

1 **Step Eight**

2
3 *Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them*
4 *all.*

5
6 *Each of the previous Steps asked us to look within ourselves. Step Eight asks us to look*
7 *outside ourselves, specifically toward the people we have harmed. With a humble heart*
8 *and the recovery tools of the last seven Steps to aid us, we begin the process of*
9 *seeking willingness to make amends. There is great wisdom in the amends process*
10 *being a two-step process, in which we identify the amends and then develop the*
11 *willingness to act. Step Eight provides us with time to contemplate the harms we have*
12 *done to others along with space for a change of heart and of behaviors. We ask our*
13 *Higher Power to remove obstacles to willingness, such as resentments, fears,*
14 *rationalization, and justification. Doing the work of this Step softens our hearts and*
15 *makes space for forgiving ourselves and others, whether or not they have harmed us.*

16
17 Our work in Step Four gave us the first glimpse of those we may have harmed. Many of
18 us chose to use our Step Four findings as the starting point for our Step Eight list. We
19 applied ourselves with honesty and humility as we added each name to our list. Having
20 seen the healing changes this Step made in the lives of others who worked it before us,
21 we felt encouraged. We had seen their attitudes and behaviors change. We had heard
22 them share their lightness of spirit and the improvement in their relationships with
23 others. We moved forward with hope.

24
25 There were many ways to create the list. For some, it was a simple handwritten list.
26 Some of us made a detailed spreadsheet with the rows for the person's name and
27 columns for the harm(s) we had done to them and our level of willingness to make
28 amends to them (e.g., now, someday, or not yet willing). Some of us asked our
29 sponsors or others who had worked this Step for input on what worked for them. With
30 this wealth of information we created a method that worked best for us.

31
32 No matter how we constructed the list, it became a powerful tool. As we looked at each
33 name, our Higher Power helped us become fully conscious of the harm our actions and
34 behaviors had caused others. We had let someone down, been dishonest, damaged
35 finances or careers, hurt friends or family members. With weak boundaries, we had
36 become enmeshed in an addictive dynamic, and even our best intentions may have
37 adversely affected our relationships. Whether we caused harm inadvertently or
38 purposefully, we acknowledged that our choices and behaviors had hurt others and
39 ourselves.

40
41 Although Step Eight asks us do the difficult work of accepting responsibility for our
42 harmful actions and behaviors, we heard that one of the great purposes of this Step was
43 to free ourselves from the guilt and shame we carried about our mistreatment of others
44 and ourselves. With this in mind, we endeavored to be gentle and to exercise
45 compassionate accountability for ourselves. Prior to recovery we may not have been
46 aware of how our character defects manifested in our relationships and dealings with

47 others. What we thought were tools, options, or solutions may actually have been our
48 faulty coping skills. Lashing out or retaliating may have been all we were capable of in
49 certain situations. Punishing ourselves for this would actually work against the purpose
50 of this Step. Instead, with the support of our sponsor, this Step brings us the opportunity
51 to be accountable for our past actions, to free us from the burdens of guilt, shame, and
52 regret.

53

54 One of the biggest challenges many of us faced was being willing to make amends to
55 those who had harmed us—especially if the harm to us felt far greater than the harm to
56 them. Defensiveness, wounded pride, judgment, and resentment toward such people
57 blocked our willingness and stood in the way of our spiritual growth. Justification,
58 rationalization, and minimizing came into play. We recognized that these faulty defense
59 mechanisms diverted our attention away from healthy remorse, and from humbly
60 seeking the spiritual gifts that willingness and acceptance bring to us. We realized that
61 Step Eight is about healing ourselves, not exonerating others from their part. In our
62 effort to move forward, we sought to detach from the other party's harm and to focus on
63 our part. Our part may have been a small portion of the overall harm that occurred in
64 our interaction, but it was still our responsibility. By focusing on our part, we found
65 healing and freedom from guilt and shame.

66

67 Uncomfortable feelings and fears may have caused us to hesitate on this Step or
68 tempted us to stray out of the present into futurizing or “what if” territory. We reminded
69 ourselves to stay within the scope of what was asked: to make a list and become willing.
70 We set aside concerns about outcomes or the possibility of facing the persons to whom
71 we needed to make amends and kept our focus on the current Step, taking on any
72 mental or emotional blocks as they arose. We trusted the process and had faith we'd be
73 provided all we needed as we prepared for Step Nine.

74

75 Sponsors played a crucial role in helping us discern where we had been overly
76 responsible for others by taking on unearned guilt or responsibility for harms we didn't
77 cause. They helped us right-size our part and let go of issues that didn't belong to us.

78

79 Our list would not be complete without adding ourselves to it. Our Fourth Step revealed
80 how we had harmed ourselves. For many of us, acknowledging and accepting this was
81 harder than facing the harm we had caused others. We may have neglected ourselves,
82 put ourselves in harm's way, ignored our needs, or acted against our values. We may
83 have blamed and shamed ourselves for things we did not have control over, like abuse
84 or things that were done to us when we were children. We may have ignored our Higher
85 Power's will for us. Our health, peace of mind, and self-respect had been harmed. We
86 accepted that it was appropriate and in fact vital to add ourselves to our Eighth Step list.

87

88 As we looked at our self-harm, we tried to be gentle. We stayed focused on self-
89 acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness. If we were to free ourselves from the weight
90 of our past behaviors, we had to accept and forgive our own shortcomings and our
91 character defects. We also kept our eyes on the mental, emotional, and spiritual
92 freedom this work could bring.

93
94 The wording in the Step, “became willing,” indicated a process in which a spiritual
95 surrender or change of heart was needed. Willingness would lead us to detachment
96 from the other party’s injustice or wrongs toward us. We would move towards
97 acceptance of their humanness and imperfections, and release our resentments and
98 pain.

99
100 We recalled times when we’d made an unwilling amends out of obligation to keep the
101 peace, but it wasn’t heartfelt or genuine. Such an amends gave us no relief. We may
102 have even felt worse, with resentment and anger growing. We compared that to a time
103 when we’d made a heartfelt amends and considered how that felt. We realized that a
104 willing heart unencumbered by anger and resentment could give a true, genuine
105 amends. We sought to find that place within us for each person on our list.

106
107 We asked our Higher Power for help with willingness. Perhaps there were people on our
108 list to whom we were already willing and eager to make amends. Yet there were others
109 with whom we still struggled, so we asked our Higher Power simply for the willingness
110 *to be* willing. In such instances, we may have found it helpful to look with fresh eyes at
111 those more challenging people on our list and to see things from their perspective. We
112 sought to accept them as they were. We began to feel compassion and empathy toward
113 them. Those feelings were indications that we were becoming willing. From this place
114 we could feel resentment toward them slip away, and peace and forgiveness take its
115 place. We felt a weight lifted from us.

116
117 As a result of our work, we experienced the change of heart we would need in order to
118 make true amends. The priceless wisdom of this process became clear as we prepared
119 to reach out and make reparations to those we had harmed.

120
121 Our work in Step Eight gave us hope of shedding our old resentments, healing old
122 wounds, and leading an intentional life in which we avoid harming others or creating
123 new resentments. We were confident that we had prepared the best we could to be able
124 to set matters right and make amends to all those we had harmed, including ourselves.
125 We were ready for Step Nine.