

Were Entirely Ready

12-Step Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

To Have God Remove All These
Defects of Character

From Awareness to Willingness — The Recovery Files

Aware · Step 4 & 5 · Ready · Step 6 work

In this workbook

- Part 1 · What Is Step Six — And Why It Is Not Optional
- Part 2 · Understanding Character Defects: What They Are and Where They Come From
 - Check-in: Defect Awareness & Inventory Clarity
 - Exercise: My Character Defect Inventory
 - Exercise: Origins — Where My Defects Came From
- Part 3 · The Hidden Payoffs: Why We Cling to What Harms Us
 - Check-in: Understanding Payoffs & Secondary Gains
 - Exercise: The Payoff Analysis
 - Exercise: The Real Cost Ledger
- Part 4 · "Entirely Ready": The Full Weight of That Word
 - Check-in: Genuine Readiness for Removal
 - Check-in: Resistance & Attachment to Defects
 - Exercise: Defect-by-Defect Readiness Meter
 - Exercise: My Most Resistant Defects
- Part 5 · The Identity Problem: Who Am I Without My Defects?
 - Exercise: Identity & the False Self
 - Exercise: Alternative Strategies — Life Without Each Defect
- Part 6 · The Spiritual Dimension: Readiness as a Form of Trust
 - Check-in: Spiritual Readiness & Surrender
 - Exercise: The Spiritual Readiness Practice
 - Exercise: My Step Six Completion Plan

Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 6 · READING

What Is Step Six — And Why It Is Not Optional

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: What Is Step Six — And Why It Is Not Optional

What Is Step Six — And Why It Is Not Optional

Step Six reads: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." Of all the Twelve Steps, this is the one most frequently glossed over, misread as a formality, or collapsed into Step Seven without meaningful engagement. It is also, when genuinely worked, one of the most demanding and most transformative. Understanding what Step Six actually asks — and why its particular demand is so difficult to meet — is essential preparation for doing it honestly.

The surface reading of Step Six suggests a simple transition: you have identified your defects in Step Four, disclosed them in Step Five, and now you are getting ready to have them removed in Step Seven. On this reading, Step Six is merely a preparatory pause — a moment of orientation before the real action of asking God to remove the defects. This reading misses almost everything important about the Step.

What Step Six is actually asking is something far more demanding than a momentary pause. It is asking you to become willing — completely, entirely willing — to surrender the character defects that Steps Four and Five have identified as the driving force behind your addiction and the source of most of the harm in your life. That word "entirely" is the Step's most important word. Not mostly willing. Not willing in principle. Entirely. Ready for all of them to go — including the ones you still like, still use, still rely on, still believe you need.

This is where Step Six becomes genuinely hard. Because the character defects identified in your inventory are not random flaws you carry by accident. They are, in every case, adaptations — survival strategies that developed for reasons and that have, at various points in your life, served real purposes. Your fear kept you alert in dangerous environments. Your dishonesty protected you from punishment when honesty was dangerous. Your controlling behavior gave you a sense of agency in situations that were genuinely out of control. Your anger had its dignities — it asserted a self that refused to be entirely erased. Your people-pleasing kept relationships intact when more authentic self-expression would have caused real consequences.

The defects were useful. Some of them were, in their original context, essential. And even in recovery — even when they are clearly causing more harm than good — they carry residual benefits that make complete surrender genuinely difficult. This is not a moral failure. It is a human reality that Step Six acknowledges by making readiness — rather than removal — its demand. You do not remove the defects in Step Six. You become ready to have them removed. The distinction is significant: it acknowledges that readiness itself requires work, that it is not automatic, and that honest engagement with why you might not yet be entirely ready is the most important work this Step contains.

Reflection Questions

1. Before engaging with this material, what has been your honest attitude toward Step Six? Have you treated it as a genuine Step requiring serious work, or as a quick transition between Steps Five and Seven?

2. The word "entirely" carries the full weight of Step Six. What would "entirely ready" actually look and feel like for you, concretely? What is the difference between partial willingness and entire readiness?

3. Which of your character defects identified in Steps Four and Five do you suspect you are least ready to surrender? Why — what does that particular defect still give you?

4. Step Six asks for readiness, not removal. What is the significance of that distinction? Why might readiness require its own dedicated work rather than being assumed after Step Five?

5. Have you ever genuinely wanted to be free of a specific defect of character and found yourself unable to fully release it? What was that experience like, and what does it tell you about the nature of Step Six?

PART 2 OF 6 · READING

Understanding Character Defects: What They Are and Where They Come From

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: Understanding Character Defects: What They Are and Where They Come From

Understanding Character Defects: What They Are and Where They Come From

The language of "character defects" has troubled many people who encounter it in recovery — it sounds like a verdict, a permanent description of a flawed self. Understanding what the phrase actually means — its clinical content, its developmental origins, and its relationship to addiction — is essential for working Step Six without either dismissing the concept or drowning in shame about it.

A character defect, in the context of recovery work, is a habitual pattern of thinking, feeling, or behaving that was once adaptive but has become maladaptive — that once served a real purpose but now consistently produces harm to yourself or others. This definition does several important things. First, it locates the defect not in the permanent structure of the self but in a pattern — something learned, something practiced, something that became automatic through repetition. Second, it acknowledges the adaptive origin — the defect was not always a defect. It was, at some point, a response to real conditions. Third, it specifies the criterion for "defect" as consistent harm production — not moral impurity, not violation of an abstract code, but the practical reality of damage to self and others.

This understanding transforms the relationship with character defects from one of shame — "I am broken at my core" — to one of honest assessment: "I have developed patterns that were once useful and have now become harmful. I can acknowledge that. I can become willing to have them change." The difference between those two postures is enormous for recovery. Shame paralyzes. Honest assessment opens a path forward.

Where do character defects come from? The most common origins parallel the origins of shame and emotional suppression discussed in earlier modules. Many defects develop in childhood as responses to family systems, attachment styles, and environments. The child who grows up in an unpredictable household develops hypervigilance and control behavior — reasonable responses to an unreasonable situation. The child whose emotional needs are chronically unmet develops either people-pleasing (if the strategy is to earn love through performance) or withdrawal (if the strategy is to stop needing). The child who learns that honesty produces punishment learns deception. The child whose anger is shamed learns to suppress it — until it finds its way out through passive aggression, sarcasm, or sudden explosion.

Defects also develop through the addiction process itself. The neurological changes produced by chronic substance use alter the brain's reward, impulse control, and empathy circuits in ways that generate or amplify specific character patterns: increased self-centeredness (as the addicted brain's needs become the organizing center of all behavior), increased dishonesty (as

concealment becomes necessary), decreased emotional empathy, and escalating risk tolerance. In this way, the addiction both originated in character defects and amplified them over time — creating a feedback loop where the defects fuel the addiction and the addiction deepens the defects.

The clinical point of all this is not to excuse the defects or minimize their impact. The harms they produced were real. The people who were hurt were real. The work of Steps Eight and Nine will address those harms directly. The clinical point is rather to understand that the defects are workable — not fixed features of an essentially defective person, but patterns that developed, that were maintained by repeated use, and that can therefore be changed through a sustained process of awareness, willingness, and spiritual openness. Step Six is where that process begins, in the most fundamental act it requires: the genuine desire to be different.

Reflection Questions

1. How does understanding character defects as adaptive patterns that became maladaptive — rather than permanent evidence of a flawed self — change how you hold them? Does it reduce shame, increase accountability, or both?

2. For your two or three primary character defects, trace their developmental origin: When and where did this pattern first develop? What real threat or need was it originally responding to? Was it, in its original context, a reasonable adaptation?

3. How did the addiction process itself amplify or create specific defects in you — beyond what was already present before your using began? What character patterns are more pronounced now than they were before active addiction?

4. The definition of "defect" offered here is: a pattern that consistently produces harm to yourself or others. By that definition — not a moral code but a harm standard — which of your patterns most clearly qualify as defects?

5. What is the relationship between your most significant character defect and your addiction? How did that defect drive your using, and how does your using deepen that defect? Can you see the feedback loop?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Defect Awareness & Inventory Clarity

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can clearly name the specific character defects identified in my Step Four and Five work
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I understand the difference between a character defect (a pattern) and a character flaw (an isolated bad act)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I can see how my defects have produced consistent patterns of harm across multiple areas of my life
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I understand the developmental origins of my primary defects — where and why they developed
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I can identify the "exact nature" — the underlying character theme — that connects most of my defects
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I am aware of defects that operated so automatically and invisibly that they were difficult to even see in Steps Four and Five
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I understand how my addiction both originated in and amplified my character defects
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I can speak about my specific defects with clarity, without either minimizing them or catastrophizing them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: Understanding Character Defects: What They Are and Where They Come From

My Character Defect Inventory

Drawing from your Step Four and Five work, systematically inventory each major character defect.

1

Defect #1

Name it. How does it operate? What harm has it produced? What benefits does it provide?
Readiness level (1-5)?

2

Defect #2

Name it. How does it operate? What harm has it produced? What benefits does it provide?
Readiness level (1-5)?

3

Defect #3

Name it. How does it operate? What harm has it produced? What benefits does it provide?
Readiness level (1-5)?

4

Defect #4

Name it. How does it operate? What harm has it produced? What benefits does it provide?
Readiness level (1-5)?

5

Defect #5

Name it. How does it operate? What harm has it produced? What benefits does it provide?
Readiness level (1-5)?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: Understanding Character Defects: What They Are and Where They Come From

Origins — Where My Defects Came From

Understanding developmental origins without using them as excuses.

1

Childhood Environment

What environment did you grow up in? What adaptations did you develop to survive or cope? Which became character defects?

2

Attachment & Relationships

What did your early attachment experiences teach you about trust, vulnerability, and connection? How did those lessons become defects?

3

Trauma & Wounds

What traumatic or wounding experiences shaped your defensive strategies? Which defenses became defects?

4

The Addiction Process

How did active addiction amplify pre-existing defects or create new ones?

PART 3 OF 6 · READING

The Hidden Payoffs: Why We Cling to What Harms Us

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Hidden Payoffs: Why We Cling to What Harms Us

The Hidden Payoffs: Why We Cling to What Harms Us

The central mystery of Step Six — and the central challenge of genuine character change in recovery — is this: if character defects produce consistent harm, why are they so difficult to surrender? Why, after the honest work of Steps Four and Five, does genuine willingness to release them remain elusive? The answer lies in what psychologists call secondary gain, and what recovery language describes more simply as the payoffs of the defect.

Every significant character defect produces harm — but it also produces benefits. These benefits are usually unconscious, rarely acknowledged, and almost never admitted to others. But they are real, and they are powerful. The person whose defect is anger derives from it a sense of power and control, a temporary relief from fear, a way of commanding attention, and a clear boundary between the self and others. The person whose defect is people-pleasing derives from it the avoidance of conflict, a sense of being needed and valued, the control that comes from knowing others are pleased with you, and the safety of never being directly rejected. The person whose defect is dishonesty derives from it the freedom to pursue what they want without accountability, the avoidance of consequences, and the flexibility to manage others' perceptions. The person whose defect is self-pity derives from it a reduction of personal responsibility, the sympathy of others, and the comfort of a coherent narrative about their suffering.

Understanding your defects' payoffs is not an exercise in self-criticism. It is an exercise in clarity. You cannot become entirely ready to surrender a defect while you are still pretending that it costs you only harm. As long as you maintain the illusion that you hold a defect purely out of helplessness — that it is something that happens to you rather than something that serves you in specific ways — you cannot make the genuine choice to release it. The choice to release a defect is not a choice between the defect and nothing. It is a choice between the defect and what becomes possible in its absence — which requires honestly acknowledging what the defect currently provides.

The Big Book speaks of becoming "entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." This language implicitly acknowledges that partial readiness — readiness to surrender the defects that cost us only pain — is the easy part. It is readiness to surrender the defects that also benefit us that constitutes the genuine work of Step Six. This is why the Step requires its own work and its own time rather than being assumed.

Honesty about payoffs is hard. It requires the admission not only that "I have done harmful things" but that "I have done harmful things and gotten something from them, and I am not entirely sure I am willing to give that up." The spiritual dimension of Step Six addresses this directly. The willingness being cultivated is not merely a rational decision to exchange a less beneficial strategy for a more beneficial one. It is a form of surrender — a trust that what

becomes available in the absence of the defect is better than what the defect provides, even when that cannot be proven in advance. The person clinging to the payoffs of their defects is, in a real sense, unwilling to trust that there is a better way to get those needs met. Step Six asks: are you willing to find out?

Reflection Questions

1. For each of your primary character defects, what are its payoffs — what does it actually provide you, beneath the harm? Be as honest as you can. What needs does it meet, what fears does it protect you from, what does it give you that part of you is reluctant to give up?

2. Which of your defects provides the highest-value payoffs? Which would be hardest to surrender not because you enjoy the defect itself but because of what you would lose by releasing it?

3. The concept of secondary gain applies beyond recovery — it operates throughout psychology. Can you think of examples in your life where you have maintained a harmful pattern because of its hidden benefits? What does that tell you about how difficult genuine readiness is to cultivate?

4. What would you need to trust — about your Higher Power, about recovery, about yourself, about the future — to believe that surrendering a specific defect's payoffs will not leave you worse off? What is the faith dimension of this Step for you?

5. Write about the payoffs of your single most resistant defect. Be brutally honest: what specifically does it give you, protect you from, or provide that you are not yet sure you can live without?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Understanding Payoffs & Secondary Gains

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can identify the specific benefits — the payoffs — that each of my primary character defects provides
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I understand that defects persist not only because of habit but because they meet real underlying needs
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I can honestly name the needs my defects meet, even when acknowledging those needs feels shameful
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am willing to examine what I would need to find alternative ways to meet the needs currently served by my defects
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I understand that becoming ready means being willing to trust that those needs can be met differently
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have been honest with myself about which payoffs are most difficult to give up and why
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I can see how the payoffs of my defects have been used by my addiction mind to justify continued use
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I am beginning to believe that the needs currently met by my defects can be met through recovery in healthier ways
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Hidden Payoffs: Why We Cling to What Harms Us

The Payoff Analysis

Brutal honesty about what your defects provide — the benefits that make surrender difficult.

1

Primary Defect Payoffs

For your #1 defect: List every benefit it provides. What needs does it meet? What does it protect you from? What would you lose if it were removed?

2

Secondary Defect Payoffs

For your #2 defect: Same analysis — all the hidden benefits, honestly named.

3

The Hardest Payoff to Release

Across all defects, what single payoff would be hardest to give up? Why is it so valuable to you?

4

Alternative Ways to Meet Those Needs

For the needs your defects currently meet, how might they be met through recovery, relationships, or spiritual practice instead?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Hidden Payoffs: Why We Cling to What Harms Us

The Real Cost Ledger — What Defects Actually Cost

Making the harm concrete and specific.

1

Relationship Costs

How have your defects damaged your most important relationships? Be specific about each relationship and each defect's impact.

2

Recovery Costs

How have your defects threatened or undermined your recovery? Where have they created relapse risk?

3

Internal Costs

What have your defects cost you in peace of mind, self-respect, and the capacity to be present to your own life?

4

The Full Balance Sheet

Weighing costs vs. payoffs: Is maintaining each defect worth what it extracts from your life?

PART 4 OF 6 · READING

"Entirely Ready": The Full Weight of That Word

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: "Entirely Ready": The Full Weight of That Word

"Entirely Ready": The Full Weight of That Word

The Big Book is careful and precise in its language, and nowhere more carefully precise than in the phrase "entirely ready." Not ready. Not mostly ready. Not willing in principle, with some practical reservations. Entirely. The Step asks for a quality of readiness that is unconditional — not limited by exceptions, not contingent on proof that removal will occur, not conditional on keeping the defects that still seem useful.

Why does the Step demand entirety? Because partial readiness — the willingness to surrender the defects you hate while retaining the ones you still find useful — is the structure of relapse risk. The defects you are least ready to release are precisely the ones most likely to drive your next crisis. Anger retained because it feels like power; dishonesty retained because full honesty feels too vulnerable; self-centeredness retained because the alternative feels like erasure; control retained because trust feels dangerous — these are not harmless retained defects. They are active threats to recovery, maintained precisely because their payoffs feel necessary.

Entirely ready does not mean certain that removal will occur. The willingness is not a guarantee about outcome — it is a posture of openness. You are not promising that the defect will disappear. You are not claiming that you have already stopped engaging in the defect. You are developing the readiness to receive removal — the absence of the internal resistance that would, consciously or unconsciously, prevent the defect from being released if a Higher Power moved toward its removal.

Entirely ready also does not mean emotionally flat about the prospect. Becoming ready to surrender a defect that has served you — sometimes for decades — is a genuine loss, and it is appropriate to grieve it. The person who is ready to have their controlling behavior removed is losing a management strategy that has protected them from the terror of powerlessness. The loss is real, even if what follows is better. Step Six permits and perhaps requires this grief. The distinction is between grieving the loss of a defect while remaining willing to release it, versus using that grief as a reason to retain the defect indefinitely.

The practice of becoming entirely ready is progressive. It is rarely arrived at in a single moment of decision. Most people who work Step Six honestly report that readiness for different defects arrives at different rates — that some defects they are readily willing to surrender because the cost-benefit calculation is clear, while others require sustained attention, prayer, and honest conversation with a sponsor or counselor before genuine readiness becomes accessible.

One of the most useful questions for assessing genuine readiness is this: if your Higher Power, as you understand that concept, were to remove this defect right now — completely and immediately — would any part of you resist? Would any part of you find a reason to hold on, to argue for an exception, to maintain that this particular defect is actually necessary? The honest answer to that question, defect by defect, is the inventory of Step Six. It will reveal where the

work remains.

Reflection Questions

1. What does "entirely ready" mean to you, practically and personally? Is there a version of readiness you are currently willing to claim, and a version you cannot yet honestly claim? What is the gap between them?

2. If your Higher Power were to remove your primary character defect right now — permanently and completely — what would your honest reaction be? Would any part of you resist? What specifically would resist, and why?

3. What defects are you most ready to surrender? What makes those specific defects easier to release — is it that their payoffs are smaller, their harms are more visible, or something else?

4. What defects are you least ready to surrender? Is your lack of readiness primarily about the payoffs you don't want to lose, the fear of who you would be without them, or something else entirely?

5. The readiness asked for in Step Six is progressive and often arrives defect by defect over time. Where are you in that progression? What would move you closer to genuine "entirely ready" for your most resistant defect?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Genuine Readiness for Removal

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I am genuinely willing to have my character defects removed — not just in principle but concretely
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I feel a sincere desire to be free of the patterns that have produced harm in my life and relationships
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I believe that my character can genuinely change — that defects are not permanent features of who I am
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am willing to be entirely ready — including for defects that I still find useful or protective
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have begun to release the identity structures built around my defects — the "I am just that way" stories
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I understand that readiness is not removal and that I do not need to have already succeeded in changing to take this Step
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I feel a sincere spiritual openness — a genuine willingness to be transformed beyond what my own effort can produce
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have had honest conversations with my sponsor or counselor about my readiness for specific defects
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5**Resistance & Attachment to Defects**

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. There are specific character defects I am not yet ready to surrender because of the benefits they provide
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I hold on to certain defects because I am not sure who I would be without them — they feel central to my identity
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I use perfectionism about readiness ("I'm not ready yet") as a reason to delay genuine engagement with this Step
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. There are defects I am willing to have reduced but not fully removed — I want to keep a version of them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am afraid that surrendering certain defects will leave me vulnerable, powerless, or unable to protect myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I believe that some of my defects are actually strengths in disguise and should not be classified as defects at all

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have reservations about the spiritual dimension of this Step — the concept of "having God remove" something

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I experience resistance to Step Six that I have not yet been fully honest with my sponsor or counselor about

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: "Entirely Ready": The Full Weight of That Word

Defect-by-Defect Readiness Meter

Assessing genuine readiness for each specific defect.

1

Most Ready to Release

What defect are you most ready to have removed? What makes you ready for this one? Rate your readiness 1-5.

2

Moderately Ready

What defects are you willing to release in principle but find yourself negotiating about? What's the negotiation?

3

Least Ready to Release

What defect are you least ready to surrender? What would you lose? What scares you about being without it?

4

Growing Your Readiness

For your least-ready defect, what would move you from partial to entire readiness? What do you need to trust, grieve, or understand?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: "Entirely Ready": The Full Weight of That Word

My Most Resistant Defects — Deep Dive

The defects you are least ready to release deserve the most attention.

1

The Defect Itself

Name your most resistant defect. How does it operate? When did you first develop it?

2

Why I'm Holding On

What specifically would you lose if this defect were removed? What does it protect you from? What identity would you have to grieve?

3

The Fear

What are you afraid would happen if this defect were gone? Who would you be without it?

4

Toward Willingness

What would you need to trust — about your Higher Power, about recovery, about who you would become — to become willing to release this defect?

PART 5 OF 6 · READING

The Identity Problem: Who Am I Without My Defects?

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Identity Problem: Who Am I Without My Defects?

The Identity Problem: Who Am I Without My Defects?

Among the deepest obstacles to Step Six readiness is a question that is rarely spoken directly but operates powerfully beneath most resistance to character change: if I surrender my defects of character, who will I be? This is not a dramatic existential question asked consciously. It is a dim, wordless terror that operates at the level of identity — the fear that the patterns being surrendered are not incidental features of the self but constitutive ones, and that their removal would leave not a better person but a hollowed-out one.

This fear has some experiential foundation. If you have been controlling since adolescence, your controlling behavior has become part of the narrative structure of your self — it is woven into how you understand your relationships, your successes, your sense of competence and safety. To surrender it is not merely to give up a behavioral habit; it is to face a reorganization of the self-narrative in which control was a central chapter. If you have relied on anger as a source of power since childhood, then a self without anger may feel like a self without backbone — passive, vulnerable, available to exploitation. If you have built your identity around self-sufficiency, then becoming genuinely willing to receive help may feel like self-annihilation.

Psychologists speak of this as the threat to self-concept — the anxiety that arises when the prospect of change challenges not just a behavior but an identity structure. It is clinically well-established that people resist changes that threaten their sense of self even when those changes would objectively improve their lives. In the context of recovery, this means that a person can simultaneously believe intellectually that their controlling behavior is harmful and feel viscerally that surrendering it would make them someone they don't recognize or trust.

Step Six addresses this not by dismissing the identity concern but by placing it within a spiritual frame. The removal of character defects is not described as an erasure of the self but as a purification — the release of patterns that are obscuring rather than constituting the real self. The person who is controlling is not, at their core, a controller — they are a frightened human being who learned to manage fear through control. Remove the control behavior and you do not remove the person; you remove the strategy that has been covering the person's actual needs, actual vulnerability, and actual capacity for trust. What emerges is not an emptied self but a more authentic one.

This is supported by the consistent testimony of people in sustained recovery who have worked through significant character change. They do not report experiencing the surrender of defects as a loss of self. They report experiencing it as the discovery of a self — a self less driven by fear and compulsion, more capable of genuine relationship, more accessible to its own depth and the depth of others. The identity that was built on and around the defects was, it turns out, a construction — a useful and understandable construction, but not the real thing.

The work of Step Six, then, includes the work of beginning to grieve the false self — the identity structures built around the defects — in order to become open to the authentic self that will emerge in their absence. This is spiritual work as much as psychological work. It requires faith that what is on the other side of the release is worth reaching toward, even when it cannot be fully imagined in advance.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of your character defects feel most central to your identity — most woven into who you understand yourself to be? What is your honest fear about who you would be without them?

2. Have you ever had the experience of losing a coping mechanism or pattern and discovering that something better filled its place? What was that like? Can that experience serve as evidence that character change does not mean self-erasure?

3. The concept of the "false self" — an identity constructed around defenses and adaptations rather than authentic selfhood — is relevant to Step Six. What does your false self look like? What behaviors, stories, or patterns constitute it?

4. If you could glimpse the person you would be after genuine Step Six and Seven work — with your primary defects removed or significantly reduced — what do you imagine that person would be like? What qualities would emerge?

5. What would you need to grieve in order to become willing to release the identity structures built around your defects? What is the genuine loss involved in character change, and how do you hold that loss with honesty?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Identity Problem: Who Am I Without My Defects?

Identity & the False Self

Exploring the identity structures built around your defects.

1

My False Self Construction

What parts of your identity are built on or around your character defects? What stories do you tell about "who you are" that are actually descriptions of defensive patterns?

2

The Authentic Self Beneath

Who might you be if those defensive patterns were removed? What qualities, capacities, or values might emerge?

3

The Grief of Release

What would you need to grieve in order to release the false self? What is the genuine loss?

4

The Hope of Emergence

What becomes possible — in your relationships, your recovery, your life — if you release the identity built on defects and let something more authentic emerge?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Identity Problem: Who Am I Without My Defects?

Alternative Strategies — Life Without Each Defect

Imagining and planning for what replaces the defects.

1

If Controlling Behavior Were Removed

How would you navigate uncertainty, manage relationships, and cope with powerlessness? What would trust look like?

2

If Dishonesty Were Removed

How would you protect yourself, navigate difficult conversations, and manage others' perceptions through full honesty?

3

If Fear-Driven Behavior Were Removed

What would courage look like? How would you live differently if fear no longer drove most of your decisions?

4

The Skills You'll Need

What new capacities, practices, or skills will you need to develop to live without your primary defects? How will you build them?

PART 6 OF 6 · READING

The Spiritual Dimension: Readiness as a Form of Trust

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Spiritual Dimension: Readiness as a Form of Trust

The Spiritual Dimension: Readiness as a Form of Trust

Step Six is, in the fullest sense, a spiritual Step — not merely psychological preparation for a behavioral change, but an act of trust in a power beyond the self. The phrase "have God remove" is significant. The agency for removal is placed with a Higher Power, not with the person working the Step. This is not accidental. It reflects a profound insight about the nature of genuine character change: it cannot be achieved through self-will alone.

This runs counter to the cultural narrative of recovery that emphasizes effort, determination, and personal accountability. And those qualities are genuinely important — Step Six requires tremendous honest effort and personal accountability in the work of identifying defects and assessing readiness. But the removal itself, the Big Book insists, is not yours to engineer. The self-will that created and maintained the defects cannot simultaneously be the force that dismantles them. Using willpower to overcome a defect that originated in excessive self-reliance is, quite literally, more of the same problem.

What Step Six asks instead is readiness to receive — a posture of openness that removes the internal barriers to change rather than forcing change through personal effort. The person who is entirely ready is not someone who has succeeded in eliminating the defect through willpower. They are someone who has cleared away the reasons they might unconsciously resist change — the payoffs they are attached to, the identity structures built around the defect, the fear of who they would be without it — and has arrived at a genuine openness to being different.

This is the spiritual move that distinguishes Step Six from ordinary self-improvement work. Self-improvement asks: what should I change and how can I change it? Step Six asks: what am I willing to have changed by a power greater than my own self-effort? The difference matters. The person pursuing self-improvement retains the ego's ownership of the change process — they are still the agent, still the architect, still the one deciding what changes and how. The person working Step Six is surrendering that ownership — becoming willing to be acted on by something they cannot fully control or predict.

For people with a traditional theistic understanding, this dimension of the Step is relatively accessible — it is simply prayer: asking God to remove what cannot be removed through personal effort. For people whose spirituality is more diffuse or uncertain, the concept requires translation. The relevant question is not "Do I believe in a God who will literally extract my character defects?" but rather "Am I willing to open myself to change that goes beyond what my own effort can produce? Am I willing to be different in ways I have not engineered?"

That willingness — that genuine openness to transformation beyond self-will — is the spiritual core of Step Six regardless of theological framework. The practical question for this dimension of Step Six is simply: can you approach your character change with humility rather than

self-management? Can you hold your defects with honest acknowledgment rather than either shame or defensiveness, and offer them — genuinely, without strings attached — to whatever you understand as a Higher Power? That offering, sincerely made, is the completion of Step Six. It creates the spiritual condition in which the removal asked for in Step Seven becomes possible.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your current understanding of "having God remove" something, given your present relationship with spirituality or a Higher Power concept? What does that phrase mean to you personally, and what does it require of you?

2. Where is the boundary, in your experience, between what personal effort can accomplish and what requires something beyond self-will? Can you think of an example from your recovery where change happened in a way that felt like more than your own effort?

3. What does the posture of "readiness to receive" feel like, as distinct from the posture of "working to change"? Have you ever been in that posture in your life? What was it like?

4. The concept of surrender is central to Step Six. What does genuine surrender mean for you — not defeat, but the kind of trust that allows transformation to occur beyond what self-effort could produce?

5. Write a brief, honest statement addressed to your Higher Power as you understand it — acknowledging the defects you are now aware of, naming the ones you are genuinely ready to have removed, and being honest about the ones your readiness for is still developing.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Spiritual Readiness & Surrender

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have a working relationship with a Higher Power concept that I can genuinely orient my Step Six toward

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can approach the spiritual dimension of this Step with sincerity, whatever my formal theological beliefs

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand the difference between trying to change myself through self-will and becoming ready to receive change

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am willing to trust that what emerges after defect removal will be better than what the defects provide

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can approach this Step with humility — genuine, un-performed humility — rather than pride or self-condemnation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am working toward a genuine surrender of these defects rather than a negotiated reduction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have prayed about or meditated on my readiness for specific defects, and have experienced some shift

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I feel spiritually ready to move from Step Six into Step Seven — the actual request for removal

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Spiritual Dimension: Readiness as a Form of Trust

The Spiritual Readiness Practice

Daily practice for cultivating genuine readiness.

1

Daily Defect Awareness

Each morning, name the defect you will pay attention to today. Each evening, review where it showed up and where you caught it.

2

Willingness Prayer

Write a personal prayer or statement asking for willingness to be made ready, for the defects you are not yet ready to release.

3

Talking to Your Higher Power About Resistance

Be honest about what you're not willing to surrender yet and why. Ask for help with the resistance.

4

The 30-Day Readiness Practice

What specific daily practice will you commit to for 30 days to grow your readiness? When? How?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 6 Reading: The Spiritual Dimension: Readiness as a Form of Trust

My Step Six Completion Plan

Moving from awareness to genuine, entire readiness.

1

Where I Am Now

Honest assessment: Are you entirely ready for all your defects to be removed? If not, which ones are you ready for and which require more work?

2

The Work Still Needed

For the defects you are not yet entirely ready to release, what specific work would move you closer to readiness?

3

My Step Six Commitment

Write your Step Six statement: "I am ready for God to remove..." (list what you're genuinely ready for). "I am working toward readiness for..." (list what still needs work).

4

Next Steps

What happens after Step Six? When and how will you take Step Seven? What preparation remains?
