

Becoming Whole Through Progressive Recovery
Steps 6 and 7 – Handout
Excerpted from *Progressive Recovery Through the Twelve Steps:*
Emotionally Sober for Life

Clearing the Channel – Steps Six and Seven

Step Six

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

Step Seven

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

“Higher Power changes men and women on the inside, then works through them in changing the outside.” —
Brother G Dawg

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In Steps Four and Five we were quite clear about the need to move toward underlying causes and conditions that produce the behaviors and attitudes that have resulted in so much difficulty, even in recovery. And the Big Book states that the byproduct of that personal inventory effort will be that we “swallow some large chunks of truth about ourselves.” From our perspective, the deepening of the inventory makes this statement all the more accurate. As we begin to see and understand the underlying patterns in our lives it can become overwhelming. When we begin to break through the denial and delusion many of us unconsciously used to maintain our unexamined lives, it can be simultaneously quite disturbing and very exhilarating.

We believe that Steps Six and Seven are the lynchpin in Progressive Recovery. It is where our attention turns toward solutions—solutions for large, enduring or lifelong difficulties. It is important to reframe some language in these two steps that many find to be potentially problematic in advancing our recovery.

Given that our personal inventory will increasingly uncover beliefs, old ideas and decisions based on self that have been unconscious, and that we are learning the destructiveness of guilt and shame as they affect our recovery, many of us must find a different orientation to what are called “defects of character” and “shortcomings.”

We do not fault those who arrived at that language so many years ago. And no doubt, many of the deeds and misdeeds of alcoholics and addicts warrant stern perspectives and language. Yet we are increasingly convinced that the root causes of our addictions, our attitudes and our behaviors are in the realm of false perceptions and misunderstandings about ourselves, other people, our lives and the world.

Some will protest what they see to be the undue softening of such an approach. We understand the concern. And we also understand that the long-term effect of punitive perspectives is ultimately not helpful in Progressive Recovery. Yes, we are fully responsible for our actions and perspectives; at the same time, in truth, we are typically innocent of mal-ice or wrongful intent. As one wise elder said, “I didn’t ever wake up in the morning planning to harm others or myself. No doubt I did harm, but on some deeper level I had no idea what was going on. I was asleep at the wheel.”

Perhaps it is better to simply refer to character defects as causes and conditions, or old ideas and decisions based on self. Doing so cements the idea that until we somehow release these misperceptions and false understandings, they will continue to be corrosive in our lives. At worst, they will drive us from our recovery back into addiction.

Another important point will be seeing that the challenges we now face in this arena are beyond mere self-improvement. Sometimes we demonstrate an ability to change our behaviors, though in the realm of so called process addictions like food and eating disorders, relationship addictions, and financial or gambling compulsions it is often yet one more level of powerlessness. Whether or not we can alter a behavior, what are we to do with intractable matters, or in changing a belief that we hold to be true? It's not as if we can simply stop believing it. And where our old ideas apply to our very nature or our identity, it becomes increasingly clear we will need spiritual aid in letting go.

Because the means of letting go of old ideas is beyond our present ability, and can only be addressed by some Progressive Power, this idea of asking for help is all the more important. We are not looking for behavioral or attitudinal improvement, but more fundamental alterations within our being.

Let's first begin by affirming the importance of clarity about the nature of the problem. Asking for support in the removal of a symptom is just about as effective as hoping that by reducing a fever we will somehow be cured of the underlying bacteria or virus that is the cause. Asking for help for a behavioral improvement is only a starting point; we must ask for assistance with the underlying old ideas, the causes and conditions, or the decisions based on self.

And we must become willing to seek out and accept assistance as we can find it anywhere in the larger world. Many of us continue to hold onto ideas of self-sufficiency, which is antithetical to the idea of a Progressive Power. Or we seek to control the terms of the assistance that may come to us. We must be willing to go to any lengths to discover the information, approaches or expertise that we may need. If this takes us beyond the rooms of recovery, we need to be fully supported in the rooms for those decisions.

Sometimes we find we are forced to let go of some of the relationships in recovery that are holding us back. Remember, as we delve more deeply and ask discomfoting questions, it may prove to be just as uncomfortable for others as it is for us. As a result, and without malice, they may steer us clear of the important inner work that is being revealed. A great master once said that the sign of a strong spiritual path is the revelation of new aspects of healing that are asked of us. Finding more challenges in recovery is not a sign of a weak program, but an indicator that the Twelve Steps are working at depth to restore us.

Many of us experience difficulty looking more deeply at ourselves or are resistant to receiving information or assistance beyond the rooms. One prayer we have found useful as a powerful statement of willingness is as follows:

Please take from me whatever needs to be removed so I can move forward. If it can't be removed, please change it within me in any way necessary. Help me to see what I need to see, feel what I need to feel, and learn what I need to learn. Help me to be willing.

Sometimes we can complement this powerful prayer with another simple one:

Please show me the nature of my unwillingness so I can pray for its release.

One observation we've made as we work the Twelve Steps more deeply is that Progressive Power does not seem able to remove anything we cannot see or acknowledge. Our current state of understanding necessarily honors our oldest and deepest ideas until the moment that we can own them within ourselves and become willing to relinquish them. Sometimes that process requires pain and suffering. However, we do not subscribe to the idea that pain is inevitable, nor do we think for a moment that suffering is optional. We see from our experience that we must experience whatever it is we must in order to become convinced of the hopelessness and futility of our path and our ways.

As noted earlier, it is interesting to discover the Big Book does not once mention the word "surrender," though it is certainly a common one in the recovery community. Upon reflection, and again based on our experience, we observe that we do not seem to surrender anything as long as we cannot see it clearly or for as long as we continue to see value in it. Instead, and this may be why the Big Book used the word abandon, we suspect that until we are fully ready to release something, it will not be taken from us, or altered in any significant way.

This point is worth a short explanation. As long as we value something, we do not and cannot release it. The inventory work and the repetitive application of these efforts at Steps Six and Seven aid us in reevaluating things. When we finally see clearly and no longer value the beliefs, old ideas, causes and conditions, or decisions based on self, then it is possible to abandon them, to let them go because we no longer desire them.

Rather than punishing ourselves for our failure to progress with some intractable challenge, we have found great value in gentleness and self-forgiveness. We have come to see that we are simply stuck, most often unconsciously. And when finally the nature of our inner obstructions are fully revealed, most of us prove to be excellent students and highly cooperative.

During these efforts to discover and release our old ideas, the causes and conditions, and decisions based on self, we often see that we can become quite discouraged. We certainly recommend the basic ideas of service and working with others as an ongoing remedy.

As we introduced in the previous chapter, there may be great value in taking on a positive and optimistic approach to the process of letting go. Since many of us have old hypercritical ideas about ourselves, many of us find great value in an assets inventory. When taken with a sponsor, a spiritual advisor, a good friend, a minister, or a therapist, an assets inventory can be very beneficial to see the great amount of good that resides within us. At a minimum it will remind us that while we may be struggling, we are fundamentally decent women and men looking in every way we are able to get out from under our difficulties.

As we mentioned in the last chapter, it is inevitable that every character defect has a reverse side to it. It is this contrast and the opportunity to see ourselves in a new light that interests us. Here are some examples we have found to be common:

- The need to control is invariably tied to some kind of self-protection. That need for safety may stem from misperception, but self-care is critically important. When we label ourselves a “control freak,” to be fair and honest we may also want to admit that it is simultaneously an effort to take care of ourselves.
- Some of us have been ridiculed for over-thinking. No doubt, that can be a real challenge to our sobriety as well as driving others away from us. At the same time, being able to think deeply and richly is a great gift. Perhaps the issue is not the thinking, but the lack of discipline. Why not consider it an asset and set about to learn how to use it effectively?
- Sometimes one person’s stubbornness is another person’s patience. Or hard-headedness can easily be reframed as persistence. The value is in the eye of the beholder.
- In a reverse example, many of us are acknowledged for our responsibility, it is seen as a strength. In the right circumstances, it is valuable. At the same time, feeling responsible for others can be terribly codependent and damaging to ourselves and others.

The larger point is that most all of us are fundamentally people of good will. The Buddhists would even remind us that our essential nature is “basic goodness.” This seems akin to the great ideas in the Big Book that tell us the fundamental idea of God will be found deep within every man, woman and child, though it may be obscured by any number of challenges.

Some of us find that as we go about the channel clearing of Step Six and Seven it is quite helpful to deliberately engage in regular exposure to anything that lifts our spirits. For some it is art, for others great food, or a good movie. At a minimum, this can restore some balance to our self-perception. At best, it may just provide a Progressive Power with enough of an opening deep within us so that we can be remade in some important ways.

We also have found that self-care is extraordinarily useful and important. While some traditionalists will say we are being selfish or self-centered in focusing on our own needs, we have learned through painful efforts over time that self-nurturance is an important part of healing and growing. We know you can’t give away what you don’t have. How could we possibly seek to be of service and benefit to others without rendering the same to ourselves? How can we offer love without first being loving?

We have concluded that service, assets or strengths inventory, and self-care can coexist quite well together. Indeed, it might be they are designed to work together.

It can be useful to remember a few things while undertaking Steps Six and Seven. First, a long period of reconstruction lies ahead. We do not change by leaps and bounds, rather by fits and starts with occasional quantum leaps that too often slip away. Progress is a curious and uneven matter. Regardless, the effort we invest is one thing at which we can succeed.

Failure is not failure. It is part of the process that leads to success. And we must try to remember that the very nature of the spiritual path is for more to be revealed in terms of what blocks us off from power. There is always one more inner blockage to be addressed, and yet progress, healing and restoration are progressive.

Years ago, an AA speaker stated that the point and purpose of recovery is to awaken more and more over time, and especially to remember that we cannot solve self-sufficiency with still more self-reliance. Instead, we move to release self-centered approaches. After all, if self could solve the problems of self, there would be no need for Twelve Steps or a Progressive Power.

One final word from our experience and from an earlier reference. It does not seem to matter what we believe about Progressive Power. You can never believe in any moment any more than what you believe. Thankfully, Progressive Power is above our opinion of it. The key is not actually a focus on Progressive Power, but on our ability to relinquish believing that we are our own power, and thereby letting go of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

A Toolkit for a Progressive Step Six and Seven

We have found that this is an arena in which it can be more challenging to find tools and approaches. Nevertheless, here are a few ideas:

- Journaling is a powerful monitoring tool. Whether used as formal inventory or merely taking stock, we recommend it without limit.
- Meditation can be such a powerful tool for insight and awareness. We encourage you to explore this arena as earlier proposed.
- *Drop the Rock—Removing Character Defects—Steps Six and Seven*, by Todd W. and Sara S., has been used by many to great effect.
- Al-Anon's *Blueprints for Progress* inventory booklet can be remarkably useful in helping with asset inventory. While it does explore our so-called character defects, it balances nicely with positive self-appraisal.
- Many of us have had great positive self-assessments through a commercial product, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. It is a well-researched approach that establishes what some call their sweet spot, which is very useful in gaining accurate self-appraisal.
- Another resource many have embraced is the book *What's In the Way Is the Way* by Mary O'Malley. It can be very useful in reframing how we view the difficulties we encounter within ourselves.

Into Action with Steps Six and Seven

To work more deeply with these steps, the following prayers can be used. If you prefer a different approach, any prayer that addresses false beliefs, underlying conditions, or our attitudes can be effective. We are asking for fundamental changes within our being, not just behavioral improvement. Remember when the causes and conditions are altered, behaviors invariably change because they are based on our old ideas. In addition, language matters. If the notion of "character defects" or "shortcomings" is shame-producing, consider setting them aside and embracing language that is reflective of new ideas and ways of being.

Please take from me whatever needs to be removed so I can move forward. If it can't be removed, please change it within me in any way necessary. Help me to see what I need to see, feel what I need to feel, and learn what I need to learn. Help me to be willing.

Sometimes if we still feel stuck, we can complement this powerful prayer with another one:

Please show me the nature of my unwillingness so I can pray for its release and work with releasing practices.

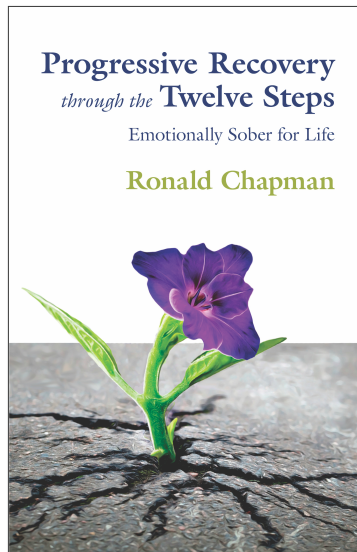
By all means, use the power of meditation and silence as a tool for listening for guidance. Refer to Step Eleven for forms of meditation that may be useful to you. And always keep your journal close at hand. When guidance comes, we find it very useful to capture it in writing since it can so easily slip away in the same way that dreams vanish if we do not capture them.

The previous quote in this chapter "... we are increasingly convinced that the root causes of our addictions, our attitudes and our behaviors, are in the realm of false perceptions and misunderstandings about ourselves, other people, our lives and the world..." provides fodder for further investigation.

- What underlying old ideas, causes, conditions or decisions based on self need to be removed or changed within me so that I can move forward? How do these relate to the outcomes in my life that are so problematic?
- In addition to prayer and meditation, what practices can I use to support releasing old ideas and decisions based on self? Therapeutic or spiritual advisors? Workshops or retreats? Forgiveness practices?

For an in depth look at this story-making part of our beings, here is a community workshop.

<https://www.seeingtrue.com/blog/unstopped>



For more information and extensive free content, visit www.ProgressiveRecovery.org

In addition, a twelve-step-based curriculum can be found at:

<https://schooloftransformation.teachable.com/p/progressive-recovery-through-the-twelve-steps>