



Letting Go of Avoidance

by Matt T.

Like many people new to the program, when I got into recovery at the end of 2007, I started by writing out and presenting my First Step. Over the years, I've updated that First Step as part of various workshops. Each time I revisit it, I gain fresh insight into how my addiction wrecked my life. But truth be told, my First Step story hasn't changed much — it's still the same core story of my powerlessness and unmanageability.

What *has* changed over the years is my awareness of my **character defects**, especially through working Step Six:

"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

As I've stayed in recovery and kept growing, I've continued to identify ways I think, feel, and respond to life that simply don't serve me anymore — patterns that kept me stuck for decades.

A Man's Example — and My Turn

In my early years, there was a man in the program who had many years of sobriety. Every so often, he would stand up in a meeting and share a kind of informal "Sixth Step" by talking through a specific character defect he was working on. It always struck me. He set an example I've tried to follow.

So today, I want to do something similar by sharing about a defect that just refuses to go away: **avoidance**.

How Avoidance Worked for Me

I've come to see that every character defect serves me in some way, even if it also hurts me. Avoidance is no exception. It's been a way to protect myself from uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and tasks.

- Avoidance lets me **ignore hard things now**, putting off feeling anxious, ashamed, or inadequate.
- It lets me do easier things instead, so at least I *feel* productive.
- Most of all, avoidance has shielded me from having to face my deepest fear: that I might try, fail, and discover I'm simply not good enough.

In a twisted way, avoidance preserved my fragile self-esteem. But it also undercut me at every turn.

What Avoidance Looked Like in My Addiction

Avoidance showed up everywhere in my life before recovery:

- I knew my marriage was in trouble, but I avoided honest conversations with my first wife.
- I avoided acknowledging my deep needs for intimacy, acceptance, and to feel desired — because I felt ashamed of having those needs.
- Even when I went to therapists, I avoided telling the whole truth.
- I avoided facing the pain and chaos caused by my acting out. I didn't want to look at how I was destroying myself and hurting others.
- I avoided facing how wide the gap had grown between the image of "Matt" I showed the world and the secret, shameful Matt I actually was.
- At work, I avoided asking for help when I was in over my head. I acted confident, struggled in isolation, and often delivered less than I could have if I'd simply admitted my uncertainty.
- I avoided conflict with friends and my spouse, saying yes when I wanted to say no, then resenting them for not reading my mind.
- I avoided finances, letting my first wife — and later my second wife — handle everything until we both spiraled into debt. That avoidance ended in foreclosure and bankruptcy.

Avoidance might not sound like a big deal. But for me, it was a **gateway defect**. Avoiding difficult truths led me to lie. I started with small lies, then big ones, until my entire life was covered by deception. My avoidance and lack of integrity were bound together.

How Avoidance Looks in Recovery

Many years into recovery, I'm still prone to avoidance. I see it daily. But I've also come to see its costs. I turn it over to my Higher Power, and little by little, I've seen change.

These days, avoidance looks different:

- I sometimes avoid uncomfortable conversations with my wife. I might sense something's off but fear what might come up. Yet every time I push through that fear, it's honored. Things improve — even if it takes hashing it out over a few days. The lie

that avoiding hard conversations keeps me safe just doesn't hold up anymore.

- I still distract myself with games on my phone, mindless news, or snacks. There's nothing wrong with those things by themselves, but for me they can be automatic avoidance. I've learned that if I take a deliberate break — choosing to rest for a bit — it's healthy. If I slip into avoidance without intention, it starts to undermine my well-being.

At work, avoidance creeps in around poorly defined projects. I procrastinate, distract myself, then beat myself up internally:

"What's wrong with you, Matt? You've always been like this. Might as well shut down for the day."

I've learned a couple strategies that work for me, especially at work:

- Talk to a co-worker and put a meeting on our calendars. Just voicing my goal helps me stop avoiding.
- Get up and take a walk, take a break. This is short term avoidance that works for me - 15, 30 or 60 minutes later, I can come back to the task.
- I've learned to be humble enough to recognize when I'm too tired or distracted — and consciously choose to tackle it later. That's not avoidance; it's wise self-care. But I watch myself closely to make sure I don't keep pushing it out forever.

Willing to Let It Go

Step Six asks, "Am I entirely ready to have God remove this defect of character?"

Today, I can say: **Yes, I'm willing.**

- I'm willing to feel uncomfortable and unsure when I start on hard projects.
- I'm willing to have the awkward conversations, even when I'd rather run.
- I'm willing to let go of avoidance — that old "friend" who's done far more harm than good.

I know I won't face every challenge immediately or flawlessly. But I'm willing to acknowledge my fears instead of burying them.

Avoidance, I see how you tried to protect me. But you've cost me far more than you've ever helped me. It's time to say goodbye.