LIFE AND DEATH ERRAND

THE 5TH STEP

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Life and Death Errand: The Fifth Step

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Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their house-cleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only ***thought*** they had lost their egoism and fear; they only ***thought*** they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of hu-

INTRODUCTION

The twelve steps are presented as three groups: two groups of three bracketing one group of six. The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are the clue to the understanding of the primary issue that we are dealing with, not only in every addiction, but also the average, garden-variety life problems encountered by each one of us living on planet Earth. The steps have helped people who not only face the reality of an addiction to alcohol or other mood-altering chemicals but also are a solution for a myriad of other common difficulties of simply making daily life work. So, many people have found a new life as they have applied the truths found in these steps to their lives. *Most have found a spiritual approach to their problems worked when other attempts at* ***real change*** *had failed.* The experiences of so many urge us to take an in-depth look at the truths that give the steps their power.

Most of us experience the temptation *of control* every day; because we are trying to construct a most perfect world. We want a world in which there is no pain—no pain of any kind. Many of us are unwilling or unable to deal with the experience of physical pain, mental anguish, emotional trauma, or social rejection of any kind. Since the people around us have a history of failing to prevent these kinds of pains from attacking our well being; long ago many of us decided that if true happiness were to be ours, we would have to take matters into our own hands. We usually don't go through this contemplation consciously. But consciously or not, the results are the same—**the commitment to attempt to maintain absolute control of our lives so that we can be assured of feeling good.**

This is it. We can discuss problems such as an addiction from a physiological perspective, or a cognitive perspective, or an emotional perspective, or a spiritual perspective. There are indeed elements of each of these themes in the addictive

thoughts, feelings, decisions and behaviors of any addict. These same kinds of thoughts, feelings, decisions and behaviors are also a part of life for many non-chemically addicted individuals. It's very difficult to live in our culture without being bombarded with a steady stream of addictive thoughts, feelings and behavioral urgings.

But it's important to understand that **the basic issue in all of this is that of control**. We are all tempted to live in the fantasy of being able to control our little world and all that comes in contact with that world. This is a normal developmental process in all children. We draw an imaginary circle around ourselves and declare ourselves Lord of the Ring. At some point in the normal development of many children, they abandon much of this immature and potentially destructive plan. Instead, they come to accept life as it is rather than the way they wish it were.

Because the unwillingness to accept and deal appropriately with the pain of life, many of us then go about constructing life on our terms. Of course, we refuse to see the reality of our lack of power to control our life. Drugs, gambling, work-alcoholism, shopping, pornography, and eating provide an effective way to prevent much of the awareness of reality from sinking in and disturbing the fantasy life we've put together. Distractions provide an effective method of engaging in willful blindness. Unfortunately, this results in ignoring significant issues until they become serious problems.

Little do we know that we are attempting to fill the job description of God. A simplified way of describing God's job description is to say He controls the universe and all that's in it. Only when we're no longer able to stand the pain that these, so called, comforts are causing in our life, will we emerge from this fantasy world to begin the process of recognizing and accepting reality. When the truth brings this fantasy world crashing down, we will often say, "Why didn't somebody tell me?" Of course, everyone and everything around us had been attempting to break through our denial. Finally, it's happened.

Chapter 1
A RUNNING START

The Fourth Step

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

If we have done the third step as it was intended to be done, it will become abundantly evident as we move on into the action steps. The first place this will become apparent is the fourth step. **If we struggle with fear and anxiety regarding what to include in the inventory, then it's clear that we have taken back our will and life that we supposedly released in the third step.** The only way that we can make "...a searching and fearless moral inventory of..." ourselves is to have God in control of our life. If God is not in control of our life, the searching will be superficial or we will be at serious risk of dredging up stuff that we're not ready mentally, emotionally, or spiritually to deal with. Therefore, we will not be fearless about the process. Instead, we will be filled with fear and anxiety. *It is truly God's responsibility to accomplish the fourth step through us. After all, we did release control of our will and our life into His hands in the third step didn't we?*

We might call the fourth step: *Inventory of self-centered values and choices that have led to self imposed devastation.* As we can see in hindsight, all that has really gone wrong in our life is due to the decisions we have made; as stated in step one, "Healing starts when we accept accountability". Most of what we have decided and acted upon has been based on lies and bad things have been the result. The further we sunk into our addiction and/or dysfunctional, self-centered behavior, the more confused we became in determining what was true and right and what wasn't. Remember the *Big Book* states in *The Doctor's Opinion*, "...at certain

times we could not differentiate the true from the false." The fourth step allows us the opportunity to see first-hand the devastation caused by self-will and ill-fated attempts at self-control. As God opens our mind to see the truth of the results of the self-life, we are given the opportunity to allow God to show us how desperately we need to live continuously in the third step. "When we run from our issues we prolong our journey, but do not change our destination." (Mark Jobe, Lead Pastor, NLCC, Chicago)

Chapter 2

THE FIFTH STEP

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs

Admission of wrong is an important spiritual issue. Often, we will not understand the need for admitting to God, another person and ourselves our wrongs. The way that I've come to handle this kind of question is to ask the questioner if they have ever had their own small children or at least have spent any time with small children. Most will answer yes to that question. Then I relate the following:

Admitted

Imagine this scene: You are in a home with small children. The children are out of sight and silent. Suddenly there is a noise coming from the kitchen that sounds like the rattle of the top on a cookie jar. Immediately, the mother of the children calls out, "What are you doing?" Initially, you think that's a silly question. We know what the children are doing—they're taking cookies to eat. But the mother persists in asking the question again. The children finally respond, "Nothing." At that point the mother gets up and goes to confront the children. Why? Because as long as the children are guilty of wrongdoing and are not admitting it, the relationship with the mother is broken. The mother moves to attempt to restore the relationship by confronting the obvious lie.

The admission that takes place in the fifth step is very similar to that which begins the recovery process in the first step. Both require stating the truth about what has really happened.

The difference, though, is great. In the first step, the ad-

mission is usually surrounded by many negative emotions—anger and fear of losing control often predominate. While in the fifth step the fear is often related to potential rejection by God or the person with whom we are doing the step. Help to allay these concerns can be found in what the Bible says in Romans 3:10-20

> As the scriptures say, no one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They rush to commit murder. Destruction and misery always follow them. They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all.
>
> Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. (NLT)

In the end, though, most feel a sense of cleansing, strengthening, and acceptance. The biggest difference is the sense of powerlessness and defeat that accompanies the first step while in the fifth step there is a sense of external direction and support.

The other results of the admitting in the fifth step are relief and forgiveness. We discover that we can admit the most horrible (to us) things and still be accepted by God and another person. Therefore, for perhaps the first time we **know** we are forgiven. We have the opportunity to feel clean, exuberant, have a sense of dignity and self-acceptance. Additionally in the process, strengthening our relationship/trust with God *and* man.

Admitted to...Another Human Being...

What would you say is the greatest blockage to the starting or completing of the fourth step and especially the fifth step? It's the desperate need for help from others; others such as friends who understand and care about us, and help from God

who also loves and cares about us—even more than our best friends. "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being..."This is when recovery really begins. Healing starts when we accept accountability—the sum of our decisions.

"What's the problem?" someone may ask us. "Sounds like a great thing being able to get off your chest a whole bunch of stuff with someone who cares about you and wants the best for you. At least it sounds that way to me! Where am I going wrong?"

The *Twelve and Twelve* makes it clear that "going it alone in spiritual matters is dangerous", and that people of high spiritual growth almost always insist on conferring with someone on better spiritual ground. This is the summary of the difficulties we face if we try to work the fifth step without admitting the exact nature of our wrongs to another human being. That's the mountain that keeps so many from these two crucial steps.

The **basic issue** involved here is **the danger of misreading God's guidance and feedback**. Without a second opinion, it's easy—oh so easy—to assume that my thoughts are God's thoughts; that what I want to do is what God wants me to do. Additionally, after awhile I get comfortable with God—He doesn't condemn me, I feel at peace with Him, I begin to enjoy His company; after some time I realize He knows all about me and still loves me. I find it much easier to admit to Him the exact nature of my wrongs. But until I become willing to talk with someone in addition to God about the things I have never been willing to talk to anyone about before, I'm like those people who keep saying to each other, "We really have to get together one of these days, yeah, we really have to do that!" But, we never get around to doing it. All this tells me is I probably haven't been that honest with God or myself. No wonder not much has changed in my life!

Why would anyone think that? Think about it! What were we like in the midst of our addiction when it came to being honest with ourselves and others? Not so honest, eh? You know what is said to be the most expensive thing in the world to buy? That's right, our own lies. They invariably keep us stuck stunting our spiritual growth. Of course I haven't been so

honest, not only with everyone around me, but most of all myself. In the midst of addictive behavior I can't be honest with myself or anyone else or I'd have to do something about my current thinking, feeling, behavior, and attitudes and I don't want to do anything. I can't do anything; I don't know what to do!

You see, we've lived for too long in a world where the wills and the desire to control the reactions of others are regarded as sacrosanct, inviolable, or not to be changed. God is expected to command what we already love and to promise what we already want. Implicit in the spirituality sought by many today is simply discovering who *they* really are and then try to successfully live it out; it's really about me—not about God or anyone else. As many have already discovered, this is a recipe for chaotic, disjointed, and dysfunctional humanness. This is why we need to share with someone who has had similar thoughts, so that we can discover we are not alone in the insanity of our thinking. There *is* hope for us! We can let go of having to defend inappropriate thinking and begin the process of change as we get honest with at least one other human being who understands. And as the *Twelve and Twelve* says, "When we are honest with another person, it confirms that we have been honest with ourselves and with God." (p. 61)

The second part of the basic issue is the problem of misreading God's guidance through my "rationalization and wishful thinking". If I have little or no experience in hearing God speak to me, it can be very easy to misread what God is saying. Or even if it is really God who is actually the one speaking to me!

First: As great as it is to actually have God speak to me, it's far greater to become a spiritually mature person in a loving relationship with him. This is part of the way I can come to correctly hear him.

Second: If I'm going to receive guidance from God, I must have the right attitude. In seeking God's word to me, I must at the same time seek and receive the *grace of humility*. God will gladly give it to me if trusting and waiting on him to act; I refrain from pretending I am what I know I am not, from presum-

ing a favorable position for myself in any respect and from pushing or trying to override the will of others in our situation.

Psalm 25:9 speaks directly to what attitude I need to experience guidance from God: *He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

The word humble has three synonyms: humility, modest, meek. A. T. Pierson, a scholar from more than a century ago comments on this psalm translating the Hebrew word for humble as meekness. He said:

> Here is a double emphasis upon *meekness* as a condition of such guidance and teaching. *Meekness is a real preference for God's will.* Where this holy habit of mind exists, the whole being becomes so open to impression that, without any *outward* sign or token, there is an *inward* recognition and choice of the will of God. God guides, not by a visible sign, but by *swaying the judgment.*

Third: Just because God speaks to me on occasion, it doesn't prove that I've understood correctly what he said or what he said means in my situation. This is why the second truth comes before this third one. I must state all communication I believe I received from God with humility. Arrogance never befits anyone who has surrendered to the All Mighty Lord of the Universe.

Prudence

This is a word that is not mentioned in the fifth step, but it's surely important in working out this step. Having this attitude is essential in the process of selecting someone with whom to do this step.

Prudence is the quality or fact of being capable of exercising sound judgment in practical matters. The *Twelve and Twelve* uses this word in connection with finding the person with whom you will reveal to the facts in your fourth step. Over the years, I've had a few patients say to me, "In choosing someone to do my fifth step with, what difference does it make? One is as good as another...aren't they?" No, they

aren't! The *Twelve and Twelve* reminds us, "Perhaps we shall need to share with this person facts about ourselves which no others ought to know."

The kind of person we want to have is someone who has faced a number of difficulties in their life; who when faced with those problems didn't immediately think of using their addiction of choice to deal with the problem.

Later on, once you've selected the person with whom you will share your fifth step, the only thing that will hinder you in completing the step, or completing it well, will be your own willingness. You must be willing to share with confidence in the person you've chosen to confide in. Maybe for you, once the decision is made, in no time at all, doubts come flooding into your mind. Doubts about the wisdom of doing this step; doubts about the suitableness of our confidant; fears about appearing weird, strange, or dangerous; fears that you are too sick to fit into Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous or any of the other 12 Step groups; uncertainty that this will do any good; and fears that you will be made a fool of through this whole process.

Remember, you did not enter into this step without thought! It all started when you sat down to write down the appropriate truths God gave you about yourself. At that time, you wisely prayed that God would bring the right person along and help you recognize that this is the one. However, its been rightly stated, "If you're waiting for the perfect messenger, you'll probably be in for a long wait!"

Exact

In the context of the fifth step, the word "exact" means, "correct, accurate, specific, explicit, precise, right, true, clear-cut, and unequivocal, on the head, on the nose, to the letter, literal, meticulous, painstaking, exacting, strict, and careful" (Family Word Finder 1975, 274). From this it can be seen that this word is meant to convey the idea of a no-frills accuracy. Much like the statement frequently made by the main de-

tective character, Sergeant Joe Friday on the very old TV show *Dragnet,* "Just the facts, please, just the facts."

The "facts" are the result of the inventory of the fourth step. Notice the synonyms: "specific," "explicit," "precise," and "accurate." The information given in this step to God and another human being is to be right and true. In no way are we to dress up the facts. They are to be the bare and naked truth about our past behavior.

We would much prefer to make our past behavior and ourselves look as good as possible. Therefore, we have a tendency to soften harsh statements. But we must state the truth about ourselves in an *unequivocal* way. The word *equivocal* means "that can have more than one interpretation; having two or more meanings; purposely vague, misleading, or ambiguous; uncertain; undecided; doubtful; suspicious; questionable conduct" (Webster's New World Dictionary 1964, 491). The step insists that we present the facts in an open, honest, unvarnished, and above-board way.

Additionally, we are to be "meticulous, painstaking, exacting, strict, and careful" in the process of assembling the facts. In the fourth step, as we consciously request that God search out the truth about our life, we want to be certain that we carefully write down the facts as God gives them to us. Having spent some part of our life in being deceptive, it is only natural for us to be tempted not to be so exacting in relating the facts. We must rigorously guard against falling into that trap. Truth is like obedience, in that partial truth is not truth at all. In effect, partial truth is really disobedience.

Exactness is necessary if we are ever going to begin again in life. Contrary to popular belief, it is possible, with God's help, to do life over. But that will only happen if we are willing to let go of all vestiges of the old life. We must be willing to put an end to the old way of thinking, feeling, believing and acting. Simply stated: Don't incorporate old practices into your new identity, because they will not work! This really hinges on continuing to act on the decision that we made in the third step. The reason that we decided to allow God to control our will and

life is because we are unable to consistently live any other way than the way that we have trained ourselves to live. And God is not going to live his life through ours in any other way than his consistent way of living. That way is distinctly different than the way we have lived while calling all the *shots* in our life.

Therefore, as we specifically, and starkly describe the reality of the way we have lived, the things we have done while attempting to get our needs met, and the person we have become as the result of the choices we have made, we are in a position for God to truly begin the change process in our life. Change requires that we first know clearly where we have been and currently are. If we don't know where we are or where we need to go, we will probably end up somewhere we didn't expect. A humble person never has to be put in his or her place, because he or she is always in it.

God does not work in our life without our permission nor without our conscious involvement. Same as in the second step, "...could restore sanity", the contingency is not on God, but whether we're willing to request and allow him to work the restoration. He definitely wants to partner with us in the changing of our life. He has specific responsibilities in the partnership, as do we. You will remember that in the third step we mentioned that our responsibilities include 1) getting to know Him, 2) trusting Him to do His part, 3) actively seeking His leading in our life, 4) giving Him thanks, and 5) praising him for all that He has done and is doing. As we actively trust Him, He will 1) develop emotional and spiritual maturity in our life, 2) help us grasp His forgiveness, and 3) lovingly protect us in the process of change. So, God is waiting for us to simply admit to Him our failures that have resulted from our "self-will run riot" (Alcoholics Anonymous 1976, 62). When we are exact and specific, then God will move to reconstruct our lives on the solid foundation of his wise approach to living. We will find ourselves becoming and doing what we never dreamed possible. We will have opened the door to God's wonderful working in our lives. NFL Hall of Fame coach Tom Landry has said that the job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do, so that they can become the men they've always wanted to be.

Nature

The step requires that we be exact about something. This is the *nature of our wrongs*. Nature is a word that comes from the same Latin root, *nasci* (past participle *natus*) to be born, as do the words nation, native, naïve, and nativity. Thus a nation was originally a body of persons having a common origin. What we do by nature or what is natural or comes naturally was born within us or as part of us (Family Word Finder 1975, 531-32). In the context of this step, the word means "the essential character of a thing; quality or qualities that make something what it is; essence" (Webster's New World Dictionary 1964, 978).

The step is urging us to own-up-to the essence of the specific wrongs we have done. Since we have spent much of our life attempting to avoid bad feelings and examining the exact specifics of our wrongs feels really bad, therefore everything within us screams against doing this step as well as the preparatory fourth step. As I have said, it would be natural for us to present what we have done in the best light possible. Without thinking, we would be tempted to vaguely state what we had done that was wrong. So, this step reminds us that we must be specific about the *essence* of what we have done.

This is crucial if we are going to accomplish what this step intends. Often, seekers of genuine change are tripped-up because they misunderstand or overlook this word—nature. They simply assume that they must provide a catalogue of every wrong they have ever done. Of course, that's impossible for most everyone even if our brain wasn't clouded with mood altering chemicals. So, to expect or even think that we would have the ability to remember every wrong will prevent us from even attempting this step or even the fourth. Some misguided individuals have even tried to do this spending many months and hundreds of sheets of paper only to relapse one or more times in the process; attempting in the flesh what needs to be done in the Spirit.

The use of this particular word directs us to look for patterns of behavior. *It is the pattern that reveals what we have done.* Doing something wrong once or twice is not the cause of our change in who we are. It is what we have repeatedly done that results in a profound alteration in our character rendering us into individuals even we didn't like. *Therefore, admitting to the nature of our wrongs means to look for the essence embodied in each pattern of wrong.* For example, if we have burglarized homes and businesses to finance our addiction, the essence of our wrong is burglary. To prove the truth of that allegation we need to provide two or three illustrations of places we have burglarized. We are not compelled to provide a list of every place we had burglarized. This process is usually so painful that it is not unusual to find ourselves mentally blocking what we have done and/or instances when the behavior occurred. This is precisely where God's help and direction come into play in the fourth step. Knowing how difficult this process can be should cause us to immediately call upon God to provide the exact information we need. He will help us grasp what the essence of the wrong is, give us appropriate examples, and help us to see the resulting character defect. And, what is so great about this is that, we don't have to wrack our brain to struggle to remember. God simply informs us. All we have to do is write it down, agree with God when He reveals it to us, and relate it accurately to the person with whom we are doing our fifth step. As you can see, we are never asked by God to do something that we can't do. Those three things are each something we are able to accomplish ourselves. Again, we have an illustration of how God will practically partner with us to accomplish the remodeling of our life that will result in recovery.

As we choose to live in the decision that we made in the third step, we continue to discover that the essence or nature of our wrongs will be revealed to us so that we can choose to do something about them. God is never punitive although he may

be disciplinary. As we choose to reveal the nature of our wrongs to another, we discover that what we thought was an unpardonable, grievous deed is not that uncommon. Our confidant is usually unfazed by what we admit. The sense of isolation lifts. We discover that frequently we have the essence of our wrongs in common. The essence of our wrongs may be the same but they may have worked themselves out in each of our lives in vastly different ways.

This is why "drunk-a-loges" at open or closed 12 Step meetings that simply talk about a list of what we have done rarely touch others at the core of their being. On the other hand, sharing the nature of our wrongs and the process of overcoming the nature of those wrongs and the character defects resulting from the wrongs we have practiced causes great identification to occur within the hearers. The nature of our wrong is the pattern of behavior that we are beginning to desire to be removed from our lives. As those patterns of the self-life go, it is possible for God then, to replace them with His successful patterns of living. And so our life changes.

Powerlessness is only significant if we are continuing to try to live our life according to the lie that says we should be able to control all aspects of our lives. As we recognize that lie for what it is, we no longer fear being powerless. We are able to accept it and then reach out for the help that is available from God. As the Lord said to the Apostle Paul to a certain request he had, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9) So, His power is available to those who ask. Only those who accept the reality of their own lack of power are willing to ask.

Where are you regarding powerlessness? Do you still believe that you should be able to control the various aspects of your life? Are you still demanding that life work the way you want it to work rather than the way it does work? Carefully examining the facts of what has happened in your life as a result of your ill-fated attempts at maintaining absolute control of your life will demonstrate the truth of your real limitations. *Accepting that truth will go a long way in changing the negative feelings of*

powerlessness into the positive feelings associated with gratefulness.

Wrongs

The final word in the fifth step is ***wrongs***. Since the step urges us to admit *the exact nature of our* ***wrongs*** it is important for us to grasp clearly what the step means as it uses this word.

This word is derived from the Old English *wrencan,* to twist. Thus something *wrong* is turned awry or twisted. Therefore, this step is talking about twisted behavior (Family Word Finder 1975, 891). This is behavior that causes confusion. So, a wrong involves dishonesty, unlawfulness, injustice, a misdeed, an injury, or an immoral act. Therefore, the other is ill treated, abused, dishonored, harmed, injured, ruined, cheated, or defrauded. They were lead to expect something positive out of the relationship, but instead, something bad happened. This causes confusion in their mind. Depending on their approach to life, they could respond to us with anger, all the way to, guilt and self-depreciation.

The essence of the wrong is in the distorting or perverting of meaning or behavior. Whatever the action, it is based on a distortion of the truth. We distort reality for our own benefit or protection. Therefore, a wrong is inexorably linked to self-preservation. So, it is often difficult to see clearly the reality of the wrong. This is usually expressed in the statement or thought, "What did ***I*** do?" This means that there will only be two ways for us to come to the realization of the wrong we have perpetrated. The first is to have something so terrible happen, such as some form of public humiliation that violently forces us to see what we have really done. The second would be to ask God to reveal the truth to us as we are willing to accept whatever God reveals. It's pretty clear that the second method is, by far, the best choice.

God is like the physician who is there to help those who are experiencing illnesses. As long as we are in denial about being sick, there is nothing that the physician can do. Usu-

ally, we won't even seek out the physician unless we think there is a problem. So, unless we see the truth of what we have actually done, we will not be really asking for help. It has been said, "...if you obey me, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Frequently though, this can be quite upsetting. So, we can go through the motions of the fourth and fifth step, but God knows exactly what we believe. When confronted with the truth, people do one of three things, 1) run, 2) deny, and 3) accept. This step urges us to come face-to-face with our wrongs. I urge you to accept the truth your inventory reveals.

There are some of us that have found that quickly admitting to whatever wrong the other person perceives we have done gets us off an uncomfortable hook. We have the tendency to too quickly agree without examining the reality of the wrong and its magnitude. For us, we evade pain through the process of rapid dismissal. In this, we essentially deny the reality of the wrong. We assume it's entirely other person and their perception. We own no part of it. Our fear causes us to become isolated from the people who could be closest to us. For us our admitting is only a defense mechanism not a way to allow God to change our life.

Just like the people who refuse to admit any real wrong, those who quickly admit wrongs are focused on themselves and meeting their needs. If any true change is to take place, we must be willing to appropriately examine our twisted, confusing, deceptive behavior. Then we must allow the reality of it to sink into our consciousness so that we will see what it has done to those around us and to us. Then, and only then, will we be able to genuinely admit the *exact nature of our wrongs* to God, ourselves, and another person.

Our purpose is always to see what needs to be changed in our life. But simply knowing what needs to be changed doesn't mean that we can or will change it. We have gotten into the fix we are in through the best decisions we were able to make. Therefore, having done the best we can in our strength, we are unable to change what we have come to see about ourselves.

We can't do better than our best. If we stop at this point, we will have the attitude of hopelessness. We say, "Nothing will change, I am trapped in this behavior." Or we will live in denial, "All I have to do is admit it then everything will be all right." Both of these approaches will result in failure to change.

The only way that change is possible is through the intervention of God. He is the only One who has the power and ability to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves—untwist what we have twisted. This means that our genuine admitting simply opens the door for God to be able to begin the remodeling process in our life. He will begin to right the wrongs we have done only if are willing to not only admit our failures but also ask Him to intervene in our life. He will then begin the process of correcting the defects of character that are the result of our wrong behavior. This process will usually take longer than we expect at the start. When I ran that program for treating chronic relapsing addicts, I had a few individuals who entered treatment suffering the symptoms of recovery. That's right—the symptoms of recovery, only they thought they were the symptoms of relapse. I know that's hard to believe, but it's true. If we don't understand what's happening to us, we can become very confused.

Now coming out of the fog of confusion, the one suffering the symptoms of recovery can rather clearly see that reality. And that it wasn't the symptoms of relapse, as they once thought.

Conclusion

Therefore, the fifth step is a process that allows us to own-up to our self-imposed devastation. It gives God the opportunity to treat us with gracious acceptance. Healing starts when we accept accountability—the sum of our decisions. Even though I take responsibility, I am responsible to make the best decisions I can. Without a second opinion, it's easy—oh so easy—to assume that my thoughts are God's thoughts; that what I want to do is what God wants me to do.

Sharing my fifth step with a mature human being alsc gives that person the opportunity to treat me with gracious acceptance. In admitting the reality of the self-imposed wreckage of my life to myself I have the opportunity to accept the grace being offered to me by God and that other person. Unless I accept the reality of what I have done, I will be unable to accept the grace being extended to me.

Remember, that which is admitted is "...the exact nature of our wrongs." It is not necessary to recount every transgression that we could dredge up. Far more important is it to see the patterns of our life. Another way to view the fourth and fifth steps is to see them as the opportunity to discover the ways in which our commitment to maintaining absolute control of our life works itself out practically in our unmanageable lives. This provides us with the basic information for the sixth and eighth steps. We now know what needs to be dealt with regarding our character and problems in our relationships.

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