

All In The Family

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

We all know that we've been hurt and let down by others, particularly our family of origin. It's part of being around humans in our world. But some of us are so focused on how we've been victimized and how others have hurt us that we fail to see how we've been hurting ourselves and then others. Our reactions are often more deadly to our soul and to the next person in line than the initial actions or words of another were to us. God has a way forward for us. That way is rooted in our living inside the story of Jesus' forgiveness and healing for our family wounds.

You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. "Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven. If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. (From Luke 6:36-38)

Those closest to us cannot escape being harmed by the consequences of our actions. If we are married, our addictions are harmful to our partners, even if we hate to admit it. God says that our lives are literally intertwined with the lives of our mates. It may be a healthy union or a dysfunctional one. In either case, we're united. The behavior of one always affects the other. Any time we fail to love sacrificially, or fail to show respect for our spouse, we are hurting them and ourselves. Sure, they have hurt us, too, but in Step 8, we're dealing with our own issues.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. Husbands love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her. (Ephesians 5:21-22, 25)

Our parents are deeply connected to our lives on so many levels. Whether our families are intact or not, whether our parents acknowledge their love for us or not, whether they've made a mess of their lives or are a picture of perfection, they are still our parents. They once held us in their arms and had hopes and dreams that our lives could be better than their own. Parents are deeply vulnerable to hurt from their children. When our lives are damaged by the effects of addiction, our parents will be vulnerable to the pain. We have the capacity to cause grief, bitter sorrow, shame, and disgrace on our parents. Even if our parents have contributed to our problems, we can still take responsibility for our side of the relationship by doing what we can to make things right with them. We can live in God's forgiveness and extend that to our parents. We can receive healing and pray for healing for our parents. We can trust

God to do what God loves to do -- heal relationships that have been broken. God makes a way where there seems to be no way.

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. Honor your father and mother. This is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends with a promise. And this is the promise: If you honor your father and mother, "you will live a long life, full of blessing". A foolish child brings grief to a father and bitterness to a mother. (From Eph. 6:1-3 & Prov. 17:25)

All parents feel guilty at one time or another about how we have raised our kids. If our needs weren't met during childhood, we may have been totally at a loss on how to meet the needs of our children as little ones, as rebellious teenagers, or as adults. We may be so overwhelmed by our experience or avoidance of parenting that we stay in denial about how our lifestyles affect our children. The truth is, when we fail to provide for our children's needs, they are hurt. We can begin again today. We can make amends by letting our children know we failed and it's not their fault. We can reaffirm our love for them, and let them know that we're taking steps to change. We can seek God's heart and help today in order to grow in God's grace as a loving supportive parent.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

We often spend a lot of time and energy on trying to change how others treat us. It's time to accept the fact that we are powerless to change anyone else. Healing can only come to us when we begin to look at what WE are doing, how WE are carrying anger, hurt, bitterness, discontent. WE need to begin to look at what WE are saying and doing today in light of God's word -- what God says is right and wrong, good or harmful -- and make changes based on those principles rather than on our history. God understands the actions that caused us pain and God wants to help us avoid perpetuating them. God has healing for every painful offence we confess and turn from -- including the hurtful words and actions of others. It's time to turn from the wounds and the blaming. It's time to turn to our compassionate Father in heaven who loves us and who is offering to fill our lives with so much good that we will have no more room for bitterness and pain. This is the true basis of a Step 8 list that prepares us to make amends.

Questions For Discussion and Reflection

How am I "breaking the cycle" of pain and dysfunction in which I grew up? Where's God in this process?