

Made a Decision

Al-Anon Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

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

A Dual-Lens Recovery Intensive — The Recovery Files

From Self-Will to Surrender to Care · Self-Will · Running the show alone · Decision · Deliberate, daily turning · Care · Held by something greater · " · Al-Anon Step Three · Alcoholics Anonymous Step Three

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

In this workbook

- Part 1 · The Words of the Step: Decision, Will, Care
 - Check-in: Making the Decision to Turn It Over
 - Check-in: Understanding "Care" — Being Held
 - Exercise: What I Need to Turn Over
 - Exercise: Exploring "Care": Being Held
- Part 2 · Self-Will Run Riot: Recognizing the Pattern
 - Check-in: Recognizing Self-Will in My Patterns
 - Exercise: My Self-Will Inventory
- Part 3 · Letting Go: What It Is and What It Isn't
 - Check-in: Capacity for Trust & Letting Go
 - Exercise: Practicing Letting Go
 - Exercise: My History With Trust
- Part 4 · Step Three from Both Sides: The Dual Recovery Lens
 - Exercise: Both Sides: Dual Recovery Reflection
- Part 5 · The Serenity Prayer as a Living Practice
 - Exercise: Serenity Prayer Life Mapping
- Part 6 · Step Three as a Daily Decision: Living the Surrender
 - Check-in: Step Three as a Daily Practice
 - Exercise: Writing My Step Three Statement
 - Exercise: Designing My Daily Practice
 - Exercise: Step Three Action Plan

Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 6 · READING

The Words of the Step: Decision, Will, Care

Al-Anon Step Three — The Recovery Files

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." Every word of this sentence has been chosen with extraordinary care.

"Made a decision." Not completed a process. Not achieved a state. Made a decision — a willful, deliberate, conscious act. This is important because it makes Step Three available to everyone, regardless of where they are emotionally or spiritually. You do not need to feel ready to make a decision. You need only to make the decision — to exercise your will in a single, deliberate direction.

"To turn our will and our lives over." It is not asking you to turn over one area of your life — the part that caused the most obvious problems. It is asking you to turn over your will — the entire operating system by which you have been navigating your existence — and your life — the totality of your circumstances, relationships, future, and outcomes.

"To the care of God as we understood Him." The word "care" is doing enormous work in this sentence. God, or your Higher Power, is not asked to take control — to override your free will, to make all your decisions, to remove all difficulty and consequence from your path. God is asked to take care — an active, attentive, holding relationship. Care implies warmth. Care implies attentiveness. The Step is not asking you to be controlled. It is asking you to be held.

The cumulative meaning of Step Three is something like this: I have recognized my powerlessness (Step One). I have opened to the possibility that something greater than myself can help (Step Two). Now I am making an active, deliberate, daily decision to stop running my life by willpower alone, and to place my trust in the hands of something that cares for me and that has access to wisdom and power I do not. This is not passivity. It is the most demanding and most liberating thing recovery asks of you.

Reflection Questions

1. Which word or phrase in Step Three creates the most resistance for you — 'decision,' 'will,' 'lives,' or 'care'? What does that resistance tell you?

2. What is the difference between making a decision and achieving a state? How does framing Step Three as a decision rather than an arrival change how you approach it?

3. What does the word 'care' mean to you in the context of your Higher Power? How is being 'cared for' different from being 'controlled'?

4. What specifically would it mean to turn over your will — not just your circumstances, but the operating system by which you navigate your life?

5. Write your own version of Step Three in plain, honest language — what you are deciding, what you are turning over, and what or whom you are turning it over to.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Making the Decision to Turn It Over

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

1. I have made a conscious, deliberate decision to place my will and my life in the care of a Higher Power

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I understand the difference between making a decision (Step Three) and taking an inventory (Step Four)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can identify specific areas of my life where I genuinely need to 'turn it over' rather than manage it myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have experienced the relief that comes from releasing something I cannot control to a Power greater than myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I approach Step Three as a daily practice, not a one-time event

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am willing to turn over the outcomes of situations I care deeply about — even when those outcomes are uncertain

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that turning my will over does not mean becoming passive or abandoning responsibility

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have made this decision out loud — in prayer, with a sponsor, or in a meeting — rather than keeping it internal

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Understanding "Care" — Being Held

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

1. I believe I am held in care — by my Higher Power, by the program, by the people who love me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can receive care and help without immediately finding ways to repay, deflect, or dismiss it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand 'care' in Step Three as active, ongoing, and personal — not passive or indifferent

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have identified specific ways my Higher Power has cared for me in the past, even in difficult times

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can accept being cared for even when I feel I don't deserve it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I understand that being 'cared for' does not mean shielded from all pain — it means held through pain

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I experience moments of genuine trust that I am not alone in my recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am learning to receive guidance, support, and care without needing to control how it arrives

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

What I Need to Turn Over

Worksheet 2 of 10

The Turning Over

This worksheet makes the act of Step Three concrete. Rather than working the Step in the abstract, you will identify the specific people, situations, outcomes, and fears that you are being asked to release into the care of your Higher Power.

People I Am Trying to Manage or Control

1. List the specific people whose behavior, recovery, choices, or wellbeing you are currently trying to control or manage.

2. For each person: what specifically are you trying to produce in their life? What outcome are you working toward through your management?

3. For each person: write a one-sentence "turning over" — a statement releasing that person and their recovery to the care of your Higher Power.

Fears I Am Managing Through Control

1. List the specific fears that are driving your self-will right now. What are you most afraid will happen if you let go?

2. For each fear: is it based on past experience, present reality, or future prediction? How much of it is actually within your power to prevent?

3. For each fear: write a turning-over statement — acknowledging the fear and releasing it to the care of your Higher Power.

My Own Recovery & Future

1. In what specific ways are you trying to manage the pace, trajectory, or outcomes of your own recovery?

2. What does it mean to turn your recovery itself — not just your addiction, but the whole process of healing — over to the care of your Higher Power?

3. Write a turning-over statement for your own recovery: what you are releasing, what you are trusting, and what action remains genuinely yours.

YOUR EXERCISE

Exploring "Care": Being Held

Worksheet 3 of 10

Care as the Center

The word 'care' in Step Three is not passive or distant. It describes an active, attentive, holding relationship — something that moves toward you, holds you, and acts on your behalf. This worksheet helps you explore what being genuinely cared for means in your life and your recovery.

My History With Being Cared For

1. Describe your earliest experiences of being cared for — or not cared for. How did your family of origin communicate care? What did it look like? What was missing?

2. What messages did you absorb about whether you were worthy of care — from parents, from religious upbringing, from early relationships? Which of those messages are still running?

3. Have you experienced being genuinely cared for by another person in recovery — a sponsor, a therapist, a member of your group? What did that feel like, and what made it different from what you had known before?

4. Where do you resist being cared for — deflecting, minimizing, insisting you are fine, repaying immediately to avoid the feeling of owing? What drives that resistance?

Higher Power Care: What It Means for Me

1. How do you currently understand your Higher Power's relationship to care — is it distant, conditional, present, warm, indifferent? Where did that understanding come from?

2. Can you identify specific moments in your life when you felt genuinely cared for by something beyond your own understanding — moments of unexpected help, grace, or peace that you cannot fully explain?

3. What would it mean to allow your Higher Power to care for you the way you have sometimes been able to care for others — attentively, unconditionally, without requiring you to have it all together first?

4. Write a description of your Higher Power's care as you most honestly understand it right now — not as you think you should understand it, but as you actually experience or wish to experience it.

Practicing Receiving Care

1. What would it look like to genuinely receive the care of your Higher Power today — in one specific, concrete situation? What would you stop doing? What would you allow?

Practicing receiving care...

2. What self-care practices — physical, emotional, relational, spiritual — constitute your participation in being cared for? What are you doing to make yourself available to care?

Practicing receiving care...

3. Complete this sentence: "The care of my Higher Power means that I do not have to _____ alone. I am allowed to _____."

Practicing receiving care...

PART 2 OF 6 · READING

Self-Will Run Riot: Recognizing the Pattern

AI-Anon Step Three — The Recovery Files

The phrase "self-will run riot" comes from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, and it describes not simply stubbornness or selfishness — but a more fundamental disorder of orientation: the habitual, compulsive, exhausting experience of insisting on managing outcomes that are not ours to manage, controlling people who are not ours to control, and navigating life as if the quality of our existence depends entirely on the quality of our management.

Self-will in recovery often looks quieter and more sympathetic than we imagine. It looks like the person who cannot sleep because they are lying awake worrying. It looks like the person who controls through service and helpfulness — because if I am always doing, always managing, always being needed, nothing can fall apart. It looks like the person who has decided, below the level of conscious awareness, to need nothing from anyone.

For the person in recovery from substance use, self-will run riot is the belief that the problem of addiction can be managed through sufficient personal effort. For the loved one in AI-Anon, it is the compulsive care-taking, the exhausting management of someone else's behavior, the belief — which feels so much like love — that sufficient effort can produce the change you want.

Step Three does not ask you to stop caring. It asks you to recognize the specific limits of your will's jurisdiction — the boundaries of what is actually yours to decide, to act on, to change — and to release everything beyond those limits into the care of something greater. The prayer of self-examination for Step Three is not "What should I do?" It is "Is this mine to do?"

Reflection Questions

1. Describe what self-will run riot looks like in your specific life. Not the textbook version — your version. What are its particular shapes, patterns, and disguises?

2. How does self-will disguise itself as virtue in your life — as caring, as responsibility, as loyalty, as love? Where has that disguise made it hardest to release?

3. What are the costs of self-will run riot in your life? What has it taken from you — in energy, in relationships, in peace, in the quality of your daily experience?

4. Can you identify the origins of your self-will — the environments or experiences that taught you that self-reliance was the only safe strategy?

5. What specific situations in your life right now are most clearly in the grip of self-will? What would it mean to release each of them to your Higher Power?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Recognizing Self-Will in My Patterns

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

1. I frequently try to control outcomes, other people, or situations that are not mine to control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have a strong tendency to believe that my way of doing things is the right way — or the only way

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I find it difficult to ask for help without feeling weak, exposed, or indebted

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I become anxious, angry, or resentful when things do not go the way I planned or intended

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I often make decisions based on what I think should happen rather than what I have been guided toward

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I notice self-will most clearly in my relationships — attempting to manage how others think, feel, or behave

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have used self-will to try to fix situations that genuinely required surrender

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I can see specific ways that self-will run riot has contributed to my suffering and the suffering of those I love

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

My Self-Will Inventory

Worksheet 1 of 10

Purpose

Self-will is not always obvious. It hides in the most sympathetic-looking behaviors — in care-taking, in over-responsibility, in the refusal to need help. This inventory helps you see the specific shapes self-will takes in your life.

AI-Anon Lens

Self-will as the loved one: controlling, managing, enabling, and sacrificing yourself in the belief that you can produce another person's recovery.

Personal Recovery Lens

Self-will as the person in recovery: insisting that addiction can be managed by willpower alone, refusing help, returning to using despite consequences.

How Self-Will Manifests in My Life

1. List five to eight specific ways self-will shows up in your life. Be concrete — not 'I try to control things' but 'I check my partner's phone every day' or 'I make promises to stop using and believe them each time.'

2. How does self-will disguise itself as something positive in your life — as love, as responsibility, as strength, as loyalty? Give specific examples.

3. In which relationships is your self-will most active? What does it look like in each of those relationships?

4. How has self-will directly contributed to your suffering — and the suffering of people you love? Be honest and specific.

Synthesis: Acknowledging the Self-Will

1. Write a clear, honest paragraph describing self-will run riot in your story — where it has been most active, what it has cost you, and what has protected it from being seen.

Synthesize with honesty and self-compassion...

2. What would it mean to thank your self-will for the protection it once offered — and then, consciously, to release it into the care of your Higher Power?

Synthesize with honesty and self-compassion...

3. Complete this sentence: "The area of my life where self-will is currently running the show — where I most need to make the decision of Step Three — is _____."

Synthesize with honesty and self-compassion...

PART 3 OF 6 · READING

Letting Go: What It Is and What It Isn't

Al-Anon Step Three — The Recovery Files

"Let go and let God" is one of the most quoted phrases in Al-Anon, and also one of the most misunderstood. If letting go simply meant giving up, walking away, or pretending you don't care, it would not be a spiritual practice. It would be denial dressed in spiritual language.

Letting go is not abandonment. For the parent of an addicted child, letting go does not mean withdrawing love, ceasing to hope, or washing your hands of your child's life. It means releasing the frantic, exhausting attempt to control outcomes that are ultimately in your child's hands. It means loving your child fully while releasing the claim that love alone, expressed through management and control, will produce sobriety. That is not abandonment. It is a profound act of faith.

Letting go is not passivity. Genuine surrender in Step Three does not mean sitting on your hands and waiting for God to arrange your life. It means acting on the guidance that is available to you — attending meetings, working with a sponsor, engaging in therapy, making amends, taking right action in your relationships — while releasing your grip on the outcomes of those actions.

Letting go is not the absence of emotion. You can grieve deeply what you are releasing. You can be terrified of what happens when your management ceases. The feelings are not the obstacle to letting go — they are part of it.

Letting go, when it is genuine, produces something unmistakable: relief. People in recovery describe it consistently: "I felt like I put down something I'd been carrying for years and didn't know how heavy it was until I set it down."

Reflection Questions

1. What has 'letting go' meant to you before encountering it in recovery? What did you believe it required or implied?

2. What is the difference, in your own experience, between letting go as abandonment or passivity — and letting go as active, loving release? Can you give a specific example?

3. What is the hardest thing in your life to let go of right now? What specifically makes it hard — fear of the outcome, grief about releasing it, pride in managing it?

4. Describe a time when you let go of something genuinely — not resigned yourself to it, but actually released it. What happened? What did it feel like?

5. What would your daily practice of 'letting go' look like if you were living Step Three consistently? What would you release each morning?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Capacity for Trust & Letting Go

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

1. I can name at least one area of my life where I have genuinely released control and experienced peace as a result

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I trust my Higher Power — or the program — enough to act on guidance even when I don't fully understand it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can distinguish between the things I can change and the things I cannot, and I am working to accept the latter

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have a practice of letting go — daily or regularly — of things that are not mine to carry

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can release outcomes in relationships without interpreting it as abandonment of love or care

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I experience genuine, sustained relief when I successfully turn something over rather than anxiety about what will happen

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am learning to trust the process of recovery even when results are not yet visible

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have experienced situations where things worked out better when I let go than when I held on

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Practicing Letting Go

Worksheet 6 of 10

Letting Go as a Practice

Letting go is not an event — it is a practice that must be exercised again and again in specific situations with specific people. This worksheet helps you work through the actual letting go process in the relationships and situations that matter most.

What I Am Holding On To

1. List everything you are currently holding on to with a tight grip — specific people, outcomes, resentments, fears, situations, and results you are trying to control. Be as specific and complete as possible.

2. For each item: how long have you been holding it? What happened when you tried to let go before, if you did? What has holding on cost you?

3. Which items on this list are causing the most suffering — yours and others'? What would immediate release of those items produce?

4. Which items are you most afraid to release, and what specifically do you fear will happen if you do? Name the fear clearly.

The Act of Letting Go

1. Choose one item from your list above — the one that most needs to be released right now. Describe exactly what letting go of it would look and feel like in practice. What would you stop doing? What would you stop thinking? What would you allow to be uncertain?

2. Write a letting-go statement for this item — a declaration that names what you are releasing, who you are releasing it to, and what you are trusting in the release.

3. What is the emotion you most need to feel and move through in order to genuinely release this? Grief? Fear? Anger? How will you allow yourself to feel that emotion without using it as a reason to hold on?

4. Describe a past experience of genuine letting go — something you actually released. What did it feel like? What happened? How does that experience inform what is possible now?

Living the Release

1. After you let go of something genuinely, what practices will help you maintain the release rather than reclaiming it? What is your plan for when you reach for it again?

Explore living in the release...

2. How will you know, day by day, whether you are genuinely releasing or simply suppressing? What does genuine release feel like in your body, your mind, your relationships?

Explore living in the release...

3. Write the beginning of a letting-go prayer or intention: "I release _____ to the care of _____. I trust that _____. I am free to _____."

Explore living in the release...

YOUR EXERCISE

My History With Trust

Worksheet 7 of 10

Trust as History

The capacity to trust a Higher Power — or anything beyond yourself — does not appear from nowhere. It is shaped by every experience of trust and betrayal in your history. This worksheet helps you understand where your current relationship with trust comes from, and what recovery is offering you instead.

Where My Trust Was Shaped

1. Describe your earliest experiences of trust — who was trustworthy in your family of origin, and who was not? What did you learn from those early experiences about whether trust was safe?

2. Have you experienced significant betrayals of trust — by people, by institutions, by your own body or judgment, or by a God you once believed in? How have those betrayals shaped your current capacity to trust?

3. In what areas of your life is trust most difficult right now? With people? With outcomes? With your Higher Power? With yourself? Where does the difficulty come from?

4. What did addiction — yours or someone you love — do to your ability to trust? What specifically was damaged, and what, if anything, has recovery begun to restore?

Trust in My Recovery Right Now

1. Describe your current relationship with trust — in your Higher Power, in the program, in your sponsor or therapist, in yourself. What is genuinely growing? What is still defended?

2. Where has recovery already asked you to trust something you could not verify? What happened when you took that risk? What did you learn from it?

3. What would it take for you to trust your Higher Power enough to make the Step Three decision — not perfectly, but genuinely? What is the remaining barrier?

4. Who in your life has demonstrated trustworthiness in recovery — someone whose trust has been consistently confirmed? What is it about them that makes them trustworthy, and what does that tell you about what trust requires?

Building Trust Going Forward

1. What specific experiences in recovery have already begun to rebuild your capacity for trust — moments when you risked trusting and the risk was honored?

Explore building trust going forward...

2. What one small act of trust — in your Higher Power, in the program, in another person — could you take this week as a practice of building trust incrementally?

Explore building trust going forward...

3. Complete this: "The most honest thing I can say about my capacity to trust right now is _____. What recovery is asking me to trust, despite that, is _____."

Explore building trust going forward...

PART 4 OF 6 · READING

Step Three from Both Sides: The Dual Recovery Lens

Al-Anon Step Three — The Recovery Files

Step Three is the first step in the twelve-step framework that is explicitly an action — a decision, made and re-made, that requires the will to be turned in a new direction. It is also the step that most clearly reveals the parallel nature of recovery for the person who has been using and the person who has been loving someone through addiction.

For the person in recovery from addiction, Step Three follows the recognition of Step Two that something beyond their own thinking is available to help. Now comes the harder part: not just believing that help is available, but actually deciding to accept it. The person in active addiction has typically been running a life organized around one central principle: I will manage this myself. Step Three is the decision to change that orientation.

For the loved one in Al-Anon, Step Three has a specific and often painful application: the decision to release the person you love to the care of a Higher Power. This does not mean ceasing to love them. It means trusting that there is a care available to your loved one that is greater than yours — a care that does not depend on your vigilance, your sacrifice, or your ability to find the right words or the right strategy. For most loved ones in Al-Anon, this is the hardest thing they have ever been asked to do. It feels like betrayal. And it is, in fact, one of the most loving things they can do.

Many people in recovery carry both stories simultaneously — in recovery from their own substance use and from the effects of growing up with, or loving, someone who was addicted. For these people, Step Three must be worked in both directions at once.

Reflection Questions

1. Which lens — personal recovery or Al-Anon — presents the more challenging Step Three invitation for you right now? Why?

2. If you carry both stories: how does turning over your own will and turning over your loved one's recovery interact in your experience? Do they support each other or complicate each other?

3. Describe the specific person, relationship, or situation that Step Three is most urgently asking you to release. What makes that particular release so difficult?

4. What would it mean to genuinely trust that a care greater than yours is available to the person you are most afraid to release? What would you need to believe for that trust to be possible?

5. Write a Step Three reflection from both perspectives — one paragraph from your personal recovery lens, one from your AI-Anon lens. What do you notice when you hold both?

YOUR EXERCISE

Both Sides: Dual Recovery Reflection

Worksheet 4 of 10

Two Surrenders, One Direction

Step Three asks for a double surrender in many people's stories: turning over both their own will about their own using, and their will about someone else's recovery.

Step Three Through the Personal Recovery Lens

1. What specifically are you turning over when you apply Step Three to your own recovery — your own using, your own mental health, your own patterns of self-management?

2. What form does self-will take in your personal recovery? How does it still try to convince you that you can manage this yourself?

3. What would it feel like to truly place your recovery — its pace, its direction, its outcomes — in the care of your Higher Power? What would you have to release to do that?

4. Write a personal Step Three statement for your own recovery: "I turn over my _____ to the care of _____, trusting that _____."

Step Three Through the AI-Anon Lens

1. Who is the specific person whose recovery, choices, or wellbeing you most need to release to a Higher Power? Describe your attachment to managing their outcome.

2. What does 'turning over' this person look like in practice? What would you stop doing? What would you begin trusting?

3. How has your inability to release this person — and their recovery — affected your own wellbeing, your own recovery, your own life?

4. Write an AI-Anon Step Three statement: "I release _____ and their recovery to the care of _____, while committing to my own recovery by _____."

PART 5 OF 6 · READING

The Serenity Prayer as a Living Practice

Al-Anon Step Three — The Recovery Files

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." These three lines are the theology of Step Three condensed to its irreducible minimum.

"Serenity to accept the things I cannot change." Acceptance, in the context of the Serenity Prayer and Step Three, means simply this: the willingness to acknowledge reality as it is, rather than continuing to expend energy fighting what is already true. I cannot change the fact that addiction is a disease. I cannot change the fact that another person's recovery is theirs to work, not mine to produce. Acceptance does not mean liking these realities. It means releasing the exhausting, futile energy of fighting them.

"The courage to change the things I can." The Serenity Prayer is not a call to passivity. It is a call to right-sized action — action appropriately focused on the domain that is genuinely yours. What can you change? You can change your own attitudes, your own responses, your own behavior. You can set boundaries — not to control another person's behavior, but to define what you will and will not participate in.

"The wisdom to know the difference." This third line may be the most challenging and most important. The wisdom to know the difference is not an intellectual achievement. It is a spiritual one — cultivated through regular prayer and meditation, through honest conversation with sponsors and therapists, through the accumulated experience of getting it wrong and learning from it.

Reflection Questions

1. Divide your current life concerns into two columns: 'Things I cannot change' and 'Things I can change.' What appears in each column? Are there items you are unsure about?

2. Which line of the Serenity Prayer is hardest for you to practice right now — acceptance, courage, or the wisdom to know the difference? Why?

3. Describe a recent situation where you fought against something you could not change. What was the cost? What might serenity and release have looked like instead?

4. Describe a recent situation where you had the power to make a meaningful change but chose passivity or withdrawal instead. What does the Serenity Prayer's call to courage mean for that situation?

5. How do you currently use the Serenity Prayer in your daily life? How might you deepen or expand that practice in this season of your recovery?

YOUR EXERCISE

Serenity Prayer Life Mapping

Worksheet 5 of 10

The Prayer as a Map

The Serenity Prayer is not just a prayer — it is a diagnostic tool. It divides your entire life situation into what is genuinely yours to change and what is not. This mapping exercise applies the prayer systematically to your actual life circumstances right now.

Things I Cannot Change — And Must Accept

1. List every significant situation in your life right now that you are fighting against — things you are spending energy resisting, wishing were different, or trying to force into a different shape.

2. For each item: is your resistance changing reality, or only consuming your energy? What has fighting these things cost you?

3. What does genuine acceptance of each item look like — not resignation or giving up, but the serenity to acknowledge reality as it is? What specifically would you stop doing if you truly accepted each one?

4. Which item on this list is hardest to accept? What specifically makes it so difficult to release?

Things I Can Change — And Must Act On

1. List the areas of your life where you do have genuine power to act — your own attitudes, behaviors, boundaries, recovery practices, relationships, and choices.

2. Are there areas where you are using the language of 'acceptance' or 'letting go' to avoid taking action that is actually yours to take? Where might you be using surrender as passivity?

3. What is the most important right-sized action you have been avoiding — something genuinely in your power that you have been leaving undone? What would it take to act on it?

4. Write three specific, concrete changes you will make this week that are genuinely yours to make — no more, no less.

The Wisdom to Know the Difference

1. Identify two or three situations in your life right now where you are genuinely unsure which column they belong in. Describe each one: what feels like yours to change, and what feels like it needs to be released?

2. Who helps you discern the difference — a sponsor, therapist, or trusted person in the program? What has their guidance revealed that you could not see on your own?

3. How has your discernment improved over the course of your recovery? Where can you now draw the line more clearly than you could before?

4. Complete this: "The wisdom I most need right now is the wisdom to know that _____ is/is not mine to change."

PART 6 OF 6 · READING

Step Three as a Daily Decision: Living the Surrender

AI-Anon Step Three — The Recovery Files

One of the most important practical truths about Step Three is also one of the most frequently missed: it is not a sacrament performed once and then complete. Step Three is a daily decision — and for most people in most seasons of recovery, it is a decision returned to repeatedly as the day's demands and provocations draw the will back toward its old patterns of grasping and control.

This is not a sign of failure. It is the honest texture of Step Three practice for virtually every person who has worked it with integrity. The cycle of release and reclaiming and release again is the actual lived experience of Step Three — and the measure of progress is not the elimination of that cycle but the shortening of the time between reclaiming and releasing.

What does a daily Step Three practice look like? It begins with intention — a morning prayer, meditation, or simple moment of conscious surrender in which you acknowledge, again, that your will and your life are placed in the care of your Higher Power. Many people in recovery use the Third Step Prayer: "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."

Throughout the day, Step Three practice requires attention — the capacity to notice when you have returned to self-will. The signals are fairly consistent: anxiety that escalates when you cannot determine the outcome of a situation. Anger when things do not go the way you planned. Resentment when another person does not behave as you believe they should. Exhaustion that comes from carrying burdens that are not yours to carry.

Father Martin was fond of pointing out that recovery is not an event — it is a daily way of living. Step Three is the daily heart of that way of living.

Reflection Questions

1. What does your current morning practice look like? Is there any element of Step Three — conscious surrender, prayer, or intention — in how you begin your day?

2. What are the specific signals — emotional, physical, behavioral — that tell you when you have taken back what you turned over? How do you typically recognize that you're back in self-will?

3. When you reclaim control during the day, how long does it typically take before you turn it over again? What supports the return to surrender? What delays it?

4. Design a specific daily Step Three practice that is honest, sustainable, and genuinely yours. What would you do each morning? What would you do when you notice yourself in self-will during the day?

5. What would your life look and feel like if you were genuinely living Step Three as a daily practice — not perfectly, but consistently? What would be different?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Step Three as a Daily 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 conscious surrender — prayer, meditation, or intentional release

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When I notice myself grasping for control during the day, I have a practice for returning to Step Three

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I regularly 'take back' my will in specific areas and then consciously turn it over again

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can identify the physical and emotional signals that tell me my self-will is running the show

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I use the Serenity Prayer or a similar practice as a daily anchor to Step Three

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I discuss my Step Three practice regularly with a sponsor, therapist, or trusted person in recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I apply Step Three not just to the big, obvious situations but to the daily, small moments of grasping and releasing

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am building a consistent Step Three practice that supports my recovery across all areas of my life

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Writing My Step Three Statement

Worksheet 8 of 10

The Decision Made Concrete

A Step Three statement is the decision made concrete — put into your own words, in your own voice, addressing your own specific circumstances. It is a declaration, made honestly and specifically, of what you are deciding, what you are turning over, and who or what you are turning it over to.

Drafting Your Statement

1. Write the first part of your Step Three statement: 'I made a decision to turn over _____.'
Be as specific as possible — name the specific areas of your will and life you are releasing.

2. Write the second part: 'I am turning these over to the care of _____. ' Use your own honest understanding of your Higher Power — not someone else's language, but yours.

3. Write the third part: 'In making this decision, I am committing to the following actions that are genuinely mine: _____. ' Name the specific, right-sized action that remains yours after the turning-over.

4. Now write the complete statement as a single, unified declaration. Read it aloud after you write it. Notice what shifts when you hear yourself say it.

YOUR EXERCISE

Designing My Daily Practice

Worksheet 9 of 10

Step Three Lives in the Daily

Step Three is not completed once — it is practiced daily. The measure of Step Three is not how well you made the decision in a single moment, but how faithfully you return to it each day as life presents its invitations back into self-will.

Morning: Setting the Intention

1. Describe your current morning routine. Is there any element of conscious surrender or intention-setting? What is present, and what is missing?

2. What form of morning Step Three practice would be honest and sustainable for you — a prayer, a moment of meditation, a written intention, a reading? Be realistic about your schedule and your temperament.

3. Write the morning Step Three intention you will begin using — in your own words, for your own life. Make it specific to your actual circumstances, not a generic formula.

4. What time each morning will you do this practice? What might get in the way, and how will you address that when it happens?

During the Day: Recognizing the Return to Self-Will

1. What are your specific signals that self-will has returned? Identify them emotionally (anxiety, anger, resentment), physically (tension, shallow breathing, racing heart), and behaviorally (checking, controlling, lecturing, withdrawing).

2. When you notice these signals, what is your current practice? Do you have a way of returning to Step Three in the middle of the day, or does self-will typically run unchecked until evening?

3. Design a mid-day return practice — a brief, repeatable action you can take the moment you notice self-will has taken over. It might be a single sentence, a breath practice, a moment with the Serenity Prayer.

4. What situations, people, or times of day reliably trigger your return to self-will? How can your practice specifically prepare for those predictable challenges?

Evening: Review and Release

1. What does an honest evening review of Step Three look like for you — a brief inventory of where you were in self-will and where you practiced surrender? How would you do this in five minutes or less?

2. When you review the day and see clearly where self-will ran the show, how do you respond to yourself — with judgment, with compassion, with honest acknowledgment and re-commitment? What response actually supports tomorrow's practice?

3. Write a brief evening release practice — something that helps you put down the day's management and enter sleep with something like surrender. Include an acknowledgment of where Step Three was practiced and where it was missed.

4. What would your life look and feel like in three months if you practiced morning intention, mid-day return, and evening release consistently? What would be different in your most important relationships? In your own inner life?

YOUR EXERCISE

Step Three Action Plan

Worksheet 10 of 10

Decision into Living

Step Three is a decision — and decisions require action to be real. This action plan translates the insights of this intensive into the specific, concrete commitments that will make Step Three a living reality.

Immediate Actions (This Week)

1. What is the single most important area of your life where you will consciously make the Step Three decision this week? Name it specifically.

2. What specific control behavior or enabling behavior will you release this week as an act of Step Three? What will you do instead?

3. With whom will you share your Step Three statement this week? By when?

4. What morning practice will you begin tomorrow — even imperfectly — to anchor your Step Three commitment?

My Step Three Declaration

This is your closing declaration — the decision, made in writing, in your own words, for yourself.

1. Write your complete, personal Step Three declaration. You might begin: "I, _____, made a decision today to turn my will and my life — specifically _____ — over to the care of _____. In making this decision, I am releasing _____ and committing to _____."

2. What is your greatest hope for what Step Three makes possible in your life? What do you most want to be different because of this work?

3. Write a letter to the self-will part of yourself — the part that has kept you safe and also kept you imprisoned. Acknowledge it, thank it for its service, and tell it what you are choosing now.
