Step 3 — Plain Talk: Quit Trying to Run the Show

> ***What this is:*** *The plain version of the Step Three Requirement Inventory. Same ideas, easier words. It's written for about a 6th-grade reading level, and for someone who is* ***not sure about God****. Use it next to the Step 2 & 3 runsheet and step-12.md §29–39.*

> ***Goal of this talk:*** *Help him feel two things, deep down. One — running his life his own way has not worked. Two — he can let a Power greater than himself help, and he doesn't have to figure out what that Power is first. Then make the decision and say the prayer together.*

Start Here If "God" Is a Problem

A lot of people hit Step 3 and freeze. The word "God" shuts them down. If that's you, read this slow.

You do **not** have to believe in God to start. You only have to be **willing** to believe there is *some* power bigger than you. That's the whole bar.

> *"Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" (◆ BB p.47 ¶2)*

The men who wrote the Big Book felt the way you might. Some of them hated religion.

> *"We have shared his honest doubt and prejudice. Some of us have been violently anti-religious." (◆ BB p.45 ¶3)*

Here is the deal that turned it for them: you don't have to take anyone else's idea of God. You pick your own. Even a small, fuzzy idea is enough to start.

> *"When, therefore, we speak to you of God, we mean your own conception of God." (◆ BB p.47 ¶1)*

And here's what they found. The minute they stopped fighting it and just got willing, things started to work — even when they couldn't explain why.

> *"...as soon as we were able to lay aside prejudice and express even a willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we commenced to get results..."* (◆ BB p.46 ¶1)

You don't need to believe. You need to be willing. That is a low bar — and it is enough for today.

Ask → Are you willing to believe there could be a Power greater than you? (yes / no)

It can be anything bigger than you that you don't run — the group, the program, nature, the truth, life itself. You can call it "a Power greater than me" and leave it right there — for today, or for good. Your idea of it might change over time, or it might not. There's no required finish line here.

> ***One note for the rest of this:*** *the quotes below are the original Big Book words, so they all say "God." Every time you see it, read in your own word — "a Power greater than me," the group, whatever you picked. You're allowed to swap the word as you go.*

What Step 3 Really Is

Quick recap of where you are:

- **Step 1** showed you the **problem** — on your own, you can't stop. Your log & loser list proved it.
- **Step 2** showed you the **fix** — a power bigger than you *can* help. (And no other *person* can do it for you either — not me, not the group. That's why it has to be a power bigger than all of us.)
- **Step 3** is where you **decide** to let that power help, instead of running everything yourself.

That's the whole step. And notice: it's a **decision**, not a feeling.

> *"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."* (◆ BB p.59)

Notice those last four words — *"as we understood Him."* The freedom to define this your own way isn't a loophole someone added for you. It's written into the step itself.

Two big words, made simple:

- **Your will** = your thinking and your wanting (what runs in your head).
- **Your life** = your doing (the things you really do).

Up to now, "me first" has given you both — your orders (what to chase) *and* your push (the drive to chase it). Step 2 said a power bigger than you can give you those instead. Step 3 is you switching who you take your orders and your power from.

So Step 3 means: *I'll stop letting "me first" steer my thinking and my actions. I'll let something bigger lead.*

It's a decision, not a lightning bolt. You might not feel anything when you say it. That's normal. A decision is something you *do*, not something you wait to feel. You can be scared and unsure and still take it — then renew it tomorrow.

You won't do this perfectly. Nobody does. You're not trying to be perfect — just pointed the right way.

> *"We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."* (◆ BB p.60 ¶2)

The One Thing You Have To See First

Before the decision means anything, you have to really believe one thing: **running your life your own way does not work.**

> *"The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success."* (◆ BB p.60 ¶8)

"Self-will" just means *me getting my way.* Pushing your own plan through, on your own power.

The Big Book paints a picture for this. It says you're like an actor who wants to run the whole play:

> *"Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way."* (◆ BB p.60 ¶8)

Plain version: you try to set up the people and the stuff around you so it all goes your way. You think, *if everyone would just do what I want, everything would be great.* But it never stays set up. People don't follow your script. So you push harder. It still doesn't work. Then you end up mad, hurt, and feeling sorry for yourself. (◆ BB pp.60–61)

You've been trying to direct a play where you don't control the other actors.

The Self-Will Check

Be honest with these. Pull from your log & loser list and your real life. The point isn't to win an argument — it's to *feel* in your gut that your way hasn't worked.

Start with a gut check. Look at your life right now. Relationships a wreck? Moods running you? A lot of fear? Feeling useless, or just unhappy? The Big Book says when those things are true, self-will is usually behind the wheel. (◆ BB p.52 ¶2)

The stuff you fight to control. We push hardest in seven spots. *(These same seven come back later, when we go deeper on the list. For now, just notice them in yourself.)*

1. **What people think of me** (pride)
2. **What I think of myself** (self-worth)
3. **The people close to me** — how I want them to act
4. **Sex and romance** — how I want a partner to act
5. **My goals** — what I think I need to be happy

6. **Feeling safe** — what I think I need to be okay
7. **Money**

Ask → In these seven spots, do you try to make people and life go your way? (yes / no)

Running the show.

- Do you spend a lot of time replaying the past, or planning out exactly how the future "has to" go?
- Do you believe that if people would just listen to you, things would finally be good?
- When something goes wrong, is your first move to try harder and push more?

Both nice and not-nice. People run the show two ways. Some bully and lie to get their way. Some are super nice, helpful, and giving — to get their way. Both are still *trying to run the show.*

Ask → Do you ever use being "nice" — favors, guilt, being needed — to steer people? (yes / no)

The blame and the hurt.

- Do you mostly blame other people and the world for your troubles?
- Do you feel like life has treated you unfairly?
- Do people seem to hurt you "out of nowhere"?
- Are you often angry, offended, or feeling sorry for yourself?

Ask → Be honest — has the center of your life been you: your wants, your anger, your hurt? (yes / no)

What's Underneath All Of It

When you line it all up, one thing keeps showing up: **me first.** The Big Book names it flat-out:

> *"Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles."* (◆ BB p.62 ¶1)

This isn't calling you a bad person. It's not name-calling at all. It's just naming the engine that's been running you: *me, my way, my plan, first.* And it's the same engine that feeds the drinking and the using.

Here's the hard truth, said straight:

> *"Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!"* (◆ BB p.62 ¶2)

In plain words: this "me first" habit doesn't just hurt you — it can kill you. It has to go.

And here's the catch you already know from Step 1 — you can't fix this by just trying harder or wanting it more. You've tried. It doesn't hold.

> *"Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help."* (◆ BB p.62 ¶2)

(*"God's help" there just means leaning on that power greater than you — your version of it, not anyone else's.*)

Ask → Can you see that your troubles mostly grew out of *you* running things — and that trying harder on your own won't pull it out? (yes / no)

"Quit Playing God" — Even If You're Not Sure There Is One

This line scares people. It shouldn't.

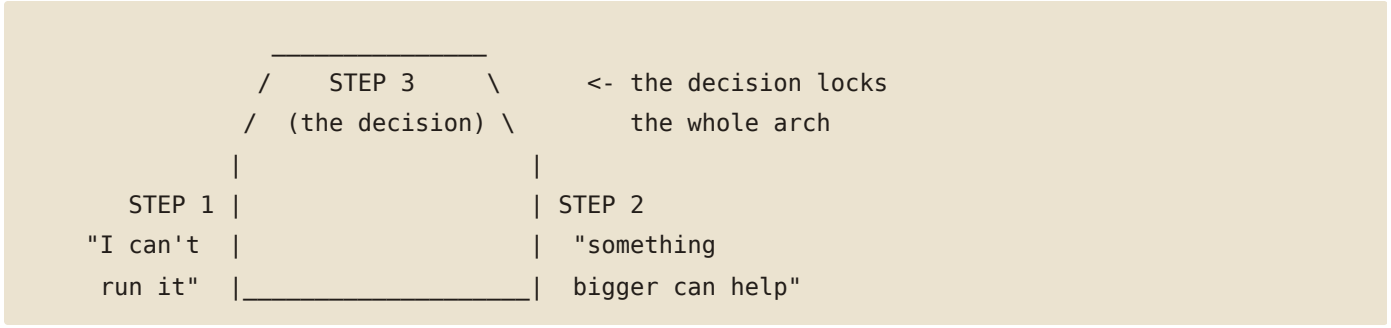
> *"First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work."* (◆ BB p.62 ¶3)

"Playing God" just means **trying to run everything and everyone** — being the boss of the whole show. You already saw that doesn't work.

So you quit that job. You let something bigger than you take the lead. You don't have to know exactly what that something is yet. You just stop insisting it's *you*.

> *"...this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom." (◆ BB p.62 ¶3)*

A keystone is the stone at the top of an arch — the one that locks all the other stones together. Step 1 and Step 2 are the two sides. Step 3, this decision, is the stone that locks them and lets you walk through.



Make the Decision — Take the Prayer

When you can say yes to the questions above, you're ready. The Big Book uses a short prayer to mark the decision. (Call it a prayer, or just call it saying the decision out loud — same thing.)

> *"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!" (◆ BB p.63 ¶2)*

That's old-style English. Here's what it's really saying:

> *I'm done running my life into the ground. I'm offering myself to a Power greater than me. Take this "me first" weight off me. Use my mess to help other people. Help me live a better way, starting today.*

And the words are yours to change. The Big Book says so:

> *"The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation." (◆ BB p.63 ¶3)*

So if "God" or "Thee" sticks in your throat, say it your way — to "a Power greater than me," to "the program," to whatever you're willing to trust. What matters is that you **mean it**, all the way, no fingers crossed.

Ask → Are you ready to stop running the show and let a Power greater than you lead — starting now? (yes / no)

If yes, we say it together, out loud. When we do, you have taken Step 3.

Then this becomes a **morning thing.** You make the decision once, then you renew it each morning. *(That morning practice is Step 11 — we'll get there later.)*

Where This Road Goes

You're not doing this for nothing. Remember the list of things that were beating you — bad relationships, no control over your moods, fear, feeling useless, feeling unhappy?

> *"We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression… we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people…" (◆ BB p.52 ¶2)*

The promises of this program are those exact things turned around — new freedom, peace, fear leaving, becoming useful to people again.

> *"We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness… That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear… Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us…" (◆ BB pp.83–84)*

Straight talk: those promises land later — after you do the cleanup and make things right with people you've hurt (that's called *amends*, and it's Step 9). But this decision — Step 3 — is where that whole road starts. No decision, no road.

Right After the Decision — Start Writing

The decision is just words until you act on it. The Big Book says the very next move is action:

> *"Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning…" (◆ BB p.63 ¶4)*

So you go home and start your **grudge list** today — Columns 1 & 2. (The runsheet has the handoff.)

- **Column 1** = who or what you're mad at (people, groups, ideas).
- **Column 2** = why you're mad — short reasons.
- **Stop there.** Bring it back before Column 3.

> ***Note for the sponsor:*** *Columns 1 & 2 are the safe step — they never ask what he did. Say that out loud; it lowers the fear. People who hurt him belong on the list. (When Column 4 comes — later, not today — the Book looks for our own mistakes, never "his part," and a child does not inventory an abuser.) Keep the language plain, keep the God-talk on his terms, and remember: willing to believe is enough today — don't push for more.*
