

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

As we approached Step Three, we were told that working the first three steps lays the groundwork of our twelve-step recovery. In Step One, we had admitted our powerlessness over our sexual obsessions and faced the unmanageability of our lives. Then, as we worked Step Two, we became open to the possibility that help was available, and that this help could come from a power greater than ourselves. Now in Step Three, we found ourselves on the threshold of asking for that help.

However, many of us experienced a lot of resistance. We feared that another monumental task was upon us. Since so much of our lives had been about willpower and control, how on earth would we go about making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God's care? How could we give up all of our control and turn our lives over to anything else? Letting go of control meant that we would have to trust God. And this frightened us. As children, many of us had been hurt while under "the care of" adults. Some of us had even been abused. We felt God had allowed the hurt or abuse to occur. That made it difficult to have faith in a Higher Power now.

But when it was suggested that we could actually find our spiritual nature a little at a time, this step became less difficult to take. We were told, "It's a lot easier than you think. Think of making a decision as opening a locked door and entering a room you've never been in. The key to the door is willingness. Once the door is open, all you have to do is walk in. Then think of walking in as a process. It will take a number of footsteps to cross the threshold and walk into the room." In fact, it took a great many small steps for most of us.

At this point many of us asked, "That's all well and good, but how do I actually become willing?" It was then pointed out to us that we had already begun. Reading recovery literature, going to meetings, making phone calls, getting a sponsor, and working the steps were all signs that we were willing to turn our lives over to a power greater than ourselves.

But many of us still rebelled. "What will become of me? I'll end up being nothing." Our fear was that if we were to turn our will and control over to God, we would lose everything. "Maybe I'll give up my sex addiction, but not the rest of me!"

It was helpful to remember that for many of us our will had gotten us into trouble. We had become examples of "self-will run riot." We had a seriously disturbed determination that was acting in the service of diseased thinking—a "will" that thought our best interests would be served by acting out sexually. We saw we had repeatedly and forcefully applied our misguided will upon our problems only to make matters worse. Because of this, many of us thought that we would have to give up our will altogether.

But this is not what Step Three asks of us. Rather, it suggests that we bring our will into alignment with God's will. Step Three, in fact, begins with us and recognizes our significance. We alone freely made a decision, not coerced by somebody or something outside ourselves. It was our choice. Although many of us had feared losing ourselves, we found that when we turned our will and our lives over to the care of God, just the opposite happened. We began to see that our Higher Power was not taking away from us but giving us more than we could ever have imagined.

There were those of us who were not able to trust God. Some of us were angry at God. Some were not even sure that there was a God. So how could those of us with these doubts turn our will and our lives over? It was suggested to us that we could start by using the SRA group as our "higher power." The spiritual safety we encountered allowed us to develop a faith in the rooms of SRA and we began to trust that if others could change, we could too. Turning our will over to a spiritual program that asked nothing in return and made no demands allowed us to use the group as our Higher Power.

Looking more closely at this step, we saw the phrase "the care of." Though often overlooked, this phrase helped us to trust and accept a Higher Power. At first glance it had appeared as though it could be deleted without really changing the meaning of the step. Certainly the step could read "turn our will and our lives over to God," and still make sense. What would be missing? A great deal. We were not turning our lives over to the wrath of God or to the neglect of God. Rather, we were turning our lives over to the "care" of God—God's love, concern and guidance. So we began to form a clearer understanding of a power greater than ourselves and our relationship to that power. That relationship included lots of care.

Entrusting ourselves to this care set us on a path of spiritual growth rather than one of self-destruction. A will and a life turned over to God's care became life-affirming, loving and healing, rather than compulsive, desperate and isolated.

How then did we "turn it over" to God? As we started to use the tools of the program, many of us began to have an idea of what "turning it over" involved. When we prayed, meditated, wrote, talked to a sponsor or other trusted member, or spoke at a meeting, we began to realize that we

were "turning it over." We were releasing what we were holding on to inside ourselves. We were letting go of our attempt to control others and the world around us. We were beginning to understand the meaning of "Let go and let God." At this point, many of us experienced a profound shift—sometimes subtle, sometimes powerful. We were discovering a path to a still deeper experience, a springboard to something truly spiritual and real. In moments of difficulty we became quiet and said, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference." We knew then we were on our way to "turning our will and our lives over to the care of God."

Now we were ready to begin working the remaining steps. Before taking the third step, we had too much fear to do this. But with our will and our lives turned over to God—to whatever degree—we were much better prepared to work these steps and face the challenges of life. In recovery, we continued to learn that aligning our will with our Higher Power not only freed us from our constant struggle, but also gave us relief and a new freedom in life. It was like discovering that we had been swimming against the river current. Once we turned around to swim with the current, we were easily carried away from the dark place we had been. We felt relieved that we no longer had to solve all our problems on our own. Now we had a loving presence that we could depend on—a Higher Power that would give us courage and wisdom and help guide us through life, one day at a time. By taking care of ourselves in partnership with God, we became free to grow and finally soar, pursuing new endeavors and long-forgotten dreams. We began to recognize the existence of grace in our lives

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