The Twelve Steps in Ten Minutes

an introduction to the Steps — the problem, the solution, the action, and where the Big Book gives the directions

> *"A.A.'s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."*
>
> — Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Foreword, p. 15

0:00 **The battery** | **1:30** **The problem** · Step One | **3:30** **The solution** · Step Two | **5:30** **The action** · Steps 3–12 | **8:30** **The ask** · a Book, a sponsor

0:00 · DEAD BATTERY

problem → solution → action

You put the key in the ignition and the damn thing won't start. Sit and talk about it until hell freezes over and you go nowhere. Look under the hood: a corroded battery cable. Now you understand the **problem** and the **solution** is evident — but knowing it doesn't start the car. Get the cable, replace it, and you're on your way. That is the **action**. The Book is built in that order, and so are the Steps. FOUNDATION MEETING

> *"To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book."*
> Foreword to First Edition, p. xiii

*How many **meetings** must you attend to have a spiritual experience? Or — how many **Steps** must you take?*
FOUNDATION MEETING

1:30 · THE PROBLEM — STEP ONE

pp. xxv–43 and Bill's Story: 59 pages

Fifty-nine pages go to the problem, because nothing works until it is understood: an allergy of the **body**, the craving once we start, and an obsession of the **mind**, the thought that starts us.

> *"We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery."* 30:11

> **The test.** *"If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic."* 44:4

When you honestly want to, can you quit entirely? yes / no

Once you start, do you control the amount? yes / no

3:30 · THE SOLUTION — STEP TWO

pp. 44–57: fourteen pages, one job

If **lack of power** is my problem, **a Power greater than myself** is the solution — and the recovered alcoholic in front of me has found one. Fourteen pages clear away the old ideas about God so you can choose your own conception. FOUNDATION MEETING

> *"Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves."* 45:9

> *"We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. 'Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?'"* 47:14 believe / willing / no

5:30 · THE ACTION — STEPS THREE TO TWELVE

pp. 58–103

> *"If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps."* 58:16

Step Three is a decision (pp. 60–63) — in practice, asking a recovered alcoholic *"Will you be my sponsor?"* How do you know you took it? *"Because you begin to take Step Four."* FOUNDATION MEETING · JOE MCF

> *"Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning…"* 63:32

Four to Nine clean house and end in the promises; **Ten to Twelve** are how we live from then on. *"There is action and more action."* 88:11

8:30 · THE ASK — THIRTY-THREE PAGES AND A SPONSOR

count them

You may have heard there are only thirty-three pages of directions. Count them: **page 30** (Step One), **page 47** (Step Two), and **pages 58 through 88** (Steps Three to Eleven). Thirty-three. Step Twelve gets a chapter of its own on top (pp. 89–103) and its prayer waits on p. 164. Every one of those pages is on page 3 of this sheet, with the line where the direction starts.

> *"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."* 58:1

> *"Further on, clear-cut directions are given showing how we recovered."* 29:3

"The only thing between you and a really good life is the first 103 pages of this book." JOE MCF, JUNE 2020

- **Get a Big Book.** Open it tonight to page xi and read to page 43 — the first instruction a good sponsor gives. FOUNDATION MEETING
- **Get a sponsor** who has taken the Steps out of this book, and take them the way the book says — in weeks, not years.
- **Then take somebody else through them.** Of 500 injection drug users followed for a year, three out of four who sponsored others stayed abstinent. CRAPE ET AL. 2002

The Map — Where Every Step Lives

what the Book says to do, the page and line where it says it, and what it promises — Steps One to Twelve

I · Steps 1–3
the decision · pp. 30–63

II · Steps 4–5
the housecleaning · pp. 63–75

III · Steps 6–9
the amends, and the promises · pp. 76–84

IV · Steps 10–12
the way we live now · pp. 84–103

Four sittings, by the Book's own seams — the shape of Wally P.'s *Back to Basics*: "Here are the steps we took…" in four one-hour sessions.

	THE STEP	THE DIRECTION — THE BOOK'S WORDS	THEN
1	Admitted we were powerless	*"We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery."* 30:11	the test: *"If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take…"* 44:4
2	Came to believe	*"We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. 'Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?'"* 47:14	*"…upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built."* 47:20
3	Made a decision	*"Being convinced, we were at Step Three"* 60:21 *"God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt."* 63:14	*"When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed… We were reborn."* 63:1 *"This was only a beginning"* 63:29
4	Searching and fearless inventory	*"we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four."* 64:8 *"In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper."* 64:28 *"We reviewed our fears thoroughly."* 68:3 *"We reviewed our own conduct over the years past."* 69:12	*"If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot."* 70:23
5	Admitted to God, ourselves, another	*"When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time."* 75:3 *"We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past."* 75:11	*"Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted."* 75:12 then *"quiet for an hour"* 75:22
6	Entirely ready	*"Are we now ready to let God remove from us all the things which we have admitted are objectionable? Can He now take them all—every one?"* 76:3	*"If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing."* 76:6
7	Humbly asked	*"When ready, we say something like this: 'My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad…'"* 76:8	*"We have then completed Step Seven."* 76:14
8	Made a list	*"We have a list of all persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory."* 76:17	*"If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes."* 76:24
9	Made direct amends	*"Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past."* 76:20 *"We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile or scraping."* 83:25	the promises: *"If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through."* 83:29
10	Continued to take inventory	*"Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them."* 84:23	*"And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone—even alcohol."* 84:30 *"a daily reprieve"* 85:15
11	Prayer and meditation	*"When we retire at night, we constructively review our day."* 86:5 *"On awakening let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead."* 86:19 *"As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action."* 87:31	*"It works—it really does."* 88:8
12	Carry this message	*"Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics."* 89:1 *"Outline the program of action, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past…"* 94:4	*"Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick."* 164:13

Steps Three, Seven and Eleven carry their prayers on pages 63, 76 and 86–87; the Twelfth Step's is on the last page: "Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick." 164:13

The Thirty-Three Pages

every page that carries a direction for taking the Steps, with the line where the direction begins

Page 30, page 47, and pages 58 through 88: thirty-three printed pages hold the directions for Steps One to Eleven. Step Twelve's directions fill their own chapter, pages 89–103, and its prayer is on page 164. Page 44 and page 45 are here too — the test and the dilemma the directions answer. **Line** = the printed line on that page, counting from the first line of text under the running head.

STEPS ONE TO FOUR · PP. 30–71

30:11 *"We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were alcoholics. This is the first step in recovery."* STEP 1

44:4 *"If, when you honestly want to, you find you cannot quit entirely, or if when drinking, you have little control over the amount you take, you are probably alcoholic."* THE TEST

45:9 *"Lack of power, that was our dilemma."* THE DILEMMA

47:14 *"Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?"* STEP 2

58:16 *"If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps."* THE DOOR

59:4 *"Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon."* · **59:7** *"Here are the steps we took"* — the Twelve Steps, 59:9 to 60:4.

60:21 *"Being convinced, we were at Step Three, which is that we decided to turn our will and our life over to God as we understood Him."* STEP 3

61:18 *"What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind?"*

62:26 *"First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director."*

63:14 *"God, I offer myself to Thee..."* · **63:32** *"Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action"*

64:8 *"Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four."* · **64:28** *"In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper."* STEP 4

65:7 *"We were usually as definite as this example"* — the grudge list, in columns.

66:24 *"We turned back to the list, for it held the key to the future."*

67:14 *"Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes."*

68:3 *"We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper"* · **68:6** *"Wasn't it because self-reliance failed us?"*

69:12 *"We reviewed our own conduct over the years past."*

70:18 *"If sex is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others."* · **70:23** *"If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot."*

71:6 *"...you have swallowed and digested some big chunks of truth about yourself."*

STEPS FIVE TO TWELVE · PP. 72–103, 164

72:1 *"Having made our personal inventory, what shall we do about it?"* STEP 5

73:33 *"We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world."*

74:20 *"Such parts of our story we tell to someone who will understand, yet be unaffected."*

75:3 *"When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time."* · **75:11** *"We pocket our pride and go to it"* · **75:22** *"quiet for an hour"*

76:1 Step Six · **76:8** the Seventh Step prayer · **76:17** Step Eight · **76:20** *"Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past."* STEPS 6–9

77:23 *"with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth."*

78:14 *"We do not dodge our creditors."* · **79:12** *"We must not shrink at anything."*

80:1 *"Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people we secure their consent."* · **81:17** *"Whatever the situation, we usually have to do something about it."*

82:28 *"We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough."* · **83:7** *"So we clean house with the family"* · **83:29** the promises

84:16 *"This thought brings us to Step Ten"* · **84:23** *"Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear."* STEP 10

85:15 *"We are not cured of alcoholism. What we really have is a daily reprieve"* · **85:32** *"Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation."* STEP 11

86:5 *"When we retire at night"* · **86:19** *"On awakening"* · **87:31** *"we pause, when agitated or doubtful"*

88:8 *"It works—it really does."* · **88:11** *"There is action and more action."*

89–103 **Working With Others** — Step Twelve's own chapter: **89:1** *"nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics"* · **90:1** *"find out all you can about him"* · **94:4** *"Outline the program of action"* · **97:4** *"Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery."* · **98:20** *"Burn the idea into the consciousness of every man that he can get well regardless of anyone."* · **100:5** *"Both you and the new man must walk day by day in the path of spiritual progress."* STEP 12

164:13 *"Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick."* · **164:21** *"Abandon yourself to God as you understand God."*

Thirty-three pages. A sponsor who has been through them. Start tonight.

Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed.; page:line = printed lines of text on that page, running head excluded, checked against the aa.org chapter PDFs. Headline: Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Foreword. Framing, marked where used: the Primary Purpose Group's Foundation Meeting script, Joe McF (June 2020, transcript), the Big Book Sponsorship guide, Wally P.'s Back to Basics, Crape et al. 2002. Serif italics are the Book.