

SECOND EDITION

# drop the rock

REMOVING CHARACTER DEFECTS

Steps 6 and 7



Bill P. Todd W. Sara S.

# **Drop the Rock**



# Drop the Rock



*Removing Character Defects*  
Steps Six and Seven

Second Edition

Bill P.  
Todd W.  
Sara S.

Hazelden Publishing  
hazelden.org/bookstore

©2005 by Hazelden Foundation  
First Edition Published by Glen Abbey Books, Inc. 1993  
First Published by Hazelden 1999  
Second Edition 2005  
All rights reserved  
Printed in the United States of America

No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without the written permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-1-59285-161-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
P., Bill, 1947–

Drop the rock : removing character defects : steps 6 & 7 / Bill P.,  
Todd W., Sara S.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

Previous ed. published: Seattle, Wash. : Glen Abbey Books, 1993.

ISBN 1-59285-161-4 (paperback)

1. Personality disorders—Patients—Rehabilitation. 2. Alcoholics—  
Rehabilitation. 3. Alcoholics—Religious life. 4. Alcoholics Anonymous.  
5. Twelve-step programs. 6. Self-help techniques. 7. Spiritual life.  
I. W., Todd. II. S., Sara. III. Title.

RC554.P2 2005

362.29'186—dc22

2004059665

25 24 23 22 21 23 24 25 26 27

Interior design by Rachel Holscher  
Typesetting by Stanton Publication Services, Inc.

Transcript of “Drop the Rock” talk by Sandy B. used with permission.

*Dedicated to  
the good works of*

**Joe McC.**  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

**Joe McQ.**  
Little Rock, Arkansas

**Charlie P.**  
Maysville, Arkansas

*for the Big Book Comes Alive workshops*

## **Usefulness Prayer**

God, help me today to find balance  
Between my character defects and the  
Principles of our Program  
So as, to be useful  
To myself, all others, and You,  
The God of my understanding.<sup>1</sup>

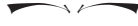
### **Step Six**

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

### **Step Seven**

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

# Contents

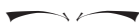


Preface	ix
Introduction	xi
Step Six	1
Step Seven	57
Serenity Prayer	93
Sanskrit Proverb	94
Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi	95
Set Aside Prayer	96
The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous	97
“Drop the Rock” Talk by Sandy B.	99
Character Defects/Shortcomings— Program Principles	101
Notes	103





## Preface



It has been more than twelve years since the first edition of *Drop the Rock* was published. During that time, I've presented the book in seminars, retreats, and talks ranging in length from one to twelve hours. The positive response to *Drop the Rock* is more than I ever expected; I have especially enjoyed hearing that many sponsors give a copy of the book to their sponsees after listening to their Fifth Step.

Many Twelve Step members hold *Drop the Rock* groups at members' homes. They meet one night a week over a specified number of weeks, usually eight. As I do in my longer seminars, the group leader preassigns the personal stories in the book to individuals. When that story is reached in the sequence of the book, the assigned member usually reads the story and comments on how he or she identifies with the character's story.

The new material in this second edition has been added as a result of comments received from individuals who have read the first edition and knowledge I have obtained throughout my recovery journey, which has now moved into its twenty-sixth year. When I first joined AA, I thought the Big Book's program of action was saying a thousand things. I slowly began to understand that it is saying a few simple things a thousand times.

During the early 1980s I worked in the archives at AA Headquarters in New York and one of the most asked questions was,

“What is the difference between character defects and shortcomings?” The answer is that there is no difference. Bill W. and the other authors of the Big Book didn’t want to use the same word in both Steps. The same approach is used in this book—“character defects” is used interchangeably with “shortcomings.”

Nell Wing, Bill W.’s longtime secretary and the first archivist at AA, and I found the original Mary “Drop the Rock” story (which begins the introduction of this book) in an old intergroup newsletter. On occasion, this book gets confused with the famous 1976 AA convention talk by Sandy B. called “Drop the Rock.” Although Sandy’s dropping the rock image is only three minutes of a fifty-minute talk, it has become legendary. Thanks, Sandy, for letting us include your “Drop the Rock” parable in this edition.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the production of this second edition as we remember that “we will always be students in the Program, we remain teachable and open to new opportunities, and we open our minds to accept and our hearts to understand.”

Bill P.  
September 2004

## Introduction



Seems there was this group of Twelve Step members taking a boat ride to this island called *Serenity*, and it was truly a happy bunch of people. As the boat pulled away from the dock, a few on board noticed Mary running down the street trying to catch up with the boat. One member said, “Darn, she’s missed the boat.” Another said, “Maybe not. Come on, Mary! Jump in the water! Swim! Swim! You can make it! You can catch up with us!”

So Mary jumped into the water and started to swim for all she was worth. She swam for quite a while and then started to sink. The members on board, now all aware that Mary was struggling, shouted, “Come on, Mary! Don’t give up! Drop the rock!” With that encouragement, Mary started swimming again, only to start sinking again shortly afterward. She was going under when she heard all those voices shouting to her, “Mary, drop the rock! Let go and drop the rock.”

Mary was vaguely aware of something around her neck, but she couldn’t quite figure out what it was. Once more, she gathered her strength and started swimming. She was doing quite well, even gaining a little on the boat, but then she felt this heaviness pulling her under again. She saw all those people on the boat holding out their hands and hollering for her to keep swimming and shouting, “Don’t be an idiot, Mary! Drop the rock!”

Then she understood when she was going down for the third time: This thing around her neck, *this* was why she kept sinking

when she really *wanted* to catch the boat. This thing was the “rock” they were all shouting about: resentments, fear, dishonesty, self-pity, intolerance, and anger were just some of the things her “rock” was made of. “God help me get rid of the rock,” she prayed. “Now! Get rid of it!”

Mary managed to stay afloat long enough to untangle a few of the strings holding that rock around her neck, realizing as she did that her load was easing up. Then, with another burst of energy, *she let go*. She tore the other strings off and *dropped the rock*.

Once free of the rock, she was amazed how easy it was to swim, and she soon caught up with the boat. Those on board were cheering for her and applauding and telling her how great she was, and how it was so good having her with them again, and how now they could get on with the boat ride and have a nice time.

Mary felt great and was just about to indulge in a little rest and relaxation when she glanced back to shore. There, a ways back, she thought she saw something bobbing in the water so she pointed it out to some others. Sure enough, someone was trying to catch the boat, swimming for dear life but not making much headway. In fact, it looked like the person was going under.

Mary looked around and saw the concern on the faces of the other members. She was the first to lean over the rail and shout, “Hey, friend! Drop the Rock!”



### **Mike shares his experience with dropping the rock:**

Before its discussion of Step Four, the Big Book says, “Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.” A thorough inventory reveals those causes and conditions; the Fifth Step allows us to share them with God and another human being, and so remove the inner pain they have caused in our past lives.

After finishing my Fifth Step, I discarded the inventory

but kept a single page that listed my major character defects. That list would come in handy later.

The first time I read Step Six, I thought it meant I had to arrive at some angelic state of mind in which I would become—and forever remain—“entirely ready” to have God remove all my defects. (I had forgotten that AA promises “spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.”)

*Twelve and Twelve* set me right. It calls Step Six “AA’s way of stating the best possible attitude one can take in order to make a beginning on this lifetime job.” To me, that means Step Six is not a onetime matter; it stretches over a lifetime of recovery. Even that “best possible attitude” is always just a beginning.

One morning, while I was at Hazelden’s Fellowship Club in St. Paul, Minnesota, I awoke very early and knew it was time to make that beginning. I took out the list of defects, read it over, and asked myself two questions: *Why are you holding on to these things?* and *What did these things ever do for you?* (I may choose to hold on to them for fear of letting go, but holding on to them for years and years led me into alcoholism.) So I got on my knees and recited the Big Book’s Step Seven prayer, which asks God’s help in replacing our willfulness with His will for us. The *Twelve and Twelve* calls that replacement a “basic ingredient of all humility.”

I went to Hazelden for treatment because I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I believe we get active with Step Six when we get sick and tired of being sick—sick and tired of the character defects of which alcoholism is a symptom, sick and tired of their effect, not on our past, but on our present lives.

In this ongoing process, the Program is asking us to go where none of us has ever been before—into lives of lessened fear, diminished anger, fewer resentments, and genuine self-esteem instead of self-pity. There is a price,

however: the willingness to **challenge and change** patterns of thought, speech, and behavior that may have gone unchallenged for ten, twenty, thirty years or more.



These stories from Mary and Mike are good illustrations for a better understanding of working the Sixth and Seventh Steps. The first five Steps have supplied the foundation for recovery. The next two Steps begin the active, day-to-day solution, removing what blocks us from **our usefulness** to other people and to our Higher Power, and especially (and ultimately) what blocks us from ourselves.

There are four basic reasons we won't be "entirely ready" to work the Sixth and Seventh Steps. The first is a conscious decision that we will never give up a specific character defect. Next, we blame our defects on others: people, situations, or institutions. Third, we rationalize. Our capacity to rationalize is unlimited. Before recovery we spent years on this one—throwing up barriers against unpleasant realities. Finally, it's denial: we are totally unaware of our own contribution to our problems.

The order of the Twelve Steps occurs for a reason. There's not much use in doing our amends in Steps Eight and Nine if there is no sign of our willingness to change by doing Steps Six and Seven. How many times in active addiction did we say we were sorry without the slightest intent of changing our behavior so we wouldn't have to say we were sorry again? Working Steps Eight and Nine is hollow unless we've begun working the Sixth Step with humility as our guide. "The Promises" in the Big Book (pages 83 and 84) come after the discussion of Steps Eight and Nine.

Let's look at the words of Sam Shoemaker<sup>2</sup> to gain some clarity on what the Sixth and Seventh Steps are asking of us. Sam was the Episcopal clergyman who ran Calvary Church and Mission where first Ebby T.<sup>3</sup> and then Bill W. (AA's cofounder and primary author of the Big Book) began their recovery.

Bill W. credited Shoemaker with passing on to him and the early AAs the “spiritual keys” that make up the Program and the Twelve Steps.

Shoemaker wrote about the necessity of making **daily surrenders**. Yes, the Sixth Step is also about surrendering, just like the Third. But Shoemaker made one point very clear: **We surrender as much of ourselves to as much of God as we understand**. In other words, our spiritual progress is based in direct proportion to our dropping the rock. We are very fortunate that all of our defects aren’t revealed to us all at once. **Recovery works by giving us daily insight into what we can do to remove what blocks us**. We need a daily awareness that our character defects are the opposite of the principles of our Program.

Shoemaker also passed on to the early AAs the idea that *God reveals as much truth as you can live up to*. That statement puts us directly on page 164 of the Big Book where it says, “The answers will come, if your own house is in order.” The Sixth Step helps us do that. Some have called the Sixth and Seventh Steps the “forgotten Steps” because they aren’t talked about that much. Others have called these Steps the most important. Perhaps the whole program is about Six and Seven.

By working the Sixth and Seventh Steps, we are less likely in recovery to stay stuck in old, unproductive, negative behavior patterns. We gain more understanding on how all the Steps, although ordered for a reason, need to be worked together. **This prevents us from falling into the trap of understanding only just enough of the Program to make us miserable and not enough to make us happy**. For example, some of us might fall into the trap of thinking the support system of the fellowship (meetings) is the entire Program of action.

The action of the Sixth and Seventh Steps culminates in dropping the rock—all the stubborn, grasping, stupid holding on to old patterns of behavior, thinking, and feeling that are harmful to our progress in recovery.



For another insight, let's return to Shoemaker, who believed progress in the spiritual life is based on our *looking inward and upward, not outward and downward*.

Reading *Drop the Rock* is a way of getting into the principles behind the Sixth and Seventh Steps, not only for understanding, but for action. We'll be looking at a number of ideas and examples of how men and women have made positive changes in their lives by working these Steps and by showing up at meetings to tell others of their experiences.

After doing our Fifth Step, many of us were directed to go home and to read the two paragraphs in the Big Book on the Sixth and Seventh Steps and then to do the Steps. Who wouldn't want to be rid of those defects of character, especially after talking about them in the inventory process? We uncovered a list of pain and agony and then shared it with another person and God. Of course we wanted to be rid of those character flaws and habits. So we prayed to let our defects go and humbly asked God for help. We thought we had done the Sixth and Seventh Steps, and that was that.

Then, down the road, we started having the same difficulties and issues arising from the same defects that had plagued us before. We may not have practiced them or noticed them quite so much after doing a Fifth Step, but they returned with a force that scared and surprised us. We went back to our sponsor and said that perhaps we needed to do another Fourth and Fifth Step. We were feeling and acting very similar to ways we used to feel and act. What should we do? Or, perhaps after years in the Program, things seemed to just have gone flat. There doesn't seem to be the same old spark, and the meetings just aren't as interesting as they once were. We've drifted into a numb place where there seems to be little growth and little reason to change.

Can we explain why we aren't entirely ready? Why can't we humbly ask? What's in our way?

If our sponsor is a good one, perhaps he or she responds that maybe it isn't the Fourth or Fifth Step that needs repeating, but that it is time to take a real look at the Sixth and Seventh. Rather than blaming the Program and the people in it for the flatness in our life, maybe it's time to rejuvenate the growth process through a jump start of the Sixth and Seventh Steps, remembering that the Program **helps those who help themselves**. The Program works for those who understand it.

— —

**Bill's thoughts on principles versus character defects:**

I once spoke at an AA group's anniversary meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota, and left the members with a riddle: "If the principles of Twelve Step recovery are not the Twelve Steps, then what are the principles?"

I returned to the same meeting about a year later to present a sponsee with a sobriety medallion and a few people approached me with the following comment: "I've been looking all year, since your talk, in the literature for the principles and can't find them!" My answer to these group members was the same one I give my sponsees: "The principles of Twelve Step recovery are the opposite of our character defects."

In recovery, we try to take the opposite of our character defects and shortcomings and turn them into principles. For example, we work to change fear into faith, hate into love, egoism into humility, anxiety and worry into serenity, complacency into action, denial into acceptance, jealousy into trust, fantasy into reality, selfishness into service, resentment into forgiveness, judgmentalism into tolerance, despair into hope, self-hate into self-respect, and loneliness into fellowship. Through this work, we learn to understand the principles of our program.

Such work may look like an overwhelming goal to an

outsider, but those of us in recovery know that our true goal is “progress not perfection.” As the Big Book tells us, we are not destined for sainthood, and we should not be discouraged when we cannot “maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. The point is that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles are guides to progress.” Also, the *Twelve and Twelve* states: “AA’s Twelve Steps are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happy and usefully whole.”

What, exactly, are these principles, and where did they come from? Over the years, a list of principles that correspond to each of the Twelve Steps has been printed in AA newsletters and on pocket cards. The origin of this list is unknown, although it is used by many Twelve Step members:

Step One	Honesty
Step Two	Hope
Step Three	Faith
Step Four	Courage
Step Five	Integrity
Step Six	Willingness
Step Seven	Humility
Step Eight	Brotherly Love
Step Nine	Justice
Step Ten	Perseverance
Step Eleven	Spiritual Awareness
Step Twelve	Service <sup>4</sup>

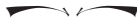
In this book, we and all those who have assisted us will attempt to take a real look at the Sixth and Seventh Steps. We must learn to take the intellectual knowledge and turn it into emotional and

spiritual reality—into living—so we can continue to change and grow and be useful. To become the person we can become, we must drop the rock—**all the grasping and holding on to old patterns of behaving, thinking, and feeling that are harmful to ourselves and to others.** The focus must become “moving toward completion” rather than “away from unpleasant and uncomfortable habits and actions.”

Please join in this adventure of learning to put the Sixth and Seventh Steps into action. Through these actions, we will be able to transform our life and relationships.



## Step Six



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

**A**t the beginning of the discussion of the Sixth Step in the *Twelve and Twelve*, it says, in a rather sexist way, that this is the Step that separates the men from the boys. Becoming entirely ready—moving into total willingness—is hard. It requires a great effort and awareness.

Step Six requires us to stop struggling. It is time to acknowledge that we need help. Not only help to stop our addiction but help in living better lives. Having gone through Steps Four and Five, we become aware of our defects of character. Perhaps pride and thoughts of superiority are blocking the way to serenity. Or it may be the habit of judging others. Perhaps it is a deep resentment, envy, or self-pity that keeps us in turmoil.

It is good to read Step Six over and over. It is brief and to the point. All it requires is becoming ready to become willing. We don't have to achieve change immediately. We can work on our attitude of mind and pray about it. We can think it over and see that our lives can become more trouble-free when we rid ourselves of destructive habits.

Step Six tells us to relax. We don't do it all alone. Reflect. We turn to our Higher Power with confidence. Think of the relief that is waiting once we become entirely ready. It's like heading into a

hot shower after working at a grubby chore. Feeling the dirt wash away is great. We emerge refreshed and shining and ready to deal with whatever comes our way.

We affirm to our Higher Power that we are ready to have God remove our defects. We continue in close and loving contact with God while we do our part in working on our shortcomings. Once we allow room for God to work in our lives, we are making it possible for wonderful changes to take place. We become more in balance with right-living principles. We all know individuals in recovery who have given up the booze or another addiction, yet they are staying dry or abstinent only by **redirecting their intense inner misery into the lives of others**. They won't work the Sixth and Seventh Steps.

We'll be discussing the Sixth Step in terms of surrender. Surrender is mentioned many times in the Program, in many different contexts, yet it can be confusing and possibly misunderstood. For the Sixth Step, a spiritual surrender is necessary. Not a passive, waiting surrender, but an active use of the will; a total surrender of mind (thinking) and body (doing).

Surrender is usually brought up in the context of pain. When our life is unmanageable (and causing pain), we must "turn it over." When we decide to turn our life and our will over to the care of God, as we understand Him, we've opened the door to surrender. In the Third Step, it is the **decision** that is the key point—an active use of the will to turn it over, to align our will with God's. In the Sixth Step, an even more active use of the will is required. We must act "as if" it has already taken place. We must have faith. Too many who take the Fifth Step make their confession and look around wondering where the solution lies.



### **Let's hear from Deb:**

The Sixth Step is the perfectly logical place to be after having completed a thorough Fifth Step. Asking ourselves,

“Do I want to give this (defect) up?” is different than asking, “Do I want to be different?”

Regardless of what little I know about “being different,” I must first ask, “Am I willing to believe that I *can* be different?” It is important to remember that Step Six doesn’t say, “Became entirely ready to make myself different.” It says, “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.” God, not me, makes me different by giving me what it takes to change. It is *my* job to act and behave like the change has occurred. In doing this, the process of change happens. Frequently this involves emotional pain; **the pain of living the way I have been becomes greater than the fear of change.** It also involves the pain of attracting seemingly obnoxious people. These folks are mirrors of my defects. I get to experience how it feels to have the shoe on the other foot.

This is a Step of surrender and trust, not *self-will* or self-determination. We surrender our ideas of which defects stand in the way of our **usefulness** to God, ourselves, and others.

Billy O. once gave me this example: “At a recovery convention, someone I sponsor approached me to talk about a problem he was having. His mom was at the same convention, and he was unable to ‘deal’ with it. He needed to talk to me about talking to her. I was practicing my defect of lust and enjoying being distracted by looking for available women. I blew him off. He ended up talking to his mom. I believe that God used my defect of lust to keep me unavailable to eliminate the middleman. The kid went straight to the source and used the tools he had to talk to his mom. This reminds me, how do I know when I’m being defective?”

God uses our defects and our assets in many ways to accomplish His will.



Is there a “fast track” to spiritual perfection or progress? It is important to get over and beyond the false pride of making “getting rid of character defects” a central focus of our lives. This approach is just one more way of not living life on life’s terms. We get into life and do the best we can with what we *know*. When we truly *know* better, we are willing to change. In the meantime, we live life.

The hardest aspect of Step Six is controlling nature. I need to accept being *human* and *fallible*. Self-acceptance is more important than self-abuse. I cannot abuse myself into spirituality by shaming and ridiculing myself. I cannot open a flower with a sledgehammer—only God opens flowers. In Step Six, I must trust that Step Seven follows.

In the past, many of us have approached Step Six with outrageous self-will to change, or to the other extreme, with no will at all. I’ve found that there is no standard of reference for the amount of emotional pain that an individual needs or can endure before being motivated to change.

If I’m not changing my behavior because of pain, whom am I trying to impress? Could it be that I’m trying to live up to an ideal in order to make an impression? To take control by redefining my self-image? Is this not still self-centeredness and self-will? Spiritual pride?

Yes, God uses defects to change me. But these questions are well worth asking ourselves as we consider our motives for change. In Step Six, our readiness to change comes from the awareness of how we are harming ourselves and therefore God.

In order to remind myself that change is God’s job, not mine, I use this prayer:

God, I don’t care what I sound like, or look like, who my partners are, or where I live. I just don’t want to be like this anymore. On Your terms, in Your time, *please* remake me as You will. Thank You.

I don't get to choose which defects God will remove. I find that living with my defects continues to teach me humility. I find that the defects that made me an active threat to society were pretty much removed at once when I stopped my addictive chemical use.

The defects that remove me from service are removed on and for the day that I ask. God lets me keep the rest of the defects to remind me of my need for daily spiritual contact. **They remind me that there is a God, and it isn't me.**

In order to have God remove our character defects, we must realize that we can't change ourselves completely by ourselves or have any lasting good purpose without spiritual intervention. "Lack of power" is our dilemma. We find a Power by which we can live.

How do we know when we are entirely ready? How do we know when we're hungry? Some have experienced an entire readiness as a feeling of being completely burned out or being at the end of their rope. Others have received a sponsor's validation of readiness. Most of us experience this readiness after we have become very familiar with the feeling or experience of not being ready or not being willing to be changed. We make friends with our defects and know how they have served us. This results in knowing how they no longer serve us.

Defects of character are our best attempts to get our needs met. They have saved our lives. My problem was one of ignorance; I didn't know what my basic human needs were and therefore didn't know how to meet them. I didn't know about the basic instincts of life, sociality, security, and sexuality until I listened and studied a Joe and Charlie tape set. This is where the "as you learn better, you do better" applies. The hole in me, the neediness, the hunger, the ache in my life that I tried to fill or stay distracted from by using addictive behavior is actually the perfectly logical result of not knowing and therefore not accepting myself as I am.

I was wrong, not bad. I did “look bad.” And I didn’t get my needs met, so I ignorantly, apparently insanely, and desperately repeated what I knew. More, more, and more. Or less, less, and less. Deprivation and overconsumption are flip sides of the same coin. **The point of recovery is finding the balance.**



Finding balance incorporates the awareness gained in Steps Four and Five with the action (the behavior changes and prayer) gained in Steps Six and Seven. Like the pendulum, we swing from one extreme of behavior to another, yet those points of extreme slowly become closer together. We change.

As in the First Step, finding balance involves *admitting* (accepting as true and valid to ourselves) that past attempts to meet our needs have failed. It is recognizing that we are truly bodily and mentally different than our fellows. We are *real* alcoholics and addicts. We must stay abstinent. “If you’re a *real* alcoholic or addict, you will stop using some day; it’s better to be alive when it happens.” Finding balance also includes recognizing that a predictable aspect of our disease is extreme action: consumption, deprivation, or repetition. This is how we become ready for finding the balance. We get to experience it. Yes, we do supply the willingness, but it is God who supplies the changes and the reasons for our willingness.

Wanting to become willing to feel different is not foreign to us. It was this willingness that we used to feed our addictive behaviors. We wanted to feel different. Now, though, we ask God, and we become ready to have character defects removed by using our awareness of ourselves and our will to be different.

In surrendering, we are saying our way hasn’t worked (what a surprise!) We are willing to try it another way. We desire to be at peace with our beliefs. We are fortunate people. We have the opportunity to face the battle of understanding our lives. We have another go-round at a life once abandoned. We want to be winners,

securely and absolutely. The willingness can be a sane and healthy choice or a reactive choice because of pain. We all get to choose—sooner or later, we get to choose. When considering the Sixth Step, we find that this approach separates the winners from the losers. **The winners actively seek and practice a new way of living. A new way of being. A new way of thinking. A new way of behaving. A new way of relating.** The losers wait until they are in so much pain that the choice becomes obvious, and then they choose to participate only enough to get the pain to stop.



### **Karen shares a realization she has had:**

Recently, I was perusing ahead in my daily meditation book when I came upon a quote by Martha Roth that piqued my curiosity. “Insight is cheap,” she said. My first reaction was, “Gee, I don’t agree with her.” We in recovery place high value on insight. After all, it’s our insight regarding the problem of addiction that makes us particularly helpful to “the person who still suffers.” But, as I read the short essay following the quote, I began to see Ms. Roth’s point.

The essay talked about people who *analyze* themselves to death. They know exactly what makes them do the things they do: the tyrannical mothers, the abusive husbands, the poverty they were raised in, or the childhood of extreme indulgence and privilege.

They have great insight, but instead of using that insight as a means to develop new and hopefully better behavior, they use it as a reason to continue with old, destructive behavior. They are not willing to go through the pain it takes to change, even though the pain of staying the same is killing them.

They are victims. The list of people who’ve done them wrong is long, and the list of those people whose expectations they cannot live up to is even longer. They cling to their character defects with alarming tenacity, all the while

blaming everything and everyone for their problems and never looking for solutions.

In fact, they don't see their poor behavior as character defects at all but more like genetic anomalies, such as bow-legs or thin hair, or the permanent result of improper socialization by parents (who in most cases probably did the best job they could).

Admitting that they might be somewhat at fault, they are sure others are more to blame. Therefore, instead of asking God to remove any defects of character, they secretly curse God for dealing them such a lousy hand.

They are good at working with newcomers, especially if they find the newcomer attractive. The problem here is that all they want to do is talk about themselves and all the newcomers want to do is talk about themselves, so these liaisons rarely last more than a few days or weeks before they bore each other to the brink of suicide.

While they rarely balk at Steps Four and Five because those Steps give them the opportunity once again to dwell on their most beloved topic, themselves, they seem to get stuck at this point and gloss over or ignore completely those Steps in the Program that are vital to emotional and spiritual recovery: Steps Six and Seven.

Without emotional and spiritual recovery, you don't have much. You have abstinence, and you may not even have that for very long. If you don't follow the "clear-cut" directions of our Program, you can't move into receiving God's directions.



Before we move ahead with our discussion of Step Six, here's a story about attitude.



### **Fred relates the “Outlook of Two AA Members”:**

Don D. went to an AA meeting one evening. He frowned when a member mispronounced a few words while reading “How It Works.” He felt appalled when another member stood up and said he was an alcoholic and an addict. Another person talked too long. As he slipped out the door immediately after the meeting, Don D. muttered, “That was terrible. I should have stayed home.”

Bob M. went to a meeting one evening. His head was bowed as he listened to the “Preamble” and “How It Works.” His eyes moistened as he listened intently to a member tell his story. He was grateful for being able to attend this meeting. After cleanup and a little socializing, he paused, and as he locked the meeting room door, his thoughts were, “Thank God for such a beautiful fellowship.”

Both AA members were at the same meeting. Each found what he was looking for.



Choosing to move into willingness and being willing to choose (in other words, being willing to take responsibility) is a positive way of living. It is saying, “Hey, I’m worth moving toward being different without pain and resentments. I value myself and others enough to choose to make changes now rather than wait until I can’t stand not making a choice.” It is a completely different perspective than waiting until it hurts to make choices. The majority of us are very aware of our defects of character, but often it isn’t until we are “sick and tired of being sick and tired” that we become willing to change.

Acting “as if” the choice is already made and the changes in our lives are already in place puts the power of our will in line with the power of the universe so that we can move forward more gracefully into living without defects unchecked.

Will it work? About as well as we surrender. Will it change our lives? Yes, without question.

It is a matter of practice and willingness, of using the Steps we've already taken to maintain our commitment. The more willing we become and the more we practice acting "as if," the more active our surrender becomes and the more we are able to live "as if." It is a fulfilling and rewarding process. Acting "as if" can raise questions of genuineness and authenticity. Is there a conflict with the person I am choosing to become and the person I currently am?

Authenticity is being true to a vision and purpose. We are authentic when we choose to act and feel and choose to behave in balance with the higher values and principles we've chosen for our lives. If those principles and values are not fully in place and manifested, it doesn't make us phony. *It makes us human.* If we feel the conflict between who we are and who we would become, it is good. It signals that we understand the difference between reality and fantasy and are moving toward reality.

There are many stages in surrendering and practicing. It's called **progress**. We will be discussing many of the stages in connection with the Sixth Step and again in working with the Seventh. We will be discussing many of the things that hinder our ability to surrender and many of the defects of character that we may wish to remove. There is no magic in recovery. **We get what we work for.**



### Let's take a look at Charlie's story:

When I first came in, I wanted all the good things people had, but I didn't want to work for them. Oh, I worked the Steps—at least the ones I thought I needed. And when it came to Steps Six and Seven, I was ready and willing to have my Higher Power remove my shortcomings—should I have any, of course. I had no idea what they were because

I didn't think I needed Step Four and thought I could skip the vital Step Five. But I prayed, vaguely, that should He see any shortcomings, I was ready for Him to remove them. The principle of Step Seven is humility. I had none.

As I made progress in recovery, I became aware of many character defects and just how blind I had been to them. Mercifully, my Higher Power showed me only what I was ready to see.

I became depressed and thought I could never be forgiven for or relieved from these shortcomings. This depression, I discovered, was not humility but another form of "playing God," **believing my character defects were more powerful than my Higher Power's forgiveness.**

Then, when I recognized Who had the power and who was powerless, I had to decide if I was "entirely ready" to ask Him to remove my shortcomings. I had to quit playing God. After all, my character defects were what I thought made up my personality, and I was pretty much in love with whom I thought I was. Self-will had been my Higher Power for a lifetime. I was afraid, not knowing that something better would take the place of my character defects.

With all the honesty I was capable of at the time, I worked the Steps in order, One through Six, then Seven, asking as humbly as I could that my Higher Power remove my shortcomings. They did not disappear. I was not struck pure.

Then I was made aware that character defects are like active addiction. I couldn't keep using and expect God to relieve my disease. **Neither could I keep practicing my character defects and expect God to remove them.**

I was going to have to develop a new set of habits—to work against who I thought I'd always been—and as I practiced these new habits, the old habits/character defects would begin to be replaced. This creates a period of grieving,



which doesn't make sense at first. Why should I hurt over the leaving (letting go, removal) of behaviors that only harmed me?

So I began really living the principles of the Program, using the support of the fellowship, the daily striving to change, to let go, and receive more. It didn't happen overnight. It takes years of practice, a lifetime. I am not a saint. But I claim, accept, and am grateful for my spiritual and healthy emotional progress.



Charlie made some very important discoveries in his journey. In the context of surrender, which we are discussing here, the first thing he discovered was that he needed to be willing to make a choice. It was up to Charlie to put his will into action and to choose to work the Steps and to practice being willing until he was entirely willing. The next thing he discovered was that his own resistance to surrendering was because his self-concept was that his personality was his character defects. If he gave up his shortcomings, he'd become the "hole in the donut." Believing there's something more and better is the essence of faith; **it is trusting that God will reshape me into what I was meant to be in the first place—a decent human being.**

How many times have we heard that at meetings? Probably many, many times. We fear becoming invisible if we stop practicing our faults. Moreover, we fear becoming average, normal, or boring. In contemplating surrender, many of us come face to face with our self-image in an honest fashion for the first time. We may have glimpsed it in Step Five, which can be a very difficult realization. We've spent a lifetime building an image of who we are and how we operate, a fantasy story, then we are asked to put it aside when it is in conflict with the new principles we've decided to follow in the Program. No wonder we have fear and misgivings.

Here is where we must rethink the nature of our true, authentic selves and whom we would become, our willingness to go to any length for recovery. It is an act of will—a choice—and we must be willing to assume accountability for that choice. *Steps Six and Seven do not say whom we would become, but who we don't want to be.* It is very threatening to the ideas we've held about ourselves when we must choose whom we would become. Our defects, many times, are our best friends. If I become (choose to be) “entirely ready” and my character defects lessen or disappear, whom will I be?

As it says in the *Twelve and Twelve*, it is not the blatantly obvious character defects that we have problems giving up, it is the ones we practice “in moderation” or only on occasion that are the most difficult. What appear to be natural instinctual drives seem to become our enemies when we start to contemplate and prepare to work Step Six. In becoming entirely ready—in deciding to be willing to surrender—we must examine our hearts and work with prayer and meditation to set aside self-image and move into self-awareness.



### **Let's take a look at Pat's story:**

When I was about three years into recovery, I had a real crisis of faith. I didn't feel I was moving and changing enough in the Program, and I wasn't confident that the people who were saying not to worry about becoming the “hole in the donut” had enough of what I wanted to be trustworthy. I went outside the Program for help through therapy and came face to face with a counselor who told me I needed to rework my Third Step. That was the last thing I wanted to hear.

He also got me thinking about Steps Six and Seven. I was afraid of losing those things that made me *me*. Would I give up my intensity and aggressiveness? Would I lose my edge? Would I become “spiritual” and monklike? How

would I handle life without some of my more important pieces? It caused me a great deal of discomfort and, occasionally, some outright fear.

In working through some of these issues with my sponsor and talking about them in meetings, I began to realize that the things that make me who I am are not defined by my actions. **I wasn't just attending meetings anymore to avoid doing what I needed doing outside of meetings.** All my defects become glaringly obvious through my actions . . . but that does not define me as a person. I may act badly on occasion. That doesn't make me a bad person.

I started looking at giving up and releasing those parts of me—those habits of action—that were defective and self-defeating. Finally I was working on the Steps *outside of* meetings instead of just talking about them *at* meetings. I saw my character defects as glitches to be corrected rather than major portions of my framework. Sometimes it felt pretty major. But, as I learned to surrender and release, how I defined myself began to change, too. Now, I seek the opportunity to look at defects and let them go. Something new and better always seems available to take their place. Over the years in recovery, I have slowly developed a deep belief that I can solve the problem and find the willingness to do so.



It becomes apparent in Pat's story, and many like it, that the "hole in the donut" fear is a shadow boxer. It can cause us alarm, but if we do the work and move forward, it gradually disappears in the light. **It disappears in proportion to our understanding of who our Higher Power is and how the God of our understanding works in our lives.** Pat also brought up a point about trust. We will look very closely at trust when we get into the Seventh Step. For now it is enough to say that trust is an ongoing issue with almost everyone in recovery.

We'll take a look now at ways of taking action and those things that cause us to resist taking action to become *entirely ready*.

## Action

For many of us, working the Steps has meant going to meetings and talking about the Steps and what they've meant in our lives, or working the Steps so we can talk about them in meetings. Occasionally, we've been forced into taking action, like doing a Fourth Step inventory or talking out a Fifth Step. Making amends calls for action. Usually, however, after taking those specific actions, we're done. Steps Six and Seven, in particular, become "nodders." We go to meetings where Six and Seven are discussed and nod wisely and serenely with almost every comment that is made. When it is our turn to talk, we explain about getting into the Sixth and Seventh after doing our inventory and taking a Fifth Step. We all feel like we're working the Steps.

It is a challenge to take another look at that process. Talking about the Steps at meetings is much different than working them. Remember that chapter 6 in the Big Book, where these Steps are outlined, is called "Into Action." Having done a little work or action on a Step in the past is a far cry from continuing to work it now. Nodding at meetings in agreement with a particularly profound comment is not the same as doing what the speaker may have done to reach that awareness.

We must become willing to take action—continuous action—to become who we can become. It takes awareness to become entirely ready. Slow down, stop doing, and be. Feel it.



### Here's Richard's perspective on Step Six:

I had enjoyed many rewards from the Program, experienced many of the feelings of liberation my sponsor had promised, and after two years of working the Steps, something was still missing. There remained lingering feelings of

discontent. The personality flaws I had uncovered in doing the Fourth and Fifth had diminished but were still there. They produced thoughts and feelings I had while using—impatience, intolerance, quick temper, arrogance, and **especially** an unforgiving attitude toward others and myself.

So I had lunch with my sponsor and discussed my situation with him. After talking a while and asking many questions, he asked, “You really think you’ve done all the Steps, don’t you?” I assured him, somewhat indignantly, that I had. Hadn’t I done the Fourth and Fifth with him? Had not he seen my Twelfth Step actively with his own eyes? Wasn’t he aware of how faithfully—in my mind—I was doing the Tenth and Eleventh Steps?

“All very true,” he said, “but what about the *Sixth* Step?” He went on by telling me a story. One night there was a man down on his hands and knees looking frantically for something on the sidewalk under a street lamp. A police officer stopped by and asked him what he was doing. “I’ve lost my keys,” answered the man. “Will you help me look for them?” The police officer joined in and after a while asked, “Are you sure you dropped them here?” The man looked up and said, “No. I dropped them back there—but there it is much too dark.” The police officer asked, “Why are we looking here then?” With all sincerity, the man answered, “Because here is where the light is, and I’m afraid of the dark.” Finished with the story, my sponsor again asked, “What about the *Sixth* Step?”

I was shocked he could ask me such a question. Of course, I was willing to change and have my Higher Power remove my defects of character, wasn’t I—*was I?*

If I was sincerely willing to change, why did I remain so much the same? I realized that perhaps I had been paying lip service to the Sixth Step. Compared to most of the other Steps, the Sixth appeared simple. I believed this, be-

cause no overt action seemed required. There is none of the dramatic confrontation that exists when we do the Ninth Step, nor is there the feeling of accomplishment that comes with helping others in the Twelfth. The Sixth is not dramatic. There are no enthusiastic witnesses to rush up and shake one's hand. It's a rather solitary affair and hence seems simple. But had I taken *any* action?

The Sixth Step means facing ourselves, and that is usually more difficult than being honest with another person. I have found it difficult to lie to others because of practicing the principles of the Program but still easy to lie to myself. When I say, all too swiftly, "Of course I'm willing to change," I know I will ask myself, "Really? Who's kidding whom?" **The fact that I will daily question my willingness to change will increase my ability to be increasingly willing.** I simply won't take the process as lightly as I have before. I can't learn anything unless I'm sincerely willing to learn. Nor will making myself promises to change have any significance until the willingness factor is developed.

My sponsor intervened again with a few of his pointed questions. "You played football in school, didn't you?" he asked—knowing full well I had. He reminded me that I told him I hated the practice, "getting those bumps and bruises for no good reason." He also reminded me how I had said I loved the actual game, especially the cheers when I did something very well.

"You know," he said, "no one gets excited about practice. It has no flash to it. It's the game that counts. But a good game performance requires hard practice, and the Sixth Step can be compared with football practice. If you're going to make continuing progress in the Program, you really have to work the Sixth and Seventh Steps. You can't stand around on one foot waiting for applause. There won't be any if you don't keep practicing."

What my sponsor told me that day still carries an important moral lesson. It's one I'm continually diligently learning, because I now—finally—am seeing the true value in the Sixth Step. Like the man looking for his keys in the wrong place, I, too, was looking in the wrong place to become *entirely ready* in the Sixth Step. I'm making progress in facing my fears and venturing **into the dark of my unwillingness** to have my character defects removed.

I am continually repeating the rather paradoxical sentence I came up with that helps me with how I now look at the Sixth Step: **The fact that I will daily question my willingness to change will increase my ability to be increasingly willing.**



It is important to discuss another aspect of recovery to gain what may be for us a new perspective. If we think that recovery is strictly about abstinence from alcohol (or drugs, food, sex, gambling, and so on) and that staying abstinent will solve all the major problems in life, then we probably won't want to hear what comes next. If, on the other hand, we feel that recovery is about living fully, usefully, and freely and about reaching toward our potential, then we might keep an open ear.

A person who is not in recovery mentioned an observation he had made about folks in recovery. He felt that recovering people spent almost all their time learning to stand up and helping others stand up, but very few spent any time walking. If "walking" in this analogy means getting on with a meaningful and purposeful life, there is some truth in his observation. We get so caught up in our own abstinence, or going to meetings and helping others recover that we lose sight of the "larger picture." Sure, there is great meaning in helping others recover. Helping others is a great way to move into humility (which we will discuss in depth in the section on Step Seven) and to gain a spiritual perspective on life. Helping others to stand, however, is not quite as meaningful as

helping others learn to walk. Nor is it as meaningful as helping others find a direction and destination to walk toward. **We help others by setting the example rather than telling them the example.** We learn to shift our vision to the horizon, rather than watch our feet. This is extremely important when we are looking to continue to grow and to let go of those things that may limit our ability to do so.

The first act is **awareness**, second is **acceptance**, then third is **surrender** (action). Once we have chosen to be willing to surrender, we move on to those things that can help our surrendering and our awareness of what it is we're giving up. The choice to surrender, the becoming entirely ready, is just that—a choice. Awareness, however, is an entirely different matter.

To make surrender effective, we must be willing to help the process by using our awareness to move into line with the surrender. We must choose to act “as if.” Our awareness must shift so we become aware *when* we aren't acting in accordance with that choice. Changing our awareness can be a slow process, or it can be instantaneous. With grace, it can happen smoothly and quickly. When we are struggling, it can seem to take forever. The difference is willingness. When we stay honest, willing, and especially open-minded, we stay aware.



### **Lisa adds how acting “as if” helped her with the Sixth Step:**

My sponsor gave me a typed piece of paper and told me to put it on my bathroom mirror and read it daily. That piece of paper said: “In the arena of human life, the honors and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities in action.” I did as my sponsor suggested, and that sentence staring at me all the time has helped me with my continuing readiness. The good character qualities I want to have are only demonstrated to me and others by my actions.

But the only way for me to get there, to get what I



needed, was to act “as if” I had it. The key word is “act.” I have discovered in my case that knowledge often follows action rather than vice versa. When I *faked* it in my early days, I found myself *making* it in later days.

In the beginning, I was asked to act “as if” I was following instructions, trusting the Program, listening to my sponsor, and coming to believe. The amazing thing was that soon I was doing those very things.

I was never able to think my way into recovery. My mind created a tremendous amount of trouble for me. I needed to turn my mind down (*not off*). I soon discovered the difference between doing and thinking. The key to acting “as if” is faith. The way to faith is *through* my fears. I have made progress and stay *entirely ready* when I turn fears over to my faith and simply act “as if.”



As we discussed, acting “as if” can seem to be in conflict with being genuine and authentic. However, when we are willing (making choices) to make positive progress and to have God shape us toward our potential as spiritual beings, then acting in accordance with those intentions is genuine in spite of our real feelings. One of the things we must be careful of is our capacity for drama.

It seems as if addiction is a path toward drama. Perhaps because most of us repressed and suppressed feelings from the very beginning, we learned to be dramatic when it was important for our feelings to be noticed. We also learned to be dramatic to hide our true feelings—even from ourselves. Even though it is important to validate, feel, and identify our feelings, we must be careful not to dramatize. When we are moving toward becoming “entirely ready,” it is easy to be self-absorbed and dramatic about our path. We must be willing to quietly move toward *self-examination, rather than self-absorption*. As we practice, this difference becomes more evident.

Ritual, prayer, meditation, and cleansing are four things we can do to make the process of self-examination move more quickly and easily.

**(1) Find a ritual.** We can develop or borrow a ritual to mark our surrender and choice to become ready. The power of ritual is incredible, and we can use that power to help us move into balance with our choice. Think about a candle ceremony, perhaps burning slips of paper with our hesitations and fears and character defects written on them. Or walk on the beach and write in the sand at the water's edge all the things that concern and trouble us about surrendering, then watch the waves erase the words and our cares. Perhaps put our thoughts and fears and feelings on slips of papers in bottles and set them sailing into the sunset at the ocean.

Or ask a sponsor. Or ask at meetings. Read about rituals and borrow one that feels good and significant to us or make up a simple, powerful ritual marking our decision to become “entirely ready.”

Rituals are rites of passage, as is the Sixth Step. Using a ritual for this powerful method of transformation personalizes the experience.



### **Let's hear from Betty:**

I have attacked Step Six many times. It has attacked me in return. We have had open warfare, and we have had peace. For periods of time, I have on purpose ignored this Step. I have said that it made no sense to me.

The battle began some years back when I regularly attended Step-discussion meetings. I had done my best on the first five Steps, I thought. I had even made a written list of all my defects. They counted up to thirty.

Following the example of an old-timer friend of mine, whose quality of recovery I admired, I printed, in ink, each of my separate defects on a poker chip. Then all thirty chips

went into a small pitcher. Every morning upon awaking, I plunged my hand into it (like picking a number from a goldfish bowl) and came up with the “chip for today.” The defect might be anger, fear, pride, resentment, gossip, arrogance, self-pity, procrastination, anxiety, intolerance, and so on, but whichever one it was had to be concentrated on for the next twenty-four hours and either reduced to a minimum or cast away.

It was a kind of game. I enjoyed wrestling with one “defect” a day. I felt I was making progress, really working the Program. It hadn’t occurred to me that I had gone overboard on this “defect” business. Thirty, indeed! How is that for the “pride” defect? Of course, most of them were not serious flaws of character such as the inability to be honest with oneself. Most were bad habits possessed, in some degree, by most humans.

Nevertheless, I kept up this game for two or three years, telling many fellow members about it and urging them to go and do likewise. I explained that, although the Step suggests that God would remove these defects when and if I became ready to let go of them, I was of the school that believed in the saying “Pray for potatoes, but pick up the hoe.” I did ask my Higher Power to lend a hand on the defect I happened to confront each day, but I felt that God expected me to use energy on rooting it out of my character all by myself.

Still those dozens of defects I had laid claim to kept cropping up again and again, over and over. It seemed that the harder I fought them, the harder they fought back. I became very discouraged. I decided I had been willing, I had tried, and I would now let Number Six, and myself, have a vacation. I put the little pitcher with its chips on the shelf behind some books and only now and then dipped into it. I kept busy and active in the Program; I felt comfortable in recovery; I was trying to practice the principles

in all my affairs. Then, out of nowhere, came a deep resentment toward a fellow member. I agonized over it, prayed over it, but discussed it with no one. I had insomnia, indigestion, and fatigue. (Any good doctor can tell you that negative emotions make people physically ill.)

Fortunately, just about that time our group was slated for discussion of Step Six. I opened my copy of the *Twelve and Twelve* and read the Step all the way through. Although I had read it many times before, it seemed as if I saw its meaning for the first time. I gathered that, instead of fighting mightily against a defect, I also had to let go of it. Just simply open my hands, my heart, and my mind and say to my Higher Power, “Here it is, this defect. I give it to You. Please remove it from me.” In this case, it was the bitter and destructive resentment that I wished to be rid of. And so it happened. It faded away and never returned.

Since then, I have followed the same procedure on other emotional problems, with the same result. I just have to keep in mind that if I am not 100 percent sincere in my *willingness* to be rid of the problem, the procedure won't work. I have come to realize that Step Six means exactly what it says. No more, no less. When, and if, I become ready to have painful, inhibiting, or long-standing flaws removed, they will be. Not always permanently and not all of them (some are always on “standby”). But if and when they return, they will be weaker and much easier to let go. As for all those bad habits I once listed as defects, I am trying to arrest them one day at a time, as I do my addiction.

A little progress has been made on pride. I can now admit that most of my troubles stem from one large and glaring defect: **self-centeredness**. For how can I wallow in self-pity, weep over resentments, be sick with righteous anger, ache with envy, and tense up with fears and anxieties unless all my thoughts are exclusively on poor me?

A long time ago, a very wise person wrote: “A person’s life is what his thoughts make it.” Through Step Six, I have learned how true that is. I may never comprehend the saying fully, yet I know its value to me. It calls forth the most precious asset any recovering person can have: the willingness to get out of the driver’s seat, to stop trying to run the show. I need to keep the Sixth and Seventh Step message of letting go and letting God in my thoughts at all times.



**(2) Use prayer.** Our ritual can include prayer. Our daily meditation and practice can include prayer. We’ll also talk about prayer in connection with the Seventh Step, but it is essential in the Sixth. As in all the Steps, prayer as a part of ritual is doubly potent and can add depth and meaning to any commitment we decide to make (for example, willingness to be or stay willing).

Use prayer to ask for awareness and willingness to receive. Use prayer to ask for depth and clarity. Use prayer to ask to become a better channel for our Higher Power. Use prayer to ask for ease and grace in surrender. Use prayer to ask how to pray. Use prayer to ask how to think and act. Use prayer to say thank you. Use prayer. Prayer can be considered **cheating** because of how much easier it makes the process go.

Prayer is of no use when it is not used. Prayer is not only a matter of belief, it is a matter of practice. We can’t get caught in the trap of dogma or method. Prayer is not about right or wrong or “should” or “only.” It is about a personal or individualized way to talk with God or our Higher Power or Universal Energy or the collective unconscious or whatever we want to call it. Prayer is not about someone else telling us how to pray or what to say. *It is about communication.*

There are some extremely effective prayers from many spiritual traditions. These prayers became effective because the people who wrote them or said them practiced them daily. The saints

who used prayer were not worried about doing it right. They were concerned about communicating with God and gaining clarity for their own action. We continually need to take a closer look at prayer and its place in our life. It can be revealing.

Many members become boosters of prayer only after having resisted using it. It just didn't seem necessary or even admirable to them. People who needed and used prayer seemed to be a rung lower on the ladder than those who could get things done. Self-will versus God's will.

It was only after getting involved in prayer through a spiritual search and surrender, then practicing it, that we come to understand its depth and meaning. Prayer is not something to be intellectualized and analyzed. It can only be realized through practice. The Program urges us to take action. Pray. An often quoted prayer goes like this:

God give me the courage and strength to know who I really am, to act accordingly in my life, and to refrain from diverting my time, energy, and interest into my character defects.



**“Prayer Is a Special Time” by Kris:**

Prayer is a special time I share with God. Prayer is the means I use to talk with God and to listen as God communicates with me. When I pray, I become still and I quiet any unrest within me. I reaffirm my oneness with my Higher Power, and I find the answers I seek.

I do not limit my prayers to a certain time or a particular place. Whenever a small success enters my life or a moment of joy illuminates my day, I silently thank God for those blessings. Every time I affirm God as the source of my good and give thanks for the many channels through which it comes, I am praying to God.

Prayer enables me to know and feel that I am a beloved child of God. I am needed because I can be an expression of good in my world. I am a **useful** person.



**(3) Learn to meditate.** Meditation and prayer are traditionally discussed in the Eleventh Step, but we can put them to use here, if we choose. Those in the Program for a while realize that the Steps are synergistic, and that after a while they will be practicing parts of one with many others, all at the same time. Meditation is a practice that can be utilized throughout the whole Program. Meditation is mostly about listening and quieting our mind (quiet time).

Although not much is said in the Big Book or the *Twelve and Twelve* about how to meditate, we are instructed to practice and become intuitive to the presence of God. We practice meditation as a discipline in our own way until we have made it a regular part of our routine. Some members benefit by reading books about meditation and its methods. Others have attended classes at their local community college, yoga center, or church. Just as with prayer and other positive disciplines in recovery, the benefits of meditation only become apparent through practice.

In using meditation for the Sixth Step, a form of contemplation can be used. Taking a single word or thought and letting it run through our mind can be very revealing. Take, for example, the word “surrender.” We may start by repeating the word in our mind over and over: “Surrender. Surrender. Surrender. Surrender. Give up. Release. Let go. Surrender. Peace. Renewal. Surrender. Vulnerable. Open. Surrender. Surrender. Strength. Change. Higher Power. Surrender.” We can keep the string of thoughts going for a while, probably no more than five minutes to start, as we do our regular morning or evening routine of prayer and meditation.

*Prayer* is seeking answers and direction in life. *Meditation* is listening for answers from a Higher Power and developing the ability within ourselves to accept the answers. *Reflection* is the

study of ways to turn the answers we get from prayer and meditation into action.

Reflection is the study of meaning and uses of the Twelve Steps. It is not a snap judgment. It requires consideration of the pros and cons of our possible choices and determination of what directions we will take to give us the best results. *The progress of spirituality from prayer to meditation to reflection is active, not passive.* It is taking part in the joy of putting the results of prayer and meditation into action. We learn through times of quiet reflection to work into our lives the answers our Higher Power has given us as a result of our prayer and meditation.

Prayer, meditation, and reflection will also give us greater awareness of our particular forms of resistance. This knowledge lets us know how we are doing it wrong, such as finding out our shoelaces aren't tied together so we can tie them. In this type of contemplation, a new awareness and focus will arise. If we are uncomfortable with traditional meditation and prayer, we may try learning some simple practices of quieting the mind and gaining concentration. We use our intuition and sense of higher purpose to find a comfortable method to practice becoming "entirely ready." We gain clarity and vision. Whatever method we use, meditation helps determine the shape of our prayer and the direction of our **surrender**.



### **Geno shares some ideas on meditation:**

All of us are God's children made extraordinary by the gifts He has given us. Foremost is the chance of a new life, one of sobriety and cleanliness one day at a time.

God has chosen us for a special purpose. Here in this School of Life, He is at work, bending, shaping, and molding us for one purpose only, and that is to, by our actions and example, be useful to others and ourselves. He will do with us what He has never done with us before. He is doing with us what He is not doing with anyone else. We are special in His eyes, and we should let Him have His way.



To accept this change in direction and have the strength to carry out these new actions, we need the Eleventh Step as our key to maintaining our conscious contact, which takes away the regrets of the past and the fears of tomorrow and allows us to deal with the challenges of today.

A quiet time of prayer and meditation with our Higher Power every morning before “the daily toil and common challenges” of the world begin will put us in a positive attitude for the day. Those of us who choose to develop a close relationship with our Higher Power find that the answers we receive (or sometimes what we call the intuitive knowledge) help us maintain our daily commitments.

We must learn to turn down our minds, open up our hearts, and give ourselves to our God in quiet times. This seems difficult at first. But discipline over self-will, although it may be slow, comes with practice. And practicing regularly is necessary in making the best use of the Eleventh Step.



**(4) Prepare for cleansing.** If we are to engage in a new course of action and become “entirely ready” to get rid of our defects, it makes sense that we start from a clean slate. Of course, common sense is a very rare thing in or out of the Program, so it is not surprising that it is rarely discussed in meetings that we might need to make an effort to get to a clean place.

Let’s take a look at a few areas that we may want to examine and clean up as we prepare to become entirely ready.

How is our language used? Are we gaining maturity? Do we swear a lot and make crude remarks about the opposite sex and use biased and prejudiced language? Do we gossip? Are we sarcastic? Do we tell dirty or risqué jokes? Do we use violent language? We take a look at our language and see how it fits in with a spiritual approach to living and to becoming entirely ready.

When we first start attending meetings, many of us are

amazed at the amount of swearing that occurs. Smoking, swearing, and making fun of those less fortunate seem to be accepted things. We need to examine this closely. How does a person who has taken a Third Step and is practicing and preparing for Steps Six and Seven talk? Try giving up swearing. Try giving up violent language. Try giving up bias. Try giving up sexism. Try giving up gossip. We become willing to give them up and act “as if” until God removes them.

Another area to look at closely is all other addictive practices. Language patterns can be addictive. Do we still smoke, binge on sugar, excessively drink coffee, recklessly gamble, abuse credit cards, act out sexually, drive over the speed limit, and so on? How do these activities affect our movement toward God and spirituality? Does practicing one addiction mean that we still have an addictive lifestyle? Remember what it says in the Big Book about alcohol (drugs, food, sex, gambling, and so on) being a symptom. It is just the tip of the iceberg. We need to closely examine our whole lives for addictive and abusive patterns. If we are to give up our defects of character, we need to become willing to see them all!

We examine our sexual life and how we relate to the opposite sex. (Or the same sex, if that is our preference.) Do we still treat others as sex objects? Do we use sex to alter our mood? Are we abusive? Are we able to be intimate? Can we reveal our true feelings in an open and trusting manner? Can we relate well with those we are sexually attracted to without becoming sexual? What is the pattern in our relationships?

Are we addicted to caffeine? Or gum? Or any substance? (It is very interesting when we start to judge those things we deem to be less threatening to our sobriety and therefore okay to keep. We really start to rationalize and explain. The fact is that these substances are addictive. Period. We can't afford to kid ourselves about that any more than we can about smoking, drinking, gambling, sexing, or any other addictions. All addictions mask feelings and change the way we deal with ourselves and others. We need to deal with them all.)

How about our work patterns? Are we a workaholic? Do we avoid our family and other issues by working tremendously long hours? Do we rationalize the time spent away from home with the explanation that we need to work this hard to keep our job? Economically, times are hard, so do we need to put in the extra effort in order to remain secure? Do we gain the major satisfaction and meaning from life through our work? Are we willing to look at how we work? Are we completely identified by the results of our work? Work is an area that many of us are afraid to examine. We might find that we use work to alter our mood. We might find that we use work to avoid things. We might find that work is much more than a job. Our work life is worth examining.

How about exercise? Do we use exercise to alter our mood? Do we become addicted to exercise and the results of exercise? Do we avoid things through exercise? Like work, this is a tough one to examine. We all need to exercise, so how much is too much? That is why we are taking a close look now. With prayer and meditation, we hope to find a balance point that is in line with our spiritual intent and our ability to share.

Let's look at cleansing to move toward becoming ready.

The first cleansing action is to examine what we eat and drink. Pick a day. Use the day to examine eating habits and drinking habits. We look at how we eat food and at our eating rituals.

The second cleansing action suggested is to make a special retreat, maybe for a weekend, at least for a day, to practice our examinations and cleansing rituals and to look at becoming entirely ready. Maybe we can go to the mountains or the beach. Maybe a friend has a cabin or summer home we can borrow. It should be a place away from our normal routine where we can be quiet and contemplative. Use the retreat to become as open as possible to all the actions necessary to becoming entirely ready.

Another cleansing action many find helpful is to make a day of silence. Don't speak for twenty-four hours. Don't listen to the radio or stereo. Don't watch TV. Don't read or clean house. Don't distract yourself with any diversions. Just be quiet and open. Let

the world enter you quietly. Contemplate this quote by Publilius: “I have often regretted my speech, never my silence.”

The next cleansing action suggested is a period of celibacy. We take some time—a week or more—to examine our sexual patterns and relationship patterns. We learn to become open to relating in a nonsexual manner. We take a close look at our own sexuality and how comfortable we are with it. Be open to our intuition and our spirituality in our sexual life.

The last cleansing action suggested is to release the clutter in our life. We take a look in our storage areas and garage. We get rid of the stuff we’ve been packing around for years every time we move. We give it to a charitable organization. We take a look in our closets. Possibly, if we haven’t worn it in a year or a year and a half, we give it away. **The point is, we quit holding on to things that are useless to us.** They may be very important to someone else who will use or wear them. We clean up our house or apartment. Those things we don’t use but have been holding on to “just in case” are let go. Release them. This way we make room in our life for new and exciting things. This is more than just a physical act. **It is symbolic of opening our life, mentally, emotionally, spiritually for new things.** It is very hard to reach for new adventures and growth in our lives when our hands are full, holding on to the baggage and excesses of our past. We are grateful for what we have in our life. Taking nothing for granted. Releasing what we can. **Getting ready to become more, and less, and better.**



**Judith shares a story of her attempts to deal with clutter:**

The first time my sponsor visited my apartment, she was taken aback by how messy it was. She went on and on about the importance of keeping my place clean and how a messy place had a dramatic effect, possibly more on an unconscious level, on my general outlook on life and recovery.

I told her I just couldn’t seem to keep my apartment

in order, which resulted in living in a mess all the time. I related feebly that I had turned the problem over to my Higher Power, and I had been praying to have God clean my home. Of course I had been mistaken then about the role of my Higher Power in my recovery. Then I went through the “being stuck on the Third Step” phase, where if my living space is messy, it must be God’s will that I live in a mess.

My sponsor and I had a good laugh about my first two attempts to deal with my messy apartment and how these ideas typically visit most of us in recovery as we make progress in understanding how the Steps work in our lives. I now know that if I don’t want to live in a mess, I need to pray to God for the willingness, courage, and motivation to clean up my own mess.



If we think of any other areas in our life that we’d like to be able to have a clearer understanding of, we can design a cleansing exercise to gain a new perspective. There is no better time than *now* to look at all the troubled areas in our life. We get ready to make over all those areas so that we become willing to examine them.



**Here is an example from Pam:**

Five years into recovery, I noticed that my spiritual life—my life in general—seemed empty and less than it could be. My marriage was not in trouble, but it was not a vibrant, joyful joining together of two people in love. My job was a job—full of stress, lots of demands, little satisfaction—and I seemed to be spending more and more time doing it. I had friends and activities but had little time to give to them and little time, it seemed, to give to myself.

At the suggestion of my sponsor, I decided to go on a retreat. I reserved a cabin on a remote island. It was an old

yoga retreat, with hot springs and a small waterfall, close to a state park with a mountain full of paths to walk. It seemed ideal. I took time off from work, about four days. I decided to do the retreat during the week as I didn't want to take time away from my family.

I went to the cabin. There was no TV or radio. There were no regular distractions. I decided to remain silent for the four days. I read and contemplated. I got up early every morning and meditated. I walked up the mountain at least once a day. I did exercises where I examined each part of my life up to this point. How did I use language? How did I like my work? What was I going to do in the future? What kind of wife was I and how was I going to change and improve? What was I doing to take care of my body? My mind? My spirit?

I fasted for a day, then I ate only healthy vegetarian meals. I stayed away from other people and just maintained my integrity unto myself. I got in touch with me again. I liked most of what I found. Some things I found I needed to change. Some things I noticed for the first time. I came back from my retreat ready to make things happen in every area of my life, and ready to let things happen as they would.



The last area we may wish to take a look at concerning Step Six is the **Seven Deadly Defects** or the **Seven Deadly Sins**. We've discussed some of these defects in other contexts, and it is worth reviewing those and adding more while we look at some areas that have troubled people from the beginning of recorded history.

The first of the Seven Deadly Sins is **pride** (excessive belief in one's own abilities). Our society is very confused about pride. Religion teaches us that pride goes before the fall. Psychology teaches us that a healthy sense of pride is essential for full functioning in the world. The Program teaches us that the misuse of pride and

the misapplication of pride have been part of the biggest cause of our problems. It is no wonder that we have mixed feelings and thoughts about pride.

With all the current interest in self-esteem and self-worth, there is another element to think about when we consider pride. Some of us come from families where we were not taught healthy emotional language and habits. We did not get a balanced perspective of the world and relationships, and some of us got a distorted view of where we stood in relation to the rest of the world. We felt (and many of us still do) **less than**. In order to make up for that, we learned to exaggerate and lie and blow our accomplishments way out of proportion in order to feel of some value. To succeed, we have to stop thinking we are **less than** other people. We tell ourselves we are *not* unworthy, inadequate, or unable to cope fully with life's problems. We begin to see the glass as half full instead of half empty. We have to get rid of feelings of inability before we can make progress. As we learn more about how false pride has held us back from our full potential, we remember, "If we change our thoughts, we can change ourselves." Our main problem centers in our mind, rather than our body.

Many of us still think our value as a human being is in what we do or what we don't do, rather than who we are. We think our value is about results—the car we drive, the person we marry, the house we live in, the job we have, the vacation we take, the clothes we wear. We've shifted the emphasis from who to what. Taking a look at pride means gaining a new perspective and looking again at who we are, not exclusively at what we have or do. Some of us have heard the slogan "The only person keeping us from having self-worth is ourselves." The willingness to work the Sixth Step on pride begins by understanding that having healthy pride in our accomplishments in life is fine as long as it is coupled with humility and gratitude. As long as we don't settle for an inferior quality of recovery and continue to strive for the best, that kind of pride will not cause harm.

However, out-of-control pride is dangerous. Too many people

are certain they “wrote the book.” They take false pride in their accomplishments and feel they have nothing left to learn. They are eager to tell everyone how much they know. **This is a sure way of closing a mind that desperately needs to be wide open.** This kind of pride has turned into arrogance and turns many people off. False pride and settling for inferiority will accomplish nothing. We no longer choose to have low self-worth or settle for **less than.** What value do I have as a human being? What do I have to offer to others in the way of service, wisdom, and help? Who have I become, and who am I becoming, in order to increase my value to the rest of humankind and myself? The thought that must go with us constantly is “How can I best serve You? Your will be done, not mine.”

We will talk about humility in relation to pride in the Seventh Step. Right now it is important to examine how we define ourselves. What criteria do we use to say who we are? “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m an alcoholic.” “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m a doctor.” “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m interested in spiritual growth and becoming my potential.” How do we define ourselves? That will say a lot about where we place pride in our lives.

Finally, we are reminded that pride is not to be feared. Although pride is listed at the top of the list of Seven Deadly Sins, the sin is having arrogance or false pride. Healthy pride is a necessary part of self-esteem and character growth. To repeat, our Program teaches us that the pride that “goes before a fall” is an unhealthy state, a symptom of character defects of egotism, grandiosity, and arrogance.

No harm will come to spiritual growth from the pride experienced when we freely admit to ourselves that any progress of ours was not made by us alone. Humble pride acknowledges the guidance of others and a faith in a Higher Power whom we call upon for inspiration and motivation. With humility and God’s help, we learn to have healthy pride in our “good works,” progress, and growth in recovery.

The second defect is **envy** (the desire for other’s traits, status,



abilities or situation). Envy is a form of fear. Just like pride, envy has a lot to do with results—other people’s. We envy the things, jobs, friends, relationships, status, and just about everything else that someone else has. We are taught to envy by advertisers and the media. We must keep up with the Joneses. We must live the lifestyle as shown in the beer commercials. We have to have the newest and the best and the biggest and the brightest. We fear we won’t get the “good things” and resent when others do.

Part of having things is the believable lie that external things make us okay. If we have all these nice things, we must be okay, right? So, if we don’t have them, something is wrong and we better get moving. Even more important, we must envy and feel bad about the people who have what we want. They obviously don’t deserve it the way we do. They must be drug dealers or liars and cheaters. Otherwise, how could they have what we want and deserve, and yet we didn’t get it and they did?

As we aim toward a lasting and comfortable willingness to change by using the Sixth Step, we find that envy is also a mask for jealousy. And jealousy is combined with other character defects such as self-will, dishonesty, hatred, selfishness, and resentment.

Jealousy is a great danger in recovery. The kind of thinking that causes jealousy makes us believe that the world owes us much more than we are able to earn by our own best efforts. To repeat, when we envy others for what they own, for their standing in the community, or for the people who care about them, we are on our way to self-pity. This state of mind produces not only jealousy, reactive depression, and an attitude that “life’s not fair,” but also anger against the world. Soon, that jealousy and anger turn against those people most dear to us. We are reminded that the Big Book calls jealousy *that most terrible of human emotions*.

Envy is very much caught up in desire. We are taught *desire* rather than *deserve*. Just because we want it must mean we are able to get it, right? The universe operates on a deserve principle—you will reap what you sow—yet we are taught if we just want it badly

enough, something will happen so we can get it. No wonder we become frustrated and depressed. Just affirm it enough in your life, and it will manifest. Wrong.

The same rules operate for everyone. We can get almost anything we need in life. We can't realistically get everything we want. We must learn to be selective and to work for what we want. Sow the seeds, and the plants will grow. The more seeds we plant, the more will grow . . . given proper nurturing, care, sunlight, water, and soil. But we only have time to plant so many seeds. And God plays a part in the weather and soil. Just as in the Sixth and Seventh Steps, God's part is as important as our part. We must do the **work**. God provides the environment and opportunity—and the power, direction, willingness, and the teachers.

If envy is a big part of our life, we take a look at how selective we've been and how we sow. We need to plant the seeds before we expect to harvest. We take a look to see if we are able to celebrate the accomplishments and victories of others. Do we feel good for someone else's triumph? We hope so. That is a big step on the path past envy.

We are reminded of the age-old wisdom, "There is not a passion so strongly rooted in the human heart as envy." In the past when we drank, used, or misbehaved, our self-worth was beaten down to the point of feeling inferior to those around us. We wallowed in our character defects of worthlessness, awkwardness, sadness, and self-pity. We were envious of those who had what we wanted.

Envy brought hatred, jealousy, anger, fear, disrespect, and distrust. We wished failure and disaster on people who had become successful or had gained in any way.

Before the Program, many of us wanted what others had, but we didn't know how to get it. Now we're happy with the miracles we receive in recovery. **We have discovered that doing is more important than having, and experiencing is more important**

**than possessing.** The willingness to work on our character defect of envy produces that positive practice of having more compassion, empathy, and love.

The next defect is **gluttony** (consuming more than required). Many of us do not balance our dietary habits. Many of us are addicted to sugar and carbohydrates. We binge and diet and binge and diet. We have eating problems. We are greedy in our eating habits, which affects our health. We've not examined the mix of exercise, nutrition, and spirit that is necessary to formulate a plan for living that provides energy, health, strength, and endurance. We have sloppy habits of taking care of this temple of the spirit. If we are greedy, we are never satisfied.

It is important to put all our habits into the context of becoming *entirely ready*. If we overlook one little addiction or one little bad habit or one little defect, are we just a "little" addictive? How can we claim abstinence if we still hold to other addictive habits or character defects? It is important that we realize that the Sixth and Seventh Steps are not just about alcohol or drugs or overeating or gambling or sexing. They are about putting our lives in alignment. **How honestly we work these Steps is in direct proportion to our desire for positive change.** No holding back. Please be willing to take a look at it all.

The next habit to examine is **sloth** (avoidance of physical or spiritual work), which is spiritual procrastination in all areas of our life. We hear that procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday. Many of us were constant procrastinators before we began our Twelve Step program. Addiction created the habit of delay because as long as we had our substance or destructive behavior, everything else could wait.

Now we know that action is truly the magic word. The slogan "Easy Does It" doesn't mean we put things off. It means to do it, but to do it in our Higher Power's good time. Slow growth, slowly making progress with our defects of character, doesn't mean postponement.

We can't put off airing problems to other people for fear of being ridiculed. We need answers early during our progress. When we attempt to ask for solutions, we can be clear and direct in our questions. We know our friends will always give us the right to be wrong and quickly correct faulty thinking. We can work through our character defects just by "pressing on." We do today what we are meant to do today. Many of us think we have no problem in this area because we work hard at our jobs. How lazy are we in our relationships? What kind of load do we carry around the house? How about our spiritual practice? Are we carrying our load there? Do we put in the time and effort to grow and expand, or do we just pay it lip service, if that? What about the other areas of our life? Are we continuing to grow mentally, emotionally, physically? Do we practice disciplines and put out the effort to make our time count? Sloth is the thief of time. The character defect of putting off actions "until things get better" is one of the most destructive detours we can make. Delays never make problems "go away;" they only make success harder to attain. If we shy away from "bringing out" our problems to others, we are sure to cause stress and misunderstanding.

Quite often, postponing facing up to reality results from fear that others will laugh at us. This is self-pity in action. **Solutions come from direct and specific action.** We always remember that others in our group give us "the right to be wrong," knowing that a change in direction is always possible for anyone with problems. Procrastination wastes precious time. When we procrastinate and delay working our Sixth and Seventh Steps, we are only making sure our problems will get worse. We remember that **solutions** come from taking action. Sloth is not just about results—it is about effort. Do we give full effort to everything we do? It is definitely worth looking at in our lives.

"I'll do it tomorrow" is a habit that leaves us always behind schedule. If yesterday's work is only getting done today, then how can today's work get done? It has to wait, of course, until

tomorrow. Can we catch up? No. We are in the habit of procrastinating. We have a black cloud over our head made up of guilt, anxiety, and worry. A feeling of failure creeps in.

In the Program, it's **a day at a time**. We try to do today's work today. What if we put off the first step of the work? Nothing will give us satisfaction unless we see the value of our day's work. Satisfaction comes from doing the job on time and reaching our goal **just for today**. If procrastination had an effect on only ourselves, it wouldn't be so bad. But no, it puts a strain on those around us. Tight schedules leave little time for conversation or for relaxed meal times, and no time to fit in the family activities. Procrastination tends to lock us out of our community, even the community of the Program. How can we share when we are in a state of mind that is preoccupied with ourselves and our problems?

Working on this character defect allows us to participate in our personal and fellowship life. The ability to concentrate, to use our time well, is everything. It is self-control. It's the Program in action. The Fourth Step speaks of instinct gone wild. We must get control of our instincts. When we are tired, we have feelings of uneasiness. These feelings come from stress and the strain of always rushing around. But the feeling of uneasiness also comes from an undernourished spirit, a spirit that never has time to go away to a quiet place and rest awhile. Don't we have enough in today's own troubles without making a double load for tomorrow?

Benjamin Franklin said, "Do you love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of." The Twelve Steps are the same for everyone. We are all given the choice, the means to break the habit of procrastination so we may be free to strive for spiritual growth in our lives.

The next defect to examine is **covetousness** (desire for material wealth or gain while ignoring the realm of the spiritual). We have a distorted view of coveting in society. Much like envy, coveting (or avarice, or desire, or greed) is cultivated by advertising and the media. We have to possess what others have. We must own and keep and grasp and hold tight all that we can. Examine

what is behind it—usually fear. Don't TV commercials make us fear we're "less than" if we don't have the advertised product?

The other sense of this word is coveting another person's partner. To inappropriately desire another or a thing is to covet. We covet all the time. It is important to examine this in our lives.

Covetousness brings up questions of ownership versus stewardship, openhandedness versus grasping and holding, and generosity versus greed and avarice. Where do we stand with these things in our lives? These are very weighty questions. It brings into question our whole view of the world, the people in it, and how we deal with them.

Are we greedy? Do we grab and reach and pull and grasp all that we can at the cost of others and ourselves? Do we value what we own and who we are in a relationship with more than who we are and who they are? Is status more important to us than substance? Are we more interested in holding and obtaining power than in becoming and reaching our potential?

We are asking more questions than we are answering here, but this is an important function of becoming *entirely ready*. We must have a fairly accurate idea of how we view life and how we operate if we are to be in a position to let go of our defects and help in transforming and changing. Most of us do not take the time to closely examine our lives and our manner of living. We make basic assumptions early in life and go on from there, rarely questioning if they need to be changed and if they were effective to begin with. Many of us took the values and methods of our parents at face value (even though we thought we rebelled and changed from them) and find ourselves living very similar lives to theirs. It is important to make sure we know what kind of life we are living if we are to change it. That is why taking the Fifth Step is so important. For that matter, *what a great opportunity the Twelve Steps offer us in reclaiming our lives*.

By accepting God's help, we learn to think clearly, honestly examine our lives, play fairly, and give generously. Our values change in recovery as we become less selfish and more **useful**. The value

screen through which we see life changes. We no longer ask only what everyone can do for us; we also ask what we can do for them. We no longer only seek out situations that comfort only us; we also discover ways to comfort. We find that we feel better about ourselves when we help others. We learn from our Program that what we may have been searching for our whole lives is wrapped up in service to others.

Our most valuable relationship is the one we have with our Higher Power, so we seek out situations and people that bring us into closer contact with our Higher Power.

The values we show in the work of recovery look different from the ones we once held. Every day brings a new opportunity to work on our character defects because our values no longer change with every passing fancy. **Our life now means something and counts for things that are good.**

The next defect to examine is **lust** (excessive craving for the pleasures of the body). Sex, and many issues surrounding sex, may be the most misunderstood and confusing area in recovery. Most of us never learned or were never modeled intimacy, so we confused sex with love, and lust with desire. For many of us, power is an issue in sex and lust, as is self-esteem. All this stuff gets wrapped up and mixed together and called sex or love or making love or intimacy. We usually don't have a clue what it is or what we're doing.

There is much recent research that concludes that many addicted people came from abusive, dysfunctional situations. As strongly as the evidence suggests that genetics plays the key role in determining a predisposition toward alcoholism and addictive behavior, new studies seem to indicate it is how we are treated and shown emotional context and modeling that determines how we move forward. **Although many of us may have come from less than ideal family situations, sponsors remind us that we, not our families, are working this Step, as we are right now.**

It makes sense that if we never learned to handle our feelings, we'd have to find a way to get by—drugs, sex, alcohol, or some-

thing. If we came from a family that denied; kept secrets; shamed; repressed and suppressed; physically, emotionally, or sexually abused us; or took part in any number of other ways of creating distortion in emotional, physical, and sexual responses, odds are our sex life is **goofy** and has been for a long time.

Many of us confuse having sex with being intimate. Many of us think that being accepted sexually is the same as being loved, only to be disappointed again and again. Many of us use sex to act out our aggression and hate of the opposite sex, in many different acts and obsessions. Men, in particular, seem to be drawn toward pornography and can have very active fantasy lives with very little contact with reality.

Advertising and the media have molded and shaped our perceptions of what is and is not a normal love life and how people relate to each other. If we grew up without a good model for intimacy, we may think some of the **junk** we see on TV, in the movies, and in the print ads is how people really behave and relate. If so, we are in for a long and confusing journey.

Lust, and all the areas associated with love and sex, is an area we need to closely examine in the light of our spiritual values. What do we really think of other people? Are they objects to be used and discarded, to be fondled and played with? Or are they people, with feelings and hearts and depth, to be cherished and nurtured and honored, just as we would wish to be? How do we treat the people we love? Warmly and openly and with respect? Or as badly as we wish, since, after all, we love them and they love us and they have to put up with us?

It is natural to have sexual drives and desires. It is part of being a spiritual being to express love through the body—openly, affectionately, passionately, and freely. In light of those spiritual values, it is important to examine monogamy (with sexually transmitted diseases being fatal or permanent now, it also is prudent to practice safe sex, under all circumstances) and all the aspects of being a sexual, spiritual person.

We are reminded what the Big Book says about sex on page 69.



“We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly, nor to be despised and loathed.”

What comes from our Higher Power is to be honored and treated with respect. Our sexuality has unlimited potential for good. We have so often turned this power in on ourselves and been destroyed by it or allowed it to destroy others.

The Sixth and Seventh Steps let us change our feelings about sex so that these new feelings can encourage wholesome relationships. When we walk with our Higher Power, our self-will doesn't run riot over our sex lives. Our spiritual awakening washes over all our relationships, even our most tender and personal.

Working on our own shortcomings allows us to gain a new sense of respect. We learn we can indeed love deeply. We find that sexuality is a powerful, life-giving force that enriches, bonds, and commits us to a special person. We no longer have to face remorse and guilt from uncontrolled self-driven lust. May we discover the joy in our God-given sexuality by treating ourselves and others with honor and respect.

Being spiritual does not mean being celibate or chaste. It may include these elements for different reasons and practices, but our body is as holy as our spirit and can celebrate the gift of love just as fully in harmony with all aspects of the spirit and love.

We need to look closely at how we relate to people. Do we dislike the opposite sex? Do we fear or hate our own sex? How do we identify ourselves as a sexual being? Once we are in a relationship with someone, does our behavior change? Do we quit trying, showing our feelings, and giving fully? Do we honor and respect the other person and the relationship? Once again, the more we know about our ways of dealing with the world and the people in it, the better we will be able to become “entirely ready.”



The last deadly defect or sin we will look at is **anger**. Anger is a difficult emotion for a lot of us to deal with because of how we were taught to deal with anger as children. Since it was not possible to show our anger toward adults, many of us have learned to deny, repress, substitute, and suppress anger. Many of us have carried this into our present situations. We never saw ourselves as angry people. We were “intense,” and occasionally we’d get mad, but we certainly didn’t see ourselves as angry.

One of the many program slogans says, “**Anger is but one letter away from danger.**” Many of us nursed long-standing resentments. Every time we thought about them, we got angry. What makes anger so dangerous is that it burns without consuming. It feeds on itself until it overwhelms all other emotions. **Anger is poison.**

When anger takes over, it acts with uncontrollable rage. We say things, feel things, and do things way out of proportion. Anger is emotional drunkenness.



**Sara shares her experience with anger and resentments:**

I always knew that I was hot-tempered and I had a short fuse, but I never viewed myself as angry. I guess I should have realized I had an anger problem when I first went to treatment. I was angry when they told me that I couldn’t drink. I was there because I had a drug problem, and how dare they tell me that I can’t drink. I had a rebellious attitude, especially toward authority figures.

I used to deal with my anger one of two ways: I was **hot**, explosive, enraged, hostile, or furious; or I was **cold**, denying and suppressing my anger. I learned that those two ways were *unskillful* and had negative impacts on my life. I was very sarcastic—I still am working on that because the definition of sarcasm is “a cutting, often ironic remark intended to wound,” and that goes against my values.

I also had a lot of loud arguments with physical fights (hot), or else I experienced severe depression, headaches, and stomachaches (cold).

After I spent two years “**trying to stop starting**” in the Program (I usually relapsed at six months), I decided that there were some character defects I needed to deal with. I had turned so much of my anger inward that I was ashamed of myself and my behaviors. I also believed a lot of things happened to me through no fault of my own, that I was a victim. That caused me pain that I had never dealt with. I also had a large list of resentments.

Step Six is about the principle of willingness, and I became willing to make some changes. I needed to deal with the character defects of sarcasm, fear, rage, control, and anger. To me, that means don’t do what I want to do.

Step Seven is about humility, and I knew I needed help getting the good things: happiness, joy, freedom, honesty, unselfishness, and purity. Again, I interpret that to be doing what I don’t want to do. I need to act out of love instead of fear or anger.

I decided it was time to change. I listened to the advice from someone in the Program, and I went to a five-day seminar on anger and resentments. I learned skillful ways to deal with anger. Because anger stems from fear, if I identify the fear, I can deal with the underlying issue. I also use meditation as a way to deal with my anger; I focus on my breathing and use other techniques for forgiving myself or smiling at situations that make me angry.

As for my resentments, I decided to take back control of my feelings and let go of my need to punish the people that had wronged me. I no longer had to refeel the pain from my old hurts. One night after a meeting, someone told me **resentment is me taking the poison and waiting for them to die.** I’m no longer at the “**jumping-off place,**” wanting to die. It’s time to let go and let God. My sponsor

suggested that I pray for the people I have resentments toward, ask God to give them what they deserve, and eventually ask God to give them the same things I ask for myself.

Being honest about my anger, first with myself and then with others, has allowed me to own my mistakes and to deal with my anger in a *skillful* manner. I didn't make these changes overnight, and I didn't do it alone. With my Higher Power as my guide, I have slowly begun the process of change. Now, with eighteen months clean time, I am becoming the person He wants me to be. I believe **“the most satisfactory years of my existence lie ahead.”**



Because we are in recovery doesn't mean we won't get angry, but the Sixth and Seventh Steps give us a process of working through anger. We learn that what usually fuels anger is fear and guilt. We can dissolve anger. The remedy for fear is faith, for faith means courage. When we are ready to replace our anger with faith, the fear and guilt that cause the anger is worked through, and the anger is removed.

Courage is what makes us do the right thing even when nobody else is doing it. We can find happiness while surrounded by darkness; we can be more loving in the middle of hate and envy, and more serene when surrounded by chaos, fear, and anger. The ideas of the Sixth and Seventh Steps help us face impossible odds. We learn that any act of courage may produce future victory for ourselves and others. The courage, which we want, takes its strength from faith, not from bravery or physical power. **Let truth and faith, our readiness, and humble quest give us courage so that when fear knocks, no one is there.**

One word often heard in group discussions is “willingness.” Yet the willingness to do something cannot exist without the specific action required to do it, and that takes courage—courage to build our character. It is courage that turns possibilities into realities and assures us that progress in improving our character is

possible. Experience teaches us that courage keeps our character defects under control.

When courage guides our willingness, we can be sure that we will not only be capable of accomplishing success but that we are also worthy of it. When we know that a goal is worth going for, courage has judgment and carefulness as allies, even though we may be moving against the tide of popular opinion. **Many of the people we come into contact with in our lives who don't live by any Program or belief think our Twelve Step way of life is trite and full of silly slogans and ideas. We can't be concerned with opinions about our way of life, even if others think it's trite, because this way of living life has become our secret to life.** We overcome our fears about setting and working toward goals. It helps us to remember **courage is fear that has said its prayers.**

The fact is, underneath all the denial and rationalization, most of us were in a constant rage, seething. For many of us in recovery, we carry a huge load of anger without realizing it. Many of us stuff anger away like “putting hungry dogs in the basement.” Sooner or later, we open the basement door to express a little anger, and the hungry dogs slip out. We move into a rage out of proportion to what triggered the anger. And most of the time we don't have a clue as to what happened.

Anger is a common defect in our attitudes and personalities. Like all other character defects, anger grows more harmful the longer it is contained. Unless we expose it freely for others to see, it can consume all of our good intentions. We must “get the monkey off our backs” before it reaches our throats.

How can we possibly make peace and form worthwhile relationships unless we bring anger into the open by working Steps Six and Seven? Letting go of hidden anger and returning to a stable state of mind is one of the first actions in finding a much more comfortable and acceptable peace with life.

We find that “letting it all out” through the Sixth and Seventh Steps is the way to become freer and happier. We continue to take daily personal assessments of our spiritual growth by moni-

toring our anger. The old truism of what to do when we become angry—to count to ten—helps us practice the letting go process of the Sixth and Seventh Steps and become better suited in dealing with anger in an appropriate way.

Anger and fear are closely tied together, and many of us in the Program learned to handle our fear with booze, drugs, food, and many other mood-altering behaviors. Now that we are in recovery, we have to learn new ways of coping with fear and anger. We need to learn healthy ways of expressing anger.

One of the biggest risks to a person in recovery is **self-righteous anger**. We become very dangerous to ourselves and others when we are “right.” Being right used to mean a free check to treat a person who is “wrong” any way we chose. Especially if we loved that person, it meant we could really cause havoc in the name of being “right.”

Most of us never learned that “right” doesn’t mean exclusive. There are many ways of being right. We just assumed that there was only one way. We were taught that by our parents, our places of worship, and our schools. As we move into our birthright as spiritual beings, we discover that “right” is a cage, not a freedom. Being right is a perspective, not a license for angry behavior. Each of us has a unique perspective, thank God, and therefore a unique way of being “right.” We must learn to temper our anger based on self-righteousness and learn to open our minds and hearts to different points of view. It doesn’t mean we won’t get angry. **It just means we won’t hurt others so often with our “rightness.”**

In looking at anger as a character defect, it is important to realize that anger is a legitimate emotion. To deny all anger in the name of spiritual growth is as unhealthy as being angry all the time in the name of being right. We get angry. We need to learn how to express that anger in a healthy, nondamaging manner. It is the inappropriate expression of anger and the out-of-proportion expression of anger that is a defect and causes us and others harm.

It was at a meeting that an old-timer said, “I am punished by my defects of character, not because I have them.” Newcomers can be puzzled by that comment for a long time. How could we be punished by our defects? Then it dawns on them. God doesn’t need to keep a watch on us and note our defects; our defects keep us from becoming all that we can become and limit our ability to grow. Joe McQ. reminds us, “When we have taken the first five Steps, it is at this point that many people make the mistake of turning it over to God and expecting God to apply Steps Six and Seven to their lives. But these are our Steps—God doesn’t need to take Steps Six and Seven. We do.” Lack of power is our dilemma. Anger (and the other six sins) keeps us from God. Without God we lack the power to live.

Another view of this is the story about Buddha talking to some of his students about anger. Buddha said anger is like picking up a burning coal with the intention of throwing it at another person. We are the ones who get burned in the process.



### **Let’s take a look at Joe’s story:**

Before my recovery began, five years ago, the Seven Deadly Sins accurately described my basic character. After my last drink, I discovered, to my amazed awakening, that the Seven Deadly Sins accurately described *human nature*. Were Steps Six and Seven going to change my basic human nature? I doubted it. So it took me four years of somewhat miserable dryness to get to the Seventh Step prayer. But then I was in for some surprises—seven of them.

Slowly, very slowly, at a caterpillar pace, I realized (I love Program realizations) that God is in the transformation business. Before I was even fully aware of it, a change was taking place in my behavior.

As a drinking author, I took great pride in my work. My pride far surpassed my accomplishments. My ego was always fatter than my bank account. Through recovery, I have

learned to write what I like and to like what I write. I no longer reach for the proverbial brass ring or yearn to write the nation's next best-seller. I have lowered my sights and have found my true niche. I am content, and I like myself more this way. Surprise! Step Seven has changed pride into self-esteem.

Did I mention yearning for literary fame and fortune? Well, I never worked toward such a goal. I wrote for money. My sole motive was personal gain; no more, no less. Today, I write from a new heart, with the reader's mental and spiritual welfare in mind. Surprise! Caring and sharing have replaced selfishness.

When I was a drinking drunk, I firmly believed that lust was a natural part of the human makeup. I often wrote highly of it, using acceptable euphemisms such as "eros," "passion," "fervent love," and "burning desire." It wasn't until sobriety and my third marriage that I could "respect," "trust," "adore," "obey," or "be true" to a loving woman. My grandiose ego is far less grandiose. I now enjoy what I once thought was a contradiction in terms: moral sex. Surprise! Love has conquered lust.

Anger was my middle name. Getting even was the name of my game. My bywords were: "I'll show them!" and "Who do they think they are?" and "They aren't going to get away with that!" This violent need to punish others blinded me to the rights of others. Sober, I learned that all people are as human as I am and no more deserving of my self-righteous anger than I am of theirs. Surprise! Anger has given way to tolerance.

I was a glutton for everything sensual, including the "pleasure" of intoxication. As it turned out, I was really a glutton for punishment, drinking anything from beer and wine to whiskey and (on one pitiful occasion) aftershave lotion. I wanted more of everything in sight, no matter what it was. I was worse than an underprivileged kid let



loose in an unguarded candy store. I was an insatiable sponge. Today, thanks to Step Seven, I no longer pray to have what I want; I pray to want what I have. Surprise! Acceptance has displaced gluttony.

“Don’t do today what you can put off till tomorrow.” Remember that kind of barroom advice? I do. I lived by it. Even in sobriety, I found myself procrastinating with the Steps, slow to read, study, and understand the programs outlined in the Big Book, fainthearted about attending meetings—in other words, dragging my feet. That’s why it took me four years to get to Step Seven. Yet, this is when I discovered that I would rather make a meeting than watch TV, that I prefer the Big Book to novels, that I’d rather pray than think. Surprise! The joy of living has replaced sloth.

Today, I understand envy as the incredible sadness that overwhelmed me when others were successful. I was hypercritical and insanely jealous of the “greats,” never once looking at the time, energy, and work they put into their success. I simply resented their “good luck,” “connections,” or “secret.” Today, I find myself admiring hardworking people who make it. There was a time, by the way, when I resented the winners in the Program. I now let them serve as examples for me. Surprise! I stick with the winners. Envy is being replaced by inspiration.

Today, I live in a daily state of surprise as Steps Six and Seven work on me. I have surrendered to the spiritual process that neutralizes character defects. Someday, maybe mine will be removed. As I said at the beginning, I move at a caterpillar pace. But that’s okay today. As a slow-moving caterpillar spinning my cocoon to the design of the Twelve Steps, I will emerge free as a butterfly. That’s a promise God always keeps.



We take a look at the part anger plays in our life and how appropriate our expression of anger is. Are we right a lot? Are we upset and judgmental a lot? Are people afraid of us? Do we punish people with our rightness? We look at anger and its consequences and then move toward being entirely ready to let it go.

It is time now to put this discussion into balance and prepare to move on to the Seventh Step. We have asked a lot of hard questions. We examined some pretty difficult areas of living. We've decided to look for excess in our lives. We are now ready to take action. What, exactly, does that mean?

Can you see why it says in the *Twelve and Twelve* that this is the Step that separates the men and women (winners) from the boys and girls (losers)? It is gut-check time. Are we ready to change our ways of living or not? It is not a "maybe" proposition. It is "fish or cut bait." **Let's fill that big self-centered hole in our being with spiritual usefulness.** Perhaps many of us have approached this Step and the one to follow in a less active manner. Odds are we may still be battling some pretty major defects in our life, too. This Step requires commitment and specific action. There is no better time to get to it than right now.

As we're taught in the Twelve Steps, the chief activator of our defects has been **self-centered fear**. Mainly fear that we would lose something we already possessed or that we would fail to get something we demanded. Living on the basis of unsatisfied demands, we obviously were in a state of continual disturbance and frustration. Therefore, we are taught, there will be **no** peace unless we are able to reduce these demands.

We hear in the Program that F.E.A.R. = Frustration, Ego, Anxiety, and Resentment. We don't want to return to the life we led before recovery, but fear should never be the reason why we don't. Fear keeps us from being open to the Program and from being entirely ready. **If we're only in recovery because we're afraid of returning to the old way of life, we'll never pay attention and open our hearts to learn about the new.** We'll be too

busy looking back over our shoulders to make sure the old life isn't creeping up on us.

We have to want the Program out of a desire for a new life, not out of fear for the old. Positive thinking and behavior will be in charge if we are to make any character growth. Every fear encourages negative thinking that can destroy us. Guilt and shame come from the past, just like fear. If those feelings are what drive us, we will never grow. The Sixth and Seventh Steps let us examine our fears. We learn to take an inventory of each fear until we understand what causes it. Then we will be able to find a way to work through it.

How do we reduce our fears? How do we move into graceful living and growth toward spiritual expression? The answers lie in our ability to become humble and trust—through the Seventh Step.

In concluding our discussion on Step Six, we hear from Joe McQ., who tells a favorite story.



### **Joe McQ. on “stripping away:”**

I have a pretty rocking chair down in my office. When I first bought the building, someone had run off and left the chair behind. There wasn't anything else there of any value, but there was this old rocking chair. It was just a horrible-looking mess, painted black, with one of the rungs broken out of the back of it. I decided I'd keep it, thinking maybe one of these days I might put it together. Quite a few years went by, and it just sat in the attic. Several times some of the guys tempted me to throw it away; in fact, I'd find it around by the Dumpster and I'd bring it back, saying I was going to look at it one of these days.

I finally got this old rocking chair out of the attic and into the light downstairs so I could really see it. And as I began to look at it, I saw that it was a really fine chair. I got some paint stripper and I began to strip it. I stripped all

the paint away and found that it was solid oak. I took the old raggedy bottom that had been covered over many, many times with different cloth and tacks, and I tore it off and threw it away. There was one broken rung, and I made an identical one by bending one and putting it in there. I sanded and refinished this chair.

Finally, I took it to the upholstery shop. I asked the man there how much it would cost to put a nice white velvet bottom in it. He looked at it and said, "I'll be glad to put it in there, but before I fix it, I'll offer you \$350 for that chair." That beautiful, valuable chair was always there. It was there all the time! It was simply covered up. That chair has always been beautiful since the day the furniture maker made it. And that's the way I am—and you are—with God's life inside us. God made us this way—beautiful and valuable.

Like the rocking chair, over a period of years, I covered myself up with all sorts of things and made a big mess. The Steps of this program have enabled me to uncover, discover, and discard. It's a program of getting rid of things to get down to what we want. It's not a program of getting anything. It's a program of getting rid of things: *uncovering, discovering, and discarding*.<sup>5</sup>



