



The Third Step - Abandon Ship “Captain of My Ship – Master of My Soul”

Reposted from Recoverytoday.net | March 2012 Edition | by: Tim Cheney

“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him”

In 47 BC, history alleges that Julius Caesar, after defeating Pharnaces II of Pontus, ceremoniously declared Veni, Vidi, Vici – I came, I saw, I conquered. It is said in the rooms, “you come”, “you come to” and “you come to believe” - Vobis, Vobis Ad, Vobis Credere. The coming was being present so that the miracle could happen, the coming to was my awakening to the realization that a higher power could do for me what I could not do for myself, namely restore me to sanity. It was only when I was able to grasp an understanding of this was I open to the possibility of coming to believe and turning my focus on the third step. It wasn't easy.

In the second step article last month, I discussed how I reconciled myself in coming to believe in God, a power greater than our selves, and how I, of little faith, created an intellectual construct based on Pascal's and James's Wager that would allow me to be comfortable with taking that leap of faith. In the final analysis, my second step was rooted in the conciliation of what is the worst thing that can happen. I had nothing to lose. The third step was more of a challenge. It is one thing to believe that a power could restore me to sanity. That merely conceded a capability or a possible outcome with no assurance or warranty. There was no method to determine whether my sanity following continuous abstinence was a result of the presence of a higher power in my life or a result of ridding my brain of toxic, psychotropic substances. I had nothing to lose by making my wager on the existence of a higher power other than surrendering the ideal of self-sufficiency and discarding destructive behavioral patterns. I was hedging my bet.

The third step however triggered alarm bells and woke up my committee. To be asked to turn my will and life over to the care of a God of my understanding was akin to requesting me to walk off a cliff feeling assured that I would not be impaled on a rock upon landing. I pondered age old questions such as how can I trust and rely on God to do for me now what he/she previously failed at so miserably? I had lost everything on His/Her watch and had almost died many times from overdoses, car accidents, street violence, etc. If God truly is all powerful and lovingly watches over His children then how can it be explained that millions die of starvation each year, that genocide exists, that mankind since the beginning of recorded history has slaughtered its own in the name of God, that many people die from addiction without knowing recovery is possible, and on and on ad infinitum. Is the third step merely a convenient catch all for rationalizing failures and a spiritual pass for avoiding material achievement in the world? To stay sober must I abandon the material world and shed all ego and ambition? These are just a few of the questions that gnawed at my core and challenged everything I had learned. It seemed counter intuitive and too simplistic. What if they were wrong? What would I lose? If I didn't do this, would I end up using and ultimately die in the gutter or a shooting gallery?

So, I needed to learn the answers to these questions if I were to take step three and go on to “work the steps”. What is truth? What is fear-based dogma? I had always preferred house connections to copping on the street so I headed off to the big God house connection, Divinity school. Here, sequestered within the walls of the ivy towers, the people from the in-the-know clan would enlighten me. In essence I envisioned my journey as a three year spiritual spin dry cycle that would result in my achieving an elevated spiritual consciousness which would immunize me from emotional and spiritual suffering. Wow!

Talking about alcoholic thinking and keeping it simple! I did not have the faintest clue that I was still chasing oblivion.

However, I did learn in time and in spite of myself when I was able to listen and to hear. I was able to weave together the messages from the rooms, the literature and divinity school and finally come to my understanding of a higher power and how I might incorporate God in my life on a daily basis. I had to believe in the message, regardless of my understanding of the messenger.

I often sit in meetings and listen to people struggle with coming to an understanding of the meaning of God's Will (Divine Will). The word "will" originates in the ninth century and can be a noun or a verb. It means testament, volition, wish, desire. The third step - Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him – uses the word will as a noun. Bear with me here, as I am one who needed to believe that I had covered my bases before accepting a concept or ideology. As mankind is the only species that possesses the power to consciously choose and as mankind was a product of the higher power, then it would logically follow to believe that it was not the intent of the phrase "turn our will and lives over" to mean for one to relinquish their volitional potential.

It was by understanding God's will as a testament that contains the universal truths and teachings found in all major religions and the twelve steps that I was able to accept this step. It was not asking me to abandon choice but to live in accordance with the spiritual truths. It was important for me to read and understand this step from a literal perspective. The phrase "made a decision" for me had to be interpreted literally. I needed to understand that the verb tense implied finality rather than a decision to be made repeatedly. I needed to put this to bed, to make a commitment, so that I would be free to move forward.

This is a day-at-a-time program and each day, each moment we exercise the choice not to drink or drug. Later in recovery, we discover that the ability to choose extends to our thoughts, our words, our actions and that these choices shape our character which ultimately determines our destiny. We learn that constant vigilance is paramount to our continued sobriety and our emotional and spiritual well being. We learn that we can choose to change and that we can become whom we wish to be.

Okay, so what am I really saying? It is God's lake, it may even be God's boat but I have a choice on where and how hard I row. For me to believe that God is micro managing my life while ignoring the atrocities that occur daily in this world would be grandiose and delusional. Does God have a plan for me? Absolutely. The plan is to be happy, joyous and free. The how is by exercising my volitional potential and living according to His will.

About the Author

Tim C. has been in long-term recovery for over 30 years. He is the co-founder and managing partner of [Chooper's Guide](#), a web-based treatment and information resource for addiction and owns and operates an apple orchard in Maine. He is active in the recovery movement in Florida and nationally and has been active for 28 years as a volunteer and advocate for substance abuse and child abuse.