The Third Step Decision

Big Book pp. 60–64 in plain words — the actor, the root of our troubles, and the decision that opens Step Four

You took Step One. You took Step Two. You're willing. Now the book asks for one decision — and it already knows what you're thinking: *"but I'm not selfish. I don't arrange life to suit myself."* These pages answer that, line by line. Read slow. Argue out loud. That's what they're for.

> *"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. Just what do we mean by that, and just what do we do?"*
>
> — How It Works, p. 60

CONVINCED OF THREE THINGS

p. 60

Before the decision, the book checks your Steps One and Two — boiled down to three lines:

a *"That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives."*
Step One — both halves. The drink beat me, **and** my life-running beat me too.

b *"That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism."*
Not willpower. Not doctors. Not love. Not me.

c *"That God could and would if He were sought."*
Step Two — the Power exists, and it is willing. My job: seek.

If a, b, and c are true, a decision is already waiting. *"Being convinced, we were at Step Three."*

WHERE YOU ARE

STEP ONE — ADMITTED
can't safely drink — and can't manage the life my mind runs **(a)**

↓

STEP TWO — CAME TO BELIEVE
a Power greater than me can restore me to sanity **(b, c)**

↓

★ STEP THREE — YOU ARE HERE
pp. 60–63 — the decision: God directs, I act

↓

STEP FOUR — AT ONCE
the list: Columns 1 & 2 — "vigorous action" starts right away

"BUT MY LIFE ISN'T UNMANAGEABLE"

the half of (a) most of us fight

Plenty of us will sign the first half of (a) — the drinking beat me — and balk at the second: *"could not manage our own lives."* My rent is paid. My job is fine. Here's the piece we miss:

> *"The fact is that most alcoholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in drink. Our so-called will power becomes practically non-existent."*
>
> — There Is a Solution, p. 24

> *"The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink."*
>
> — More About Alcoholism, p. 43

Who manages your life? **Your mind** — every plan and every choice goes through it. Step One proved that this same mind, at certain times, will call the first drink a good idea. A manager who now and then burns down the store is not a good manager — even in the weeks the store looks great. That is what **unmanageable** means. Not "my life looks like a wreck today" — **"the one running it can't be trusted with it."** Agreeing to Step One is agreeing to (a). Both halves.

So Step Three's question was never *"is my life bad enough yet?"* It's *"who should run it — the mind that drinks, or the God who doesn't?"*

How to use this sheet: one row at a time. Read the book's words out loud. Read the plain words. Then stop and talk: *where is this true in my life?*

Arguing with a row out loud is allowed — these pages were written for the man who doesn't buy it yet.

THE READING — PARTS ONE & TWO

Self-Will — and the Actor

Where the "I'm not selfish" question gets its answer.

PART 1 — THE FIRST REQUIREMENT

p. 60

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success." — p. 60	"Self-will" = me running my life my way, on my own power. The book's first ask isn't good behavior — it's honesty about a track record. **"Can hardly be a success"** — this way of living loses.
"On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good." — p. 60	"Collision" = crash. Living on self-will, I keep crashing into people. Notice: **even when I mean well.** Good motives don't stop the crashes. Count your current collisions — fights, cold wars, grudges.

PART 2 — THE ACTOR WHO RUNS THE SHOW

pp. 60–61

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"Most people try to live by self-propulsion. 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." — p. 60	"Self-propulsion" = pushing myself through life on my own power. Now the book's big picture: life is a play. I'm **one actor** in it — but I keep grabbing the director's chair. The lights, the set, the other players = my family, my boss, my friends. **"In his own way"** — there's the tell.
"If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful." — pp. 60–61	Read my plan honestly: I want **everybody** happy — not just me. That's why it never feels selfish from the inside. The plan feels generous. It is still **my** plan for everyone else's life.
"In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing." — p. 61	Stop on this one. The actor is often a **nice guy**. Kind. Patient. Giving. Niceness can be stagecraft — one more way to move the players where I want them. **Selfish, in this book, does not mean mean.**
"On the other hand, he may be mean, egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits." — p. 61	Or he bullies. Most of us mix both — sweet here, sharp there. Different tools, **same job: my way.**

TWO TOOL BAGS — ONE JOB

how nice people direct

THE SOFT TOOLS

- Helping — so you'll owe me
- Agreeing — to keep the peace I need
- Advice nobody asked for
- Doing it all myself, "so it's done right"
- Being so good you can't tell me no

THE HARD TOOLS

- Temper — raising the cost of crossing me
- Guilt trips
- The silent treatment
- Threats and ultimatums
- Keeping score

Both bags arrange people. The question is never *"was I nice?"* — it's *"was I directing?"*

The Show Flops — Five Honest Questions

PART 3 — WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS

p. 61

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more." — p. 61	People won't stay arranged. The show flops. And watch my move: I don't question the directing — **I direct harder.**
"He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him." — p. 61	**"More demanding or gracious"** — I push harder, or I charm harder. Both are volume knobs on the same demand. It still doesn't work.
"Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying." — p. 61	Sound familiar? "Okay, I'm not perfect, **but—**" and the "but" points at everyone else. Then come the three feelings that eat us: anger, hurt pride ("indignant"), and poor-me.

PART 4 — FIVE HONEST QUESTIONS

p. 61

Now the book asks five questions about this actor. They're really about me. Answer each out loud — yes or no.

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind?" — p. 61	**Q1:** Even my kindness — was it free? Or was it working an angle? ("Self-seeker" = out for myself.)
"Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well?" — p. 61	**Q2:** "Wrest" = wrestle out of, force from. "Delusion" = a lie I believe. The lie: **if I manage life well enough, I can force it to pay me happiness.** Catch the word *manage* — Step One already told me how my managing goes.
"Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show?" — p. 61	**Q3:** Everyone around me already sees what I'm after. The act fools exactly one person: **me**. **Q4:** And my grabbing teaches them to grab back.
"Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?" — p. 61	**Q5:** Even at my best — best mood, best intentions — when I'm running the show, I produce mess, not music.

Nobody Thinks He's Selfish — and the Root

PART 5 — THE GALLERY

pp. 61–62

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"Our actor is self-centered—ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays." — p. 61	"Self-centered" doesn't mean stuck-up. It means **the whole play turns around me** — my comfort, my plans, my feelings sit at the center of every scene.
"He is like the retired businessman who lolls in the Florida sunshine in the winter complaining of the sad state of the nation; the minister who sighs over the sins of the twentieth century; politicians and reformers who are sure all would be Utopia if the rest of the world would only behave; the outlaw safe cracker who thinks society has wronged him; and the alcoholic who has lost all and is locked up." — pp. 61–62	Five very different men — rich, religious, powerful, criminal, and one of us, locked up with nothing. Nothing alike on the outside. Inside, one identical thought: **"the problem is out there."** And not one of them thinks he's self-centered.
"Whatever our protestations, are not most of us concerned with ourselves, our resentments, or our self-pity?" — p. 62	"Protestations" = all my "not me!" objections. The book hears you saying it — and answers with a question: **where does my mind actually go, all day?** Track one day honestly: me, my grudges, my hurts.

PART 6 — THE ROOT OF OUR TROUBLES

p. 62

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"Selfishness—self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles." — p. 62	The diagnosis, with an exclamation point. The root was never the booze — p. 64 will call liquor *"a symptom."* The root is **self**: my life aimed at me.
"Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate." — p. 62	What's the engine under the selfishness? **Fear — in a hundred costumes.** Afraid I'll lose what I have, or won't get what I want, I step on people. They step back. Keep this sentence — your whole Fourth Step hangs on it.
"Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt." — p. 62	"Invariably" = every time, no exceptions. Even the "out of nowhere" hurts: look back far enough and I find an earlier **me-first decision** that walked me into range. Careful — this is **not** "everything is my fault." It's: I always had a hand in where I was standing.
"So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so." — p. 62	My troubles are mostly homegrown. "Self-will run riot" = my way, out of control, wrecking the block. And the last six words are for you: **"though he usually doesn't think so."** The book expects you not to see it. Not seeing it is part of the sickness.

a hundred forms of fear → **me-first decisions** → **stepped-on toes** → **they retaliate** → **resentment**

Column 4 of your inventory will walk this chain backward until it finds the fear.

THE READING — PARTS SEVEN & EIGHT

It Kills Us — So We Quit Playing God

PART 7 — WE MUST, OR IT KILLS US

p. 62

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible." — p. 62	"Above everything" — top of the list, before anything else in my life. The stakes are the drink's stakes: **it kills us** — because it's what marches us back to the drink. Then three words of hope: **God makes that possible.**
"Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to." — p. 62	"Convictions galore" = plenty of values. Knowing right was never my problem — **doing it was.** Beliefs and rules didn't remove self.
"Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help." — p. 62	Wishing didn't work. Trying harder didn't work. Where have I heard that before? **The bottle.** Self can't remove self — the broken manager can't fix the manager. The help has to come from outside me.

PART 8 — THE DECISION: QUIT PLAYING GOD

p. 62

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work." — p. 62	Here's the how. All this time I've been **playing God** — writing the script, judging the cast, running the show. The verdict takes four words: **it didn't work.**
"Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children." — p. 62	The decision itself, in the book's own picture. Same play. Same stage. One change — **I give up the chair.** "Hereafter" = from now on. Principal and agent: He owns the firm; I carry out the day's work. Father and children: I'm kept, not fired. I don't leave the stage — I finally just play my part.
"Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom." — p. 62	A **keystone** is the top-center stone of an arch: set it, and everything holds; pull it, and the arch falls. This one simple idea — **God directs, I act** — is what every other step stands on. "Triumphant" = winning. "To freedom" — out of the bondage we're about to pray about.

Same shape as page 60: must be rid of it · couldn't on my own power · God can. The book just proved **a-b-c all over again** — this time about selfishness, not only alcohol.
Convinced twice, the decision stops being scary. It's just the next honest move.

THE READING — PART NINE

What Followed the Decision

The Third Step promises — what's on the table.

PART 9 — WHAT FOLLOWED

p. 63

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well." — p. 63	**"Sincerely"** is the only condition. New Employer: He supplies what I need. My side of the job: **stay close, do the work He gives.**
"Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life." — p. 63	Watch the cure start working: **less "what can I get," more "what can I give."** A contributor to the show instead of a director of it.
"As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn." — p. 63	Power. Peace. Courage. Company. And the **hundred forms of fear start draining.** "Reborn" is the book's word, not mine. This is what's on the table when you take the step.

P. 63 — "WE WERE NOW AT STEP THREE. MANY OF US SAID TO OUR MAKER, AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM:"

"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!"

— How It Works, p. 63

Thee, Thou, Thy are old English for *You* and *Your*. "As Thou wilt" = as You want. Read it slow — the next page takes it one line at a time.

One Line at a Time

THE PRAYER, LINE BY LINE

p. 63

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt." — p. 63	**The offering.** Take all of me — and *build* with me. I stop being the architect and become the material. God does the shaping; I stay workable.
"Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will." — p. 63	**The release.** "Bondage" = chains, slavery. Chained to me — my wants, my fears, my show — I can't serve anybody. Untie me from myself so I'm free to be useful.
"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." — p. 63	**The witness.** Not "make my life easy." Beat my troubles out in the open, where the people I want to help can watch — so my life becomes the evidence. ("Bear witness" = show proof.)
"May I do Thy will always!" — p. 63	**The surrender.** The whole decision in five words: **Your way. All the time.**

PART 10 — TAKING THE STEP

p. 63

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"We thought well before taking this step making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him." — p. 63	Think first — then mean it. "Abandon ourselves utterly" = **all in** — no fingers crossed, nothing held back for later.
"We found it very desirable to take this spiritual step with an understanding person, such as our wife, best friend, or spiritual adviser. But it is better to meet God alone than with one who might misunderstand." — p. 63	This is why sponsor and sponsee usually take it **together, out loud** — often on our knees. That's the normal way, not a strange one. And if the only company would scoff, God alone is better company.
"The wording was, of course, quite optional so long as we expressed the idea, voicing it without reservation. This was only a beginning, though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once." — p. 63	Your own words work fine. What's required: say the idea **out loud, holding nothing back** ("without reservation"). And mark this — **"only a beginning."** The prayer starts the work; it doesn't finish it. Many feel something at once. Either way — a beginning.

Companion sheet: **The Third Step Prayer** — one page, the prayer in four movements — for the day you take it.

THE READING — PART ELEVEN & WHAT IT OPENS

At Once — the Door to Columns 1 & 2

PART 11 — VIGOROUS ACTION

pp. 63–64

THE BOOK SAYS	IN PLAIN WORDS
"Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted." — pp. 63–64	The decision is a **starting gun, not a finish line.** "Vigorous action" = work, with muscle in it. "Housecleaning" — the house is me. We go room by room.
"Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us." — p. 64	Read that twice: **"little permanent effect unless at once followed."** A Step Three not followed by Step Four wears off. That's why the list starts today — not "someday."
"Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions. Therefore, we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four." — p. 64	The drink was the **fever, not the infection.** ("Symptom" = the sign of a sickness, not the sickness.) The inventory goes hunting for the infection — and the book names the hunt: Step Four.
"First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered its common manifestations." — p. 64	"Flaws in our make-up" — remember the root (p. 62)? **Self.** The inventory looks for the shapes self takes in me. The book names the first shape right away: resentment — **the "number one" offender.**
"In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry." — p. 64	Your assignment, straight from the book. **On paper. Who** — people, institutions (a company, the church), principles (beliefs like "I can't have fun sober"). **Why** — next to each name. That is Column 1 and Column 2.

WHY THESE PAGES MATTER

- **They answer "I'm not selfish."** Selfish means directing, not mean. Kind is one of the costumes. (p. 61)
- **They expect the blindness.** "Though he usually doesn't think so" — not seeing it is part of the sickness. (p. 62)
- **They find the engine: fear.** A hundred forms of it. Column 4 will hunt yours by name. (p. 62)
- **They re-run a, b, c.** Can't manage self. Can't fix self on my own power. God can. (pp. 60, 62)
- **They won't let the decision sit.** "Little permanent effect unless at once followed." (p. 64)

THE DOOR TO COLUMNS 1 & 2

start today

HOW BBA WALKS IT

- **Pray first, every session** — "God please help me face and be rid of the things in myself which have been blocking me from You, other people and myself."
- **Column 1** — every name: people, institutions, principles. Names only.
- **Don't stop early** — you will know when the list is done.
- **Column 2** — why, next to each name. Brief. Number the names, letter the reasons.
- **Then stop** — bring the list to your sponsor. Column 3 is the next meeting.

Take the **Columns 1 & 2 quick-reference sheet** home with you.

Deciding to clean the house never cleaned a house. Step Three decides; Step Four scrubs.
And remember p. 60: *"We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection."* **Willing is the whole entry fee.**

Same play. New Director. Your part starts with a list.

Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book), “How It Works,” pp. 60–64; “There Is a Solution,” p. 24; “More About Alcoholism,” p. 43 · Big Book Awakening framework · companion sheets: The Third Step Prayer · Columns 1 & 2 Quick Reference · The Bridge Passage (pp. 65–67)