

Step 5: Admit to ourselves, to our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ, to proper priesthood authority, and to another person the exact nature of our wrongs.

Key Principle: Confession

In our addictions, most of us felt isolated or alone. Even on occasions when others might feel a sense of connectedness, we felt like we didn't fit in. Many of us felt broken and thought no one would accept or love us, especially if they knew about our addictions. As we came to recovery meetings, we began to emerge from the isolation in which addiction thrived. At first, many of us just sat and listened, but eventually we felt safe enough to share our experiences. Still, we kept many things to ourselves—shameful things, embarrassing things, heartbreaking things, things that made us feel vulnerable.

Working step 4 may bring back these feelings of shame and embarrassment, so we recommend working step 5 right after completing step 4. Postponing it would be like acknowledging an infected wound without cleansing it. Admitting our wrongs seemed overwhelming, but as we asked Jesus Christ for help, He gave us courage and strength.

Sharing our inventories with our sponsors and then confessing to our bishops seemed to be the hardest things we had ever done. But those who had gone before us helped us understand the importance of this step. Writing our inventories helped us become fully aware of our mistakes, weaknesses, and sins. But becoming aware of them was not enough. Addiction thrives in secrecy. By working through step 5, we broke that secrecy. Sister Carole M. Stephens taught, "Hope and healing are not found in the dark abyss of secrecy but in the light and love of our Savior, Jesus Christ" ("The Master Healer," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2016, 11). Being completely honest prepares us for the next steps and allows Jesus Christ to heal us more fully.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught: "Repentance can never come until one has bared his soul and admitted his actions without excuses or rationalizations. ... Those persons who choose to meet the issue and transform their lives may find repentance the harder road at first, but they will find it the infinitely more desirable path as they taste of its fruits" ("The Gospel of Repentance," *Ensign*, Oct. 1982, 4).

Trusting God and summoning courage, we decided to work step 5. We weren't sure we could overcome the intense feeling of shame and fear of rejection. Some of us started to share or confess but gave in to fear and had to try again. We prayed and asked God to help us have the strength we would need. Sharing and admitting our mistakes was a powerful experience. As we did so, we felt Jesus Christ's love for us, which gave us hope that it would be okay.

Although our sponsors helped us write our inventories, we needed to share our inventories with them or another trusted person. They saw things from a different perspective and helped us see patterns we couldn't. They helped us better understand our tendencies toward negative thoughts and emotions (such as self-will, fear, pride, self-pity, jealousy, self-righteousness, anger, resentment, lust, and so on). These thoughts and emotions reflected the nature of and were the fruits of our wrongs. But our sponsors could see the good in us and helped us see the good in ourselves.

We confessed to our bishops or branch presidents anything that was illegal or that would have prevented us from having a temple recommend. If we had doubts about what to confess, we asked our priesthood leaders. Our confessions involved seeking forgiveness from Jesus Christ through prayer and proper priesthood authority. For most of us, this experience was liberating. We unloaded our heavy burdens and placed them at the Savior's feet. We felt peace, joy, and love. This experience was sacred and sweet.

Action Steps

This is a program of action. Our progress depends on consistently applying the steps in our daily lives. This is known as “working the steps.” The following actions help us come unto Christ and receive the direction and power necessary to take the next step in our recovery.

Share our inventories from step 4 with our sponsors and confess our sins to God and proper priesthood authorities as needed

Alma advised his son Corianton to “acknowledge [his] faults and [the] wrong which [he did]” (Alma 39:13). This advice can serve as a guide and inspiration for working step 5. This step includes sharing our inventories from step 4 with another person, typically a sponsor, who has been through the process and can help us share in an honest and a thorough way. If a sponsor is not available, prayerfully select another trusted person, preferably someone well-grounded in recovery. Avoid anyone you suspect might extend improper guidance, provide misinformation, or have difficulty maintaining confidences. We also suggest caution in sharing our inventories with close family members. It is important to counsel with our bishops or therapists to decide when to disclose our behaviors to a spouse in order to prevent further injury to them.

Jesus Christ taught that confession is an essential part of the repentance process: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:43). Therefore, we confess our sins to our Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ and seek His forgiveness. Furthermore, we should confess our more serious transgressions to a bishop or branch president. If you are unsure what to confess, listen to your conscience and be mindful of sexual sins or other immoral behaviors. When in doubt, remember the invitation to “come now and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18) and discuss your questions with your priesthood leader.

“While only the Lord can forgive sins, these priesthood leaders play a critical role in the process of repentance. They will keep your confession confidential and help you throughout the process of repentance. Be completely honest with them. If you partially confess, mentioning only lesser mistakes, you will not be able to resolve a more serious, undisclosed transgression. The sooner you begin this process, the sooner you will find the peace and joy that come with the miracle of forgiveness” (*True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* [2004], 134).

Let peace into our lives

Repentance and confession bring peace into our lives. Elder Quentin L. Cook described this peace by stating: “When there has been a major transgression, confession is required to bring peace. Perhaps there is nothing to compare with the peace that comes from a sin-wracked soul unloading his or her burdens on the Lord and claiming the blessings of the Atonement” (“Personal Peace: The Reward of Righteousness,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2013, 32).

Occasionally people in recovery meetings or in other situations continually rehearse their sins and shortcomings. Though they constantly confess their mistakes, they never find peace. Do not confuse step 5 with an obsessive desire to dwell on negative things. The intent of step 5 is exactly the opposite. We work step 5 not to hold on to the things we confess but to let them go.

Once we honestly and thoroughly completed step 5, we were left with nothing to hide. We outwardly demonstrated our desire to “give away all [our] sins” (Alma 22:18) so that we could receive a greater knowledge of God’s love and the love of many people who care about us.

Study and Understanding

The following scriptures and statements from Church leaders can help in our addiction recovery. We can use them for meditation, study, and journaling. We must remember to be honest and specific in our writing to gain the most benefit from it.

Confess to God

“I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:7).

- How does confessing my sins to God help me make positive changes in my life? How does it give me courage and strength to confess to another person?

Create a Note

Focus on how God sees us

“Let not any man publish his own righteousness; ... sooner let him confess his sins, and then he will be forgiven, and he will bring forth more fruit” (Joseph Smith, in History, 1838–1856 [Manuscript History of the Church], volume C-1 Addenda, 46, josephsmithpapers.org).

- One major obsession of people who struggle with addiction is a desire to look good to others. How would this desire keep me from improving and “bringing forth more fruit,” or good works?

Create a Note

- How would my behavior change if I were more concerned about how God perceives me?

Create a Note

Be sincere

“Whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also” (Mosiah 26:29).

When we confess our sins, we must be sincere.

- Consider how holding back part of my confession undermines the sincerity of my efforts. What part of my inventory, if any, am I tempted to hide?

Create a Note

- What do I have to gain by hiding this portion of my inventory? What do I have to lose?

Create a Note

- How might Jesus Christ bless my life if I confess the most difficult things first and give them to Him?

Create a Note

Confess our sins as soon as we recognize them

“In this same year were they brought to a knowledge of their error and did confess their faults” (3 Nephi 1:25).

- This verse is an example of people who did not procrastinate confessing their faults once they recognized them. What are the benefits of confessing my sins right after I recognize them?

Create a Note

- What might be the detrimental effects if I procrastinate confessing my sins?

Create a Note

Relieve stress and find peace

“I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good” (Alma 39:7).

Some people may claim that steps 4 and 5 focus too much on negative things and only add to the stress of recovery. In this verse, we learn that being aware of our shortcomings and facing our mistakes will help us in recovery.

- In what ways can steps 4 and 5 relieve me of stress and bring me more peace?

Create a Note

Forsake sin

“By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:43).

- To forsake something means to abandon it or give it up completely. How does confessing my sins demonstrate my desire to forsake my old ways?

Create a Note

Create a Note