established on such a footing, we became less and less 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."

We have been delivered from the gates of hell, and we have come back to tell what it was like. It isn't a pretty picture. But, now we realize we never have to go back there again, as long as we don't forget to allow God to be our Director.

It is decision time once again. "The Big Book" authors tell us we are now ready to take Step Three. The middle paragraph on page 63 contains the Third Step Prayer. This prayer is an affirmation of the decision we are making at the bottom of page 62. Before we say this prayer together as a group, there are some considerations we need to look at first. About 2/3 of the way down page 63, beginning with the last line of paragraph 2, they provide us with the directions and a warning:

“We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly (or completely) to Him. We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our wife, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand. The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.”

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

We are so fortunate that, in the years since the Big Book was written, the fellowship has grown to where very few, if any, newcomers have to take the Third Step alone. We're here today to take this monumental Step with you.

Because it says, “We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready, that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly (or completely) to God”; we would like to take a moment for personal reflection for those of you taking the Steps with us. Could we please have a moment of silence to think about whether or not you are ready to decide to turn your will and your life over to the care of the God of your own understanding.

(*****Please provided ten seconds of silence*****)

Thank you.

At the bottom of page 63, we can find the last point made about Step Three. The Big Book authors tell us what we need to do after we've made our Third Step decision. It is perhaps the MOST important point made about the Third Step, yet it is rarely discussed at meetings and usually overlooked. It states, “NEXT we launch 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 was a 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.”

Please note the authors say AT ONCE. It's telling us that this Third Step decision will have LITTLE permanent effect unless we IMMEDIATELY follow it up with a strenuous effort to face (and where we face these things is in Steps Four, Five and Six), and to be rid of (and where we get rid of these things is in Steps Seven, Eight and Nine), the things in ourselves which had been blocking us (and what we're being blocked off from is the ability to turn our will and lives over to BEGIN with). So after working the six middle Steps, then and ONLY then, will we be able to turn our will and our lives over to God with any kind of consistency, or else our initial contact with our Creator won't last.

Let's see who is ready to proceed. Will the newcomers and those working the Steps with us who have completed Steps One and Two, please stand.

(*****Please pause and wait for them to stand*****)

Please keep in mind that, like we just said, the actions necessary to bring about the Step Three decision are Steps Four through Nine, because Steps Four through Nine are how we remove the blocks from turning our will and life over to God. This is the Third Step question:

“Do you now decide to take the actions necessary to turn your will and your life over to the care of God as you understand Him?”

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

(*****Please have each person standing answer the question*****)

Thank you. Please be seated.

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

Although they say the wording is quite optional, the authors do provide us with a prayer that can be used as a daily affirmation of this Third Step

decision. Let me read it first and then we will say it together as a group. Starting with the second line in the second paragraph on page 63, it reads:

"...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!"

Let's now read the Third Step Prayer together as a group.

"...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!"

Please begin to include saying this Third Step Prayer as part of your daily time with God, and when needed throughout the day.

We have now completed all the information that the "Big Book" authors provide for Step Three. What I am about to read now has been called "The Step Three Parable" because it captures what we think is the essence of the Third Step:

A drunk is staggering along the street and he meets God. "God, I can't do this anymore," he says. "Please, please, will you give me sobriety?" God says, "Sobriety isn't free, how much money do you have?" The drunk reaches into his pocket. "Fifty bucks." "I'll take it," says God, "you're sober." The man stands up straight, drunk no more. It feels pretty good. "Yeah but, God?" "Yes?" "I know I gave you my money willingly. But, you see, I need to get gas for my car." God says, "You have a car?" "Well, yes." "You didn't tell me that. I'll take your car too." "But..." God interrupts and says, "I'll take the car. It's part of the price for your sobriety." "But how will I get to work?" "You have a job? I'll take the job, too." "But God, how will I pay my mortgage?" "Mortgage? You have a house? I'll take that too." "But God, my family. How will I take care of them if You have my house and my job?" God says to him gently and lovingly: "In order to keep your sobriety; you must give Me these things. But I will let you drive My car, as long as you remember it's MY car. You can have the job, but remember

you're working it for ME. It's My house but I will let you live in it. And as for the family, they are MY family but I will trust you to take care of them."

Even though we have taken a considerable amount of time on the first three Steps, all we have done is make decisions. Now we are going to begin to take some specific actions that will carry us the rest of the way to an experience of God.

Step 4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

What are these "causes and conditions" mentioned at the end of the Third Step? Well, the "Big Book" authors use a lot of different words meaning the same thing: "damaged or unsalable goods", "flaws in our make-up", "defects of character", shortcomings, and even wrongs. All these have the same meaning and the same effect: they block us off from God and from others.

The authors start by comparing a personal inventory to a business inventory. In the first full paragraph of page 64, they write:

"Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he CANNOT fool himself about values."

So, we are going to conduct the equivalent of a commercial inventory on our lives. We are going to discover what had blocked us off from the Sunlight of the Spirit.

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

In the next paragraph, the authors tell us exactly what we have to do to conduct a Fourth Step inventory:

"We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self (not alcohol but self), manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations."

If you remember, this is a reference back to what was discussed in Step Three that self-will (or “my life run on my will”) is the root of our troubles. We are now going to inventory or, "take stock" if you will, of three manifestations of self-will: our resentments, our fears, and our sex conduct and harms toward others.

We have provided inventory sheets for you to do this, and we will read the "clear-cut", simple directions that the "Big Book" authors have documented for us. Let us reassure you, the Fourth Step is not difficult nor should it be a tedious process. Within seven pages of text, the "Big Book" authors give us precise instructions on how to make a good beginning on facing and getting rid of the obstacles in our path to the Power greater than ourselves.

The first manifestation of "self" we're going to look at is our resentments.

Since Bill Wilson liked using different words that mean the same thing, the book uses a few different expressions when describing who and what to write down. People, institutions or principles with whom we have resentment, with whom we were angry, with whom we were hurt or threatened or interfered with, with whom we felt had wronged us, with whom we stayed sore at, with whom we felt “burned up” toward, and with whom we held a grudge. Also included in this list should be people, institutions or principles with whom we were annoyed with, agitated by, or let down by; and also include your regrets because regret is resentment toward yourself. Needless to say, this is usually a long list.

The word resentment comes from the Latin word “sentire” which means “to feel”, and when you put “re” in front of any word, it means “again”, so the word resent means “to feel again”. After we experience what we perceive as being wronged by someone, the first response usually is anger or frustration. But then after a while, after we have reviewed in our mind what happened, and have felt the anger or anxiety again and again, we move to the next stage, which is resentment. Over a short period of time, as I playback the suspected harm in my head, I become less and less involved in what happened and the other person becomes more and more to blame. Sometimes we are able to let the incident go without moving past anger, but if you are a self-centered alcoholic, that is usually a difficult thing to do since we tend to keep score of these things so we can at some point get back at them. I’m sure no one here can relate.

Since the Big Book says that Step Four “AT ONCE” follows Step Three, we would like to briefly describe the first three columns of the Resentment Inventory so that you can start writing your Fourth Step when you leave here today. Next week we will cover Step Four in its entirety.

Please turn to the sheet entitled "Resentment Inventory" on page 6 in the packet provided for you. You can clearly see that the first three columns of this sheet resemble the example found on page 65 in your Big Book, with the exception of an added fourth column. Don't worry! The directions for the fourth column are found on page 67 and we'll be getting to that next week.

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

Let's first look at the simple step-by-step, column-by-column procedure the "Big Book" authors give us for writing the resentment inventory. The chapter “How It Works” says - “Resentment is the “NUMBER ONE” offender. It destroys more alcoholics than ANYTHING else, from it stem ALL forms of spiritual disease. Resentment leads ONLY to futility and unhappiness; to the precise extent that we permit resentment do we squander the hours that might have been worth while; this business of resentment is INFINITELY grave; it is FATAL; when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit; the insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again; these things are poison; because of it the world and its people really dominated us; the wrong-doing of others FANCIED OR REAL had power to actually kill.”

We are going to start reading from the bottom of page 64. Six lines from the bottom of page 64, the authors tell us:

"In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper."

So in the first column, "I'm resentful at", it says to put the following:

"We listed people, institutions or principle with whom we were angry."

Second column, second instruction - 3 lines up from the bottom of page 64:

"We asked ourselves why we were angry."

In our example on page 65 and on our sheets, the second column is entitled, "The cause".

Why am I resentful, "burned up" or sore at whatever is written in each of the boxes in the first column? What did they do to make me angry? List all the resentments you have for each name. Keep in mind that you may have more than one resentment toward any one person, place or thing.

We continue writing the names in the first column along with the reason in the second column until we are finished. How do you know when you are finished? Well, when you think you are finished and no more names come to mind, stop. Ask God for Guidance. If more names come, write them down. If not, you are finished with the first and second columns unless you think of something later. Please note that there is a Resentment Inventory Prompt Sheet just before the Resentment Inventory that will give you some other ideas as well.

In the third column, third instruction - page 64, last three lines and page 65, first two lines:

"In most cases it was found that our self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships, (including sex) were hurt or threatened."

In the first paragraph on page 65, the "Big Book" authors repeat themselves and add a few more ways self can be affected:

"On our grudge list we set opposite each name our injuries. Was it our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal, or sex relations, which had been interfered with?"

Remember: our self-esteem is how we view ourselves. Our pocketbook is money or material possessions. Our ambitions are our plans for the future or what we wanted. And our security is our general sense of personal well being, and has two possible viewpoints – financial security or emotional security.

Then, at the bottom right of the example given on page 65, the "Big Book" includes the word "pride". Pride can be defined as an exaggerated opinion of ourselves. That makes up the seven ways that self can be affected in

column three. Also provided for you in the handout packet is a list of definitions for words used in the Fourth Step and these definitions should be handy as you are writing this.

2*****NEXT LEADER*****

(*****Explain the Resentment Inventory Sheets, give a few examples and answer any questions. For now, ONLY do the first three columns.*****)

1*****NEXT LEADER*****

Please pay attention to what I am about to read. For those of you who are working the Steps with us, this is what is expected over the next week:

- 1) Please start saying the Third Step Prayer each morning and when needed throughout the day.
- 2) Please make copies of each of the three inventories provided in your packet so that you will have blank forms to write on. What is suggested is to make 10 copies of the Resentment Inventory, five copies of the Fear Inventory, and 10 copies of the Sex And Harms Inventory.
- 3) As you are writing, please start saying the Step Four Prayer (found at the bottom of page 4 in your handout packet) and finish ONLY the first three columns of your Resentment Inventory, the first two columns together, top to bottom, before going on to the third column. Then do the third column, one section at a time, top to bottom, until you are finished with it. Please make this a priority and try to do some writing EVERY day.
- 4) When you are COMPLETELY finished with the 3rd column, please begin to pray the Step Four Resentment Prayer (at the bottom of page 8 in your handout packet) for the people, institutions or principles that you wrote down in the first column of your Resentment Inventory.

Please remember to talk with your temporary sponsor after this meeting to swap phone numbers if necessary and get to know each other so that they can assist you with your Fourth Step. We wish you the very best as you leave here to complete the first three columns of your Resentment Inventory. Please remember to bring this week's handout packet with you to the NEXT session so that we can continue with the inventories provided.

This is the end of session 2. Are there any questions?