

STEP SIX

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

The spiritual principle of Step Six is willingness. At first, this step seemed to be an impossible undertaking until we realized that we were talking about a lifelong process. Our newfound awareness of our defects of character, as well as the realization that the removal of them might take the rest of our lives, was, for some of us, difficult and painful. But all that was required was to become entirely ready to let go of the defects of character that were blocking our relationship with a Higher Power. What we needed was a readiness to let go, and an openness to allow our loving God to do deep and lasting work in our hearts and minds.

Character defects are, by their very nature, expressions of self-will. We realized that by practicing them it was impossible to practice spiritual principles. We could no longer afford to deny or suppress our defects with drugs or self-will. We became responsible for our recovery and for letting God work within us.

For many years, we did not recognize our defects of character as such. In fact, we often relied on them in much the same way that one relies on a crutch. They were coping mechanisms. For example, rather than dealing with issues of intimacy, we would often sabotage relationships by using our character defects to push people away. We lied, cheated, and manipulated as a way not only to get what we wanted, but also to allow us to project a false image that we had of ourselves, an image which we wanted others to perceive as well.

In reality, many of our lives were full of strife. It felt like life was a war — us against them. There was a fierce competition for power, wealth, ideas, and love. We were afraid that we would not measure up; we would be losers. We lost our self-esteem, dignity, and self-respect. We became estranged from our society, our work, our families, and our friends.

At times, some of us would not accept limits to our needs, passions, and ambitions. We lost our sense of social harmony. We paid little attention to our means, our consciences, or our faculties. We welcomed the label “outlaw.” We dared society to discipline us by ignoring its laws, norms, and customs. Then, we were outraged and surprised when society acted against us!

Alternatively, some of us took the other tack, perhaps a much more dangerous and heartbreaking one. We were fatalistic. We accepted other people’s constraints on our needs, desires, and ambitions. We believed that our lot in life was inevitable, inescapable, and miserable. Finally, we reached the point where our disease enslaved us. Our needs were unfulfilled, our passions frustrated, and our ambitions thwarted because we could see no other way to live. The sad fact was that we cruelly and piteously oppressed ourselves and usually found other people who were more than willing to help us do so.

Another source of our character defects was the degree to which we integrated into society. We chose withdrawal and were egoistic, or we chose involvement and were self-effacing. On the one hand, we became so enamored with our own projects, plans, and personalities that we lost our humanity. On the other, we were so

intensely involved in what others were doing that we lost ourselves.

When we chose to immerse ourselves in the lives of others, it was easy to believe that we were really quite heroic and had their best interests at heart. It was often very difficult to admit that our concern was control, our worry was manipulation, and our anxiety about others was an avoidance of our own needs, desires, and ambitions. We chose not to develop our personalities and we paid the price for it. To the extent that we did not allow others to grow and learn, they may have disliked and resented us. To the extent that we failed to develop our own personalities, others may have taken advantage of our weaknesses.

In the Third Step, we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a God of our own understanding. We became willing. However, at that point, we were not yet truly aware of what our will and our lives meant, specifically. After taking the Fourth and Fifth Steps we became aware, in a very real way, what our will and our life had been. We had now written down, in black and white, the exact nature of what was standing between us and a true realization of what we had set out to achieve in the Third Step. Step Six required us to let a power greater than ourselves work in our lives. But were we still willing?

By the time we got to Step Six, it was apparent that our needs were often distorted, our passions sometimes abnormal, and our ambitions warped. Many people have difficulty finding a proper way to associate with others and with society at large. Addicts have the same problem compounded by a spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical disease. Our defects of character, together with our virtues, had provided us with a way of behaving. The difference

between our defects and our virtues is their effectiveness in helping us live clean spiritual lives.

We took our moral inventories and admitted the exact nature of our wrongs. It was easy for us to see that those were action steps. It was difficult for many of us to see that Step Six was a step that required just as much, if not more, action. The action we took was becoming entirely ready to let our Higher Power remove or transform these imperfections of our character. This state of readiness applied as much to our minor faults as it did to our major shortcomings — pride, anger, greed, lust, gluttony, envy, and laziness. Our goal was to be entirely ready to let go of each of our defects of character and to practice the faith required to let God remove them.

To become entirely ready, some of us performed exercises such as writing, sharing, and praying about our defects of character. Many defects were so objectionable that we could easily relinquish them. But to let go of defects that we had become attached to, we needed to pray for willingness. Thus, we used the defects of character, identified in our Fifth Step, as a basis when writing examples of how they had played out in our lives. We wrote to discover why they no longer worked for us and how they had hurt us and the people we loved. Talking with our sponsors, or at meetings, we shared the results of what we had written as a way of increasing our readiness to let go of these defects.

Our newfound awareness was making it impossible for us to comfortably continue practicing our character defects. Going beyond our own self-interest and becoming concerned with the feelings and well being of others was new behavior. This new attitude was contrary to our prior

self-obsession, which had in fact been the root of our disease.

No one was asking us to be perfect in our application of this spiritual goal. Step One was the beginning of the process of losing our obsession with marijuana and compulsive using. By the time we reached Step Six, the compulsion to use and the obsession with the drug had been removed from us. If we had practiced that kind of willingness once, why not try the same kind of willingness with our imperfections? Our faith had cleared the path for recovery. Could we continue on by surrendering our defects of character? Yes. By practicing Step Six, we acquire the humility needed to take Step Seven.