

Made a Decision

12-Step Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

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

From Self-Will to Surrender — The Recovery Files

The Step Three Journey · Self-Will · Running the show alone · Surrender · Cared for, free, restored

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PART 1 OF 5 · READING

Step Three: The Full Text and Its Meaning

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: Step Three: The Full Text and Its Meaning

Step Three: The Full Text and Its Meaning

Step Three of Alcoholics Anonymous reads: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." Eighteen words. Each one chosen with precision. Each one loaded with implications that take a lifetime of recovery to fully inhabit.

Understanding Step Three fully — not as a religious obligation to be performed and filed away, but as a profound and daily interior shift — begins with a careful reading of every phrase.

"Made a decision." The Step does not say "turned our will and our lives over." It says made a decision to turn them over. This distinction is not semantic — it is the entire architecture of the Step. A decision is an act of the will. It is not a feeling, not an achievement, not a completed event. It is a choice, made in the present moment, which must be renewed daily — and sometimes hourly — because the forces of self-will do not retire after a single defeat. Step Three is not a destination. It is a direction. It is a choice, made once formally and then repeatedly in the daily practice of living.

"To turn our will and our lives over." This is the radical core of the Step. The program is not asking for a partial surrender — the comfortable parts of life while you retain management of the areas you consider most important. It is asking for everything: will and life. Will — the driver, the decision-making center, the ego that insists on its own way. Life — the outcomes, the relationships, the career, the health, the future. Both. The totality of the self placed in something other than the self's own management.

"Over to the care of." These five words reframe what surrender actually means. Step Three is not asking you to be obliterated, controlled, or stripped of personhood. It is asking you to place yourself in the care of something. Care is relational. Care involves attention, protection, and genuine concern for wellbeing. The God of Step Three is not a dictator demanding unconditional compliance. It is a caretaker — something whose nature includes genuine care for the one who surrenders to it. This reframe is essential for those who experience surrender as humiliation or erasure.

"God as we understood Him." These five words carry the same liberty and latitude established in Step Two. Your understanding of God is yours. The program does not require theological uniformity, doctrinal agreement, or submission to any particular religious tradition. What it does require — and what experience consistently confirms — is some working concept of a Power greater than the self to whom the will and the life are being entrusted. As your understanding deepens in recovery, this concept will grow. But you begin from wherever you honestly are.

Reflection Questions

1. What was your initial reaction to Step Three — the whole of it? Where did you feel resistance, relief, confusion, or recognition?

2. "Made a decision" — not "completed a surrender." How does understanding Step Three as an ongoing decision rather than a one-time achievement change how you approach it?

3. The Step asks for "will AND lives" — both the driver and the destination. Is there an area of your will or your life that you are instinctively trying to keep off the table? Name it honestly.

4. "Over to the care of" — not "over to the control of." How does the word "care" change the nature of what surrender means in Step Three? Does it make surrender feel different?

5. Step Three logically follows Steps One and Two. If Step One was honest defeat and Step Two was the opening of a door, what is Step Three? What does it mean to actually walk through that door?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

"Made a Decision": The Act of Choosing to Surrender

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Made a Decision": The Act of Choosing to Surrender

"Made a Decision": The Act of Choosing to Surrender

The opening phrase of Step Three — "made a decision" — is not incidental. It is the hinge point between the first two Steps and everything that follows. Steps One and Two are, fundamentally, Steps of perception and belief: we came to see the truth of our powerlessness (Step One) and to open ourselves to the possibility of a Power greater than ourselves (Step Two). Step Three is the first Step of action — the point at which perception and belief are translated into a deliberate interior choice.

A decision, in its deepest sense, is a cut. The Latin origin — *decidere* — means to cut away, to cut off. To make a decision is to sever the alternatives, to commit to one path by turning away from others. When the program speaks of "making a decision," it is describing this kind of commitment: a genuine turning, not a tentative experiment. Not "I'll try this and see how it goes," but a genuine interior shift that says, "I am choosing this direction, and I will keep choosing it."

This does not mean the decision is made once and never needed again. The experience of virtually every person who has worked Step Three is that it must be made repeatedly — daily, and sometimes moment by moment. Self-will does not surrender once and then retire. It resurfaces in a thousand small ways every day: the insistence on having things your way in relationships, the anxiety about outcomes you cannot control, the rage when reality does not conform to your preferences, the compulsive over-planning that is really fear masquerading as competence. Each of these moments is an invitation to remake the decision of Step Three.

The Big Book's description of the "director" metaphor is one of the most clarifying passages in the entire AA literature. It describes the actor who tries to arrange the entire play from his position on the stage — directing every other actor, controlling every outcome, ensuring that the whole production serves his comfort and satisfaction. This is the self-will that Step Three asks us to lay down: the exhausting, ultimately futile project of directing everything from inside the performance.

The actor who finally accepts that he is not the director — that there is a director, that the director is competent, and that trusting the director produces better results than running the show himself — has made the Step Three decision.

What makes this decision genuinely difficult is that control feels like safety. For many people in recovery — particularly those with histories of trauma, abandonment, or environments where others repeatedly demonstrated their incompetence or malice — maintaining control over every variable is not stubbornness or pride. It is the survival strategy that kept them functional in situations where trusting others was genuinely dangerous.

Understanding this is essential: the resistance to Step Three's decision is not weakness. It is the echo of very rational responses to very real past threats. The work of Step Three is not to

condemn the control strategy, but to distinguish between the situations that required it and the present situation — which is, for perhaps the first time, safe enough to try something different.

The decision of Step Three is not made once in a formal ceremony and then carried forward automatically. It is made each morning when you wake up. It is made each time self-will surges and you choose to pause and ask for direction rather than immediately acting on your own instinct. It is made in every conversation where you choose honesty over performance, every moment of anxiety where you choose trust over compulsive planning, every disappointment where you choose acceptance over resentment.

The decision accumulates through these small renewals into a new way of being — a life increasingly organized around trust rather than control.

Reflection Questions

1. The Latin root of "decision" means "to cut away." What specifically are you cutting away when you make the decision of Step Three? What alternatives, illusions, or survival strategies are you choosing to release?

2. Have you ever experienced the exhaustion of being the "director" — trying to arrange and control every outcome? What did it cost you? What was it like in your body, your relationships, your inner life?

3. The resistance to Step Three is often rooted in very rational past experiences where control was genuinely necessary. Where in your history did the need to control everything become a survival strategy? Does it still make sense in your current situation?

4. If Step Three must be made daily rather than once, what would that look like in practical terms in your life? When in your day does self-will typically reassert itself most powerfully?

5. Describe a specific recent moment when you could have made the Step Three decision — when you could have paused and chosen trust over control — but did not. What happened instead? What might have happened differently?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Willingness to Surrender Control

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I am genuinely willing to release control of outcomes I cannot determine
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. When things do not go my way, I can accept this without prolonged resentment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I ask for guidance before making major decisions, rather than acting solely on my own judgment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I can distinguish between taking responsible action and obsessively controlling outcomes
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I am willing to have my plans change if something better is being offered
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I can release worry about the future after I have taken the action available to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I am open to my Higher Power directing my recovery in ways I did not plan
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I practice letting go on a daily basis, not just in crisis moments
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Recognition of Self-Will Patterns

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can recognize when self-will is driving my behavior — when I am operating from ego rather than guidance
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I am aware of my most common self-will patterns (controlling relationships, outcomes, my image, etc.)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I notice when I am "directing the show" rather than trusting the process
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I can catch myself mid-self-will-run-riot and make a different choice
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I understand the specific ways my self-will has been most destructive in my addiction and recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I recognize the early warning signs of self-will before it escalates into crisis
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I am honest with my sponsor or counselor about when self-will is overriding my Step Three commitment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I take a daily inventory of where self-will showed up and what I can do differently
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Made a Decision": The Act of Choosing to Surrender

Personal Control Inventory

The first step in releasing control is seeing clearly where you are currently trying to maintain it — and what that costs.

1

Relationships I Try to Control

Who do I most try to manage, fix, or control? What specific behaviors, thoughts, or feelings am I trying to control in them? What happens when they do not cooperate?

2

Outcomes I Insist On

What outcomes do I demand from life — in my recovery, relationships, career, health? What anxiety shows up when those outcomes feel uncertain?

3

My Image and Reputation

How much energy goes toward managing how others see me? What am I protecting? What is the cost of this management?

4

The Recovery Process Itself

Am I trying to manage my own recovery — deciding which suggestions to follow, which Steps matter, which changes are necessary? What would it mean to release management of my recovery to a Power greater than myself?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Made a Decision": The Act of Choosing to Surrender

The True Cost of Control

Control does not come free. It extracts a price — in energy, relationships, peace, and recovery stability. This exercise totals the bill.

1

Energy Cost

How much mental and emotional energy goes toward trying to control people, outcomes, and my image? What is not available to me because that energy is being consumed?

2

Relationship Cost

What has my need for control cost me in my relationships? How have people responded to being managed rather than met?

3

Peace Cost

When was the last time you felt genuinely at peace — not distracted, not controlling, not planning, but actually present? How often does control rob you of peace?

4

The Full Balance Sheet

Looking at the full cost of control, what is the honest verdict? Is maintaining control worth what it is extracting from your life?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Made a Decision": The Act of Choosing to Surrender

Fear of Surrender Excavation

Most resistance to Step Three is rooted in fear. Understanding the specific fear is the first step in addressing it honestly.

1

What I Am Afraid Will Happen If I Surrender

What specifically do you fear might happen if you genuinely turned your will and life over? Name the fears concretely.

2

Where This Fear Came From

Looking back at your history, where did the fear of surrender originate? What experiences taught you that losing control was dangerous?

3

Is the Fear Still Rational?

Is the situation that originally made control necessary still your current situation? Or are you protecting against threats that are no longer present?

4

What Might Become Possible

If you released the fear and genuinely practiced Step Three, what might become possible in your recovery, relationships, and peace of mind?

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

"Will and Our Lives": What We Are Actually Turning Over

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Will and Our Lives": What We Are Actually Turning Over

"Will and Our Lives": What We Are Actually Turning Over

The Step Three surrender has two distinct dimensions, and both deserve careful examination: will and life. These are not the same thing, and the distinction between them illuminates the full scope of what the Step is asking.

Will is the driver — the internal faculty of desire, decision, and determination. It is the voice that says "I want," "I insist," "I should," and "I know best." It is the center of self-direction: what you pursue, what you avoid, what you demand from yourself, from others, and from the universe. Self-will, in the context of addiction, is not simply willpower in the ordinary sense. It is the fundamental orientation of the self around its own preferences, comforts, and ideas about how things should be.

The Big Book's famous phrase "self-will run riot" is describing a will that has become the unchallenged organizing principle of a life — a will that treats its own preferences as the natural law that the universe ought to obey.

Turning over the will means something very specific: it means releasing the demand that things be other than they are. It means surrendering the insistence on particular outcomes, particular relationships behaving in particular ways, and particular events following particular scripts. It means the daily practice of asking "what is my Higher Power's will for me today?" rather than "how do I get what I want today?" It means submitting your own ideas, plans, and preferences to a process of discernment — checking them against the guidance available through prayer, meditation, sponsors, and the recovery community — rather than executing them unilaterally because they feel right.

Turning over the life means something more comprehensive and, in some ways, more concrete. "Our lives" encompasses every domain: relationships, career, finances, health, housing, family, sexuality, creative expression, and daily routine. Turning over the life does not mean becoming passive, abdicating responsibility, or waiting for divine intervention to manage the practical dimensions of existence. It means approaching every domain with the question "what is being asked of me here?" rather than "how can I arrange this to my advantage?" It means being willing to have your life look different from what you planned, if that difference is what genuine healing and growth require.

The practical application of "will and life" surrender in early recovery often focuses on three specific areas where self-will is most dangerous. The first is relationships: the compulsive need to manage other people's perceptions, feelings, and behaviors — to ensure that you are seen well, that you are not abandoned, that conflicts are resolved in ways that protect you. The second is outcomes: the inability to endure uncertainty about how things will turn out, leading to compulsive planning, anxiety, and the need to control variables that are genuinely not

controllable. The third is the recovery process itself: the tendency to manage one's own recovery — to decide which suggestions to follow, which Steps apply, which changes are necessary — as if the disease of addiction has left the judgment intact.

A useful way to hold the distinction between will and life is through the metaphor of the river. Will is the paddling — the direction and force you apply to navigate the current. Life is the river itself — the current, the banks, the obstacles, the destination. Step Three asks you to stop fighting the current, to trust that the river knows something about where it is going, and to use your paddling not to override the river's direction but to work with it. You do not become a passive log. You become a boat that is responsive to something larger than its own engine.

Reflection Questions

1. When you honestly examine your "will" — what you most insist on, what you most resist, what you most demand from life and others — what do you find? What does your self-will most obsessively pursue or protect?

2. In which specific domain of your life is self-will most clearly running the show right now — relationships, finances, career, the recovery process itself? What would "turning it over" concretely look like in that domain?

3. "Self-will run riot" — where in your recovery history has your own will, running unchecked, produced the most damage? What did that riot specifically look like?

4. Turning over "our lives" does not mean passivity. How do you hold together taking responsible action with genuine surrender of the outcome? Where does your effort end and trust begin?

5. What area of your life are you most reluctant to include in the Step Three surrender? What does keeping that area under your own management protect you from? Is that protection serving you?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Understanding What Is Being Surrendered

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have a clear understanding of what "turning over my will" means in practical, daily terms
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I can name specific areas of my life where I am genuinely practicing Step Three surrender
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I understand that "turning over my life" is about all domains — relationships, career, health, and recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I know the difference between surrender and passivity — I take action while releasing outcomes
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I understand that Step Three is a daily decision, not a one-time completion
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I can see the difference between what I am responsible for and what I need to release
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have thought carefully about what specific things I am placing in my Higher Power's care
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I practice the Third Step Prayer or an equivalent daily conscious contact practice
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Will and Our Lives": What We Are Actually Turning Over

Will & Life Mapping — What Am I Turning Over?

Step Three asks for "will and lives" — both. This exercise maps what that specifically means for you.

1

My Will — What I Most Insist On

What do I most demand from life? What do I most resist? What outcomes do I insist must happen? Be specific and honest.

2

My Life — Specific Domains

List each domain: Relationships / Career / Finances / Health / Recovery Process / Future Plans. For each, write what "turning it over" would concretely mean.

3

What I Am Not Willing to Turn Over

What area of will or life am I instinctively protecting from Step Three surrender? What does keeping it under my management protect me from?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Will and Our Lives": What We Are Actually Turning Over

Surrender by Domain — Turning Over Each Area of Life

Step Three asks for "our lives" — all of it. This exercise walks through each domain to make the surrender specific and concrete.

1

Relationships

What relationships am I trying to control? What would turning them over to my Higher Power's care look like practically?

2

Career / Work / Purpose

How is self-will showing up in my work or career? What would surrender mean here?

3

Finances

Where is fear or control dominating my relationship with money? What would trusting my Higher Power with finances require?

4

Health

Am I trying to control my health outcomes through anxiety and obsession? What would surrender with responsibility look like?

5

Recovery Process

Am I directing my own recovery, or am I following guidance? What needs to shift?

6

Future / Plans

What plans am I clinging to that may need to change if my Higher Power has different direction? Am I willing to let them change?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Will and Our Lives": What We Are Actually Turning Over

The Director Metaphor — Letting Go of the Script

The Big Book describes the "actor who tries to run the whole show" from his position on the stage. This exercise applies that metaphor to your life.

1

The Play I Am Trying to Direct

Describe the "play" of your life. What are you currently trying to control and direct from your position on the stage?

2

The Other Actors I Am Trying to Manage

Who are the people in your life you are trying to get to follow your script? What happens when they improvise or refuse?

3

The Outcome I Demand

What ending are you insisting on? What happens if the play goes differently?

4

What Would Change If You Let the Director Direct

If you genuinely stepped back and let someone else run the show, what would become possible that your directing prevents?

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

"Over to the Care of": Surrender Is Not Submission

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Over to the Care of": Surrender Is Not Submission

"Over to the Care of": Surrender Is Not Submission

Perhaps the most clinically and spiritually important distinction in all of Step Three is embedded in five small words: "over to the care of." Not "over to the control of." Not "over to the judgment of." Not "over to the power of." Over to the care of.

Care is a relational concept. Care implies someone — or something — that pays attention to you, has genuine concern for your wellbeing, and acts on your behalf rather than simply for its own purposes. To be cared for is to be the object of benevolent attention. It is the experience that, when functioning healthily, produces the foundational sense of safety that developmental psychologists call secure attachment — the deep knowing that you are seen, valued, and protected by someone or something reliable.

This distinction matters enormously because the word "surrender" — which is often used to describe the Step Three movement — carries associations that are deeply unhelpful for many people in recovery. Surrender in the military sense means defeat, submission to a superior force that will now dictate your fate. Surrender in the context of trauma can mean the cessation of resistance to someone who is actively causing harm. For people who have experienced either military service, trauma, or coercive control, the invitation to "surrender" can feel not like liberation but like the repetition of something terrible.

Step Three is not that kind of surrender. It is closer to the experience of putting down a burden that has become too heavy to carry — not because someone demands it, but because you finally recognize that carrying it is making you sick, and that there is something trustworthy enough to carry it instead. It is the difference between submission — which is compliance under threat — and trust — which is the voluntary release of control to someone or something whose care you have come to believe in.

The word "care" also reframes the nature of the God of Step Three. Whatever your working concept of a Higher Power — traditional religious deity, the recovery group, the natural world, a universal love — Step Three asks that it be understood, at minimum, as something that cares. Not something indifferent to your wellbeing. Not something that judges and withholds. Something that is genuinely for you, that is actively engaged in your restoration, and whose guidance — if sought and followed — reliably moves you toward health rather than harm.

For those with histories of caregivers who failed them — parents who were absent, abusive, addicted, or simply inadequate; authority figures who exploited trust; God concepts inherited from religious experiences that were more shaming than supportive — the concept of trustworthy care may feel like a fantasy. This is important to honor, not dismiss.

The work of Step Three for these individuals often involves, first, the careful examination and update of their models of what care actually looks and feels like — drawing on the evidence of trustworthy people who have appeared in their lives, on the experience of the recovery

community as a caring presence, and on the gradual accumulation of moments in which turning something over actually produced something better than managing it alone would have.

Surrender to care is also not the end of your agency. You remain the one making choices in your life. You retain your values, your voice, your responsibility for your own behavior, and your participation in your own recovery. What changes is the center from which your choices are made — moving from the isolated ego, driven by fear and self-will, toward something more grounded, more connected, and more trusting. You are not being erased. You are being invited into a more spacious and supported way of being.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your personal history with being genuinely cared for? Who in your life has demonstrated real care — reliable, consistent, non-conditional concern for your wellbeing? How has that history shaped your capacity to trust Step Three?

2. How does the word "care" change the nature of what Step Three is asking, compared to words like "control," "submission," or "obedience"? Does the distinction feel real and meaningful to you?

3. Where in your life are you carrying burdens that are making you sick — burdens that were not meant for you to carry alone? What would it mean to actually set them down?

4. What does genuinely trustworthy care look and feel like to you? Have you experienced it in the recovery community, in a sponsor or counselor, or in some other relationship? How is it different from care that was conditional, inconsistent, or harmful?

5. Step Three is surrender to care, not the end of your agency. What remains yours — what does not change when you make the Step Three decision? How do responsibility and surrender coexist?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Trust in a Higher Power's Care

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I believe my Higher Power is genuinely for my wellbeing, not indifferent or punishing
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have evidence — from my own experience — that trusting something beyond myself produces better outcomes
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I can release difficult situations to my Higher Power and feel some genuine relief
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I trust that my Higher Power is at work in my life even when I cannot see how
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I approach difficulty with some sense that meaning or growth might be embedded in it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I experience moments of real peace and connection in my relationship with my Higher Power
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. My trust in a Higher Power is growing, however gradually and imperfectly
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I can ask for help — from my Higher Power and from others — without experiencing this as weakness
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Over to the Care of": Surrender Is Not Submission

My Trust History

Your history with trust — who was trustworthy, who wasn't, what happened when you trusted — shapes your capacity for Step Three surrender.

1

People Who Were Trustworthy

Who in your life demonstrated reliable, consistent, non-conditional care? What did that care look and feel like? How did it shape you?

2

People Who Were Not

Who violated your trust? What did that violation look and feel like? How did it shape your relationship with vulnerability and surrender?

3

The Trust Balance

Overall, has your life experience taught you that trust is mostly safe or mostly dangerous? Is that conclusion still serving you, or is it preventing growth?

4

Building New Trust

Who in your current life (sponsor, counselor, recovery friends, Higher Power) is demonstrating trustworthiness? What would it mean to let yourself trust them more fully?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: "Over to the Care of": Surrender Is Not Submission

The Third Step Prayer — Deep Dive

The Third Step Prayer is perhaps the most concrete articulation of the Step Three intention. This exercise slows down and personalizes each phrase.

1

"God, I offer myself to Thee"

What does it mean to offer yourself? What specifically are you placing into your Higher Power's hands?

2

"To build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt"

What would it mean to be built with rather than building alone? What is the difference between God doing with you versus doing to you?

3

"Relieve me of the bondage of self"

Where are you most enslaved to self-will? What is the bondage of self costing you? What would relief feel like?

4

"That I may better do Thy will"

What is the difference between doing God's will and doing your own? How would your life be different if you genuinely sought God's will first?

5

"May I do Thy will always"

Not "sometimes" or "when convenient" — always. What does that level of commitment ask of you?

6

Your Personal Third Step Prayer

Using the structure above, write your own personal Third Step Prayer in your own words:

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

Living Step Three: The Daily Practice of Surrender

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: Living Step Three: The Daily Practice of Surrender

Living Step Three: The Daily Practice of Surrender

Step Three is the most misunderstood Step in terms of its ongoing nature. Many people complete the formal Step Three — perhaps reading the Third Step Prayer with their sponsor, acknowledging the decision to a witness — and then proceed as if the work is done. As if surrender, once accomplished, does not require renewal. This misunderstanding is one of the most reliable predictors of relapse: the person who believes they have "done" Step Three but who has not built the daily practice through which the decision is kept alive.

Step Three must be lived. It is not an event in the past tense — it is a present-tense orientation, renewed each morning and recommitted to each time self-will reemerges, which it does reliably, persistently, and often loudly.

The daily practice of Step Three is, in essence, the practice of recovery itself. Every morning's prayer or meditation. Every moment of pausing before reacting. Every decision made by consulting something beyond one's own immediate preference. Every acceptance of an outcome that was not chosen. Every request for help rather than unilateral action. These are not separate from Step Three — they are Step Three, lived out in the texture of an ordinary day.

The Third Step Prayer, found in Chapter Five of the Big Book, is the most concrete articulation of the Step Three intention available in the AA literature. 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."

Each phrase deserves meditation. Each phrase is a specific, concrete release of something — the self as construction project, the self as primary concern, the self as obstacle, the self as the measure of all things.

The daily practice of Step Three shows up in recognizable, specific patterns in the life of someone genuinely working this Step. It shows up in the morning inventory — the brief pause before the day begins to set an intention of openness and willingness rather than agenda. It shows up in the decision-making process — the habit of asking "what does my Higher Power want here?" before executing a plan that serves only self-interest. It shows up in relationships — the practice of releasing the need to manage other people's reactions, perceptions, and feelings, and instead showing up honestly and leaving the outcome to something beyond the self. It shows up in how difficulty is received — whether hardship is met with resentment and resistance, or with the question "what is being asked of me in this?"

The practical test of Step Three is the acceptance test. When something happens that you did not choose, did not want, and cannot change — a medical diagnosis, a relationship ending, a job loss, a legal consequence, a recovery setback — what is your first interior response? If it is the demand that things be otherwise, the surge of resentment at the universe for not cooperating with your

preferences, the frantic search for ways to override what has happened — that is self-will, and it is the signal to recommit to Step Three. If it is — even imperfectly, even after the initial shock — the capacity to say "I accept this, and I trust that something useful can come from this," that is Step Three lived out in real conditions.

The promise embedded in daily Step Three practice is not that life becomes comfortable, or that outcomes always align with your preferences, or that pain disappears. The promise is liberation from the exhausting tyranny of self-will. The person who genuinely lives Step Three is free — not from life's difficulties, but from the compulsion to fight everything that does not conform to their demands. This freedom is described across recovery literature in consistent terms: a lightness, a spaciousness, a capacity to be present to what is actually happening rather than being perpetually consumed by what should be happening instead. It is perhaps the most practically transformative gift of the entire Twelve Step process.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you been treating Step Three as a completed event or as a daily practice? What does your actual daily experience of Step Three look like — or what would it need to look like?

2. The Third Step Prayer asks to be "relieved of the bondage of self." What does the bondage of self look, feel, and act like in your daily life? Where are you most enslaved to your own preferences, demands, and ego?

3. Describe a recent situation where you reacted from self-will rather than from a place of Step Three surrender. What happened? What would have happened differently if you had paused and made the Step Three decision in that moment?

4. The acceptance test: when something happens that you did not choose and cannot change, what is your first interior response? What is the gap between your instinctive response and the response you would like to have?

5. What would your life look and feel like if Step Three were genuinely, consistently practiced — not perfectly, but honestly and regularly? What would be different about your relationships, your emotional state, your recovery stability?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Daily Step Three Practice

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I begin each day with some form of intention-setting or prayer that renews my Step Three decision

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When self-will surges, I have a reliable practice for pausing and recommitting to surrender

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I regularly check in with my sponsor or counselor about where Step Three is and is not alive for me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can identify specific moments in the past week where I practiced genuine Step Three surrender

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. My recovery is becoming more about "what is being asked of me?" than "how do I get what I want?"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I notice and acknowledge small moments of trust and release, not just the dramatic ones

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have a morning practice that grounds me in Step Three before the demands of the day begin

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I experience growing freedom from the exhausting work of trying to control everything

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: Living Step Three: The Daily Practice of Surrender

Letters of Release — Turning It Over in Writing

Writing creates clarity. These letters are acts of release.

1

Letter 1: To Self-Will

Write a letter to your own self-will acknowledging what it has tried to do, thanking it for its effort, and explaining why you are choosing to release it now.

2

Letter 2: To Your Higher Power — Formal Surrender

Write a formal letter to your Higher Power turning over your will and your life. Be specific about what you are placing in care.

3

Letter 3: To a Specific Person You Are Trying to Control

Write (but do not send) a letter to someone you have been trying to control, releasing them and the outcome of that relationship.

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 3 Reading: Living Step Three: The Daily Practice of Surrender

My Step Three Commitment Statement

This is your formal, personal Step Three commitment — to be read, shared with your sponsor, and returned to when self-will reasserts itself.

1

What I Am Turning Over

Specifically name what you are turning over — areas of will, areas of life, outcomes, relationships, fears.

2

To Whom I Am Turning It Over

Name your Higher Power and what you understand about its nature and care.

3

What I Am Keeping (Responsibility, Not Control)

What remains yours — what responsible actions are you committing to while releasing control of outcomes?

4

My Daily Practice

How will you renew this decision daily? What practices will keep Step Three alive?

5

My Step Three Commitment Statement

Write your full Step Three commitment in your own words — to be shared with your sponsor and returned to regularly:
