

Confession Is Good for the Soul

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save,
nor his ear too dull to hear.

But your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you,
so that he will not hear....

The way of peace they do not know;
there is no justice in their paths.
They have turned them into crooked roads;
no one who walks in them will know peace.

So justice is far from us,
and righteousness does not reach us.
We look for light, but all is darkness;
for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows....

“As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD.
“My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in
your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the
mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their
descendants from this time on and forever,” says the
LORD. – Isaiah 59:1-2, 8-9, 21 (NIV)

We've heard it forever: confession is good for the soul.
Why? Often criminals confess, and by the time they get to
trial they're in an all-out effort to set aside that confession.
They don't seem to think it benefits their soul or any part of
them.

We each know, instinctively, the truth of beneficial results from admitting our wrong. Renounced confessions as often as not result from the lawyer's choice rather than the defendant's. Perhaps, though, the defendant already has the benefit of the release inherent in confession and now wants that additional plus of avoiding punishment under the judicial system.

For OA members though, the punishment usually already happened. We're far harsher in meting out vengeance to ourselves than any impartial tribunal and certainly more so than a loving God offering grace for the asking.

The Fifth Step brings release and relief, instead of the judgment we expect instead of the judgment we expect from the other person and already feel from the God we've cringed from or avoided because of our perceived unworthiness. Instead of condemnation we find confirmation of our humanity, of our membership in a community with the common history of trying to eat our way out of shame. The result of confession is not vilification but— surprise — *validation!*

We come out of the experience with God's words written in our hearts: "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever." – Isaiah 59:21(b) (NIV)

Slimming Steps

What does forgiveness feel like? How does it feel to learn you are part of a group and accepted?

The Exact Nature of Our Wrongs

“Teach me, and I will be quiet;
show me where I have been wrong.
How painful are honest words!
But what do your arguments prove?
Do you mean to correct what I say,
and treat the words of a despairing man as wind?...
“But now be so kind as to look at me.
Would I lie to your face?
Relent, do not be unjust;
reconsider, for my integrity is at stake.
Is there any wickedness on my lips?
Can my mouth not discern malice?” – Job 6:24-26, 28-30 (NIV)

Beyond the value of telling your darkest secrets to somebody else and finding that person doesn't recoil from you, the other human in the room for your Fifth Step serves a very real purpose. The aim of the Step is *not* to recount every transgression from your first memory to your present anger at the invasiveness of the Step. Instead, it's an opportunity for an outside opinion, for another person's input.

Have you seen an image of your home from a satellite? Have you stood high enough above a familiar place to see it from a different perspective? The familiar scene is recognizable, but probably you see aspects never before obvious to you.

Beyond simply the novelty of the Step Five event, new insights can be gained from the experience. Your sponsor (or other companion) has that overview on your life, developed by hearing your summary of those issues bothering you. The character trait we see as procrastination another may recognize as fear, even panic, at the task avoided.

The woman who led me to Twelve Step recovery asked me various times of my feelings, my reactions, my thoughts about happenings and situations. Soon she stopped me immediately when I began a sentence, responding to a question about *my* feelings with the name of the dominant person in my life, the object of my codependency. Once she began calling my attention to the habit, it became exceedingly clear to me, yet for years I'm sure it existed without a hint of it in my conscious mind.

The Big Book sets out two reasons for the Fifth Step, reasons that the "solitary self-appraisal" of Step Four is insufficient. First, if we skip Step Five, we're likely to return to the behavior that drove us into the program. In addition, it's likely we won't learn enough humility, fearlessness, and honesty until we reveal our deepest, darkest secrets to someone else. We're actors, accustomed to putting on a "game face" for the world while disguising our anger and insecurity. We're good at rationalization, and after a while we find ourselves explaining the equivocation to someone else, listening to ourselves as we do, and actually believing what our ears hear *us* say.

The best way out – in this and in so much of life – is through.

We pocket our pride and go to it, illuminating every twist of character, every dark cranny of the past. Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator.... We feel we are on the Broad Highway walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 75)

Slimming Steps

What are your deepest darkest secrets? What have you never told another human being and fully, until now, intended to take with you to the grave? Can you see a benefit of telling someone else? How would you feel if you no longer had such a burden to carry?

Can you generalize your character defects? What do you do over and over? If you have done your Fifth Step, what did you learn about yourself?

It's Not Over Until It's Over

"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
Selah – Psalm 46:10-11 (NIV)

The second part of the Fifth Step is for only two of the three participants in the first part: you and God:

Returning home we find a place where we can be quiet for an hour, carefully reviewing what we have done. We thank God from the bottom of our heart that we know Him better. Taking this book down from our shelf we turn to the page which contains the twelve steps. Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. Is our work solid so far? Are the stones properly in place? Have we skimmed on the cement put into the foundation? Have we tried to make mortar without sand? (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 75)

The explicit instructions include:

- Find a place where we can be quiet for an hour.
 - Review the Fifth Step conversation.
 - Thank God for better knowledge of him.
 - Open the Big Book to Page 57 and read Steps One through Five.
 - Consider whether we have omitted any part of any of these directions.
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- ☑ Ask four questions:
 - ✓ Is our work solid?
 - ✓ Are the stones in place?
 - ✓ Have we skimped?
 - ✓ Did we try to make mortar without sand?

Is our work solid? That's an easy question. What of the other three? What do they mean?

The first hint appears in Bill's Story on page 12 where, talking of his conversation with Ebby, he says:

It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning. I saw that growth could start from that point. Upon a foundation of complete willingness I might build what I saw in my friend. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 12)

The willingness that is Step One is the foundation on which the building is begun. On page 47 the cornerstone is identified:

We needed to ask ourselves but one short question. "Do I now believe, or am I even willing to believe, that there is a Power greater than myself?" As soon as a man can say that he does believe, or is willing to believe, we emphatically assure him that he is on his way. It has been repeatedly proven among us that upon this simple cornerstone a wonderfully effective spiritual structure can be built. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 47)

The analogy is to building an arch and is first mentioned on page 62, which also identifies the Step Three decision as the keystone of the arch:

First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most Good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and

triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom.

(*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 62)

The “powerful cement” binding the materials is said to be partially “the feeling of having shared in a common peril.” (Page 17)

This passage, at the end of Step Five on page 75, says:

Carefully reading the first five proposals we ask if we have omitted anything, for we are building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 75)

As we complete each Step, the arch grows in size as well as strength of structure. The arch concept, while ancient, is intricate. Arches are made of wedge-shaped blocks set with their narrow side toward the opening so that they lock together. The topmost block, called the keystone, when locked into place insures the arch cannot collapse under any amount of weight. From the Coliseum of ancient Rome to the Parisian Arc de Triomphe to New York City’s Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Arch at Grand Army Plaza, arches memorialize triumphant marches. Perhaps Bill W. wrote remembering the arches in and around Winchester Cathedral, the site of his own first spiritual experience. Whatever the image leading to the metaphor, thousands of Twelve Steppers over the decades certainly have passed through this triumphal arch to freedom.

Slimming Steps

What Steps have you taken? What lessons have you learned on your march this far? What do you think the question about making mortar without sand means?

Naturally

I roar, a lion incensed
you deign to cross me.
I scurry, a trembling mouse,
as you approach.
Like a wood rat I claim
your bauble for its sparkle.
It's natural.
For an animal.
I want to be more.
I need to be more.
I need a new nature, God.

Step Six

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

Ready to Let God

Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, “A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar”.... Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.

All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.... This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.... You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.’ “

As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. – 2 Chronicles 20:2-3, 13, 15b, 17, 22 (NIV) [Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-30.]

Step Six says we were entirely ready to let God remove our defects of character. It feels a lot like Step Three revisited. Maybe revisiting Three is a good idea after Four and Five. We’ve discovered how deeply entrenched our character defects are by Step Six. We figure we’ve already asked for relief from our weaknesses, many of us for years and years. We’ve earnestly prayed, “God, give me the power to resist...” and “God, help me stop....” We’ve had mixed results. The same outcome we got in dieting for years and years and years. The same success we had from the

resolutions to do anything right. The same failures, time after time. Why hasn't God helped us when we asked? We already admitted way back at Step One we were powerless and couldn't do this.

There's a shorthand version of the first three Steps: I can't. God can. I'll let him.

But we *don't* let him. We're still asking *him* to help *us*. And therein lies the problem. Look at the story of Jehoshaphat on hearing of the coming threat from Moab and Ammon. He cried to God for help, bewailing. He reminded God they would turn to him in the event of famine or plague. He blamed God for not letting Israel defeat Moab and Ammon earlier. He griped that now Israel didn't have the power to defeat the armies advancing. In all his protestations, he overlooked the obvious. "This is God's fight, not yours, King." Jehoshaphat sent out what we'd now call a praise team. And God won.

I can't. God can. I'll let him. That doesn't say, "I'll recruit God as my assistant." It says, "I surrender. Here I am, God, reporting for duty. I stand here, cowed by my character defects lined up here before us. Can I hang onto your coattails and watch you wipe them out?"

Slimming Steps

Write what it would be like to be an actor in God's play, not the director of your own. Describe how you've tried to live by self-propulsion. How have you been self-centered in your relationship with God?

What Does Willingness Mean?

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." ...

But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Genesis 22:1-3, 11-12 (NIV) [Read Genesis 22:1-12]

I hate some of the Old Testament stories. When my children were day-care age, I "interviewed" a church day care as to their curriculum. I mentioned Noah's ark, and the woman said, oh, they used that story all the time. I told her that wasn't a picture of God as I knew him, someone who gets mad and destroys humanity to just start over. She didn't understand, but I put my kids there anyway, lacking a more suitable alternative. The story of Abraham's going to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac is equally abhorrent.

Still, for adults, what a lesson it teaches! We need to be entirely ready to have God remove our character defects. What does entirely ready mean? It means absolute trust.

When it looks like God's careening down the wrong path with your life, it means you resist the urge to grab the wheel. It means whatever is most precious to you – your reputation, your wealth, your family, your career, your abstinence, anything! – will not stand in the way of your blind obedience to God's will. He has no obligation to show you the whys. He doesn't have some "splaning to do" as Ricky often told Lucy in the TV show *I Love Lucy*. Faith. Trust.

There are activities meant to build group cohesiveness involving blindfolded people falling backwards, then being gently passed from hands to hands. Could you do it calmly? Could you do it at all? If you knew God's hands were there to catch you, would the answer be closer to yes – or further away? How real is your God? Is he such a spirit, a wisp, so disassociated with the physical, you couldn't trust him physically?

Isn't it easier to trust him physically than mentally or spiritually?

Slimming Steps

Write about it. How well do you trust God? How ready are you to have him remove defects of character that are an integral part of you? How can you cope? How could you decline?

Opposite of Fat is Understanding?

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. – Isaiah 6:10 (KJV)

My drug of choice historically has been sugar. I'm every bit as addicted to sweet rolls, brownies, and bread pudding as anyone is to rum, vodka or Coors. The effect comes close to being the same, too. Food addiction causes a person to break out in fat and bad knees while alcoholics end up with DWI's and cirrhosis, but both dull the spirit. Each presents a means by which life's pains, rages – and joys – burrow unseen, unobserved and undetected, but for the inner turmoil caused by the suppression. "Restless, irritable and discontent," Dr. Silkwood called it. "[W]hile they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false." The restlessness continues "unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking" their drug of choice. (quotations from *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages xxviii-xxix)

When I'm detoxed from sugar, I'm a different person. I worked with a counselor in both conditions. At the beginning, when she asked how I felt about a subject, the first word out of my mouth was my husband's name. I recognized no feelings, no opinions, no ideals, no interests of my own. Instead, serving the whims of the master of the house had

become my world. To make some kind of room for me, I found it necessary to stake out a spot by forcing a space for me – filling it all with my massive body. Only when I managed to break the addictions – to food and to him – was I able to allow myself the luxury of recovery. My heart truly had been made fat, as Isaiah understood. My eyes were shut, my ears heavy, and my sight, hearing, and above all my understanding all remained buried under the mounds of fat.

In Step Six we become wholly ready for God to remove our defects of character. Can it be one of your defects of character is worshipping another god, whether that god might be a person you feel the need to please or even a self-image you feel the need to retain?

Slimming Steps

If you move past the list of character defects named in describing Step Four, do you find false gods? What unconventional defects of character do you have?

Pardon My Asking, Lord

Lord, did you hesitate, waffle or pause
before touching the crusted and unseeing eyes?
Did the odor distract from your virtuous cause,
did the man disappear amid lice and the flies?

How did you feel when the leprous came
calling "Unclean!" as the Hebrews required?
Were you repulsed by the old and the lame
reeking with filth and with feculence mired?

Probably not. I guess perfected love
overlooks filth, can set foulness aside.
Love in its essence would tower above
bias, see vile folk beatified.

Perfect I'm not. But you told me to be
and your life is my model, your spirit my goal.
Lord, hear my prayer. Give me grace, set me free
to bypass my hang-ups, to love every soul.

Let me shake any hand when a tender is made,
hold the patient with AIDS in a heartfelt embrace.
Inmates and homeless I would greet unafraid,
passing to others the strength of your grace.

A Human Doing

Trust in the LORD and do good;
 dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Delight yourself in the LORD
 and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD;
 trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,
 the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.
Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
 do not fret when men succeed in their ways,
 when they carry out their wicked schemes. – Psalm
37:3-7 (NIV) [Read Psalm 37.]

I came across the phrase “a human doing” as opposed to a human being. Neat! And right to the point. “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” is a Herculean task in the December days of rush and purchase, cook, eat, wrap, eat, run back out for the forgotten present, trek back for wrapping paper, watch the weather, we need to leave now or we’ll not get there. Holidays, birthdays, and special occasions are even tougher times for many compulsive eaters, whose solace in food has been denied them, perhaps by the miracle of its being removed. Others rely on their commitment to another person to follow a food plan despite the additional pressures and temptations.

Add to the omnipresence of our trigger foods the reunions and time spent with the people with whom we interacted to become the mixed-up-crazy individual who first walked through the doors of OA. What a formula for disaster!

We're reminded, at times, "Jesus is the reason for the season." Yet there's another reminder for compulsive eaters necessary on such stress-filled days, joyous though they may be. That is that God can and will remove the burden of stress. All we have to do is let go and let him take it. Sometimes it's a bit more complicated, since we've held on so tightly and for so long we have no idea what we're holding – so enter Steps Four, Five, and Six. But simply the willingness to let God take "our difficulties" whether we understand or not will lead to peace and serenity, a state of being (not doing) exquisitely more beneficial to us – and to those around us – than anything we can become as a human being. On this day it's good to stop, think, and pray.

God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always! (Alcoholics Anonymous, page 63)

Slimming Steps

Are you a human doing or a human being today?

Christmas Eve

Why write a Christmas poem?
After two thousand years
the subject's saturated,
glorious songs by
Handel, Wesley, the bigs.
Besides, why me? I've
decked no tree these last few years.
Writing checks passes for giving
and keeps me out of malls.
It's Christmas Eve – I sit
with my computer. But earlier
I went to church, sang carols,
felt "in." And I care.
In a grinchy kind of way.
I'm thankful. For computer
peaceful nights, for people
I care enough to write
checks to. For an account
that doesn't cringe.
For God's love, as much tonight
as last night, last month, a week from
Tuesday. I'm glad earlier years
torn between competing parents
have passed, dissipated, ended.
I'm glad for hope for peace on
earth for me, for others, for
people who let go and let
God grant us glory. For the Word
that's God who gives us words.
For Grace. Thanks, God.
