

A Commentary on Steps 1, 2, 3 of SA for Catholics



In memory of the PIONEERS of the twelve-step movement,
we extend our most profound gratitude and appreciation.
We are truly blessed.

*Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.*



He will show you how to create the fellowship you crave.¹
(*The Big Book*)

Introduction

We, the fellowship of Sexaholics Anonymous (SA), are greatly indebted to Roy K and the founding members who helped establish the SA program.

Sexaholics Anonymous came into being in the years 1979-1981. It is now a growing, international fellowship. The Twelve-step program, brought into the world through those finding victory over the tyranny of alcoholism, has become ours by the grace of God. We offer this book (*Sexaholics Anonymous/White Book*) in the hope and prayer that it will continue to be blessed in the recovery of many from sexaholism.²

Since the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1935, Catholics have fully embraced the AA program by participating in the fellowship and in carrying the AA message. Catholics have been pivotal in shaping the fellowship's early development and expansion. Sister Ignatia collaborated closely with Dr. Bob, both of whom were pioneers in the hospital treatment of alcoholism. Their contributions were vital to the success and evolution of AA.³ Fr. Ed Dowling served as Bill Wilson's spiritual advisor and friend for twenty years, until Father died in 1961.⁴ The establishment of Sexaholics Anonymous is a significant development that emerged from the twelve-step movement initiated by these remarkable pioneers.

We admit and understand our addiction is with lust. *Remember that we deal with lust—cunning, baffling, and powerful!*⁵

We became true addicts: sex with self, promiscuity, adultery, dependency relationships, and more fantasy. We got it through the eyes; we bought it, we sold it, we traded it, we gave it away. We were addicted to the intrigue, the tease, the forbidden. The only way we knew to be free of it was to do it. "Please connect with me and make me whole!" we cried with outstretched arms. Lusting after the Big Fix, we gave away our power to others.⁶

The sexaholic has taken himself or herself out of the whole context of what is right or wrong. He or she has lost control, no longer has the power of choice, and is not free to stop. Lust has become an addiction. Our situation is like that of the alcoholic who can no longer tolerate alcohol and must stop drinking altogether but is hooked and cannot stop. So it is with the sexaholic, or sex drunk, who can no longer tolerate lust but cannot stop.⁷

The addictive process, as recognized in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), also applies to Sexaholics Anonymous. A sexaholic cannot take the first "lust drink," as doing so will trigger the phenomenon of craving.⁸ *(We) stopped thousands of times; almost every time was the "last time." Staying stopped was (our) problem.*⁹

Until we actually experienced these first three Steps, we would never enter the liberating reality of the Twelve. These three were the archway through which we left the old life behind and entered the new life of sobriety and inner peace. They deal with deflation and surrender.¹⁰

Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—that one is God. May you find Him now.¹¹

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus perfected the commandment on adultery to warn us about lust and to reveal to us how sinful lust truly is:

*You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt. 5:27-28).*¹²

How incredible it is that Jesus wants us to know the whole truth? Jesus identifies lust as a destructive force. The *White Book* specifies that lust is the driving force behind our adulterous behavior and sex addiction.¹³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church articulates the meaning of one’s heart:

The heart is the seat of moral personality: “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication ...” The struggle against carnal covetousness entails purifying the heart and practicing temperance.¹⁴

Steps One, Two, and Three describe the change of heart from self to God, without which no real change in our lives can come about.¹⁵

Sexaholics Anonymous defines sexual sobriety in a way that aligns closely with the principles of Catholicism:

Thus, for the sexaholic, any form of sex with one's self or with partners other than the spouse is progressively addictive and destructive. We also see that lust is the driving force behind our sexual acting out, and true sobriety includes progressive victory over lust.¹⁶

The attached commentary on the first three steps was crafted to assist Catholics dealing with matters related to sexual lust, pornography, and sex addiction. The document serves as a preliminary guide for the Catholic fellowship on their spiritual journey toward recovery. The information discussed, along with that used in the case studies, comes from Scripture, the Catechism, and SA literature, including *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*. *Hey Catholics Online* does not speak for Alcoholics Anonymous or Sexaholics Anonymous; however, we believe that steps one, two, and three are foundational to the SA program and provide the necessary footing for all subsequent steps.

Today's technology enables us, as Catholics, to connect online and share the wisdom of the twelve-step program. Together, we can discuss the pain of addiction that arises from self-will running rampant and celebrate the victory of sobriety, which we receive through the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. In gratitude, we not only support each other in recovery but also help nurture our faith. We continue to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit to lead us, as we always have. We now begin *A Commentary on Steps 1, 2, 3 of SA for Catholics*.

Step 1

We admitted that we were powerless over lust—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Briefing: Step One

The information in the briefing, except for bullet two, comes from *The Big Book of AA* and is written for the sexaholic. Bullet two is from the SA literature, *Step into Action*.

1. We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were sexaholics. This is the first step in recovery.¹⁷
2. Step one was a flat admission of defeat. “We are beaten,” we said, “and we can’t stop doing what makes us sick.” Lust was killing us.¹⁸
3. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—usually brief—were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization.¹⁹
4. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his lusting is the great obsession of every sexaholic. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity and death.²⁰
5. We know that no real sexaholic ever recovered control.²¹
6. (Sexaholism is a) progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.²²

Commentary: Step One

We admitted that we were powerless over lust—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step one is a personal milestone and the beginning of recovery from sexaholism. Once we become honest with ourselves, we can learn what it means to take step one.

1. We learned that we had to fully concede to our innermost selves that we were sexaholics. This is the first step in recovery.
2. Step one was a flat admission of defeat. “We are beaten,” we said, “and we can’t stop doing what makes us sick.” Lust was killing us.

From the *White Book: The Problem*, provides us with descriptive detail on lust and what it means to be powerless over lust, and how it was destroying us from the inside.

Many of us felt inadequate, unworthy, alone, and afraid. Our insides never matched what we saw on the outsides of others.

Early on, we came to feel disconnected—from parents, from peers, from ourselves. We tuned out with fantasy and masturbation. We plugged in by drinking in the pictures, the images, and pursuing the objects of our fantasies. We lusted and wanted to be lusted after.

We became true addicts: sex with self, promiscuity, adultery, dependency relationships, and more fantasy. We got it through the eyes; we bought it, we sold it, we traded it, we gave it away. We were addicted to the intrigue, the tease, the forbidden. The only way we knew to be free of it was to do it. "Please connect with me and make me whole!" we cried with outstretched arms. Lusting after the Big Fix, we gave away our power to others. This produced guilt, self-hatred, remorse, emptiness, and pain, and we were driven ever inward, away from reality, away from love, lost inside ourselves.

Our habit made true intimacy impossible. We could never know real union with another because we were addicted to the unreal. We went for the "chemistry," the connection that had the magic, because it bypassed intimacy and true union. Fantasy corrupted the real; lust killed love.

First addicts, then love cripples, we took from others to fill up what was lacking in ourselves. Conning ourselves time and again that the next one would save us, we were really losing our lives.²³

Since the beginning of our sexaholism, we led a double life and have not been honest with ourselves or anyone else, including God. We were on a self-destructive path, and eventually, we hit rock bottom. Shame, guilt, remorse, loneliness, anger, and fear are some of the emotions that surfaced. We were sick: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.²⁴ We wanted to stop the lust, but our attempts never lasted.

3. All of us felt at times that we were regaining control, but such intervals—usually brief—were inevitably followed by still less control, which led in time to pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization.

Lust is cunning, baffling, and powerful. Time and time again, we would swear off lust only to find ourselves back in fantasy or on the internet, desperately wanting more of the drug. St Paul's dilemma in Romans 7:15 is very much our dilemma.

*What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate.*²⁵

Over the years, we have adopted ways to justify our actions, cling to our addictions, and downplay any damaging effects. We found it difficult to accept that our lives were unmanageable, often pointing fingers at others when we recognized problems. This denial blinded us to the mental, emotional, and spiritual issues that emerged as our addiction to lust deepened. Our lives were filled with challenges, creating confusion and discouragement for both ourselves and our loved ones. *The Big Book* acknowledges those who continue to live this way.

4. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his lusting is the great obsession of every sexaholic. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity and death.

Many of our struggles with pornography and immoral sexual behavior began at a young age. We developed self-deceptive beliefs, including the notion that we could control our lust. To protect ourselves from criticism and emotional pain, we became more closed off and defensive. We built strong defense mechanisms to shield ourselves from feelings of shame, humiliation, or fear that our secrets would be exposed. Unfortunately, we held onto these illusions and falsehoods for a long time, even during our recovery.

Denial becomes woven into the fabric of our being. By refusing to listen to that still small voice within, we begin by denying we are hurting ourselves. For this lie to persist, denial must pervert the reality of ourselves and others and turns into blindness. We become unwilling and finally unable to see the truth about ourselves.²⁶

The blindness starts as we deny the truth about our wrongs and hold on to the lie of our own rationalizations. [...] This creates willful blindness-delusion-for which there is no cure except a change of heart.²⁷

If we can admit our wrongs and if we come to know the truth about our addiction, we thank the Holy Spirit for our change of heart. This realization is a significant hurdle for any sexaholic to overcome; it marks both a breakthrough and a triumph.

We can become willing to see and surrender what we know we're doing wrong.²⁸

A sexaholic in recovery must embrace and forever live the adage, one day at a time. Regardless of the years of sobriety and regardless of how successful someone becomes, the sexaholic will never be able to take "a lust drink again" without the risk of relapse. The following statement is cited in *The Big Book*:

5. We know that no real sexaholic ever recovered control.

The good news is that acceptance of our sexaholism is the key to a happy and joyous freedom we could otherwise never know.²⁹

Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my sexaholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and in my attitudes.³⁰

Our sexaholism doesn't stand still. It progressively worsens.

6. (Sexaholism is a) progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.

- Reflect on bullet six, understanding that our addiction worsens over time. Consider what our future holds if we continue to give in to lust. Lust exacts a significant toll.

Obvious effects are any of the proliferating horde of venereal diseases. Many of us found that impotence or frigidity also resulted from our sexaholism. But a vast range of other effects that we are just beginning to recognize accompanied many of us on our disastrous path toward sexual and emotional ruin.³¹

- Imagine a life free from addiction and lust. In this reality, we would utilize our talents more effectively and achieve our personal goals. We would make wiser choices with our time and money, striving each day to live with integrity and honesty. Our family and loved ones could depend on us, knowing that they are a priority in our lives. We would also come to understand what it truly means to enjoy intimacy. Furthermore, we would dedicate time to pray and praise God.

- In John 5, there is a remarkable story where Jesus goes to a crippled man and heals him.

Jesus saw the man lying there. He realized that he had been there a long time, and said to him, "Would you like me to make you well?"³²

- Many of us who struggle with sexaholism have endured years of suffering. Like the crippled man, we may feel destined to lead unhappy and troubled lives. However, Jesus offers help, assuring us of healing and restoration.

Advancements in technology will continue the development of adult content and pornography, making it even more accessible and alluring. Artificial Intelligence (AI) will amplify the lust-driven media and take the addiction to a whole new level while corrupting minds and souls. Technology facilitates the hookup culture by providing easy access for messaging and a constant, wide-ranging pool of real and imaginary partners through dating and social media apps. Despite the drug becoming "stronger", more accessible, and more demanding, our lust addiction will never be satisfied. It will always crave more. Through Jesus Christ and being in recovery, we learn that *one lust drink* is sinful, toxic, and will send us into a downward spiral. The only solution is to accept our sexaholism, stop lusting, and ask for help. *Without help, it is too much for us.*³³

The following excerpt from the *White Book* is taken from Roy K's *A Personal Story*. The narrative is set in the early seventies, a time when Roy K was not yet familiar with the concepts of sexual addiction or sexaholism. During this period, he began to notice specific patterns in his thoughts and behaviors that conflicted with his personal values—Roy seeks clarity about his actions amid confusion.

Case Study: Excerpt One from Roy K's A Personal Story

At first, it would only be under certain conditions or with a certain type of prostitute, and always with protection against disease. But one by one, over time, every single constraint and taboo was crossed. The more I indulged, the broader the spectrum of possibilities for feeding the obsession, including crossing the gender line. [Some of Roy's thoughts at the time he and his first wife divorced.] But I thought I was free. Free from the yoke of marriage and responsibility. How easy to forget the family even existed. Free to pursue lust as I wished without having to creep home guiltily, fearing discovery. But the more freedom I had, the less free I became. [...] Sex with myself had never stopped, and the magazines kept apace to feed the progression, abetting it further still. Then I'd try to stay completely sober without either. Nothing worked longer than a few weeks at best. [...] Each new stage brought increased craving, which brought ever greater dependence and more insatiable desire and an ever greater

need to quit. About this time, I was beginning to look for a way out again; my ability to function and cope was deteriorating. Few realize what a terrible toll this thing takes on a person. But none of the professionals I went to for help caught on to the real problem. And I still had no idea what the real problem was. The problem was always "out there"-wife, children, other people, the boss, the job, institutions, religious hypocrisy. [...] What I needed was not more knowledge about my psychology or God, but power to stop what I was powerless over and obey the little light I already had. I had stopped thousands of times; almost every time was the "last time." Staying stopped was my problem and I made countless vain attempts at that: churches, prayer, fasting, therapy, tranquilizing drugs, and then remarriage, a new home, and a new job. [...] I had no idea that I was deluding myself, creating my own insanity. One stage at a time, I had been seducing and victimizing myself into a great lie: The Wages of Lust Is Life. I had never come to terms with the true nature of my problem: The wages of lust is death.³⁴

Commentary: Excerpt One from Roy K's A Personal Story

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Sexaholism is a progressive illness. Over any considerable period we get worse, never better.³⁵

Lust always wants more; lust creates more lust.³⁶

The following passage in the *White Book* is a compelling description of lust that illustrates its power and deception. Understanding how lust manipulates our thoughts and behaviors is essential for recovery.

(Lust) seems to be a spiritual force that distorts my instincts; and whenever let loose in one area, seems to want to infect other areas as well. And being nonsexual, lust crosses all lines, including gender. When energized by lust, my sexual fantasies or acting out can go in any direction, shaped by whatever I experience. Thus, the more I indulge in sexual lust, the less truly sexual I become.

Therefore, my basic problem as a recovering sexaholic is to live free from my lust. When I entertain it in any form, sooner or later it tries to express itself in every form. And lust becomes the indicator of not only what I do, but what I am.³⁷

[Some of Roy's thoughts at the time he and his first wife divorced] But I thought I was free. Free from the yoke of marriage and responsibility. How easy to forget the family even existed. Free to pursue lust as I wished without having to creep home guiltily, fearing discovery. But the more freedom I had, the less free I became.

Roy's delusional thinking begins to unravel as he becomes aware of his lust addiction.

Lust is the most important thing in my life; it takes priority over me.

Captive to lust, I cannot be myself.

Lust makes me its slave; it kills my freedom; it kills me.³⁸

[...] Sex with myself had never stopped, and the magazines kept apace to feed the progression, abetting it further still. Then I'd try to stay completely sober without either. Nothing worked longer than a few weeks at best. [...] Each new stage brought increased craving, which brought ever greater dependence and more insatiable desire and an ever greater need to quit. About this time, I was beginning to look for a way out again; my ability to function and cope was deteriorating. Few realize what a terrible toll this thing takes on a person. But none of the professionals I went to for help caught on to the real problem.

In the chapter *The Addictive Process* from the *White Book*, it explains how "the lust fix" adversely affects our overall well-being. When we stop using the lust drug, we face emotional and physical withdrawal symptoms, which cause us to fall back into the cycle of addiction.

Over time, the sense of pleasure begins to diminish; we feel less relief. The habit starts producing pain, and hangover symptoms begin appearing when the pleasure is outweighed by the pain: tension, depression, rage, guilt, and even physical distress. To relieve this pain, we resort to our habit again.³⁷

And I still had no idea what the real problem was. The problem was always "out there"-wife, children, other people, the boss, the job, institutions, religious hypocrisy. [...] What I needed was not more knowledge about my psychology or God, but power to stop what I was powerless over and obey the little light I already had. I had stopped thousands of times; almost every time was the "last time." Staying stopped was my problem and I made countless vain attempts at that: churches, prayer, fasting, therapy, tranquilizing drugs, and then remarriage, a new home, and a new job. [...] I had no idea that I was deluding myself, creating my own insanity. One stage at a time, I had been seducing and victimizing myself into a great lie: *The Wages of Lust Is Life*. I had never come to terms with the true nature of my problem: *The wages of lust is death*.

Roy's endless attempts to stop lusting brought him to a dead end. He knows he is captive to lust and being manipulated in a manner that could ultimately destroy him. Roy had been blinded to the truth about himself, but now realizes he was living in a fantasy world of his own making. He recognized he was on a self-destructive path. Overwhelmed by these revelations, he felt uncertain about what to do next.

This challenging period marked both the lowest point in Roy's life and a potential turning point. Hitting rock bottom often signifies the beginning of the recovery process. The pain experienced during such times can be overwhelming, prompting individuals to reassess their situations and become more open to making positive changes.

Review: Step One

1. After reading this passage, it becomes clear that Roy K is ready to take step one. He recognizes that lust is ruining his life, yet he finds himself drawn back to it time and again. He made countless attempts to stop, but the lust drug is too cunning, baffling, and powerful. He said, "Staying stopped was my problem."
2. Roy accepts defeat and wants to end the cycle of addiction. He knows he is powerless over lust and that his life is unmanageable. Any newcomer coming into the program must do the same and accept their sexaholism.
3. In the early seventies, if Roy K were approached by a member of Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) and introduced to the twelve-step program, he would likely have accepted the invitation to join. He would probably have recognized himself as a sexaholic and been open to seeking further help by going to step two.
4. Individuals who struggle with lust and are willing to listen, ask questions, or seek help should be commended and respected for their courage.
5. We know we have no other option but to stop. Once we accept our sexaholism, we do everything in our own power to stop feeding lust. To restate the first bullet from the briefing: If the newcomer knows, in their most innermost self (their heart and mind), that they are sexaholic, then they have taken the first step.

Sexaholics Anonymous is for those who know they have no other option but to stop, and their own enlightened self-interest must tell them this.³⁹
6. Newcomers to SA are limited in understanding addiction and have few recovery tools. They may lack confidence in their ability to stay sober—and rightfully so.
7. Dom Lorenzo Scupoli, author of *The Spiritual Combat*, holds that a true **spiritual warrior** is not someone who never experiences failure but rather someone who gets back up with even greater trust in God. This mindset is essential for us Catholics to embrace as we embark on our recovery journey. To move forward in recovery, we go to step two.



Step 2

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Briefing: Step Two

Before we delve into SA literature, let's take a moment to consider what the second step is stating. Members of SA often refer to "a Higher Power" or "a God of my understanding" to describe "a Power greater than ourselves." However, when we hear these terms at meetings, they often lack depth and clarity. Discussions about God can feel uninspiring and restrictive, especially given God's crucial role in our recovery.

The term "sanity" in the latter part of step two is often misunderstood or misrepresented. For those of us in recovery, it is essential to have a clear and consistent understanding of what "sane" and "insane" mean. Without this clarity, and without a meaningful relationship with God, we may miss the true purpose of step two.

- "Sane" refers to a mental state in which a person is rational, capable of reasoning, and generally aligned with reality.
- In contrast, "insane" describes a mental state where someone holds beliefs or perceptions that are irrational and inconsistent with reality. Their thoughts, feelings, or actions may lack logic or reason.
- SA literature provides insights and examples of both sane and insane thinking and behavior. We can deepen our understanding of these concepts by learning from those in recovery and witnessing their experience, strength, and hope.
- A significant benefit of being part of the Catholic community is that it allows us to discuss God and our Catholic faith openly and with ease.

Commentary: Step Two

In our addiction, we were blinded to the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. By adopting these gifts and seeking guidance, we can gain inner strength and power as we strive for freedom from the bondage of sexual addiction. The Holy Spirit will assist us in discerning God's will and help cultivate a purity of heart. Before we continue with the commentary, let's pause for a moment to say a prayer from Psalm 143:10:

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. May your kind spirit guide me on ground that is level.⁴⁰

The three knowledge items listed below are excerpts from *The Big Book*. They provide insight into the nature of sexaholism and will guide us through step two. The knowledge items are key to understanding addiction; however, the AA literature emphasizes that self-knowledge alone will not keep a sexaholic sober. In the chapter *More About Alcoholism* from *The Big Book*, it firmly states:

But the actual or potential sexaholic, with hardly an exception, will be absolutely unable to stop lusting on the basis of self-knowledge.⁴¹

Knowledge item one: *The Problem*

We know that while the sexaholic keeps away from lust as he may do for months or years, he reacts much like other men. We are equally positive that once he takes any lust whatever into his system, something happens, both in the bodily and mental sense, which makes it virtually impossible for him to stop. The experience of any sexaholic will abundantly confirm that. These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first lust drink thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the sexaholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body.⁴²

- Knowledge item one connects the first lust drink to our thinking and behavior:
 - If the sexaholic does not take the first lust drink, then there is no issue. The sexaholic thinks and behaves just like anyone else.
- To describe it another way:
 - It's only a problem once the sexaholic takes the first lust drink. For the sexaholic, the first lust drink sets the cycle in motion, and the phenomenon of craving develops.⁴³
- The problem:
 - We understand the issue—it's the first lust drink. The solution seems straightforward: avoid lust and don't take the first lust drink.
- The bigger problem:
 - Even though we recognize that lust is at the root of our problems, why do we still struggle with it despite our resolve to remain sober and to be free from its grip?

I had stopped thousands of times; almost every time was the "last time." Staying stopped was my problem and I made countless vain attempts at that: churches, prayer, fasting, therapy, tranquilizing drugs, and then remarriage, a new home, and a new job.⁴⁴

Knowledge item two: *Insidious Insanity / Subtle Insanity*

The concept of "insidious insanity" is presented in the upcoming excerpt from Bill W's story. Another example of "insidious insanity" is provided in the subsequent case study, *Excerpt Two from Roy K's A Personal Story*.

The following narrative recounts a momentous event in the history of Alcoholics Anonymous. In 1935, Bill was on a business trip to Akron, Ohio, and was staying at the Mayflower Hotel. He had recently discovered that sharing his trials with other alcoholics not only benefited them but also helped him resist the urge to take his first drink. While in the hotel lobby, he noticed a church directory and considered that someone from a local church might assist him in connecting with another alcoholic. It had been six months since his last drinking spree.

Case Study: An Excerpt from Bill W's Story

[...] Still physically weak, and sober but a few months, he saw that his predicament was dangerous. He wanted so much to talk with someone, but whom? One dismal afternoon he paced a hotel lobby wondering how his bill was to be paid. At one end of the room stood a glass covered directory of local churches. Down the lobby a door opened into an attractive bar. He could see the gay crowd inside. In there he would find companionship and release. Unless he took some drinks, he might not have the courage to scrape an acquaintance, and would have a lonely weekend. Of course, he couldn't drink, but why not sit hopefully at a table, a bottle of ginger ale before him? Then after all, had he not been sober six months now? Perhaps he could handle, say, three drinks—no more! Fear gripped him. He was on thin ice. Again it was the old, insidious insanity—that first drink. With a shiver, he turned away and walked down the lobby to the church directory. Music and gay chatter still floated to him from the bar. But what about his responsibilities—his family and the men who would die because they would not know how to get well, ah—yes, those other alcoholics? There must be many such in this town. He would phone a clergyman. His sanity returned, and he thanked God.⁴⁵

Commentary: Insidious Insanity

Bill's interior landscape: Bill acknowledged from the start that his situation was on shaky ground, and he knew he must stay away from alcohol. He is under significant stress and feels physically weak because of previous bouts of drinking. He is facing financial difficulties and is unsure whether he has the funds to pay for the hotel. Bill thinks he could make a friend at the bar and feel less lonely. He longs for the opportunity to talk to another alcoholic.

Reread the above excerpt: Take special note of Bill going back and forth in his thinking, debating between **going into the bar** and **checking out the church directory**.

We see Bill waffling or going back and forth, trying to decide on what to do:

- 1 His idea to “examine the church directory and make a phone call” is a responsible and rational choice.
- 2 “Going into the bar” would be irresponsible and risky. If Bill went into the bar, he would not be thinking of the potential consequences. For an alcoholic, on shaky ground, this choice is irrational.

Bill reached a turning point that demands a decisive choice. *We stood at the turning point.*⁴⁶

Waffling between rational and irrational thinking and standing at the turning point are characteristic of step two.

If the waffling continues, it may give rise to further temptation to drink. Bill recognizes and acknowledges his mind shifting to wanting a drink: insidious insanity—that first drink. Insidious means: *proceeding in a gradual, subtle way, but with harmful effects.*

Sometimes the desire to drink can be strong enough that a person experiences little to no waffling. If the urge to drink overtakes one's thoughts, it could lead to the phenomenon of craving, making it virtually impossible to stop after just one drink.

When being tempted, the shift in one's mind to wanting the first drink (first lust drink) is a move towards insane thinking (insidious insanity) and is characteristic of step two.

Bill stood at the turning point: With a shiver, he turned away and walked down the lobby to the church directory. (Bill) would phone a clergyman. His sanity returned, and he thanked God. Bill's decision to return to the church directory saved him from insanity and the craving phenomenon. His decision would also become historic. The next day, Bill W met Dr. Bob for the first time.

In these circumstances, we know the sexaholic is vulnerable and is experiencing temptation, while waffling between being rational and irrational. The temptations for the first lust drink creep in—insidious insanity. All this happens before taking the first lust drink and can happen very quickly. This situation is difficult, but the battle doesn't end here—it gets worse! There is another issue the sexaholic needs to address.

Knowledge item three: *Memory Lapse*

The fact is that most sexaholics, for reasons yet obscure, have lost the power of choice in lust. Our so-called will power becomes practically non-existent. We are unable at certain times, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago. We are without defense against the first lust drink. The almost certain consequences that follow taking a lust drink do not crowd into the mind to deter us. If these thoughts occur, they are hazy, and readily supplanted with the old threadbare idea that this time we shall handle ourselves like other people. There is a complete failure of the kind of defense that keeps one from putting his hand on a hot stove. The sexaholic may say to himself in the most casual way, "It won't burn me this time, so here's how!" Or perhaps he doesn't think at all. How often have some of us begun to lust in this nonchalant way, and after the third or fourth (hour), pounded on the computer and said to ourselves, "For God's sake, how did I ever get started again?" Only to have that thought supplanted by "Well, I'll stop at midnight." Or "What's the use anyhow?"⁴⁷

Commentary: Memory Lapse

The desire for the first lust drink carries a built-in euphoria that overrides rational thinking. We experience a memory lapse that prevents us from recalling any previous binges or sprees. If we shift from sane, rational thinking to insane, irrational thinking, various memory and behavioral traits become apparent.

- Our desire for the first lust drink increases—this can happen in an instant.
- Our willpower becomes practically non-existent.
- Our self-knowledge and knowing the truth about our sex addiction and lust evaporate. We don't remember the suffering, humiliation, shame, the hangover, and the cries from our loved ones. We don't recall the phenomenon of craving or the devastating consequences of our lust. If rational thoughts do occur, they are hazy, weak, and easily dismissed.

Our inability to remember the pain and consequences of any previous relapse, along with having the desire for the first lust drink, is characteristic of step two.

Our willpower and self-knowledge dissipate during a memory lapse, which is characteristic of step two.

Having a memory lapse while battling for sobriety is a significant disadvantage and a huge problem for recovering sexaholics. Our courage and desire for sobriety fade away. Our past victories over lust seem meaningless.

At the same time, we are separating ourselves from God. Our way of life set us on a course away from instead of toward. And this is inevitably true, even though we may still be fervently engaging in religious exercises or having spiritual experiences or sober in other programs.⁴⁸

It would help tremendously if we could remember the misery of our past relapses along with the remorse, suffering, and shame. If we lose our sanity, we become like lost sheep—alone and susceptible to the wolves.

Case Study: Excerpt Two from Roy K's A Personal Story

After reading an issue of *Time* magazine on *The New Alcoholism* in 1974, Roy K started attending AA meetings for his sexaholism. He discovered that the AA program would work for lust, his drug of choice. The following excerpt from Roy K's personal story is a testament to his early years in recovery.

I put down lust as one would put down heroin or alcohol. For me, that meant not feeding it through the eye or in the mind. I also abstained from all sex, including with my wife. The second marriage was on the verge of collapse anyway. I wasn't even afraid sexual withdrawal would kill me, as I had felt before. I simply knew I had to stop, no matter what the cost. A strange thing happened; I didn't die! Why hadn't anyone ever told me that sex was optional?

I began going to AA meetings, stopped drinking and taking tranquilizers, and read the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. I identified with the alcoholics right down the line.

After a few months I began having sex with my wife again, and not long thereafter discovered an amazing thing- sex without lust. They were two entirely different things! Intercourse without stimulation or an arousal scenario playing in my mind was something I had never known before. It was very simple, natural, real, and satisfying. What a gift!

But I soon discovered something else: it was too rare a thing. The pattern was that even though I was having sex only with my wife and had withdrawn from feeding lust at other times, I was still resorting to memories of pictures or past encounters to achieve arousal and orgasm. I wasn't free of my past, even though I was apparently free of the sexual compulsion in its old "scarlet" forms. What was wrong? Wouldn't everything be all right as long as I didn't take that first "drink"? But what was drinking for the alcoholic wasn't drinking for me, the sexaholic. To be fully free, I'd have to be free even of resorting to other partners in my mind. And for me, this was a long time in coming. I

would discover slowly that my mental habit patterns were the key to my illness; without healing here, there would be no real recovery.

But here again, I found I was just as powerless over the images in my memory as I had been in my compulsive pursuit of sex. The more I tried to force the memories away, the harder they fought to stay alive. I would have to begin working the Twelve Steps of recovery for the inner man. But I delayed, and delay was almost fatal. After a year and a half without acting out the old sexual compulsion, I fell. I was casually glancing through a newsmagazine and lingered too long on a revealing photograph. By the third look, I had taken the first "drink"-the lust look-and what the alcoholics said would happen, happened. The first drink got me drunk. Within a matter of hours I was out on the streets again, having lost control, trying desperately to score.

This precipitated a lust-sex binge that lasted on and off for some three months.

Commentary: Excerpt Two from Roy K's A Personal Story

In examining Roy's case study, we can uncover the distinctive characteristics of steps one and two and highlight the fundamental truths related to sexaholism.

I put down lust as one would put down heroin or alcohol. For me, that meant not feeding it through the eye or in the mind. I also abstained from all sex, including with my wife. The second marriage was on the verge of collapse anyway. I wasn't even afraid sexual withdrawal would kill me, as I had felt before. I simply knew I had to stop, no matter what the cost. A strange thing happened; I didn't die! Why hadn't anyone ever told me that sex was optional?

Roy has taken step one. He has the desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober. Roy learned early in his recovery that he had to stop feeding lust. Lust is the drug that gives us the euphoric high, and once we take the first lust drink, it triggers the phenomenon of craving, leading to an insatiable desire for more of the drug. To reiterate SA's sobriety definition:

Thus, for the sexaholic, any form of sex with one's self or with partners other than the spouse is progressively addictive and destructive. We also see that lust is the driving force behind our sexual acting out, and true sobriety includes progressive victory over lust.⁴⁹

As stated in the Introduction, Jesus clarified the commandment on adultery to warn us against lust and to reveal its sinful nature.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matt.5:27-28)

I began going to AA meetings, stopped drinking and taking tranquilizers, and read the book Alcoholics Anonymous. I identified with the alcoholics right down the line. After a few months I began having sex with my wife again, and not long thereafter discovered an amazing thing- sex without lust. They were two entirely different things! Intercourse without stimulation or an arousal scenario playing in my mind was something I had never known before. It was very simple, natural, real, and satisfying. What a gift!

As our addiction deepened, lust drove us further into isolation.

...we were driven ever inward, away from reality, away from love, lost inside ourselves.⁵⁰

At the start of our recovery, we struggled to connect with others and form meaningful relationships. The fellowship and its meetings have taught us that we don't have to face our addiction and character defects alone. When Roy K began attending AA meetings, he realized the significance of being with fellow recovering members.

It helped change that lonely grey inner world of the separated self into the bright sunlight of glad times shared together. Victory over lust was not the grim experience I had feared. I was getting connected to life and began to feel impulses of joy. I was beginning to have what my lust had really been looking for. I can't have the inner freedom from the need to lust without this real connection.⁵¹

Cautionary Note: It is important to recognize the effects that alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs may have on our recovery from lust. Alcohol, like other depressants, slows down the central nervous system, which can lead to feelings of relaxation, increased confidence, and reduced inhibitions. Substances such as alcohol and cannabis may diminish our ability to resist temptations to lust. During the recovery journey, it is vital to stay vigilant and recognize the triggers that could undermine our commitment to sobriety.

But I soon discovered something else: it was too rare a thing. The pattern was that even though I was having sex only with my wife and had withdrawn from feeding lust at other times, I was still resorting to memories of pictures or past encounters to achieve arousal and orgasm. I wasn't free of my past, even though I was apparently free of the sexual compulsion in its old "scarlet" forms. What was wrong? Wouldn't everything be all right as long as I didn't take that first "drink"? But what was drinking for the alcoholic wasn't drinking for me, the sexaholic. To be fully free, I'd have to be free even of resorting to other partners in my mind. And for me, this was a long time in coming. I would discover slowly that my mental habit patterns were the key to my illness; without healing here, there would be no real recovery.

Once we take step one, we immediately take action and do our best to stop the lust. We "baby-proof" our day-to-day living to make things easier for ourselves. The main objective is to identify those individuals, places, and things that are potential lust triggers or those that give us lust hits. Through prayer and guidance from other members, we can identify our triggers and develop creative strategies to avoid them. Some proactive measures may include using accountability software, removing social media accounts, or finding alternative ways to exercise instead of going to the gym. Additionally, we might need to limit our interactions with certain people or avoid specific places. Taking "step one" actions will help significantly to prepare us for step two. The *White Book* is quite direct in explaining what we need to do.

We stop feeding lust. We get rid of all the materials and other triggers under our control. We stop feeding lust through the eyes, the fantasy, and the memory. We stop relishing the language of lust, resentment, and rage. We stop living only and always inside our own heads.

[...]The program doesn't tell us how to stop-we had done that a thousand and one times-it shows us how to keep from starting again. We had it backwards; before, we always wanted the therapist, spouse, or God to do the stopping for us-to fix us. Now, we stop; and then, in our surrender, the power of God becomes effective in us.⁵²

But here again, I found I was just as powerless over the images in my memory as I had been in my compulsive pursuit of sex. The more I tried to force the memories away, the harder they fought to stay alive. I would have to begin working the Twelve-steps of recovery for the inner man. But I delayed, and delay was almost fatal. After a year and a half without acting out the old sexual compulsion, I fell. I was casually glancing through a newsmagazine and lingered too long on a revealing photograph. By the third look, I had taken the first "drink"-the lust look-and what the alcoholics said would happen, happened. The first drink got me drunk. Within a matter of hours I was out on the streets again, having lost control, trying desperately to score.

This precipitated a lust-sex binge that lasted on and off for some three months.

Taking lust hits without surrender is feeding lust. In recovery, we stop deluding ourselves when it comes to fantasies and lust looks. When we have a lust temptation, we are at the turning point. We surrender each temptation and examine our hearts. If we don't, there will be a time when lust will overpower us, and we will be at risk for a relapse. The phenomenon of craving could take over.

This inevitably happened to Roy. Roy was attracted to the photograph. He said it was the third look. This is how the *insidious insanity* thinking in our sexaholic mind works:

- The photograph is the spark that triggers the lust. The lust trigger wants more lust—there is a desire to take another look (insidious insanity). It's fair to say Roy waffled at least twice from rational thinking (consequences to the lust look) to irrational thinking (no consequences to the lust look).
- Roy's turning point position occurred when he looked at the photograph, and when he waffled between being rational and irrational. *We stood at the turning point.*⁵³
- When Roy waffled the third time, he admitted to taking the lust drink. At his turning point, the insane option prevailed. The lust drink got him drunk. Roy's commitment to sobriety dissipates immediately. The phenomenon of craving asserts control and demands more and more of the drug.
- Due to his memory lapse, Roy has no reason not to take the drug. His willpower and knowledge on addiction do not help. He has no memory of past guilt, self-hatred, remorse, emptiness, or pain. He doesn't consider the possible consequences. Bill W and the early members warned us that our knowledge and resolve for sobriety would not be enough to keep us sober.

But the actual or potential sexaholic, with hardly an exception, will be absolutely unable to stop lusting on the basis of self-knowledge.⁵⁴

- The lust drink sent Roy on a lust binge lasting three months—a pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. Once the phenomenon of craving asserts control, lust has full rein throughout the binge. There is no way of knowing the harm lust will cause or what boundaries lust will cross.

Please note: The reference to the "third look" is simply Roy's description of his actions. There is no significance to the first, second, or third look. A trigger can be powerful enough to omit any waffling. Various factors, such as holding onto resentment, fear, a seductive image, or a euphoric memory, can evoke the phenomenon of craving—much as Pavlov's classical conditioning experiment showed that "ringing the bell" causes a dog to salivate. We must maintain our sanity, or lust will pervert and corrupt us at will. *Without help, it is too much for us.*⁵⁵

After the three-month binge, Roy hit rock bottom once again. He tells us, returning to the AA program was nothing short of a miracle:

Somehow, by what had to be another miracle, I was able to crawl, raving, back to AA and start all over again. But this time, I would have to work those Twelve Steps to survive. I got a sponsor (a friend on the program to help me work the Steps) and began working on me.⁵⁶

I became as a child, teachable, having to reject my way of doing and thinking for a new way of life based on surrender of my will to God.⁵⁷

When we stand at the turning point, we turn to our Shepherd and ask for help. We ask Jesus to keep us sane and to help us stay in reality.

Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power—that One is God. May you find Him now! Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon.⁵⁸

Dear Catholics,

The suggestions in the commentary aim to support Catholics dealing with issues related to sexual lust, pornography, or sex addiction. When you attend Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) meetings at heycatholics.com, feel free to embrace your Catholicism. In regular twelve-step meetings, we typically refrain from discussing religious and faith-based topics. At these meetings, when we share our experience, strength, and hope, we are encouraged to express our Catholic faith and our reliance on God. We continue to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit in our thoughts and prayers.

Step Two and Prayer

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

As Catholics, we can personalize step two to say:

- *Jesus can restore me to sanity.*

When we stand at the turning point, we have no time to waste. Prayer is the most powerful spiritual weapon available to us. We can make step two a prayer and a plea:

- *Please, Jesus, restore me to sanity.*
- *Please, Jesus, help me to stay sane so I don't take the first lust drink.*

The following prayer is called the *Step Two Prayer*, inspired by *The Big Book*:

- *GOD, I'm standing at the turning point right now. Give me your protection and care as I abandon myself to you and give up my old ways and my old ideas just for today. AMEN*

The Jesus Prayer cultivates a spirit of humility and reliance on God, which naturally leads to a profound sense of gratitude for His presence and provision in our lives. When we combine it with any of the Step Two prayers, we further strengthen our humility and dependence on God.

- *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

We endured years of suffering, longing for a better life, but we were weighed down by negative forces stemming from lust, irrational thinking, shame, anger, isolation, and other burdens. Step Two offers a beacon of hope. In this pivotal step, we invite Jesus to restore our sanity. With a clear and renewed mind, we find the strength to break free from the grip of lust. Filled with gratitude in our hearts, just as Bill W did at the Mayflower Hotel, we lift our voices in thanks and praise to God.

Step Two and Catholicism

Step two is the battleground for spiritual warfare. Satan knows our vulnerabilities. There is a good reason why we say lust is cunning, baffling, and powerful! The evil one is even more cunning, baffling, and powerful! When we stand at the turning point, Satan will attack us because of our weakness. At the turning point, we submit to the Lord who brings us back into reality, away from the shackles of lust.

So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)⁵⁹

A Spiritual Battle

Replacing lust with gluttony, greed, or another vice does not free us from the illusion that we are managing our lives or progressing in our recovery from addiction.

Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root.⁶⁰

When we awaken to the illness of sexaholism, we need to be vigilant and ready for spiritual battle. We are honest regarding triggers that put our sobriety in jeopardy. We take action by maintaining custody of our minds and eyes. We establish appropriate boundaries and practice fasting, when necessary, especially in public places, when using the phone, at the gym, and on the internet. Likewise, we acknowledge the truth regarding alcohol and cannabis. Other drugs can lower our defense against lust and provide Satan with opportunities to attack. We surrender to the Lord our shame, fear, resentments, excitement, or other emotions that may trigger an urge to lust. Lust can lead to a chain reaction of other sins, such as sloth, jealousy, and anger. Interestingly, these same sins can then spark the desire for lust.

Throughout history, the seven deadly sins—pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth—have weakened humanity by leading us to commit further sins and engage in immoral behavior. From a spiritual perspective, the Catechism and the Church offer invaluable insight into why we may be prone to sin and addiction.

As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the domination of death; and inclined to sin. (This inclination is called “concupiscence.”)⁶¹

Considering our culture and our fallen state, it's not surprising some of us became sexaholics. Gratefully, God and the Church provide healing and prepare us for the spiritual battles through His Grace and the Sacraments:

*Baptism confers on its recipient the grace of purification from all sins. But the baptized must continue to struggle against concupiscence of the flesh and disordered desires. With God's grace, He will prevail.*⁶²

Our recovery and healing from lust involves purifying the heart and practicing temperance. Due to our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, we may face unfortunate situations, as illustrated by Roy's lingering over the photograph. If there is lust in our hearts, we turn to Jesus without hesitation. We acknowledge our wrongs, repent, reconcile with God through confession, do penance, and make necessary amends. With God's grace, we persevere in the spiritual battle, renewed in humility and confidence. We are blessed. We are ready for the **spiritual battle**; we are prepared to take step two! We now go to step three.



Step 3

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

We can personalize step three to say:

- Made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of Jesus.

When we have a rational, sober mindset, we are equipped to make informed decisions. We are in a spirit of gratitude and want to connect with God and others. We join the human race. We become active in the Church. God calls us to be in communion with Him and with one another. By attending SA meetings, we express our thoughts and feelings through open and honest conversations. Bill W learned early in his recovery that he needed another alcoholic to talk to. In his search, he found Dr. Bob.

The verse Matthew 18:20, *For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst*,⁶³ encourages us not to be "lone Catholics," but to participate in a community of prayer. It is well-documented that when Bill W and Dr. Bob met to discuss alcoholism and the future of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), they read scripture and prayed together. Through these meetings, Bill and Dr. Bob formed the first AA group, and the twelve-step movement began.

Step Three and Faith

While on our journey in Sexaholics Anonymous, recovery is essential and non-negotiable. We cannot settle for complacency or a lukewarm commitment to our faith. We fully embrace the Church to live out our faith according to God's will. Those who wish to preserve their lives must take up their Cross and follow Jesus. Our faith calls us to do His will and surrender to Him, resisting all temptations of lust. Failing to do so can lead to our downfall. If we relapse, we pick up our Cross, seek help and direction from the Holy Spirit, express sorrow for our sins, and go to confession. To further strengthen our faith, we attend Mass, receive the Eucharist, practice fasting, and maintain a devoted prayer life. We are under His care. As our faith strengthens, we will achieve greater stability in our lives and gain **victory over sin**.

Summary: Step Three

In Matthew 16:24: *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow me."*⁶⁴

- If we experience a temptation to sin, *at the turning point*, we deny ourselves and offer thanks and praise to Jesus for his saving grace.
- If we fall short in any way, with a contrite heart, we thank the Lord for His forgiveness at the confessional.
- We continue to bear our Cross and follow Jesus, the head of the Church. *We are under His care.*

We are ready to take step three!

God Bless



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⁵ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA 206

⁶ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, v

⁷ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, 3

⁸ Wilson, AA, pp xxxvii, xxxviii

⁹ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, 18

¹⁰ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, 79

¹¹ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, 206

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- ¹⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 2517.
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- ¹⁷ Wilson, AA, 30
- ¹⁸ Sexaholics Anonymous, Step Into Action, (SA Literature, 2004), 9
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- ²⁰ Wilson, AA, 30
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- ²³ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, 203
- ²⁴ Sexaholics Anonymous, SA, 61
- ²⁵ “Romans 7”, Bible, NAB, accessed May 11, 2025, <https://biblehub.com/catholic/romans/7-15.htm>
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- ³⁰ Wilson, AA, 449
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- ⁴⁵ Wilson, AA, pp 154,155
- ⁴⁶ Wilson, AA, 59
- ⁴⁷ Wilson, AA, 24
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The Leper’s Prayer

And a man with leprosy came to Him
and bowed down before Him, and said,
“Lord, if You are willing, You
can make me clean.”

Jesus reached out with His hand and
touched him, saying, “I am willing; be
cleansed.” And immediately his
leprosy was cleansed.

(Matt. 8:2-3)