

WEEK SEVEN: Chapter 5 – HOW IT WORKS (Step Three)

Now as we have completed the **Chapter to the Agnostics**, we have laid the **foundation** and have established the first Two Steps.

Keeping in mind the problems Bill was having with the first forty people, writing the book was quite a task. Bill was writing the book in Hank's office in New Jersey and his secretary Ruth Hock would type these chapters out as Bill stood behind her. As these chapters were finished they were sent to the Akron and New York groups. The groups would go over each chapter and every word. This was a real task and we really don't know all they went through to get this book written. Ruth said that she had typed this manuscript forty-four times before it was finally printed!

Bill had completed the first four chapters and felt the groundwork had been laid. He felt it was now time for the main purpose of the book, to show alcoholics how to recover. Prior to writing this chapter he was having trouble. He prayed for guidance and then laid down. After a few minutes he picked up his pad and pencil and began to write. He said that it seemed as though his pencil had a mind of its own. Within thirty minutes he had written "How it Works" and the Twelve Steps. He really didn't know how many Steps he needed as he started. He had the Six Steps from the Oxford Group. He knew the Steps needed expanding in order to close the loopholes the drunks would jump through. When he finished, he numbered them. He noticed there were Twelve Steps and equated this with the twelve Apostles.

He had just finished the Steps when Howard, a New York member, stopped by to see him. Bill had a newcomer with him. They took a look at the Steps and neither one of them liked them. Both of them started giving Bill hell about the Steps. You know how alcoholics are, **they don't like change**. They had six steps in the Oxford Group and didn't care for him doubling the Steps. How would you feel if you went to a meeting and all of a sudden you had twenty-four steps? There were a lot of discussions and arguments in the groups. This crisis was probably only one of many in writing *The Big Book*. The writing of the book stopped and they went through a great dilemma. Some changes were made and they were able to go on with the book. Now we are going to read what Bill wrote that night as it appears in the Original Manuscript.

(From the Original Manuscript)

Chapter Five HOW IT WORKS

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our **directions**. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program. Usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a way of life which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.

Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. 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 **follow directions**.

At some of these **you** may balk. **You** may think **you** can find an easier, softer way. **We doubt if you can.** With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.

Remember that **you** are dealing with alcohol - cunning, baffling, powerful! **Without help it is too much for you.** But there is one who has all Power - that one is God. **You must find him now!**

Half measures will avail **you** nothing. **You** stand at the turning point. **Throw yourself under His** protection and care with complete abandon.

Now we think you can take it! Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as **your** program of recovery:

1. Admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care **and direction** of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely willing that God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly, **on our knees**, asked him to remove our shortcomings - **holding nothing back.**
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make **complete** amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our contact with God, praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual **experience** as a result of **this course of action**, we tried to carry this message to **others, especially** alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

You may exclaim, "What an order, I can't go through with it." Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Our description of the alcoholic, the chapter to the agnostic, and our personal adventures before and after, **have been designed to sell you** three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That **you** are alcoholic and cannot manage **your own life.**
- (b) That probably no human power **can relieve your** alcoholism.
- (c) That God **can and will.**

If you are not convinced on these vital issues, you ought to re-read the book to this point or else throw it away!

We think in the **final statement**, Bill makes it clear what he has been trying to convey to us. He has been using the Doctor's Opinion and the first four chapters to sell us three pertinent ideas. Those three pertinent ideas are contained in Steps One and Two. So, if you are not convinced, you should read the book again or throw it away.

The very next thing he is going to start us on is Step Three. If you don't have Steps One and Two you can't do Step Three. Before the book was written, they would go out to the hospital, jails, or wherever, and by sharing of their stories they would convince him that he was alcoholic also. Through talking about the **disease**, the **physical allergy** and the **obsession of the mind**, they could help him see his **problem** and take Step One. Then they would ask if they could come back in a day or two.

They would return and begin talking about **Spirituality**, telling him how they had found it necessary to find a **Power Greater than human power**, and how they **apply it in their lives in order to recover**. They would help this alcoholic that had already identified with them, to be able to take what we know today as Step Two. Then they would take him to the Oxford Group meeting. They invited him to the meeting and would tell them that they had been talking with him and are **convinced** that he knows he is an alcoholic and that he **believes that God can restore him to sanity**, so we want to **sponsor him into the group**. That is what sponsorship was back then. The group would then vote on whether or not to take him into the group. After he was voted into the group, two or three of them would take him upstairs in Dr. Bob's house. **They would get down on their knees and he would make his surrender**, which we know today as Step Three.

So, if you are sold on Steps One and Two, you are now ready to take Step Three. From Step Three on, the book tells us with every Step, why you need to take it, how to take it and what the results will be. It does not do that with Steps One and Two because **they are not Working Steps**. Steps One and Two are **Conclusions of the Mind** that we draw based upon the information presented to us in the Doctor's Opinion and the first four chapters.

I think it is also clear, that Bill meant for these Steps to be a set of **individual directions** for the individuals to recover because he kept saying you, you, you. He did not call them **suggestions**, Bill called them **directions**. The rest of the fellowship immediately was upset when they saw this. Changing from 6 steps to 12 steps was bad enough, but what they really didn't like was the word 'directions'. They said, "Bill, you can't give an alcoholic direction. If you try, he won't do a damned thing!" Another bunch thought it wasn't strict enough. They argued back and forth. They said, "Instead of saying 'you' and 'you had to'; let's say 'we' and 'we had to'." Bill didn't want to change anything but the group insisted because it was their book, not his.

Finally, Bill realized he was going to have to accommodate their wishes. With the suggestion of a non-alcoholic psychiatrist they made some changes; they decided to drop 'directions' and make it 'suggestions' and quit saying you, you, you and say we, we, we and quit saying 'must', and use 'ought'. People would probably use the book a little more. Also as a compromise between the fundamental Christians and the Atheists, they decided on 'God as we understand him'.

Now, Bill is a real alcoholic, and alcohol is **cunning, baffling and powerful**. He said, "OK, I will agree to your changes, but I'm going to make a deal with you right now. I'm tired of fighting over this book. I'm not going to fight with you anymore. If I am to finish the book, you will have to let me be the final authority from here on out." They didn't want to write it either, so, they agreed to let Bill be the final authority from then on. What Bill knew that they didn't, was that he was going to put the word 'directions' back in the book, just two pages later. The rest of the way through the book he's used the words 'you' and 'must' also. This is the story of "How It Works", as it is written today.

READ: Page 60, paragraph 3 → page 60, paragraph 4 “motives are good.”

There are three words in Step Three that need to be defined. If we can understand them as the writer understood them, then it makes Step Three easy.

1. **Decision** - The word decision implies there is going to be further action.
2. **Will** - My will is nothing more than my mind; the power of choosing my actions or my thoughts.
3. **Life** - My life is nothing more than my actions. What I am today is the sum total of all the actions I have taken throughout my lifetime.

One of the problems many of us have in Step Three is that if we take Step Three, we will turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. But the Step said we make (made) a decision to do that. If we could turn it over in Step Three, we wouldn't need the rest of the Steps. If we make a decision to do something we are going to need to take certain action. The Action needed is Steps Four through Nine. All action is born in thought! If the thinking is right then the actions are right and usually the life is okay. If the thinking is lousy, the actions are lousy and life goes to hell in a hand-basket.

READ: Page 60, "Most people" → page 62, paragraph 3

“This concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.” Again, we can see he is adding to the spiritual structure. In Step One, willingness was the foundation. In Step Two, believing was the cornerstone, and we didn't even know what we were building. Now here in Step Three, he tells us we are building an arch through which we passed to freedom. Step Three is the keystone in this arch. So we gain another stone in the structure. The keystone is the supporting stone at the top of the arch. It is the stone that holds the arch together. *(See diagram on p.53.)*

READ: Page 63, paragraph 1

We thought well before taking this Step, making sure we were ready; that we could at last abandon ourselves utterly to Him. This was only a beginning. Though if honestly and humbly made, an effect, sometimes a very great one, was felt at once.

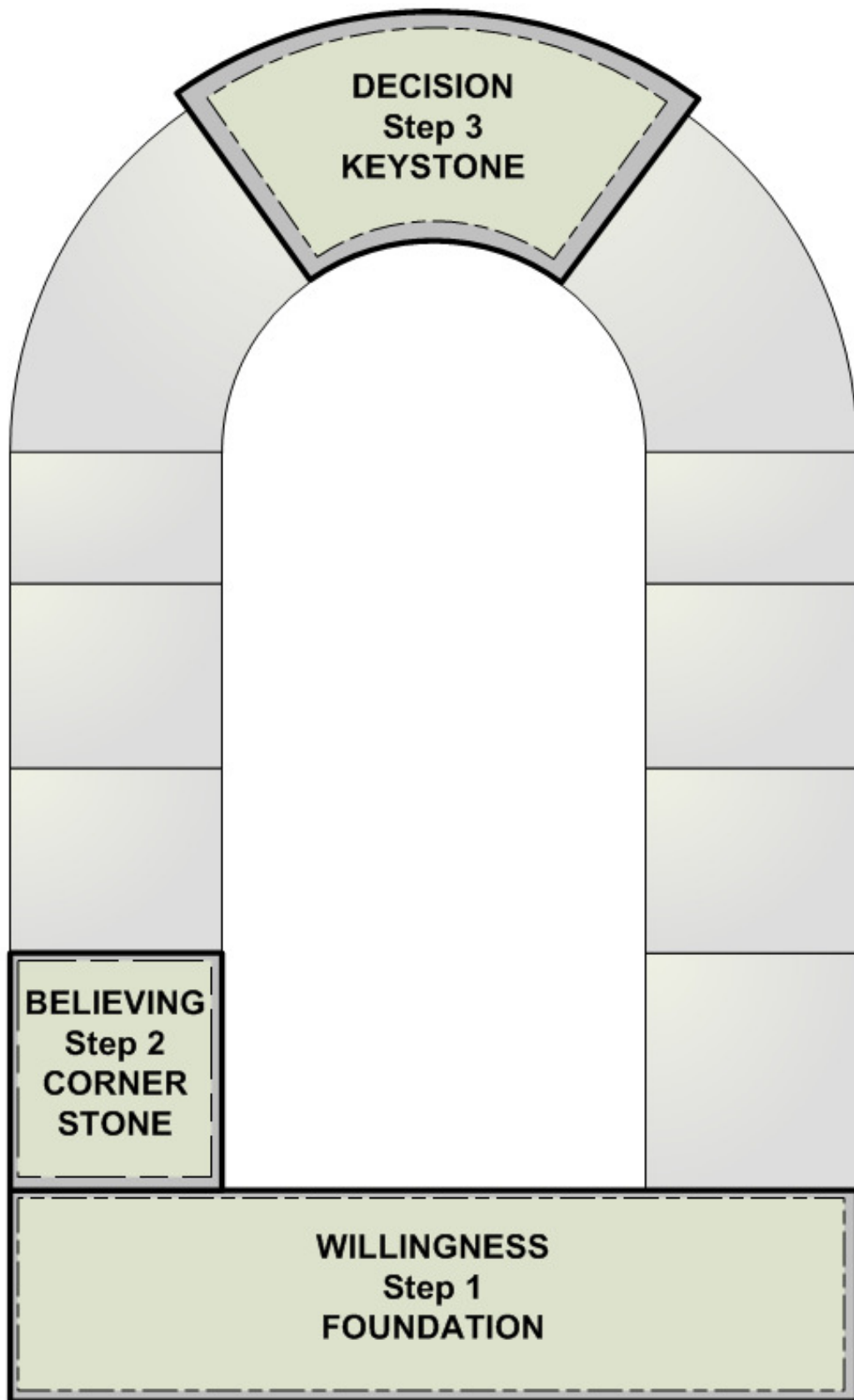
LEADER: Review the chart “Road to Decision” on page 54 of the workshop handout.

WE ARE NOW READY TO TAKE STEP Three: Many groups take this step together and recite the prayer that is set forth on page 63 at this time.

“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!”

BIG BOOK WORKSHOP HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Continue reading page 63, paragraph 4, through the end of the chapter. Read and be prepared to discuss Step One of the Inventory Guide. You should be prepared to start your Step Four next week.



“...the arch through which we passed to freedom.”

ROAD TO DECISION

