

Step Five

“Admitted to ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

Our Basic Text tells us that “Step Five is not simply a reading of Step Four.” Yet we know that reading our Fourth Step to another human being is certainly *part of* Step Five. So what’s the rest, the part that’s more than simply a reading?

It’s the *admission* we make – to God, to ourselves, and to another human being – that brings about the spiritual growth connected with this step. We’ve had some experience with making admissions already. We’ve admitted we have a disease; we’ve admitted we need help; we’ve admitted there’s a Power that could help us. Drawing on our experience with these admissions will help us in Step Five.

Many of us finished our Fourth Step with a sense of relief, thinking that the really hard part was over, only to realize that we still had the Fifth Step to do. That’s when the fear set in.

Some of us were afraid that our sponsor would reject or judge us. Others hesitated because we didn’t want to bother our sponsor with so much. We weren’t sure we trusted our sponsor to keep our secrets.

We may have been concerned about what the inventory might reveal. There might be something hidden from us that our sponsor would spot immediately – and it probably wouldn’t be anything good. Some of us were afraid of having to re-feel old feelings, and wondered if there was really any benefit to stirring up the past. Some of us felt that as long as we hadn’t actually spoken our inventories out loud, the contents wouldn’t be quite real.

If we consider all our feelings about the Fifth Step, we may find that we are also motivated to continue this process by a desire for more recovery. We think about the people we know who have worked this step. We’re struck by their genuineness and by their ability to connect with others. They aren’t always talking about themselves. They’re asking about others, and they’re truly interested in knowing the answer. And if we ask them how they learned so much about relationships with others, they’ll probably tell us that they began learning when they worked Step Five.

Many of us, having worked the Fourth and Fifth Steps before, knew that this process always resulted in change – in other words, we’d have to stop behaving the same old way! We may not have been entirely sure we wanted that. On the other hand, many of us knew we had to change, but were afraid we couldn’t.

Two things we need to begin working Step Five are courage and a sense of trust in the process of recovery. If we have both these things, we’ll be able to work through more specific fears and go through with the admissions we need to make in this step.

Facing Fears

Any of the fears we’ve talked about here might be ours, or we might have other fears that plague us. It’s essential that we know what our fears are and move forward in spite of them so that we’re able to continue with our recovery.

- What reservations do I have about working the Fifth Step?
- Do I have any fears at this point? What are they?

No matter what our fears stem from, most of our members have done pretty much the same things to deal with them. We pray for courage and willingness, read the section from “*A New Beginning*” on the Fifth Step, and seek reassurance from other members. Many of us have had the experience of going to step study meetings and finding that, coincidentally, the topic always seems to be Step Four or Five. If we make the effort to share what we’re going through, we’re sure to get the support we need from other members. Calling upon the spiritual resources we have developed through working the previous steps will allow us to proceed with our Fifth Step.

- What am I doing to work through my fears about doing a Fifth Step?
- How has working the first four steps prepared me to work the Fifth Step?

Admitted to God

In GA, we experience a way of life where the spiritual meets the everyday, where the ordinary meets the extraordinary. When we admit the exact nature of our wrongs to the God of our understanding, our admission becomes more meaningful.

How we make our admission to the God of our understanding depends on the specifics of our understanding. Some make a formal admission to God apart from the admissions we make to ourselves and another human being. Others acknowledge or invite the presence of a Higher Power in some way before going over the inventory with their sponsor. Those of us whose Higher Power is the spiritual principles of recovery or the power of the GA fellowship may have to explore different methods of working this portion of the Fifth Step. Our sponsor can help with this process. Whatever we do is okay as long as we are aware that we are also making our admission to a Higher Power.

- How will I include the God of my understanding in my Fifth Step?
- How is my Third Step decision reaffirmed by working the Fifth Step?

To Ourselves

When we were gambling, most of us probably had people telling us we had a gambling problem and should get some help. Their comments didn't really matter to us. Or even if they did matter, it wasn't enough to stop us from gambling. Not until we admitted our addiction to ourselves and surrendered to the GA program were we able to stop using. It's just the same with the admission we make in the Fifth Step. We can have everyone from our spouse to our employer to our sponsor telling us what we're doing that's working against us, but until we admit to our own innermost selves the exact nature of our wrongs, we're not likely to have the willingness or the ability to choose another way.

- Can I acknowledge and accept the exact nature of my wrongs?
- How will making this admission change the direction of my life?

And to another Human Being

As addicts, one of the biggest problems we have is telling the difference between our responsibility and the responsibilities of others. We blame ourselves for catastrophes over which we have not control. Conversely, we're often in complete denial about how we have hurt ourselves and others. We overdramatize minor troubles, and we shrug off major problems we really should be taking a look at. If we're not sure what the exact nature of our wrongs is when we begin our Fifth Step, we'll know by the time we finish – because of making our admissions to another human being. What we can't see, our listener can, and he or she will help us sort out what we need to accept as our responsibility and what we don't.

Most of us asked someone to be our sponsor before we began formally working the steps, and have been developing a relationship with that person ever since. For most of us, our sponsor will be the "another human being" we choose to hear our Fifth Step. He or she will help us separate the things that were not our responsibility from the things that were. The relationship we have been building with our sponsor will give us the trust we need to have in him or her. The therapeutic value of one compulsive gambler helping another is often powerfully demonstrated when our sponsor shares details from his or her own inventory as we share ours. This goes a long way toward reassuring us that we are not unique.

The trust we must have in the person who is to hear our Fifth Step goes beyond simply being assured that he or she will keep our confidences. We need to trust that our listener can respond appropriately to what we are sharing. One of the primary reasons that so many of us find ourselves choosing our sponsor as the person who will listen to our Fifth Step is because he or she understands what we're doing and therefore knows just what kind of support we need during this process. Also, if our sponsor is our listener, it will help promote continuity when we work the following steps. Still, if for any reason we choose someone else to hear our Fifth Step admission, his or her "qualifications" are the same ones we would look for in our sponsor: an ability to be supportive without minimizing our responsibility, someone who can provide a steadying influence if we begin to feel overwhelmed during our Fifth Step – in short, someone with compassion, integrity, and insight.

- What qualities does my listener have that are attractive to me?
- How will his or her possession of these qualities help me make my admissions more effectively?

For most of us, developing an honest relationship is something new. We're very good at running away from relationships the first time someone tells us a painful truth. We're also good at having polite, distant interactions with no real depth. The Fifth Step helps us to develop honest relationships. We tell the truth about who we are – then, the hard part: We listen to the response. Most of us have been terrified of having a relationship like this. The Fifth Step gives us a unique opportunity to try such a relationship in a safe context. We can be pretty much assured that we won't be judged.

- Am I willing to trust the person who is to hear my Fifth Step?
- What do I expect from that person?
- How will working the Fifth Step help me begin to develop new ways of having relationships?

The Exact Nature of Our Wrongs

Another way to ensure that our Fifth Step is “not simply a reading of Step Four” is to focus on what we are supposed to be admitting: the *exact nature* of our wrongs. There is a diversity of experience in our fellowship about what, precisely, is “the exact nature of our wrongs”. Most of us agree that, in working Step Five, we should be focusing our attention on what's behind the patterns of our addiction and the reasons we acted out in the ways we did. Identifying the exact nature of our wrongs is often something that happens while we're sharing our inventory. Sometimes the repetition of the same type of situation will reveal the exact nature of that situation. Why do we, for example, keep choosing to involve ourselves with people who don't have our best interests at heart? Why do we keep approaching every relationship we have as though our very lives depended on having the upper hand? Why do we feel threatened by new experiences, and so keep avoiding them? Finding the common thread in our own patterns will lead us right to the exact nature of our wrongs.

At some point in this process, we will probably begin calling certain patterns of behaviour our “character defects”. Though it won't be until the Sixth Step that we begin an in-depth examination of how each one of our defects plays a role in keeping us sick, it certainly won't hurt to allow this knowledge to begin forming in us now.

- How does the exact nature of my wrongs differ from my actions?
- Why do I need to admit the *exact nature* of my wrongs, and not just the wrongs themselves?

Spiritual Principles

In the Fifth Step, we will focus on trust, courage, self-honesty and commitment. Practicing the spiritual principle of trust is essential if we are to get through the Fifth Step. As mentioned above, we will probably have some experience with our sponsor that allows us to trust him or her enough to go ahead with this step; but what about the more profound issues that arise when we wonder if working this step will really do any good? We have to trust a process as well as another person. The connection between the Fifth Step and our spiritual development isn't always clear to us. This doesn't mean that the connection is any less real, but it may make it harder for us to trust the process.

- Do I believe that working the Fifth Step will somehow make my life better? How?

Courage is one principle we'll have to practice just to get started on this step. We'll probably need to continue drawing on our courage periodically throughout our work on this step. When we replace the phone on its hook just as we are about to call our sponsor for an appointment to make our admissions, we're feeling fear and we need to practice courage. When we're sharing our inventory and we see a paragraph that we just can't tell anyone about, we need to face that moment of fear with courage and go ahead with sharing *all* of our

inventory. When we've just shared something excruciatingly painful, and our feelings of vulnerability are so overwhelming that we want to shut down before we hear what our sponsor has to say, we're at a defining moment in our recovery and we need to choose the courageous path. Doing so will influence the future course of our lives. Each time we feel fear, we remind ourselves that giving in to it has rarely had anything but negative consequences in our lives, and doing so this time won't be any different. Such a reminder should be sufficient to motivate us to gather our courage.

- What are some of the ways in which I can find the courage I need to work this step?
- How does practicing the principle of courage in working this step affect my whole recovery?
- Have I set a time and place for my Fifth Step? When and where?

Practicing the principle of self-honesty is essential when we admit to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs. Just as we mustn't disassociate ourselves from our emotions simply because we're afraid of our listener's response, so we can't afford to shut down our own reactions. We must allow ourselves to experience the natural and human reaction to the subject under discussion: our lives as compulsive gamblers. Our lives have been sad. We've missed out on a lot because of our addiction. We've hurt people we loved because of our addiction. These realizations are painful. However, if we pay close attention, we'll probably recognize another feeling that's beginning to form in the wake of the pain: hope.

We've finally stopped gambling over our feelings, running away from our feelings, and shutting down because of our feelings; now, for the first time, we have a chance to walk through our feelings, even the painful ones, with courage. Doing so will, in the long run, makes us feel better about ourselves. This is one of the paradoxes that we often find in recovery. What begins in pain ends in joy and serenity.

- How have I avoided self-honesty in the past? What am I doing to practice it now?
- How is a more realistic view of myself connected to humility?
- How does practicing the principle of self-honesty help me accept myself?

The principle of commitment is demonstrated by the action we take in this step. Many of us have made so-called "commitments" in our lives, commitments which we had no intention of sticking to in tough times; our "commitments" were made solely for the sake of convenience. With each step we've taken in the program of GA, we've deepened our real, practical commitment to the program. Getting a sponsor, working the steps, finding a home group and going to its meetings – each one of these actions demonstrates that we're committed to our recovery in a practical, meaningful way.

- How does sharing my inventory with my sponsor further my commitment to the GA program?

Moving On

One of the many benefits we get from working Step Five is a sense of self-acceptance. We clearly recognize who we are today, and accept ourselves without reservation. Just because we're lacking in certain areas doesn't mean we're worthless. We begin to see that we have both assets and defects. We're capable of great good – and of inflicting great harm. There are aspects of our personalities that make us very special. Our experiences, even the negative ones, have often contributed to the development of the very best parts of us. For the first time, we're able to acknowledge that we're okay just as we are, right at this moment. But accepting ourselves as we are today doesn't mean we can relax and stop striving for improvement. True self-acceptance includes accepting what we're lacking. It wouldn't be self-acceptance if we believed we had no further growing to do – it would be denial. So we acknowledge what we're lacking, and we make a commitment to work on it. If we want to be more compassionate, we work on it by practicing the principle of compassion. If we want to be better educated, we take the time to learn. If we want to have more friends, we take the time to develop our relationships.

- How has working Step Five increased my humility and self-acceptance?

As we finish Step Five, we may feel a sense of relief; we've unburdened ourselves by sharing what we previously had put a lot of energy into hiding or suppressing. It is true that our "defects ... die in the light of exposure". Exposure to the light brings a sense of freedom that we feel no matter what the outer circumstances of our lives may be like.

All of our relationships begin to change as a result of working this step. We especially need to acknowledge how much our relationships with ourselves, with a Higher Power, and with other people have changed:

- How has my relationship with a Higher Power changed as a result of working the Fifth Step?
- How has my relationship with my sponsor changed as a result of working the Fifth Step?
- How has my view of myself changed as a result of working this step?
- To what extent have I developed love and compassion for myself and others?

Along with a sense of relief, our weariness with our character defects has probably reached a peak. This will translate easily into a state of being entirely ready – just what we need to begin Step Six!