**Step 3: Deciding to Turn It Over**

*“I made a decision to turn my will and life over to the care of God, as I understand Him.”*

This assignment is designed to help you work Step 3. Whether or not you have worked this step before, it is a good idea to go through this handout with your 12-step sponsor and your therapist.

Step 1 asks people to admit some things that they may not have been able to see clearly at first. One of those things was that they were powerless over a substance or behavior, and the other was that their lives were out of control. Step 2 asked them to accept that it was possible that some power greater than themselves could straighten out the craziness.

Neither of the first two steps calls for any action—they are thinking steps. Now Step 3 asks you to make a decision to turn your will and your life over to the care of God.

Most people don’t like this idea. First of all, people in this society have usually been raised to believe they should be in control of their own lives. The idea of turning over control to anyone or anything else sounds crazy, like letting go of the steering wheel in traffic. Second, many have had bad experiences with religion, or they may have cried out to God in despair and pain and seen nothing change.

The 12-step experiences of millions of people since 1935 seem to show that a relationship with a Higher Power may be helpful. Many of those people are highly intelligent and not likely to be conned or brainwashed; many started out with the same doubts and suspicions about God that you may have now. But for millions of people like you, this step came to make sense, and the results show that it seems to work.

1. Are you comfortable with what this step asks you to do? If you aren’t, what part bothers you, or what do you feel you might have a hard time doing?

2. You’ve probably done your best to solve your own problems before this. You've given them your best thought and your hardest efforts, but your best often hasn't worked. What benefits do you think you might see if there was a God or Higher Power greater than yourself that would help you, and you were able to turn your problems over to this God or Higher Power?

3. Some people recommend breaking this step down into phrases and examining them one by one. The first phrase is “Made a decision.”What does “making a decision” mean to you?

4. “Made a decision”sounds like a shift from thinking to acting—the action can be right now or in the future. Are you ready to decide on strong action to change your life? If you still need to think about it for a while you can do that. The step doesn't say that once you make this decision you have to “turn your will and your life over” today. It says you *decide* you will do so. Does thinking of it this way change the way this step sounds to you? If so, how?

5. Are you ready to decide you will act, even if not today? If you’re stuck at this point, talk with your sponsor or a friend who's already gone through this. Find out how they felt and what happened. Other than talking with a friend or your sponsor, what can you do to find out more about this step and to get answers for any questions or difficulties you have with it?

6. The next phrase is “to turn our will and our lives over.” Have you had painful experiences with entrusting others with things that were important to you, such as possessions, information, decisions, or even your safety or the safety of someone else, and had them let you down? Do you feel this has happened with God or a Higher Power? If you answered “Yes” to either of these, what happened and how did you feel about it?

7. A big part of trust is learning *how much* trust you can give a person or thing. If you trust them to do something they can’t or won’t do, you’ll be disappointed and possibly hurt. Has someone failed to do what you trusted them to do? Can you see now that they didn’t have the ability or character to do it? What happened, and how do you feel about it now?

8. To go on thinking about that last question and avoid feeling let down by God, you need to have a realistic understanding of what God can and will do. That brings us to the last phrase in this step: “to the care of God *as we understood God.*” Those last four words are very important. This step doesn’t ask you to trust someone else's version of God or a Higher Power. It asks you to set aside whatever you’ve been taught about God and start over. It requires you to figure out for yourself what kind of God or Higher Power makes sense to you. How can you figure out for yourself what God or a Higher Power might really be like?

9. Here is one way that has worked for other people.

a. Find a quiet place to sit and think. God is often referred to as a father. This may make you uneasy if your father was someone you couldn't trust and feel safe with. But think about being a parent. If you have children, think about how you feel about them, and if you don't have kids, think about how you would want to treat them if you did. First think about what you can do for your children. List some things you can do for them:

b. Now think about the limits of what you can do for your children. What are the things you’d like to do for them, but can’t? List some of the dangers you can’t protect them from:

10. Can you protect your children from all the results of their own actions? As a parent you can do your best to teach your children, to advise and warn them, but sometimes they still do things you know will hurt them and others. Often they may hurt you. How does it feel to think about your children making mistakes and being hurt or hurting someone else in spite of your efforts to teach and warn them?

11. Some recovering people believe in a God who really is like a parent, who gives God’s children much of what they need and can teach and advise them, but who can’t make them listen or take away their free will. Because this God will not take away their free will, God can’t keep these children from doing things that hurt them or others. This God gives support and guidance as well as comfort and healing after bad things happen but can't prevent many bad things that do happen. How does this compare with your picture of yourself as a parent?

12. Now think about the experiences you have had in your life and the world as you see it around you. Would a God like this make sense in this world and still be able to help you with your recovery from being dependent on a drug? If such a God existed, how could you tell?

13. One way many people feel they could tell God was there would be that God would help them when they needed help. Think back on your life. Were there times when something happened at just the right time for you in a way that seems hard to believe? Times when your luck was better than anyone would expect? What happened?

14. Another piece of evidence to look for is the advice a good parent gives his or her children. To see whether God has given us advice and warnings, we would need to know how God might communicate with us. Many people say that there were times when they felt a kind of inner voice—a hunch, gut feeling, intuition, conscience—urging them not to do something and giving them an uneasy feeling about it. What experiences have you had like that?

15. When you ignored that inner voice or feeling, what were the results?

16. Do you think that inner voice could have been a way for your God to give you advice? If that makes sense, how do you feel about the idea that God has been talking to you from within?

17. Another way some people feel God reaches out to them is through other people. What experiences have you had of someone showing up at just the right time in your life and helping you or telling you something you needed to hear?

18. Do you think that could have been another way for God to communicate with you, and if so, how do you feel about that idea?

19. If this way of thinking about God makes sense for you, it still leaves the question of how to “turn our will and our lives over.” Since this idea of God is about a being who helps people mainly by providing help and guidance, what would “turning it over” mean, so that you wouldn't be hurt by expecting God to do things God wouldn't do?

20. For many people who find this way of thinking about God useful, “turning it over” means looking to God for emotional support and guidance. Do you feel you could listen for the guidance of your inner voice or conscience and follow that guidance? How would your life be different up to now if you based your choices and actions on that guidance rather than on your impulses, fears, desires, and compulsions?

21. If you feel this makes sense, it’s one way to do Step 3. You can seek God’s guidance and support from your inner voice and then trust and follow that guidance and watch for the support of God in the good other people bring to you in your daily life. There’s another side. Since you also play a role in other people’s lives, this would also mean that God has acted through you. Have you ever been the one who was there at just the right time for someone else? What happened? How did you help them?

22. How does it feel to think that you might be evidence of God in the life of someone else?

23. If this discussion of God as a parent has not helped, there are other ways to think about the nature of God. Some people think of God in ways guided by Native American beliefs. Others think of something like the “Force.” These are the important things to do:

a. Spend time thinking about it and decide for yourself what kind of God could exist, based on the experiences and information you have, and could be helpful to you.

b. Decide how you could tell whether God did exist. What evidence would there be?

c. Look for evidence and events that are hard to explain any other way.

24. Would you want the benefits of a good relationship with a God you could trust to help you? If you would, what would you be willing to do to have that in your life?

25. Now do another imagination exercise. Imagine a future in which you have found answers to your questions and troubled feelings about God. Imagine knowing you could count on the guidance and support of a Higher Power. See yourself living with confidence and peace of mind and knowing that you will never face a problem alone again. How does it make you feel?

26. What can you do to start moving toward that life?

If you still aren’t ready for Step 3, go back and spend more time on Steps 1 and 2. If you aren’t ready to turn your will and life over yet, don’t give up on AA, NA, or another 12-step program. You can attend meetings and get other benefits, such as people who accept, like, and respect you; good feedback and advice; structure and routine; a safe social circle; and moral and emotional support. However, to have your best chance of staying clean and sober and of being happy and successful in other areas of life, you can't work the 12 steps without Step 3.

Be sure to bring this handout to your next session with your therapist and talk about your thoughts and feelings about the exercise.