

A Working Step 8 & 9 Guide

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Step 8 Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Something that you may not have noticed about the Eighth Step is that the word ALL is mentioned twice.

At this point in our work we will need to refer back to our Fourth Step inventories. From the lists of names on our inventories we are able to compile our Eighth Step amends list. We examine our sheets for the people we have harmed by our conduct and whom we owe amends. On page 76 in the third paragraph, the "Big Book" states:

"Now we need more action, without which we find that "Faith without works is dead." Let's look at Steps Eight and Nine. We have a list of ALL persons we have harmed and to whom we are willing to make amends. We made it when we took inventory. We subjected ourselves to a drastic self-appraisal. NOW we go out to our fellows and repair the damage done in the past. (So we are NOT going out to fix relationships. We go out to repair the damage done, to set right the wrongs we have done. The book continues.) We attempt to sweep away the debris which has accumulated out of OUR effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves. If we haven't the will to do this, we ask until it comes. (So here's a little prayer for when we are NOT willing to make an amend. Just like in the Sixth Step, if we are unwilling, we pray for the willingness until it comes. The book continues.) Remember it was agreed at the beginning we would go to ANY LENGTHS for victory over alcohol."

We make a separate list of names even though they're already listed in our inventories. By having a separate list of names, we're able to see more clearly those people we will go to, to make our amends.

The 12 & 12 suggests we redouble the efforts we made while writing inventory when making our Eighth Step list. On page 77 of the 12 & 12, Bill writes:

"Every A.A. has found that he can make LITTLE headway in this new adventure of living until he FIRST backtracks and REALLY makes an accurate and unsparing survey of the human wreckage he has left in his wake. To a degree, he has already done this when taking moral inventory, but now the time has come when he ought to REDOUBLE his efforts to see how many people he has hurt, and in what ways."

Aside from the list of names of those we owe amends, there's a second part to this step that we don't want to overlook. Some people we will be willing to go to right away. With others, we'll have to pray for the willingness to do this. The book suggests we pray daily for the willingness until it comes. In the meantime, we can begin to make those amends that we are ALREADY willing to do. We have found when we begin the restitution process in conjunction with praying for the willingness to do the seemingly more difficult amends, we start to ALSO become willing to make the amends that we never thought we'd be willing to face. We become more willing when we commence to get results from making other amends. When making the Eighth Step list, it is sometimes suggested to break the names into two categories: amends I am willing to make NOW, and amends I am NOT willing to make now. Also, the word "amend" has a second definition besides "setting right the wrong". To amend a document is to make a permanent change to it. So in making amends, not only are we to "right all such matters to the best of our ability", but we must ALSO change and stop doing the behavior that brought about the harm to begin with. You cannot make amends for things you still do. We can't call it OLD behavior if we are STILL doing it. We must move away from our old habit of apologizing for something but then doing it again. Our changed actions will speak louder than our words. For an Eighth Step form to help you put together your Eighth Step list please go back to the Step 8 & 9 files and see the "Step 8 & 9 Worksheet." Please pay close attention to the headings for each column.

Let's move on to Step Nine.

Step 9 Made direct amends to such people, wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

On the fourth paragraph on page 76, the "Big Book" provides us with some insight as to how to approach some of those to whom we owe amends. Page 76, paragraph four:

"Probably there are still some misgivings. As we look over the list of business acquaintances and friends we have hurt, we may feel diffident (which means lacking confidence) about going to some of them on a spiritual basis. Let us be reassured. To some people we need not, and probably should not emphasize the spiritual feature on our first approach. We might prejudice them. At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. But this is NOT an end in itself. Our REAL PURPOSE is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

In the last sentence of this paragraph, the "Big Book" clearly states our purpose for living. It tells us why we are here -- to serve God and the people about us.

In Step Seven it says: "I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to You and my fellows." Now in Step Nine it says: "At the moment we are trying to put our lives in order. BUT THIS IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF. Our REAL purpose is to FIT OURSELVES to be of MAXIMUM service to God and the people about us." So our making amends is part of how God brings fulfillment to what we're praying for in Step 7!

The book continues by asking us to let our actions, rather than our words, demonstrate to others that we have changed. Walking the walk is more important than just talking the talk. Starting with line four of page 77, the book states:

"It is SELDOM WISE to approach an individual, who still smarts from our injustice to him, and announce that we have gone religious. In the prize ring, this would be called leading with the chin. Why lay ourselves open to being branded fanatics or religious bores? We may kill a future opportunity to carry a beneficial message. But our man is SURE to be impressed with a sincere desire to set right the wrong. (So again, it says that we are there to set right the wrong, NOT to fix the relationship. The book continues.) He is going to be MORE interested in a demonstration of good will than in our talk of spiritual discoveries.

We don't use this as an excuse for shying away from the subject of God. When it will serve any good purpose, we are willing to announce our convictions with tact and common sense."

One of the most difficult amends to make is to someone we genuinely do not like. But, whether we like them or not, we MUST proceed. The text continues:

"The question of how to approach the man we hated will arise (they're talking here about someone on our resentment list). It may be he has done us MORE harm than we have done HIM and, though we may have acquired a better attitude toward him, we are still not too keen about admitting our faults. (The reason why we probably have a better attitude toward our enemies is because back in the Fourth Step we were asked to forgive and pray for those we felt had harmed us since they LIKE OURSELVES are spiritually blocked off whenever anyone brings about harm. The book continues.) Nevertheless, with a person we dislike, we take the bit in our teeth. It is harder to go to an enemy than to a friend, but we find it much more beneficial to us. WE GO TO HIM in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing OUR former ill feeling and expressing OUR regret."

So the book gives us an important attitude we should have when going to make amends to someone we do not like. Our attitude needs to have a helpful and forgiving spirit, and in a few sentences it says that our manner needs to be calm, frank, and open.

In the next paragraph, the text even provides us with instructions on what to say and what NOT to say:

"Under NO condition do we criticize such a person or argue. Simply tell him that we will NEVER get over drinking until we have done our UTMOST to straighten out the past. (This last line speaks directly to those of you who will be or have in the past made a beginning but lost interest halfway through the amends process. If that be the case, we need to ask ourselves this simple question: Does my lack of willingness to move forward with making amends have anything to do with whether I drink again or not? It's an important consideration to make. The book continues.) We are there to sweep off OUR side of the street, realizing that NOTHING worthwhile can be accomplished UNTIL we do so, NEVER trying to tell him what HE should do. HIS faults are NOT discussed. We stick to OUR OWN. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the result.

In nine cases out of ten the unexpected happens. (That's 90% of the time.) Sometimes the man we are calling upon admits his own fault, so feuds of years' standing melt away in an hour. RARELY do we fail to make satisfactory progress. Our former enemies sometimes praise what we are doing and wish us well. Occasionally, they will offer assistance. It should NOT matter, however, if someone does throw us out of his office. We have made our demonstration, done our part. It's water over the dam."

The "Big Book" explains what to do about our debts. We may not like the sacrifice required to make good on our bills, but sacrifice we must. The process forces us to rely on God for guidance, which takes us out of self-will, and into God's Will. Under God's direction, we find it MUCH easier to make restitution than we EVER thought possible. In the middle of page 78, the book states:

"Most alcoholics owe money. (Of course, that's an understatement and should say, "ALL alcoholics owe money!") We do NOT dodge our creditors. Telling them what we are trying to do, we make no bones about our drinking; they usually know it anyway, whether we think so or not. Nor are we afraid of disclosing our alcoholism on the theory it may cause financial harm. Approached in this way, the most ruthless creditor will sometimes surprise us. Arranging the best deal we can (and I'd like to add that we need to follow through with this plan) we let these people know we are sorry. Our drinking has made us slow to pay. (Now here's a warning.) We MUST lose our fear of creditors NO MATTER HOW FAR WE HAVE TO GO, for we are liable to drink IF we are afraid to face them."

The next paragraph deals with criminal offenses:

"Perhaps we have committed a criminal offense which might land us in jail if it were known to the authorities. We may be short in our accounts and unable to make good. We have already admitted this in confidence to another person, but we are sure we would be imprisoned or lose our job if it were known. Maybe it's only a petty offense such as padding the expense account. Most of us have done that sort of thing. Maybe we are divorced, and have remarried but haven't kept up the alimony to number one. She is indignant about it, and has a warrant out for our arrest. That's a common form of trouble too."

Next the book instructs us again to ask God for guidance. This reliance upon God is ESSENTIAL if we are to outgrow the fears that have separated us from our true selves, our Creator, and others. The book continues:

"Although these reparations (or amends) take innumerable forms, there are some general principles which we find guiding. Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to ANY lengths to find a spiritual experience (which of course is AA's solution to alcoholism), (now here's a little prayer) we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, NO MATTER WHAT the personal consequences may be. We may lose our position or reputation or face jail, but we are willing. We HAVE to be. We MUST not shrink at ANYTHING."

Next is an example of how to proceed when OTHER people may be affected. Here, EXTREME caution needs to be taken:

"Usually, however, other people are involved. (Here's a warning) Therefore, we are not to be the hasty and foolish martyr who would needlessly sacrifice others to save himself from the alcoholic pit. A man we know had remarried. Because of resentment and drinking, he had not paid alimony to his first wife. She was furious. She went to court and got an order for his arrest. He had commenced our way of life, had secured a position, and was getting his head above water. It would have been impressive heroics if he had walked up to the Judge and said, "Here I am."

"We thought he ought to be willing to do that if necessary, but if he were in jail he could provide nothing for either family. We suggested he write his first wife admitting his faults and asking forgiveness. He did, and also sent a small amount of money. He told her what he would try to do in the future. He said he was perfectly willing to go to jail is she insisted. Of course she did not, and the whole situation has long since been adjusted."

The "Big Book" suggests we ask others for help before we make some of our more difficult amends. We need direction, preferably from someone who understands and has experienced the inventory and restitution process. We MUST make SURE we do not create further harm to others as we clean up OUR side of the street. At the top of page 80, notice the directions of what to do, and please notice the five specific points the book now makes:

"Before taking drastic action which might implicate other people we (1) secure their consent. If we have obtained permission, have (2) consulted with others, (3) asked God to help and (4) the drastic step is indicated we (5) MUST not shrink."

So it says that we need to (1) ask the people who will be affected (like a business partner or our family) if it is OK with them that we make this amend, (2) talked with our support group and others that may have made a similar amend, (3) pray to ask God to help us decide what to do, and (4) the amend still seems like it is the right thing to do, we then (5) MUST not balk at going through with setting right the wrong.

Next is a story of a man who used this formula before proceeding to make amends:

"This brings to mind a story about one of our friends. While drinking, he accepted a sum of money from a bitterly-hated business rival, giving him no receipt for it. He subsequently denied having received the money and used the incident as a basis for discrediting the man. He thus used his own wrong-doing as a means of destroying the reputation of another. In fact, his rival was ruined. He felt that he had done a wrong he could not possibly make right. If he opened that old affair, he was afraid it would destroy the reputation of his partner, disgrace his family and take away his means of livelihood. What right had he to involve those dependent upon him? How could he possibly make a public statement exonerating his rival?

After consulting with his wife and partner he came to the conclusion that it was better to take those risks than to stand before his Creator guilty of such ruinous slander. (This next line is important.) He saw that he HAD to place the outcome in God's hands or he would soon start drinking again, and all would be lost anyhow. He attended church for the first time in many years. After the sermon, he quietly got up and made an explanation. His action met widespread approval, and today he is one of the most trusted citizens of his town. This all happened years ago."

The next page or so deals with domestic troubles like sex outside of a relationship. Starting with the second line from the bottom of page 80, we find:

"The chances are that we have domestic troubles. Perhaps we are mixed up with women in a fashion we wouldn't care to have advertised. We doubt if, in this respect, alcoholics are fundamentally much worse than other people. But drinking does complicate sex relations in the home. After a few years with an alcoholic, a wife gets worn out, resentful and uncommunicative. How could she be

anything else? The husband begins to feel lonely, sorry for himself. He commences to look around in the night clubs, or their equivalent, for something besides liquor. Perhaps he is having a secret and exciting affair with "the girl who understands." In fairness we must say that she may understand, but what are we going to do about a thing like that? A man so involved often feels very remorseful at times, especially if he is married to a loyal and courageous girl who has literally gone through hell for him. Whatever the situation, we usually HAVE to do something about it. If we are sure our wife does not know, should we tell her? Not always, we think. If she knows in a general way that we have been wild, should we tell her in detail? Undoubtedly we should admit our fault. She may insist on knowing all the particulars. She will want to know WHO the woman is and WHERE she is. We feel we ought to say to her that we have NO right to involve another person. We are sorry for what we have done and, God willing, it shall NOT be repeated. MORE than that we CANNOT do; we have NO right to go further. Though there may be justifiable exceptions, and though we wish to lay down no rule of any sort, we have often found this the best course to take. Our design for living is not a one-way street. It is as good for the wife as for the husband. If we can forget, so can she. It is BETTER, however, that one does NOT needlessly name a person upon whom she can vent jealousy."

In the first paragraph on page 82, we are yet again instructed to ask God for guidance as we make good on our past misdeeds:

"Perhaps there are some cases where the utmost frankness is demanded. No outsider can appraise such an intimate situation. It may be that both will decide that the way of good sense and loving kindness is to let by-gones be by-gones. Each might pray about it, having the other one's happiness uppermost in mind. Keep it ALWAYS in sight that we are dealing with that most terrible human emotion-jealousy. Good generalship may decide that the problem be attacked on the flank rather than risk a face-to-face combat."

This is an example of how we must be tactful and considerate of others as we make our amends. Nobody said it would be easy - it just has to be done. Remember to ALWAYS use your Higher Power as your CONSTANT Guide. By following His direction, the most difficult situations can have a positive outcome.

In the next several paragraphs, the "Big Book" authors state quite emphatically that stopping drinking is ONLY a BEGINNING. We MUST take additional action if we are to recover from alcoholism:

"If we have NO such complication (the complication they are talking about here is sex outside of a relationship. The book continues), there is PLENTY we should do at home. Sometimes we hear an alcoholic say that the only thing he needs to do is to keep sober. Certainly he must keep sober, for there will be no home if he doesn't. But he is yet a LONG WAY from making good to the wife or parents whom for years he has so shockingly treated. Passing all understanding is the patience mothers and wives have had with alcoholics. Had this not been so, many of us would have no homes today, would perhaps be dead. The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. (What a perfect analogy.) 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. He is like the farmer who came up out of his cyclone cellar to find his home ruined. To his wife, he remarked, "Don't see anything the matter here, Ma. Ain't it grand the wind stopped blowin'?"

So just not drinking is NOT enough. The "Big Book" makes that VERY clear. The reconstruction that will need to take place in most homes may at times seem difficult. But, once again, we rely heavily on prayer and guidance from our Higher Power, sponsor and support group. At the top of page 83, our text states:

"Yes, there is a long period of reconstruction ahead. We MUST take the lead. A remorseful mumbling that we are sorry WON'T fill the bill at all. We ought to sit down with the family and frankly analyze the past as we now see it, being VERY careful NOT to criticize THEM. THEIR defects may be glaring, but the chances are that OUR OWN actions are partly responsible. So we clean house with the family, (now here's a Ninth Step prayer) asking each morning in meditation that our Creator show us the way of patience, tolerance, kindliness and love.

The spiritual life is NOT a theory. We HAVE to LIVE it (Again, the book is saying that our program needs to be more than some mental idea. It MUST be a motivating and growing positive way of life. The book continues). Unless one's family expresses a desire to live upon spiritual principles we think we ought NOT to urge them. We should NOT talk incessantly to them about spiritual matters. They will change in time. Our BEHAVIOR will convince them MORE than our words. (One of Dr. Bob's most popular quotes is, "Carry the message, and if you must - use words." Walking the walk is so much more important than just talking the talk. The book continues.) We must remember that ten or twenty years of drunkenness would make a skeptic out of anyone."

Here we're told that in order to achieve the vital psychic change, we HAVE to LIVE the A.A. program. So, we don't just TAKE the Steps. We practice these principles on a DAILY basis. The first nine Steps, or _ of the program, basically deal with the past. Next week we will be providing you with the information for AA's way of life, or AA's way of spiritual growth one day at a time, through the process of Step Ten, Eleven, and Twelve.

The next paragraph on page 83 gives us directions on what to do if we can't make amends to someone face-to-face. Notice that they saved this for last:

"There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them IF we can HONESTLY say to ourselves that we would right them IF we could. Some people cannot be seen - we send them an honest letter. And there may be a valid reason for postponement in some cases. But we DON'T delay IF it can be avoided. We should be sensible, tactful, considerate and humble without being servile (which means submissive) or scraping (which means harsh). As God's people we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone."

Please notice that this last paragraph mentions writing an honest letter to people we cannot see. This ALSO includes if the person we harmed or hated has died. A letter written and read to a substitute listener can bring about much relief and freedom from guilt and remorse we never thought we could get rid of.

The "Big Book" concludes the Ninth Step with another list of results. Starting at the bottom of page 83, it tells us precisely what is going to happen once we commence to clear away the wreckage of our past. It describes these results as promises. The "Big Book" is filled with promises. These are just a few more of them:

"If we are painstaking (which means showing care) about THIS phase (the amends phase) of our development, we will be AMAZED before we are half way through. We are going to know a NEW freedom and a NEW happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace (to comprehend serenity and to know peace, we must experience it). No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our WHOLE attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us - sometimes quickly (as in a spiritual experience), sometimes slowly (as in a spiritual awakening). They will ALWAYS materialize IF we work for them."

What a message of hope! It is almost beyond comprehension that all of these wonderful events WILL occur IF we just make our amends to those whom we have harmed. But, they WILL happen - that's a guarantee.

Please turn to page 155. We would like to give you an example of someone who could not stay sober until he became willing to complete all his amends. This man is our Akron co-founder, Dr. Bob. Dr. Bob had been involved with MOST of AA's solution for alcoholism but he still drank every day because he refused to work with others and he refused to make amends for harms done. After being introduced to Bill Wilson, and relapsing one last time, he finally decided to work the ENTIRE program, instead of HIS program. With this new motivation, he accomplished making all his amends quickly and never drank again. He also started working with other alcoholics to the point where Bill Wilson referred to him as "the Prince of the Twelve-Steppers". We can read about Dr. Bob's Ninth Step in the second paragraph on page 155:

"When our friend related his experience, the man agreed that no amount of will power he might muster could stop his drinking for long. A spiritual experience, he conceded, was ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, but the price seemed high upon the basis suggested. He told how he lived in CONSTANT worry about those who might find out about his alcoholism. He had, of course, the familiar alcoholic obsession that few knew of his drinking. Why, he argued, should he lose the remainder of his business, only to bring still more suffering to his family by foolishly admitting his plight to people from whom he made his livelihood? He would do anything, he said, but that.

Being intrigued, however, he invited our friend to his home. Some time later, and just as he thought he was getting control of his liquor situation, he went on a roaring bender. For him, this was the spree that ended all sprees. He saw that he would HAVE to face his problems squarely that God might give him mastery.

One morning he took the bull by the horns and set out to tell those he feared what his trouble had been. He found himself surprisingly well received, and learned that many knew of his drinking. Stepping into his car, he made the rounds of people he had hurt. He trembled as he went about, for this might mean ruin, particularly to a person in his line of business.

At midnight he came home exhausted, but very happy. He has not had a drink since. As we shall see, he now means a great deal to his community, and the major liabilities of thirty years of hard drinking have been repaired in four."