

Session #3 — Steps 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9

This is the third in a series of four Beginners' Meetings. We're pretending that it's the fall of 1946, and we are attending an A.A. meeting in which newcomers are being taken through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous in four one-hour sessions. In our case, we're working the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous.

For those of you who are planning to lead a Beginners' Meeting, we want to assure you that there are no "rules" on how to do it. Our format is based on written and oral histories of A.A. oldtimers throughout the United States and Canada, but it is still our interpretation of how these sessions were taught in the mid 1940's. Please feel free to modify or adapt our approach to your specific needs.

WELCOME to the third session of the A.A. Beginners' Meetings. Together, we're taking the Twelve Steps as described in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Our objective is to find a God of our understanding who will free us from the deadly affliction of food addiction.

Our names are _____ and _____ and we are members of OA. We're here to guide you in your journey toward a spiritual solution to your addictive behavior.

So far, we have taken steps One through Four. Hopefully during this time each newcomer has taken the Fifth Step with his or her "sharing partner" or spiritual advisor.

Are there are newcomers here without their "sharing partner?" If so, please so indicate. We will assign a "sharing partner" to each of you who needs one. [Ask for volunteers to "sharing partner" those who are need one.] Thank you.

Let's see how many are still on track. Will all the newcomers who have completed their Fourth Step inventories and have shared them with another person, please so indicate.

We congratulate you for having the honesty, open mindedness and willingness to do what is necessary to recover from food addiction. You are well on your way to that promised spiritual awakening. We want you to know that everything you read and hear today is for your benefit. You've done the work—now you will receive the rewards. Thank you.

As we said earlier today, we don't care who did the writing, just as long as you and your sharing partner came up with a list of character defects and a list of people to whom you need to make your amends. You will turn over your shortcomings to God in Steps Six and Seven and you will make restitution to those whom you've harmed in Steps Eight and Nine.

If you haven't had the opportunity to finish or share your inventory, please stay. You may hear something that will motivate you to complete Steps Four and Five in the near future. But, keep in mind that you have to do the work in order to receive the benefits and blessings we will be talking about later.

We are now entering the phase of the program where more and more actions are required. These actions produce results. Many of these results are in the form of promises which, as our lives change, become an integral part of our spiritual being.

If our lives didn't get better, why would we want to stay sober? If all we had to look forward to was restlessness, irritability and discontentment, why do the work? O. A. offers so much more—a new way of living—far more beautiful than anything we could ever imagine. That's why we take the Steps.

Let's see what is in store for us. But, before we do, let's review what the "Big Book" says about Step Five.

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

In the middle of the second paragraph on Page 72, the "Big Book" authors tell us why we need to admit our shortcomings to another person. Starting with the ninth line in the second paragraph, they state:

“...The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only *thought* they had lost their egoism and fear; they only *thought* they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness, and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else *all* their life story.”

We share our inventory because we are great at self deception. Aren't we the ones who used to say we didn't have a problem with addiction? Didn't we tell ourselves over and over that we were doing fine as we were sinking deeper and deeper into the abyss of addiction?

Since we're not good judges of character, especially our own, we confide in someone else. Only another person can see us as we really are.

As discussed earlier, we can share our inventory with any number of people. Some of those mentioned on page 74 of the “Big Book” are church leaders, doctors, psychiatrists and friends.

The person we choose has to be closemouthed, trustworthy and supportive. He or she must never discuss our inventory with anyone else. Starting with the seventh line in the last paragraph on page 74, the “Big Book” authors write:

“...It is important that he be able to keep a confidence; that he fully understand and approve what we are driving at; that he will not try to change our plan.”

The “Big Book” authors give us specific instructions for taking the Fifth Step. At the top of page 75, they tell us that, as soon as we decide who is to listen to our inventory, we take action immediately:

“When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. He should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.”

In the second paragraph on page 75, the “Big Book” authors provide us with more directions:

“We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past.”

Then, they announce that after we have shared our inventories, we will be rewarded. Further on in the second paragraph on page 75, the “Big Book” authors provide us with a list of benefits we receive as the result of taking the Step.

“...Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. We feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe.” (page 75, para. 2, lines 2-11)

We are now well on our way toward recovering from our addiction. The “Big Book” authors state we are in the process of having a spiritual experience and as a result, our obsession to act out destructive behaviors is being removed.

Think about how these promises are coming true in your lives. They certainly have come true in ours.

In page 75, paragraph three, the “Big Book” authors give us specific directions on what to do after we have finished sharing our inventories:

“Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimped on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand?”

The “Big Book” authors propose that we review the first Five Steps to make sure we haven’t omitted anything. If you have done this, you are ready to proceed to the Sixth Step:

Step 6: *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

In Step Six, the “Big Book” authors have us answer a simple question. Starting with line three in the first paragraph on page 76, they ask:

“...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? If we still cling to something we will not let go, we ask God to help us be willing.”

So, according to the “Big Book” authors, it is a decision time once again. We realize they want you to take your Sixth Step on the same evening you share your Fourth Step with your “sharing partner.” In case your “sharing partner” didn’t direct you to page 76 of the “Big Book,” we’ll take you through the Sixth Step now. If you have already completed the Sixth Step, we ask that you take it again now with the Group.

During the Fifth Step, we identified our character defects using the assets and liabilities checklists we discussed earlier today. In Step Six, we make the preparations necessary to turn these character defects over to God.

Let’s start with a moment of silence so we can ask God for the willingness to have our higher power remove all of the shortcomings we found in our inventories.

(a moment of silence)

Now, will the those who have completed the Fifth Step please so indicate. This is the Sixth Step question:

“Are you now ready to have God remove from you all the things which you have admitted are objectionable?”

Please answer, one at a time, yes or no.

[Have each newcomer answer the question.]

Thank you.

Those of you who answered yes to this question have completed the Sixth Step and are ready to proceed to Step Seven.

Step 7: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

This step is straightforward. It consists of a prayer.

The prayer is found in the second paragraph on page 76. It reads:

“...My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.”

We would like each of you who is ready to take the Seventh Step to read the prayer along with us a second time.

Let’s read the Seventh Step Prayer together.

[Read the prayer a second time.]

According to the “Big Book” authors, we have completed Step Seven.

Now, it is time to clear away the wreckage of our past. We do this by making amends or restitution.

Step 8: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

The “Big Book” authors state, “made a list.” Do we need to make this list? Actually, no! We made our list as part of our Fourth Step. In the middle of page 76, paragraph three, the “Big Book” authors confirm this:

“Now we need more action, without which we find that ‘Faith without works is dead.’

Let’s look at *Steps Eight and Nine*. 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.”

That’s why we hold onto our Fourth Step inventory. It contains our Eighth Step amends list.

For those newcomers who made an amends list as part of your Fourth Step inventory, congratulations. You have completed the Eighth Step.

Let's move on to Step Nine.

Step 9: Made direct amends to such people, wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

The amends process is explained in detail on pages 76 through 83. On page 76, starting with the sixth line in the third paragraph, the “Big Book” authors tell us what to do:

“...Now we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven’t the will to do this, we ask until it comes. Remember it was agreed at the beginning *we would go to any lengths for victory over alcohol.*”

In the next paragraph on page 76, the “Big Book” authors provide us with some insight as to how to approach some of those to whom we owe an amends:

“Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach. We might prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is not an end in itself. Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us.”

In the last sentence of this paragraph, the authors clearly state our purpose for living. They tell us why we are here—to serve God and our fellows.

Then, on page 77, they ask us to let our actions, rather than our words, demonstrate to others that we have changed. Starting with line four, they write:

“...It is seldom wise to approach an individual, who still smarts from our injustice to him, and announce that we have gone religious. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But our man is sure to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. He is going to be more interested in our demonstration of good will than our talk of spiritual discoveries.”

One of the most difficult amends to make is to someone we genuinely don’t like. But, whether we like them or not, we must proceed. In the first paragraph on page 77, starting with the ninth line, we find:

“...Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. We go to him in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill feeling and expressing our regret.”

In the next paragraph, paragraph two, on page 77, the authors even provide us with instructions on what to say:

“Under no conditions do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply we tell him that we will never get over drinking until we have done our utmost to straighten out the past. We are there to sweep off our side of the street, realizing that nothing worth while can be accomplished until we do so, never trying to tell him what he should do. His faults are not discussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result.”

The authors explain what to do about our debts. We may not like the sacrifice required to make good on our bills, but sacrifice we must. The process forces us to rely on God for guidance which takes us out of self-will and into God’s will. Under God’s direction, we find it much easier to make restitution than we ever thought possible. In the middle of page 78, paragraph two, they write:

“Most alcoholics owe money. We do not dodge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise us. Arranging the best deal we can we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow to pay. We must lose our fear of creditors no matter how far we have to go, for we are liable to drink if we are afraid to face them.”

Keep in mind that courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is facing the fear and walking through it.

Then on top of page 79, paragraph two, the “Big Book” authors again instruct us to ask God for guidance. This reliance upon God is essential, if we are to outgrow the fears that have separated us from our Creator:

“Although these reparations take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything.”

The “Big Book” authors suggest we ask others for help before we make some of our more difficult amends. We need direction, preferably from someone who understands in the inventory and restitution process. We must make sure we do not create further harm as we clean up our side of the street. At the top of page 80, they write:

“Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people, we secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have consulted with others, asked God to help and the drastic step is indicated, we must not shrink.”

In the first paragraph on page 82, we are yet again instructed to ask God for guidance as we make good on our past misdeeds:

“Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be that both will decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let by-gones be by-gones. Each might pray about it, having the other one’s happiness uppermost in mind.”

This is an example of how we must be tactful and considerate of others, as we make our amends. Nobody said it would be easy—it just has to be done.

In the next several paragraphs on page 82, starting with paragraph two, the “Big Book” authors state quite emphatically that stopping drinking, in our case acting out on our addiction, is only the beginning. We must take additional action if we are to recover from addiction:

“...Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he must keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn’t. But he is yet a long way from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated...”

“The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough.”

Keeping sobriety or abstinence alone out is not enough. The “Big Book” authors make that very clear. At the top of page 83, they write:

“Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We must take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry won’t fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being very careful not to criticize them. Their defects may be glaring, but the chances are that our own actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindliness and love.”

“The spiritual life is not a theory. *We have to live it.*”

Here we’re told that, in order to recover from addiction, we have to live the A.A. program. So, we don’t just take the Steps, we live the Steps, on a daily basis.

Then further down on page 83, paragraph three, the authors give us directions on what to do if we can’t make amends to someone face-to-face:

“There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don’t worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could. Some people cannot be seen—we send them an honest letter.”

The authors conclude the Ninth Step with another list of benefits. Starting at the bottom of page 83, paragraph four, they tell us precisely what is going to happen once we commence to clear away the wreckage of our past. They describe these benefits as promises. The “Big Book” is filled with promises. These are just a few of them:

“If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.”

“Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.”

What a message of hope! It is almost beyond comprehension that all of these wonderful events will occur if we just make amends to those whom we have harmed. But, they will happen—that’s a guarantee.

Dr. Bob, the Akron, Ohio, A.A. co-founder, found that he could not stay sober until he made his amends. He accomplished this in one day. At the top of page 156, we read about Dr. Bob’s Ninth Step:

“One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. He found himself surprisingly well received, and learned that many knew of his drinking. Stepping into his car, he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business.”

“At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since.”

This concludes our discussion of Step Nine. For the newcomers, part of your assignment for the next week is to start on your amends. If you are not sure how to proceed with a specific amends, ask you “sharing partner” or spiritual advisor for help.

Our next session we will take Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve. Before we end this session, we want to lay the groundwork for the Eleventh Step. This is the Step that puts us directly in contact with the God of our understanding.

The Eleventh Step reads: *“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out.”* Right from the beginning, the “Big Book” authors have been preparing us for this conscious contact by interspersing references about receiving guidance from God.

So, before looking ahead to the Eleventh Step, we’re going to look back to some of the previous “Big Book” references to guidance.

Let’s start by defining the word, “guidance.” Since the “Big Book” was written in the late 1930’s, the authors of Newcomers Step Workshop used a dictionary from that period to define “guidance.” We must be sure we know what the “Big Book” authors meant when they wrote the word, not what the word means today.

The verb “to guide” is defined as: “to lead or direct, influence, or regulate.” Two synonyms are “to disclose” and “to show.”

Now, let's look for the passages in the "Big Book" where the authors use the words that refer to guidance. There are over a dozen of them.

We just read one of them a few minutes ago. Let's go back to page 83, and look again at the last sentence in the first paragraph. It reads:

"…asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindness and love."

So, each day we ask God to show us the right way to live. In other words, we ask God to guide us in our actions.

There are many more references to guidance, starting all the way back at the First Step. We're only going to mention a few of them.

On page 13 in "Bill's Story," the A.A. co-founder talks about meditation and guidance. Starting with the third line in the fourth paragraph, Bill writes:

"…I was to sit quietly when in doubt, asking only for direction and strength to meet my problems as He would have me."

The term, "sit quietly" is similar to the Oxford Group concept of "quiet time," which is a daily morning meditation. It is common practice for Oxford Group members to write down the guidance they receive during this "quiet time" so they can check what they have written against a set of standards referred to as the "Four Absolutes." These are: Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love.

The process is based on the belief that "God speaks" and that God will guide and direct anyone who is willing to listen. They write down what they hear so they can separate the self thoughts from the God thoughts and then take the appropriate actions. They believe that if what they have written is honest, pure, unselfish and loving, these thoughts are from God. If what they have written is dishonest, resentful, selfish or fearful, these thoughts are from self.

The "Big Book" authors also believe that "God speaks." As we will learn in the next session, Our Creator communicates with us through inspiration, an intuitive thought or a decision.

On page 57, paragraph two, the authors state that God is going to speak to us:

"…He has come to all who have honestly sought Him."

"When we drew near to Him, He disclosed Himself to us!"

When the "Big Book" authors write, "He disclosed Himself to us!," they are implying that God will reveal itself to us.

At the bottom of page 69, we find yet another reference to guidance. Starting with the sixth line in the third paragraph, the “Big Book” authors write:

“...In meditation, we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it.”

How is God going to provide us with the right answer? God’s going to tell us. That’s why it is so important to learn how to listen.

These are just a few examples from the “Big Book” on prayer and meditation. They are sufficient to get us started. We now know what we need to do in order to find the “Spirit of the Universe.”

We’re going to provide you with some additional material on how to establish a conscious contact with God. In the late 1930’s, a member of the Oxford Group wrote a short essay titled, How to Listen to God. It is the one of the clearest set of instructions we have found on how to meditate.

We will briefly take you through this four page pamphlet. We suggest you conduct your daily morning meditation based on these guidelines.

The Oxford Group author begins the pamphlet with this statement:

“These are a few simple suggestions for people who are willing to make an experiment. You can discover for yourself the most important and practical thing any human being can ever learn—how to be in touch with God.”

At the bottom of the first page, the author gives us the prerequisites.

“Anyone can be in touch with God, anywhere and at any time, if the conditions are obeyed.”

1. “These are the conditions:

- to be quiet and still;
- to listen;
- to be honest about every thought that comes;
- to test the thoughts to be sure they come from God;
- to obey.”

In the remaining pages of the pamphlet, the author provides additional insight into “How it Works.” On the second page, he tells us:

2. Write!

“Here is the important key to the whole process. Write down everything that comes into your mind. Everything. Writing is simply a means of recording so that you can remember later.” On the third page, he shows us how to sort out the God thoughts from our own thoughts:

3. Test

“...Take a good look at what you have written. Not every thought we have comes from God. So we need to test our thoughts. Here is where the written record helps us to be able to look at them.

- a) Are they completely honest-pure-unselfish-loving?
- b) Are they in line with our duties-to our family-to our country?
- c) Are they in line with our understanding of the teachings found in our spiritual literature?”

The author of the pamphlet tells us to test our guidance using the Oxford Group Four Absolutes of Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness and Love.

In OA, we use the opposites of the Four Absolutes as a test for self-will. This test is described three times in the “Big Book.” Earlier, we learned how to use this test in the Fourth Step to complete our moral inventories. In addition, the test is also used as part of our Tenth and Eleventh Steps.

Let’s look again at how the “Big Book” authors use the test for self-will in the Fourth Step:

The Alcoholics Anonymous	The Oxford Group
<u>Test for self-will</u>	<u>Test for God’s will</u>
Selfish(ness)	Unselfishness
Dishonest(y)	Honesty
Self-seeking	Purity
Frightened (or Fear)	Love

We can use the same test to check our guidance. If what we have written is Selfish, Dishonest, Self-seeking, and Frightened we can be assured those words are based in self-will and therefore, are not from God.

So we can use either the A.A. test for self-will or the Oxford Group test for God’s will to check our guidance.

Now, back to the Oxford Group pamphlet. The author next asks us to check our guidance. Here is where your “sharing partner” or spiritual advisor can be very helpful.

4. Check

“When in doubt and when it is important, what does another person who is living two-way prayer think about this thought or action? More light comes in through two windows than one. Someone else who also wants God’s plan for our lives may help us see more clearly.”

“Talk over together what you have written. Many people do this. They tell each other what guidance has come. This is the secret of unity. There are always three sides to every question—your side, my side, and the right side. Guidance shows us which is the right side—not which side is right.”

Then the author explains what to many of us is the most difficult part of all:

5. Obey

“Carry out the thoughts that have come. You will only be sure of guidance as you go through with it. A rudder will not guide a boat until the boat is moving. As you obey, very often the results will convince you that you are on the right track.”

Remember, God has given us free will—we’re free *not* to listen to God’s guidance. But, we must be prepared to accept the consequences if we are not willing to follow our Creator’s plan for our lives.

The author tells us what we need to do if we don’t hear any definite thoughts during our meditation. He says it is a sign that we haven’t completely cleared up the wreckage of the past—we need to make additional amends. He writes:

“If I am not receiving thoughts when I listen, the fault is not God’s.

Usually it is because there is something I will not do:

- something wrong in my life that I will not face and make right;
- a habit or indulgence I will not give up;
- a person I will not forgive;
- a wrong relationship in my life I will not give up;
- a restitution I will not make;
- something God has already told me to do that I will not obey.”

Look this list over. Most of these items are described in the “Big Book” as part of our inventory and restitution process. If we have been thorough and honest in Steps Four through Nine, we will have removed the blocks that have prevented us from establishing a two-way communication with God.

So, start making amends to those whom you have harmed and practice prayer and meditation each morning. Write down your guidance and share it with your “sharing partner” or spiritual advisor.

As for the results, they are described on the bottom of the last page of the “How to Listen to God” pamphlet.

“There is a way of life, for everyone, everywhere. Anyone can be in touch with the living God, anywhere, anytime, if we fulfill [God’s] conditions.”

When [we] listen, God speaks

When [we] obey, God acts

This is the law of prayer.”

Are there any questions?