

NA Step Three Deep Dive

NA Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

"We Made a Decision to Turn Our Will and Our Lives Over to the Care of God as We Understood Him"

Narcotics Anonymous — Step 3

Self-Will · Controlling, demanding, exhausted · Surrender · Released, trusting, cared for

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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 5 · READING

Understanding Step Three: "We Made a Decision to Turn Our Will and Our Lives Over to the Care of God as We Understood Him"

Step Three is the hinge upon which the door of recovery swings open. If Step One was the diagnosis and Step Two was the prognosis, then Step Three is the patient's consent to treatment. It is the moment where understanding becomes action — where the intellectual acknowledgment of powerlessness and the tentative belief in a Power greater than yourself crystallize into a conscious, deliberate decision to live differently.

"We made a decision" announces that Step Three is fundamentally an act of will — paradoxically, the decision to stop relying solely on your will. It does not say "we turned our will and our lives over" — that would describe completed, perfect surrender. It says "we made a decision to turn" — a commitment of intention, a setting of direction, a choice to begin a process that will unfold over the rest of your recovery and your life. Step Three does not demand perfection. It demands a decision.

"To turn our will" addresses the interior life — your desires, your plans, your demands, your insistence that things be as you want them to be. Your "will" is not simply your willpower but your entire orientation toward controlling outcomes. It is the agenda you carry into every situation, the script you've written for how other people should behave, the timeline you've imposed on your recovery, the demand that life conform to your expectations.

"And our lives" extends the decision from the interior to the exterior — from what you want to what actually is. Your life includes your circumstances, your relationships, your health, your career, your finances, your future. Turning over your life does not mean becoming passive, abandoning responsibility, or ceasing to make decisions. It means accepting that you are not the ultimate authority on what should happen.

"Over to the care of" introduces the most tender word in Step Three: care. Not control, not judgment, not punishment — care. Step Three does not ask you to turn your life over to a tyrant or an absent landlord. It asks you to turn your life over to care — the kind of attentive, invested, compassionate concern that a loving parent extends to a beloved child.

"God as we understood Him" preserves the radical freedom that NA extends to every member: the freedom to define your own understanding of a Higher Power. Your understanding is enough. It doesn't need to match anyone else's. It only needs to be honest and sufficient to sustain the decision you are making.

Step Three is often called the "action step" of the first three steps because it converts understanding (Step One) and belief (Step Two) into a concrete decision. Steps Four through Nine are the specific actions through which the Step Three decision is carried out. Without the decision, those actions have no foundation. With it, they become the daily practice of turning over your will and your life — one situation, one fear, one resentment, one relationship at a time.

Reflection Questions

1. Step Three asks for a "decision" — not perfection. What does it mean to you to make this decision, knowing you will not execute it perfectly?

2. What does "your will" look like in practice? What are the demands, plans, agendas, and scripts you carry into daily life? What would releasing them feel like?

3. The step says "care" — not control, not judgment. How does the word "care" affect your willingness to turn things over?

4. What is your current understanding of "God as we understood Him"? Has it evolved since you began recovery?

5. Step Three is the hinge between understanding and action. What actions become possible once this decision is made?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Decision Readiness

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

1. I understand that Step Three asks for a decision — a turning point in intention — not perfection in execution

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am ready to make a conscious, deliberate choice to try a different way of living than self-directed willpower

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have worked Steps One and Two thoroughly enough that Step Three feels like the natural next action

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I understand what I am deciding to turn over — my will (desires, plans, demands) and my life (circumstances, relationships, future)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am willing to make this decision even though I don't fully understand what it will look like in practice

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I recognize that this decision must be renewed daily — it is not a one-time event but an ongoing commitment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can distinguish between making the decision (Step Three) and perfectly executing it (the work of a lifetime)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am willing to take this step imperfectly rather than waiting until I feel completely ready

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Word-by-Word Step Three Deconstruction

The Decision That Changes Everything

Why This Matters

Step Three is the most consequential decision you will make in recovery. Examining it word by word ensures you understand what you are deciding — not a vague spiritual gesture, but a specific, intentional reorientation of how you approach life.

WE MADE A DECISION

Step Three is an act of will — the decision to stop relying solely on your will. It's a turning point, not an achievement. You don't have to execute perfectly; you have to decide genuinely.

What does this phrase mean to you personally — in concrete, daily terms?

Where do you feel resistance or fear around this phrase? What makes it difficult?

How does your life experience — both the pain and the recovery — relate to this phrase?

TO TURN

"Turn" implies direction — a change in orientation. You are not being asked to destroy your will but to redirect it. Instead of your will driving the bus, Step Three reverses the arrangement.

What does this phrase mean to you personally — in concrete, daily terms?

Where do you feel resistance or fear around this phrase? What makes it difficult?

How does your life experience — both the pain and the recovery — relate to this phrase?

OUR WILL

"Will" means your desires, plans, demands, expectations, and scripts for how life should go. It's the internal agenda you bring to every situation.

What does this phrase mean to you personally — in concrete, daily terms?

Where do you feel resistance or fear around this phrase? What makes it difficult?

How does your life experience — both the pain and the recovery — relate to this phrase?

AND OUR LIVES

"Lives" means everything external — your circumstances, relationships, career, health, finances, future. It's everything you've been trying to orchestrate and manage through self-will.

What does this phrase mean to you personally — in concrete, daily terms?

Where do you feel resistance or fear around this phrase? What makes it difficult?

How does your life experience — both the pain and the recovery — relate to this phrase?

OVER TO THE CARE OF

"Care" is the most important word in Step Three. Not control, not punishment, not neglect — care. You are placing yourself in the hands of something that cares for your wellbeing, growth, and healing.

What does this phrase mean to you personally — in concrete, daily terms?

Where do you feel resistance or fear around this phrase? What makes it difficult?

How does your life experience — both the pain and the recovery — relate to this phrase?

GOD AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM

Your understanding. Your Higher Power. Your terms. This phrase protects your freedom while requiring your honesty. You must have SOME understanding — but it doesn't need to be complete, certain, or conventional.

What does this phrase mean to you personally — in concrete, daily terms?

Where do you feel resistance or fear around this phrase? What makes it difficult?

How does your life experience — both the pain and the recovery — relate to this phrase?

Step Three Synthesis

1. Rewrite Step Three in your own words — a personal version capturing what each phrase means for YOUR life.

2. Which phrase was hardest? What does that reveal about where your surrender needs to deepen?

3. Which phrase brought the most relief? What is it about releasing that area that feels like freedom?

4. Read your personal Step Three aloud. What happens inside when you hear yourself make this decision?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Self-Will Run Riot: Understanding What You Are Turning Over

The NA literature describes the addict's fundamental problem as "self-will run riot" — the unchecked belief that we can and should control everything: ourselves, other people, circumstances, outcomes, the future, and even reality itself. Self-will run riot is not just stubbornness. It is an entire operating system for life — a comprehensive approach to existence built on the premise that you are the center of the universe and that your job is to arrange the world to your specifications.

It manifests in obvious ways: the refusal to accept help, the insistence on doing everything yourself, the demand that other people behave according to your script, the belief that if you just try hard enough, you can force any situation to produce the outcome you want. But it also manifests in subtler ways that are harder to recognize.

Consider the self-will in your expectations. Every time you enter a situation with a rigid picture of how it should go — and experience frustration, anger, or resentment when it doesn't — self-will is operating. These expectations are expressions of self-will — your demand that reality conform to your internal blueprint. And when reality refuses to comply, your self-will produces suffering: resentment, disappointment, self-pity, and the belief that life is unfair.

Consider the self-will in your fears. Fear is often self-will in disguise — it is the insistence that certain things must not happen, that you must be protected from specific outcomes. Fear of financial insecurity is self-will demanding that your finances be secure. Fear of rejection is self-will demanding that others accept you. Fear of failure is self-will demanding that your efforts succeed.

Consider the self-will in your resentments. Every resentment contains an implicit demand: "This person should have treated me differently." "This situation should not have happened." Resentments are the emotional residue of unmet demands — and those demands are expressions of self-will.

Self-will also drives the people-pleasing, approval-seeking, and image-management that characterize many addicts' lives. The desperate need to be seen as competent, likable, successful, or "fine" is self-will's attempt to control how others perceive you.

Understanding self-will run riot is not meant to produce self-hatred. It is meant to produce recognition — "Oh, that's what I'm doing. That's the pattern. That's what I'm being asked to let go of." And the relief that follows this recognition can be extraordinary, because it means you don't have to carry the impossible weight of managing the entire universe anymore. Step Three says: you can put that down. You were never supposed to carry it in the first place.

Reflection Questions

1. Where do you see "self-will run riot" operating most clearly in your life today? Give three specific examples from the past week.

2. How do your expectations create suffering? What rigid pictures do you carry into situations, and what happens when those pictures don't match reality?

3. Examine your fears through the lens of self-will. What outcomes are you demanding must not happen? What would it look like to release those demands?

4. What resentments are you currently carrying? For each one, identify the implicit demand — the "should" that reality violated.

5. If you could put down the weight of managing the universe — all the controlling, expecting, demanding, and fearing — what would that feel like? What would become possible?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Self-Will Awareness

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

1. I recognize that my self-will — my insistence on running things my way — has been a central problem in my addiction and my life

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can identify specific situations where my determination to control outcomes made things worse rather than better

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand that "self-will run riot" means more than stubbornness — it means my entire approach to life was built on controlling what I cannot control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can see how my need to be in charge extended beyond substances into relationships, work, emotions, and daily decisions

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am honest about the fact that my best thinking and most determined efforts could not solve my addiction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I recognize that my desire to control is often driven by fear — fear of what will happen if I let go

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can identify the difference between healthy agency (making choices I can influence) and self-will (demanding outcomes I cannot control)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I acknowledge that self-reliance became a liability in my addiction because it kept me from seeking the help I needed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Self-Will Inventory

Mapping Where You Insist on Running the Show

Purpose

You cannot turn over what you haven't identified. This inventory maps the specific domains where self-will operates in your life. For each area, you'll examine how control shows up, what it costs you, and what surrender might look like.

Self-Will in Relationships

EXAMPLES

Trying to change people, scripting how others should behave, keeping score, manipulating to get your way, refusing to accept people as they are

How does self-will show up specifically in this area of YOUR life? Give concrete examples.

What has this self-will cost you? What suffering has your insistence on control produced here?

What would surrender look like in this specific domain? Not passivity — but releasing the death grip on outcomes.

Self-Will in Emotions

EXAMPLES

Refusing to feel certain emotions, demanding happiness, trying to think your way out of grief, suppressing what arises naturally

How does self-will show up specifically in this area of YOUR life? Give concrete examples.

What has this self-will cost you? What suffering has your insistence on control produced here?

What would surrender look like in this specific domain? Not passivity — but releasing the death grip on outcomes.

Self-Will in Outcomes

EXAMPLES

Demanding that plans work out as envisioned, inability to accept Plan B, catastrophizing when results differ from expectations

How does self-will show up specifically in this area of YOUR life? Give concrete examples.

What has this self-will cost you? What suffering has your insistence on control produced here?

What would surrender look like in this specific domain? Not passivity — but releasing the death grip on outcomes.

Self-Will in Image/Perception

EXAMPLES

Managing how others see you, inability to show vulnerability, performing competence or wellness, people-pleasing

How does self-will show up specifically in this area of YOUR life? Give concrete examples.

What has this self-will cost you? What suffering has your insistence on control produced here?

What would surrender look like in this specific domain? Not passivity — but releasing the death grip on outcomes.

Self-Will in Recovery

EXAMPLES

Trying to control the pace of healing, comparing your recovery to others', insisting you already know the answers, resistance to guidance

How does self-will show up specifically in this area of YOUR life? Give concrete examples.

What has this self-will cost you? What suffering has your insistence on control produced here?

What would surrender look like in this specific domain? Not passivity — but releasing the death grip on outcomes.

Self-Will Summary

1. Which domain contains your most active self-will? Where is the grip tightest?

2. What is the common thread running through all your self-will patterns? What is the underlying fear or need?

3. If you could release self-will in just ONE area, which would produce the most relief? Why?

4. Write a statement of recognition: "My self-will shows up most powerfully as ___ and it costs me ___."

YOUR EXERCISE

Control vs. Surrender Mapping

What You Can Change and What You Must Release

The Serenity Principle

Step Three doesn't ask you to stop taking action — it asks you to stop demanding outcomes. This exercise helps you distinguish between what you can legitimately influence (your choices, effort, attitude) and what you must release (other people's behavior, final results, timing of change).

Situation #1

The Situation: Describe something in your life you're trying to control right now.

WITHIN MY POWER

NOT WITHIN MY POWER

My Step Three Action: What does appropriate action + released outcomes look like here?

Surrender Statement: Write a specific turning-over statement for this situation.

Situation #2

The Situation: Describe something in your life you're trying to control right now.

WITHIN MY POWER

NOT WITHIN MY POWER

My Step Three Action: What does appropriate action + released outcomes look like here?

Surrender Statement: Write a specific turning-over statement for this situation.

Situation #3

The Situation: Describe something in your life you're trying to control right now.

WITHIN MY POWER

NOT WITHIN MY POWER

My Step Three Action: What does appropriate action + released outcomes look like here?

Surrender Statement: Write a specific turning-over statement for this situation.

Situation #4

The Situation: Describe something in your life you're trying to control right now.

WITHIN MY POWER

NOT WITHIN MY POWER

My Step Three Action: What does appropriate action + released outcomes look like here?

Surrender Statement: Write a specific turning-over statement for this situation.

Situation #5

The Situation: Describe something in your life you're trying to control right now.

WITHIN MY POWER

NOT WITHIN MY POWER

My Step Three Action: What does appropriate action + released outcomes look like here?

Surrender Statement: Write a specific turning-over statement for this situation.

Control vs. Surrender Summary

1. Looking across all five situations, what pattern emerges? What type of thing are you most consistently trying to control?

2. Was it difficult to distinguish between what's within your power and what isn't? Where was the line blurriest?

3. How much of your daily energy is spent trying to control things in the "Not Within My Power" column?

4. Which surrender statement was hardest to write? What does that difficulty reveal?

5. If you lived from the "My Step Three Action" column consistently, how would your life be different?

YOUR EXERCISE

Fear-Based Control Excavation

Understanding What Drives the Grip

Fear Drives Control

Behind every attempt to control is a fear. You grip tightly because you're afraid of what will happen if you let go. This exercise excavates the fears beneath your self-will — because when you name the fear, you can turn THAT over instead of acting on it.

Fear of Financial Insecurity

How does this fear drive you to control money, work, or other people's financial behavior? What would trusting your HP with your finances look like?

How does this fear operate in YOUR life? What control behaviors does it produce?

What evidence shows this fear's predictions are unreliable? When has letting go produced something better than control did?

Write a surrender statement for this specific fear.

Fear of Rejection / Abandonment

How does this fear drive you to people-please, avoid vulnerability, or cling? What would releasing this fear look like?

How does this fear operate in YOUR life? What control behaviors does it produce?

What evidence shows this fear's predictions are unreliable? When has letting go produced something better than control did?

Write a surrender statement for this specific fear.

Fear of Failure

How does this fear drive you to overwork, perfectionism, paralysis, or refusal to try? What would trusting the process look like?

How does this fear operate in YOUR life? What control behaviors does it produce?

What evidence shows this fear's predictions are unreliable? When has letting go produced something better than control did?

Write a surrender statement for this specific fear.

Fear of the Unknown / Future

How does this fear drive you to plan obsessively, refuse to accept uncertainty, or demand guarantees?

How does this fear operate in YOUR life? What control behaviors does it produce?

What evidence shows this fear's predictions are unreliable? When has letting go produced something better than control did?

Write a surrender statement for this specific fear.

Fear of Losing Control Itself

This is the meta-fear: the fear of what will happen if you stop controlling. What catastrophe do you predict? Has that prediction ever actually come true when you've let go?

How does this fear operate in YOUR life? What control behaviors does it produce?

What evidence shows this fear's predictions are unreliable? When has letting go produced something better than control did?

Write a surrender statement for this specific fear.

Fear of Being Hurt Again

How does past pain drive you to build walls, refuse trust, and control emotional distance in relationships?

How does this fear operate in YOUR life? What control behaviors does it produce?

What evidence shows this fear's predictions are unreliable? When has letting go produced something better than control did?

Write a surrender statement for this specific fear.

Fear Excavation Summary

1. Which fear has the strongest grip on you? How long has it been driving your behavior?

2. Is there a "master fear" underneath all the others — one core terror that generates the rest?

3. When you review the evidence against your fears, how accurate have fear's predictions actually been?

4. What would your life look like if you responded to fear with surrender instead of control?

5. Write a comprehensive fear surrender: "Today I turn over my fears about ___, ___, and ___ to the care of my Higher Power. I trust that ___."

YOUR EXERCISE

"My Will" and "My Life" Inventory

Comprehensive Mapping of What You're Turning Over

Two Halves of Surrender

Step Three identifies two things to turn over: your WILL (internal — desires, demands, plans, agendas) and your LIFE (external — circumstances, relationships, outcomes, future). This comprehensive inventory maps both halves so your surrender is specific rather than vague.

"My Will" — The Internal Inventory

1. What are your strongest current demands — the things you insist **MUST** happen or **MUST NOT** happen? List at least 5.

2. What plans are you gripping most tightly? What outcomes are you trying to force?

3. What expectations do you carry into relationships, work, and recovery that create suffering when unmet?

4. What desires are you treating as needs — things you want so desperately that not having them feels life-threatening?

5. Write a surrender statement for your will: "I am willing to release my demand that ___ and trust that ___."

"My Life" — The External Inventory

1. What life circumstances are you trying to control that are genuinely beyond your power?

2. What relationships are you trying to manage rather than participate in authentically?

3. What aspect of your future are you most anxious about, and how does that anxiety drive control behavior?

4. What areas of your life are you refusing to accept as they currently are?

5. Write a surrender statement for your life: "I am turning over the outcome of ___ and accepting what unfolds."

Will & Life Integration

1. Which is harder for you to turn over — your will (internal demands) or your life (external circumstances)? Why?

2. Where do your will and your life intersect most dangerously? Where does an internal demand create the most external chaos?

3. If you could summarize what you are turning over in one sentence, what would it be?

4. What remains that you are NOT yet willing to turn over? Be honest. What would it take to get there?

5. Write a comprehensive Step Three statement: "I make the decision to turn my will — specifically my demand that ___ — and my life — specifically the outcomes of ___ — over to the care of my Higher Power."

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

Turning It Over to Care: What Step Three Is — and What It Isn't

One of the greatest barriers to Step Three is misunderstanding what it asks. Many people hear "turn your will and life over" and imagine a complete abdication of agency — becoming a passive, helpless puppet who makes no decisions, takes no action, and drifts through life waiting for divine instruction. Clarifying what Step Three actually asks — and what it explicitly does not ask — is essential.

Step Three does not ask you to stop thinking. It asks you to stop believing that your thinking alone is sufficient to solve every problem. You still have a brain, and you are expected to use it. But you use it in partnership with something greater rather than in isolation. You make the best decision you can, then release the outcome.

Step Three does not ask you to become passive. In fact, the steps that follow — the searching moral inventory, the sharing of that inventory, the identification of character defects, the making of amends — are among the most demanding actions a human being can undertake. Step Three enables action; it does not replace it. What changes is not your activity level but your motivation and your attachment to outcomes.

Step Three does not ask you to abandon your preferences, opinions, goals, or personality. You are still you. What Step Three asks is that you hold these things with an open hand rather than a clenched fist — that you pursue your goals while remaining willing to accept that the results may differ from your vision.

Step Three does not ask you to accept abuse, injustice, or harm as "God's will." Turning your life over to care does not mean becoming a doormat. Care, by definition, does not harm. If a situation is harmful, the caring response is to address it, set boundaries, or remove yourself.

What Step Three does ask: that you make a conscious, daily decision to release your insistence on controlling what you cannot control. That you bring your plans, fears, and desires to your Higher Power and ask for guidance rather than demanding compliance. That you trust that the universe, God, the recovery process, or whatever Power you have come to believe in has your wellbeing in mind.

The word "care" is the emotional heart of Step Three. It answers the terrified question that every addict carries: "But if I let go, what happens to me?" Step Three answers: you are caught. You are held. You are cared for. Not controlled, not puppeted, not abandoned — cared for.

Reflection Questions

1. What misconceptions about Step Three have been blocking your willingness? Did you believe it meant becoming passive, abandoning your intelligence, or losing your identity?

2. How do you distinguish between healthy goal-setting (open-handed) and self-will (clenched-fist)?

3. The step turns your life over to "care." What does care look like in your recovery? Where have you experienced evidence of being cared for?

4. What specific area of your life do you most need to "turn over" right now? What would it look like to release your grip on that situation while still taking appropriate action?

5. If Step Three enables rather than replaces action, how does it change the quality of your action?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Trust in Care

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

1. I believe that the word "care" in Step Three is significant — I am turning my life over to care, not control or punishment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am developing trust that my Higher Power has my wellbeing in mind, not my destruction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have experienced moments in recovery where I felt cared for by something beyond my own effort

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am beginning to believe that I deserve care — that I am worth the investment of a Power greater than myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can distinguish between turning my life over to a caring Power and losing my identity, agency, or intelligence

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am building a relationship with my Higher Power that feels safe enough to trust with my will and my life

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have seen evidence in my recovery that when I let go, things tend to work out differently — and often better — than I planned

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am learning that care from my Higher Power often comes through other people, recovery principles, and the unfolding of events

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Surrender & Letting Go

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

1. I am developing the ability to release my grip on outcomes and trust that the process will unfold as it should

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have experienced moments of genuine surrender — letting go of something I was clutching — and found relief rather than disaster

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can distinguish between surrender (an act of courage) and giving up (an act of despair)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am learning to say "I don't know" and "I need help" without experiencing those statements as failures

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am willing to let go of my demand that I understand everything before I can trust it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am practicing releasing specific fears, resentments, and anxieties rather than holding them as weapons or shields

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can identify areas of my life where I am still holding on tightly and am willing to explore loosening my grip

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I understand that surrender is not passive — it is the active, courageous decision to stop fighting what I cannot control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Evidence of Care

Where Your Higher Power Has Already Shown Up

Seeing the Care

Step Three asks you to turn your life over to care. But can you see evidence that care has already been operating? This exercise collects specific moments where something beyond your own effort seemed to be working on your behalf.

What Brought You to Recovery

1. What circumstances, events, or people brought you to recovery? Does the chain of events suggest something larger at work?

2. Was there a specific moment, person, or event that opened the door to recovery that you couldn't have orchestrated yourself?

3. If you had gotten what you wanted during active addiction, would you be alive today? How was NOT getting your way actually a form of care?

Care in Your Recovery Process

1. Describe a moment in recovery where something happened at exactly the right time — a meeting, a conversation, a realization — that felt like more than coincidence.

2. Has someone appeared in your recovery who said exactly what you needed to hear? Describe that experience.

3. Where has recovery worked in ways you couldn't have planned or controlled?

Evidence from Letting Go

1. Describe a specific time when you let go of trying to control something and the outcome was better than what you were demanding.

2. Have you ever had a plan fall apart — and later realized the failure served you better than success would have?

3. When you have practiced surrender, what has the result been? Has catastrophe followed, or has something unexpected emerged?

Daily Care You May Be Overlooking

1. What in your daily life today is evidence of care — things that are present, working, or healing that weren't present during active addiction?

2. Who in your life demonstrates care for you? Name them and describe what they do.

3. Write a list of 10 things in your life today that you did not create through self-will alone.

Evidence of Care Summary

1. Looking at all the evidence, how strong is the case that something beyond your own effort has been working in your life?

2. What is the single most compelling piece of evidence that care is real — the one thing you cannot explain away?

3. How does seeing this evidence affect your willingness to turn your will and life over?

4. Write a statement of trust based on evidence: "Based on what I have experienced, I can trust the care of my Higher Power because ____."

YOUR EXERCISE

The Letting Go Practice Lab

Practicing Surrender in Specific Situations

Practice, Not Perfection

Surrender is a skill that improves with practice. This lab invites you to practice letting go in specific real situations — one at a time. For each item, you'll identify what you're gripping, practice releasing it, and record what happens.

Letting Go Practice #1

What I'm Gripping: Name something specific you are currently holding tightly — a resentment, a fear, an outcome, a demand, a plan.

Why I'm Gripping: What fear or need is driving you to hold on? What do you believe will happen if you let go?

My Letting Go Action: What specific step will you take to release this? (A prayer, a conversation with your sponsor, a conscious decision to stop engaging)

What Happened: After practicing letting go, what actually occurred? Was the catastrophe you feared realized — or did something else happen?

Letting Go Practice #2

What I'm Gripping: Name something specific you are currently holding tightly — a resentment, a fear, an outcome, a demand, a plan.

Why I'm Gripping: What fear or need is driving you to hold on? What do you believe will happen if you let go?

My Letting Go Action: What specific step will you take to release this? (A prayer, a conversation with your sponsor, a conscious decision to stop engaging)

What Happened: After practicing letting go, what actually occurred? Was the catastrophe you feared realized — or did something else happen?

Letting Go Practice #3

What I'm Gripping: Name something specific you are currently holding tightly — a resentment, a fear, an outcome, a demand, a plan.

Why I'm Gripping: What fear or need is driving you to hold on? What do you believe will happen if you let go?

My Letting Go Action: What specific step will you take to release this? (A prayer, a conversation with your sponsor, a conscious decision to stop engaging)

What Happened: After practicing letting go, what actually occurred? Was the catastrophe you feared realized — or did something else happen?

Letting Go Practice #4

What I'm Gripping: Name something specific you are currently holding tightly — a resentment, a fear, an outcome, a demand, a plan.

Why I'm Gripping: What fear or need is driving you to hold on? What do you believe will happen if you let go?

My Letting Go Action: What specific step will you take to release this? (A prayer, a conversation with your sponsor, a conscious decision to stop engaging)

What Happened: After practicing letting go, what actually occurred? Was the catastrophe you feared realized — or did something else happen?

Letting Go Practice #5

What I'm Gripping: Name something specific you are currently holding tightly — a resentment, a fear, an outcome, a demand, a plan.

Why I'm Gripping: What fear or need is driving you to hold on? What do you believe will happen if you let go?

My Letting Go Action: What specific step will you take to release this? (A prayer, a conversation with your sponsor, a conscious decision to stop engaging)

What Happened: After practicing letting go, what actually occurred? Was the catastrophe you feared realized — or did something else happen?

Letting Go Summary

1. Across your five practices, what happened when you let go? Was the result what you feared — or something different?

2. What was the hardest thing to release? What made it so difficult?

3. What surprised you about the experience of letting go? Was there relief? Freedom? Anxiety? A mix?

4. Based on these experiments, is letting go as dangerous as your self-will told you it would be?

5. What is one thing you are ready to let go of right now — today? Name it, and write a surrender statement.

YOUR EXERCISE

Voice of Control vs. Voice of Surrender

Recognizing Self-Will in Real Time

Two Voices

In every situation, two voices compete: the Voice of Control (your self-will demanding outcomes) and the Voice of Surrender (your Step Three decision trusting the process). Learning to hear both — and choose which to follow — is the daily practice of Step Three.

Your recovery isn't progressing as fast as you want

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

Someone you love is making choices you disagree with

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

You're facing a financial problem you can't immediately solve

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

Your plans for the day fall apart completely

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

You're asked to do something in recovery that makes you uncomfortable

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

You feel like you're losing an argument and your pride is at stake

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

You don't know what's going to happen next and the uncertainty is unbearable

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

You've made a mistake and the consequences are unfolding

VOICE OF CONTROL SAYS:

VOICE OF SURRENDER RESPONDS:

Summary

1. Which scenario triggered the loudest Voice of Control? Why?

2. What does your Voice of Surrender sound like at its best? What phrases or truths are most powerful?

3. How quickly can you notice the shift from surrender to control? What helps you catch it?

4. Write a go-to response for when you hear the Voice of Control: "When I notice self-will surging, I will ____."

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

A Daily Reprieve: Step Three as an Ongoing Practice

Step Three is often misunderstood as a one-time event — a decision you make once, after which you have "completed" the step. This understanding is dangerously incomplete. Step Three is a decision that must be renewed daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes moment by moment. It is not a box to check but a posture to maintain.

The reason Step Three requires daily renewal is straightforward: self-will doesn't surrender once and stay surrendered. It reasserts itself constantly — in the morning when you wake up and immediately begin planning and worrying, in the afternoon when a coworker irritates you and you begin constructing resentments, in the evening when fear about the future keeps you awake.

Many people in recovery develop morning routines that begin with a conscious Step Three renewal. This might be the traditional 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. 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." Or it might be a personal version in your own words, or a simple statement of intention: "Today I choose to let go of control and trust the process."

Throughout the day, Step Three becomes a real-time practice. Your boss criticizes your work and your self-will surges with resentment — Step Three says: pause. Feel what you feel. Then ask yourself, "Am I willing to turn this reaction over?" Every situation is an opportunity to practice the Step Three decision: I will do what I can, and I will release what I cannot control.

Over time, something remarkable happens. The practice of Step Three — morning intention, daily application, evening review — begins to change your default setting. The gap between self-will's surge and surrender's response shortens. Resentments that once festered for weeks are processed and released in days. The practice doesn't make you immune to self-will, but it makes you increasingly skilled at recognizing it and increasingly willing to release it.

This is the daily reprieve that recovery promises — not a permanent cure, but a daily practice that produces a life fundamentally different from the one self-will created.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you have a morning practice that renews your Step Three decision? If yes, describe it. If no, what might you be willing to try?

2. Describe a specific situation from the past week where self-will reasserted itself. What happened? What would the Step Three response have been?

3. How quickly do you notice when you've "taken back the wheel"? Is the gap between self-will's surge and your awareness of it shortening?

4. Do you practice an evening review? What does letting go at the end of the day look like for you?

5. If Step Three is a daily practice rather than a one-time decision, how does that change your expectations of yourself?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Living Step Three

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

1. I engage in daily practices that reinforce my Step Three decision — prayer, meditation, surrender rituals, or conscious intention-setting

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When I notice myself gripping tightly to a plan, outcome, or demand, I am developing the ability to pause and practice letting go

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I regularly check in with my sponsor, support network, or recovery community about how I am living Step Three

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can identify specific moments in the past week where I practiced turning something over rather than trying to control it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am becoming more comfortable with uncertainty, ambiguity, and not knowing what comes next

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I respond to fear and anxiety with surrender practices rather than control behaviors more often than I did before

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have a personal Step Three prayer, affirmation, or ritual that I use regularly to reconnect with my decision

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I understand that Step Three is a foundation for the action steps (4-9) that follow — the decision that enables the work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Designing Your Daily Step Three Practice

Making the Decision Every Day

Daily Renewal

Step Three is a decision renewed daily — in the morning, throughout the day, and at night. This exercise helps you design a concrete, sustainable daily practice that keeps your Step Three alive rather than letting it become a one-time event.

Morning Surrender Practice

1. What time will you begin your morning practice? What will the routine look like?

2. Write your personal Step Three prayer, affirmation, or intention-setting statement in your own words.

3. What specific things will you turn over at the start of each day?

4. How will you remind yourself of this decision if you don't feel it? (Action before feeling)

During-the-Day Practice

1. What are your triggers for self-will? Name your top 5 — situations, people, or emotions that cause you to grip tighter.

2. For each trigger, what will your Step Three response be? Design a specific in-the-moment practice.

3. How will you recognize that you've "taken back the wheel"? What are your warning signs?

4. Who can you reach out to during the day when self-will is winning? Name specific people.

Evening Review and Release

1. What will your evening review look like? When will you do it?

2. What questions will you ask yourself? (Where did I practice surrender? Where did self-will win? What do I need to turn over before sleep?)

3. Write an evening surrender statement — something you'll say or think as you release the day.

4. What will you do when the evening review reveals that self-will dominated the day? (Hint: compassion, not punishment)

Daily Practice Commitment

1. Is this plan realistic and sustainable, or is self-will trying to create a "perfect" system?

2. What is the bare minimum daily Step Three practice you commit to — the one you will do even on hard days?

3. Who will hold you accountable for this daily practice? How will you report on it?

4. What will you do when you skip a day — or a week? (Return to it without punishment, not abandon it with shame.)

5. Write a daily Step Three commitment: "Every day, I commit to ___ in the morning, ___ during the day, and ___ at night — not perfectly, but consistently."

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

The Doorway to Action: How Step Three Enables Steps Four Through Nine

Step Three is sometimes called "the hinge of the steps" because everything that follows depends on it. Steps One and Two prepared you for the decision; Step Three is the decision; Steps Four through Nine are the actions that carry the decision into every dimension of your life. Without the Step Three decision, the action steps are impossible — not because you lack the ability, but because you lack the willingness.

Consider what Step Four asks: a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself. Without Step Three, this inventory is either impossible (because self-will protects the ego from honest examination) or useless (because without surrender, the insights produced by the inventory have nowhere to go). Step Three provides the container for Step Four — the willingness to look honestly at yourself because you have decided to trust a Power greater than your self-protective ego.

Step Five asks you to share that inventory with another person. Without Step Three, the vulnerability required by Step Five is unbearable — your self-will cannot tolerate being known and exposed. But with Step Three, you share your inventory not as an act of self-destruction but as an act of faith.

Steps Six and Seven involve identifying your character defects and asking your Higher Power to remove them. These steps are impossible without Step Three because they require you to admit that you cannot remove your own defects through willpower — the very realization that self-will resists most fiercely.

Steps Eight and Nine require the humility, courage, and other-centeredness that self-will alone cannot produce. Self-will makes amends transactional: "I'll apologize so they'll forgive me and I'll feel better." Step Three makes amends genuine: "I'll make amends because it's the right thing to do, regardless of how the other person responds."

Step Three also prepares you for Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve — the maintenance steps. Step Ten (continued personal inventory) is Step Four practiced daily with Step Three's surrender. Step Eleven (prayer and meditation) is Step Three's daily renewal formalized into ongoing practice. Step Twelve (carrying the message) is Step Three lived outward.

The decision of Step Three, then, is not a single moment but a foundation. It is the ground upon which the entire house of recovery is built. And like any foundation, it must be solid, maintained, and periodically inspected.

Reflection Questions

1. How has your Step Three decision (or lack thereof) affected your ability to do the action steps that follow? Where has surrender opened doors, and where has self-will kept them closed?

2. Which upcoming step feels most intimidating? How might deepening your Step Three decision reduce that fear?

3. If Step Three provides the willingness for everything that follows, where is your willingness strongest? Where is it weakest?

4. Have you experienced the difference between doing recovery work with self-will running in the background versus doing it with genuine surrender?

5. Understanding Step Three as a foundation for ongoing recovery, how does that change your sense of its importance?

YOUR EXERCISE

Writing Your Personal Step Three

Your Decision — In Your Words — On Paper

Making It Real

A written Step Three becomes a covenant with yourself and your Higher Power. It transforms a vague intention into a specific, documented decision you can return to when self-will reasserts itself.

Part 1: The Self-Will I'm Turning Over

Drawing from Exercises 2 and 4, describe the self-will and fear-based control patterns you are choosing to release.

I recognize that my self-will has manifested as... My need to control has cost me... The fears driving my grip are...

Part 2: The Decision I Am Making

State your Step Three decision clearly. What are you deciding? What are you willing to do? What are you releasing?

Today I make the decision to... I am choosing to turn over... I am releasing my demand that... I am willing to...

Part 3: The Care I Am Turning To

Describe the Higher Power you are turning your will and life over to and the evidence of care you have experienced.

I am turning my will and life over to the care of... I believe this Power cares for me because... The evidence I have seen includes...

Part 4: How I Will Live This Decision Daily

Drawing from Exercise 7, describe your concrete daily Step Three practice — morning, during-the-day, and evening.

Each morning I will... During the day, when self-will surges, I will... Each evening I will...

Part 5: My Personal Step Three Prayer

Write your own Step Three prayer or affirmation — in your own words, to your own Higher Power. This becomes something you can use daily.

Final Reflection

1. What was the hardest part of writing this Step Three? What did it reveal?

2. How does it feel to see your decision written down — documented, specific, real?

3. Who will you share this Step Three with? When?

4. How does this decision prepare you for Step Four — the searching and fearless moral inventory?
