

Perfect Help

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. – Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)

Is God everything, or is he nothing? We wrestled with this in Step Three, and now it comes home to rest. Our character defects served us well – until they didn’t serve us well. Maybe greed *is* bad. Okay. I’ll hope for a mere million-dollar lottery win, not the mega-jackpot. Perhaps rage *is* bad. Can we settle for getting a little pissed off?

Step Six says, “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character” but we’d rather read it as “Decided we ought to be better people.” Of course we also reserve the right to define “better.” It’s like running a fever two days before the trip of a lifetime. You know you should go to the doctor, but what if she tells you not to go on the trip? You’ll have to tell Harry if you go to the doctor, and he might make you stay home. Surely an aspirin will fix it. Why go to extremes? It’s just a little fever. Okay. Maybe it’s a lot, but aspirin will bring it down to just a little.

Doing the prudent thing, the *right* thing, the only course of action that actually frees you from the insanity you recognized in Step One, in every area of your life – Wow! That's tough.

A wise old man I once worked for would sit in his chair as I described complex legal cases I needed to be able to present to a jury. I could talk about details and in's and out's for an hour. When I stopped, he gave me a single point as my focal point, the cornerstone for the whole case. Even in a hopeless quagmire of a situation, though, he would tell me, "Sometimes the best way out is through." In Step Six our focal point is God as we understand him, God who is everything, and God to whom I'm willing to turn over my life and my will.

God wants me to have perfect peace. He is a perfect God, and he doesn't let me stop short with good-enough peace. The best way out is through, and on the other side, what a treat! Thank God!

Slimming Steps

What would perfect removal of your character defects look like? Can you honestly say you are completely ready for God to completely remove them? Page 76 of *Alcoholics Anonymous* says, "If we still cling to something we will ask God to help us be willing."

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to
remove our shortcomings.

Fat Cows, Skinny Cows

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other cows came up – scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.” – Genesis 41:17-21 (NIV)

Pharaoh dreamed of fourteen cows, seven fat and sleek and seven slender – gaunt. Now, Genesis calls the lean cows ugly and the fat ones sleek. And Peter Paul Rubens painted “Rubenesque” women, admiring their lovely plump figures. I was Rubenesque a hundred pounds ago, and I’ll take this me, thank you.

Pharaoh’s lean cows ate the fat ones and remained lean. The sages of Egypt couldn’t figure out the dream. They were stumped. Why were cows eating cows, why didn’t consuming a fat cow make the skinny one fat? It simply didn’t make sense, and they couldn’t devise any scenario in which it did.

The sages hadn’t been to diet and calorie/weight and pay organizations. They hadn’t starved themselves to get rid of “sleekness.” Nor did they have the benefit of OA and the Twelve Steps. If they had, they might have realized similar mysteries. You can live on so few calories you damage your health, and the weight stubbornly stays in place. But with a

spiritual approach to the Steps, you can eat full, satisfying meals, and amazingly, the pounds slough off.

So, how do you get there? By surrendering. By turning off the analytical mind telling you the whole idea is absurd. By simply doing what you're told to do, whether it makes a whit of sense or not. By delving into your past to learn who you are and to find your strengths while admitting and accepting your past and the weaknesses that plagued you then. By letting God guide, and following his lead without questioning.

When I was young, Daddy would say, "When I say jump, you better jump and you can ask how high on the way up." That kind of obedience of our heavenly father can turn fat cows into slender ones and miserable cows into happy people. Promise.

Slimming Steps

Are you analytical? Is it possibly a character defect?
Remember, all character defects have a good side as well.
How can you turn your will and your actions over to God?

Fire Sale

Discontinued
habit
cheap
worn thin
useful for
avoidance
wasting time
numbing life.
May cause
wasted hours
days
months
lifetimes.
Benefits
retired
fired
escapists.
Discontinued
habit
available.
Bargain.
Free.
Except for life lost.

Well! Are You Proud of Yourself NOW?

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. – Galatians 6:2-5 (NIV)

It's a familiar question, "Well! Are you proud of yourself now?" Actually, the expected answer seems usually to be "No." But does it have to be? Just what does pride in self mean?

Pride certainly runs with an obnoxious crowd, including vanity, conceit, vainglory, arrogance, and egotism. Yet at times it chums up with self-esteem. We compulsive overeaters, whose constant companion has been low self-esteem, can't very easily see that combination as bad. Still, just what does the word pride really mean? Perhaps pride is deep pleasure or satisfaction from your own achievements, or maybe it means the consciousness of one's own dignity, as in swallowing pride.

Les Carter, author of *Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me*, observes:

Humility is the opposite of pride because it reflects a lack of self-preoccupation, a willingness to serve, an acknowledgment that we are limited in our ability to control other people

and circumstances, and an understanding that we cannot demand favored treatment.

Humility we know about as we work Step Seven, “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.” Does this mean we have to approach Step Seven without the remnants of self esteem we may have preserved? Do we give up our dignity in this step? Do we have to believe we have no worth, no merit?

No! We do not give up our dignity, for we are God’s children, and how dignified is that! We have worth, we have merit. And we have self-esteem. But pride in ourselves? No, we don’t have pride in ourselves by any of the definitions, for the best option for that is a feeling of esteem or deep satisfaction derived from our own achievements. Hey, look back up there at Step One! We admitted we were powerless over food, and that our lives had become unmanageable. That means we realized we have nothing to be proud of, for we can’t pull ourselves out of this muck.

But pride? Oh, yes. We’ve got pride. We have the shield of Abraham, the fear of Isaac, the mighty one of Jacob. With the writer of Psalm 47, we see ourselves as the pride of Jacob, for whom God chose our inheritance and to whom he gives his love.

When you’re asked, “Are you proud of yourself now?” answer with awe and honor, “I’m proud of God who made me what I am now!”

Slimming Steps

What does humility mean to you?

Neither Life nor Death!

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

Neither life nor death will separate me from God's love. I know. I've loved this passage for a long time, I've used it for theological arguments where mine is a minority position, I've rested in the firm conviction of salvation. My life or my death, it's in God's hands.

It doesn't say that! There's no limitation saying "Neither my life nor my death nor [lots of other stuff] will separate me from God's love!" What about the death of other people, those close to us we rue, regret, or blame on God, or those of our enemies, on whom we wish a quicker one. What about other peoples' lives?

Consider the passage in the Big Book about our directing the play.

Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful. In trying to make these arrangements our actor may sometimes be quite virtuous. He may be kind, considerate, patient, generous; even modest and self-sacrificing. On the other hand, he may be mean,

egotistical, selfish and dishonest. But, as with most humans, he is more likely to have varied traits.

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 59-60)

I knew I tried to direct little things, when I occasionally thought about this passage – one act plays, or just scenes. What of epic dramas, though? That never occurred to me, but I'm absolutely guilty of that one, perhaps even more than the mini-plays. I know best when people should bow out – die – or when God/Fate/Chance is too cruel in ripping a person out of the play too soon. Foolish me. I'm wrong.

My parents have lost their dignity and quality of life. After sixty-seven years of marriage and ninety plus years, enough is enough. Let us remember them as they were! That's not my decision. It's God's, and he doesn't need my input.

I know a lot of OA's consider suicide. While I never have, murder has crossed my mind, and wishing people dead has dwelt there. No more, with God's help. I'll leave that in his hands. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference! Amen, so be it!

Slimming Steps

How do you direct life's plays?

The Purpose of Pride

“I cried like a swift or thrush,
I moaned like a mourning dove.
My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens.
I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!”
But what can I say?
He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this.
I will walk humbly all my years
because of this anguish of my soul.
Lord, by such things men live;
and my spirit finds life in them too.
You restored me to health
and let me live.
Surely it was for my benefit
that I suffered such anguish.
In your love you kept me
from the pit of destruction;
you have put all my sins
behind your back. – Isaiah 38:14-17 (NIV)

Is pride listed as a character defect you're asking God to remove? Most of us would answer in the affirmative. Our “difficulties” developed for very specific reasons, each of them serving a purpose in our efforts to live in the midst of the wreckage of life. What, then, was the purpose of pride? Oh, a most elevated one – in fact, a high one. Pride sufficed as the guiding power by which we attempted to bring order to our lives. We sought to overcome overeating because of pride, to set aside our doubts and fears and forge ahead to avoid embarrassment, which says really, to build our pride.

So long as we lacked the necessary relationship with God and the desperation to turn away from our self-help attempts, pride often served as our higher power!

We got by with it, somehow, though certainly not well. Like Isaiah, we found ourselves surveying the results and proclaiming, "I am troubled, Lord. Come to my aid." Now, at Step Seven, we find that means turning away from pride, for we cannot serve two masters. We come understanding – at least vaguely – what we're giving up. It can for some be easy in that we've sensed the power before us, but even with that understanding – can we relinquish our pride?

Yes. That's the nature of Step Seven. We come humbly asking God to remove even this defect of character. And, in an odd twist, that action – asking humbly to surrender the power – defines humility itself.

Slimming Steps

How did pride lead to the high points of your life before recovery? Did it contribute to the lows as well? Are you willing to find true humility by turning your pride over to God?

What God Cannot Do

With what shall I come before the LORD
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:6-8 (NIV)

God tells us what we ask we'll receive, to seek expecting to find, and that doors will be opened when we knock. What's our part in that? The asking, seeking, and knocking. Yes, he could freely give, could set out all good things for easy finding, and leave the doors open, but he abstains. He leaves us with the blessed – and cursed – gift of our free will. He doesn't pull our strings.

God can – and will – remove our character defects. What he cannot do is to fill the vacuum. When God removes our dishonesty, a chasm gapes in our conduct. What do we do to keep from falling in the hole? We practice honesty. To fill the gap left from our procrastination? Practice diligence, moving ahead, orderly progress. To replace selfishness, try doing small kindnesses for people around you. Substitute a good habit for a bad one. A habit is a behavior we have engaged in so often it has become an involuntary response.

God's part is loosening the hold the involuntary response has on your life, removing it unless you hold on. Your part is keeping the void filled as God removes the trash.

Steps Four and Five are action steps. Six and Seven are tools of change. It doesn't happen overnight, though sometimes the removal is sudden. But the new habit takes a while to plant, water, and grow. "They" say repeating good habits for a month solidifies them. Give it a try.

What *does* the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him. What a delightful change!

Slimming Steps

What behaviors do you plan to practice as God removes your character defects? Name five actions you can take for each bad behavior you're walking away from.

if you walk it works

If you do as we say
walk our simple path
bedevilments dissolve
abundance transpires
lives evolve to radiance
as the fifth dimension
of existence homesteads
in your heart and home

Step Eight

Made a list of all persons
we had harmed and became
willing to make amends to
them all.

Worth as Much as the Dog?

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. – 1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV)

Our lives are changed, and we're ready to go make amends to the world. Maybe we've already begun to make amends at home, even unknowingly, with changed lives. Still, it makes sense, as we look at those people to whom we owe amends, to consider the family.

I heard a sad description of a family situation once. A dog lover spoke, which gave the words even more poignancy: "You know, John treats Spot better than he does Mary and the kids – and sometimes Spot up and bites him!" I know another situation where the dogs are considered an adult couple's "kids" and even called that – but her husband's mother gets treated like dirt, ignored, and insulted. Do you treat the animals in your household better than the people? Or, lacking pets, do you treat family members like animals?

Love and respect may be easier to feel for others in recovery than for people with whom we've shared major chunks of our lives. How do you learn to love a husband, a wife, a parent, a child? You learn by facing your fears, by looking at how your character defects have made your family who they are. Has your temper angered others so they lashed out at you? Did your lying or cheating create insecurity and fear in family members? Has your selfishness resulted in jealousy leading to retaliation?

Our illness may cause us to isolate, but it's not a solitary illness – we come from families of sick people and create other sick people by our own actions. Fortunately recovery acts in the same way. Our recovery enables that of those we interact with. As you grow stronger, pay attention to what's happening around you. Perhaps the difference isn't just your better understanding of your family member but your changes enabling healing in the other.

Living amends means just that: living your amends. The instructions for Step Nine describe the issue. We of OA substitute in our mind for “alcoholic” “compulsive eater” and for “sobriety,” “abstinence.”

The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough.
(Alcoholics Anonymous, page 82)

Look around. Are you seeing normalcy and “nothing wrong” with destruction all about? You're the tornado. Clean up your mess by thoughtful living and loving your loved ones more than your best friend – no matter how many legs the friend has.

Slender Steps

Pretend to be your spouse, child, sibling or parents. Describe how the compulsive eater in your life (meaning you!) has treated you.

Life in the Hospital

There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:22(b)-24 (NIV)

The disagreement doesn't matter, not these fifteen years later. I could tell you, though, exactly what we argued about and again prove my position right. The man I disagreed with made no sense, didn't even seem to comprehend my precise and articulate reasoning. He continued to insist on his asinine reading of the rules, a reading that would harm my sons. I've seldom been so incensed.

I knew his wife better than I knew him. I respected her mind and her ability to stand face to face with me and counter argument for argument. As I steamed through the next few days, I learned more about my adversary. His education matched neither mine nor his wife's. He has not been trained in analysis, nor in any academic skills past high school. He worked with his hands, leaving cognitive skills to others who might be interested. His argument didn't make sense but, through his reasoning, it was the best logic he could put forward.

I was still right on the argument, but the wind had sloughed out of my sails. It didn't matter. Since he was the one in the decision-making position, his interpretation stood. My sons survived. So did I, my lesson learned. It's not fun to compete on an uneven playing field.

You're about to make amends to other sick people, quite possibly people who haven't had the benefit of walking through eight Steps of recovery. You may still have issues with these people, recall confrontations of your own, fifteen years past, when you know you were right. It doesn't matter. We're all sinners here, all sick people. You're making amends in the confines of the hospital, healing yourself by reaching out to them, cleaning your own side of the street.

When you accept that the other person involved may have been, like you, doing the best they could at the time and under the circumstances, reaching out to them with the peace offering may become much easier to do.

Paul recognized a universal truth. He wrote the church at Rome, people he had not met but a congregation he admired. He told them their faith was being reported worldwide. Yet speaking to these people he had no hesitation in calling them – and himself – sinners. Truly they and we could be described as “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” He went further, though, and proclaimed these sinners sharing the hospital of sick people with him to be “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Slimming Steps

What do you know of the people on your amends list that describes their suffering and makes it easier for you to realize they were doing the best they could in their interactions with you?



Purposeful Forgetting

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. – Philippians 3:12-16 (NIV)

The word “resent” comes from the Latin root *sentire* meaning “to feel” with the prefix “re” meaning again. We feel again the insult, the shame, the anger, the guilt, the humiliation when we indulge in resentment. We relive and thus re-feel events from yesterday or decades ago, and instead of dulling in time, often the emotional level increases with the replaying.

We’re selective, though, in our re-feeling. As we discovered in Step Four, we don’t remember the whole sequence of events. Instead we purposefully forget our part. We lay aside how our behavior may have set in motion the other party’s action. Sometimes they actually didn’t act at all. They did nothing, and because we had the understanding, never expressed outside our own mind, they *should* have done something or said something or been something, we resent. Again, and again, and again. They never ever were
