Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.”
(Lamentations 3:40)

Let’s break this Step down to figure out how to take a searching and fearless moral inventory.

**Searching** means “a willingness to explore or discover.” It also implies a lengthy process that continues for a while. **Fearless** means “to set about without fear.” Why would we have fear? Because discovering the truth about ourselves can be painful. We can only be fearless if we begin this process knowing it is a good thing. Confessing our sin sets us free physically, spiritually, and emotionally (Psalm 32). We can trust that God will work in our lives through it. If we have fear, we can ask God for the willingness to face this with courage. **Moral** has to do with our behavior. We want to see where we have gone astray, which implies that some of the things we did were wrong. We are willing to identify them and eventually right them.

**Inventory** means “to take stock of something.” An inventory of a store is done to see which items are there and which are missing. Once the inventory is done, adjustments are made to the books, so that the books will accurately reflect what is in stock currently. We do the same with our lives. We take stock to set things right to start fresh. We also take stock of the good things we want to keep—our assets—and the bad things that are present that we want to get rid of: our character defects, liabilities, and past mistakes.

God wants us to take stock of our lives. First Corinthians 11:31 says, “But, if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.” Galatians 5:16-25 reminds us that we should be living by the Spirit in a new way of life that doesn’t give in to the sinful nature.

All of us have a conscience that results in us feeling guilty, yet we have the awesome promise and assurance that we can “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience” (Hebrews 10:22). We all have true and false guilt. True guilt needs to be felt for the things we have done that are wrong. False guilt is guilt we carry for things we feel bad about that weren’t wrong or weren’t our responsibility. First John 3:18-22 tell us that even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts. He is the ultimate judge of what we did and whether it was right or wrong. Our goal is to be able to live in a way that keeps us from feeling guilty whether that involves letting go of false guilt or confessing our sins to let go of our true guilt.
You will do one inventory of your life to start, and later do inventories for specific incidents, relationships, and issues. You will find inventories to be a helpful way of dealing with problems in your life and relationships.

The purpose of a moral inventory is to:

- Rid yourself of guilt and remorse over the past
- Identify liabilities/character defects
- Identify assets/positive character traits
- Identify fears
- Clear up resentments
- Identify your part in relationship problems
- End rationalizing and justifying of your actions

How to Do the Inventory

*The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* suggests an inventory be done of one’s resentments, fears, and relationships. This allows you to look at what people have done to you that you are still hanging onto and what you have done that you regret and need to let go of. It is also a way to make an assessment of your character assets and defects.

The Four Column Method

*Resentment* means “to re-feel an injustice.” Hebrews 12:15 reminds us not to allow any bitter roots to grow, because they defile many people. The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous believed that resentment for alcoholics was poison because resentment led to self-pity, which was used as a reason to drink. Step Four was intended to rid them of both. This makes sense when you understand that addictions are a way of coping with pain. Much of that pain comes from guilt about the past and resentments toward others. The ability to deal with that pain in a healthy way removes the reason to engage in the addiction. Resentment for adult children of dysfunctional families and codependents is also poison, because it leads to self-pity, which keeps them feeling like victims, feeling stuck in the problem, and unable to take responsibility for themselves.

The inventory chart for this Step follows the suggested outline in “The Big Book” (pages 64-71). Fill it in as follows:

**Column 1:** Identify the person, institution, or principle toward which you hold the resentment, anger, or hurt. I also look at disappointments, hurts, and regrets, because it helps bring up additional examples of things that have happened in our lives that we need to look at.

Person: Label the person by name.

If it is someone you have a lot of history with, you should write the name on the top of the paper and make the whole page about this person.
Institution: any group of people such as a company, government, church, agency, or organization that you have anger or resentment toward.

Principle: a rule, law, or idea that angers you.

Some examples are: “Good things happen to bad people,” “The rain falls on the just and unjust,” “Life isn’t fair,” or “Accept life on life’s terms.” Laws may include tax laws, child custody laws, or divorce laws. Rules may include things at work, family rules, or church traditions.

Column 2: Identify the anger, resentment, disappointment, hurt, or regret (past or present). How detailed you get depends on how much “stuff” you are carrying. Some people go back to every specific instance they can think of from their childhood to the present. Others put only the main incidents or the things that are still bothering them the most.

Column 3: This column can be filled in now or later. Your goal is to say how the incident in Column 2 affected you at the time it occurred and later on. “The Big Book” lists these possibilities: self-esteem, finances, ambition, personal relationships, sexual relations, security, and pride. You can add others. The things that happen to us affect us in multiple ways and it is important to understand how.

Column 4: I like to leave this part for use in Step Five when you are sharing your inventory with someone else. By doing this at a later time, you have a chance to take the other person’s perspective into consideration and you are free to just focus for the time being on getting out all your resentments, anger, hurts, disappointments, and regrets without having to analyze them.

Listing Fears

“The Big Book” also recognizes the need to look at our fears because they affect our lives and cause us to engage in addictions and dysfunctional behaviors. We have to face our fears to move forward, especially since we are doing a “fearless” inventory. Answer these questions:

- What are my fears?
- Why do I have each one?
- How does each one affect my decisions and actions?
- What benefits do I get from giving in to the fear?

Here are some common fears: failure, success, exposure, loss of material things, financial problems, people, losing sobriety, injury to self or others, divorce, children being hurt, death, the future, the unknown, loss of a job, admitting the truth, health problems, rejection, making friends, and specific things like airplanes, public speaking, and heights.

Once we identify each one and the role each plays in our lives, we need to turn the fear over to God, do what we know is the right thing to do in spite of the fear, and trust him with the outcome. David said in Psalm 56:3, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you.”
Relationship Inventory

“The Big Book” suggests we also look at our conduct in our relationships: “We have listed the people we have hurt by our conduct, and are willing to straighten out the past if we can” (page 70). Our human tendency is to blame others for our problems, since it is easier to see others’ faults than our own. The addict blames other people for the addiction; codependents blame the addict for their problems; adult children from dysfunctional families blame the dysfunctional family: all of us find someone or something to blame rather than taking personal responsibility.

Answer these questions:

- Who did I hurt? How?
- How was I selfish?
- How was I dishonest?
- Was I self-centered and uncaring?
- Was I manipulative?
- Was I accusatory?
- Did I enable or cover-up and prevent others from facing their own consequences?
- Did I control or manage others’ lives?
- Was I overly responsible or irresponsible?
- Did I exercise self-control or was I emotionally reactive?
- Why did I act the way I did?
- What do I wish I had done now that I see things differently?

Answering these questions should make you aware of patterns in how you have conducted yourself in your relationships. It will also help you see your own faults, which will lessen the resentments you have toward others. And it can be the beginning of your list in Steps Eight and Nine, where you will work on making amends.

Inventory of Assets and Liabilities

During your inventory, you should be able to see your character traits. Use these patterns to identify good traits (assets) and bad traits (liabilities). Some of our inborn positive traits have become bad traits, as a result of living and coping with dysfunction and addictions. For example, caring can become caretaking, trusting can become gullibility, and cautiousness can become fearfulness. Try to identify the positive parts of you that have been lost and those that have been distorted. Use the assets and liabilities list in the question section to identify your assets and liabilities. You can also refer back to the list later to measure your progress and to identify things you want to work on changing in Steps Six and Seven.
Other Ways to Do an Inventory

- Write your life story.
- List your wrongs and regrets.
- Do a written analysis of a time, relationship, situation, or incident. You can use “The Big Book” chart or you can just write about the incident to get clarity over what happened and your part in it.
- Do an emotional inventory. List your emotions over the things you are struggling with.
- Do a spiritual inventory. Write about your spiritual state and your relationship with God in the past and present.
- Family-of-origin work: Look at your experience in your family. Get a clearer understanding of the dysfunction, your role in the family, and how it has affected who you are today.

The purpose of your inventory is to look honestly at your behavior past and present. The most important thing is that you do some kind of searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself; it is less important which method you use.

Step Four Questions

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

1. Describe how you feel about doing a searching and fearless moral inventory. Is there anything keeping you from it? How could it help you?

2. Describe how resentments are affecting your life and relationships. Name a few resentments you are struggling with.
3. How have you blamed others for your choices? How can you begin to take responsibility for your choices?

4. We have to face our fears to move forward, especially to do a “fearless” inventory. Answer these questions:
   - What are your fears?
   - Why do you have each one?
   - How does each one affect your decisions and actions?
   - What benefits do you get from giving in to the fear?
   - Are you willing to do the right thing even though you are still fearful?

5. Describe the circumstances under which you succumb to self-pity. How does that keep you from moving forward?
6. Go through this list of opposite character traits and check which one of each pair most describes you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>Liabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Mean-Spirited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>Uncaring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible; Reliable</td>
<td>Irresponsible; Unreliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincere</td>
<td>Insincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>Proud; Self-Righteous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>Tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Untrustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Impatient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>People-pleaser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable</td>
<td>Unreasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>Thoughtless; self-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-Minded</td>
<td>Close-minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Unrealistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generous
Respectful
Courteous
Content
Optimistic
Grateful
Hard-working
Confident
Forgiving
Honest
Cooperative; agreeable
Prompt; on time
Empathetic; understanding
Flexible
Selfish; stingy
Disrespectful
Rude
Discontented
Pessimistic
Ungrateful
Lazy
Insecure; fearful
Resentful; unforgiving
Dishonest
Uncooperative; disagreeable
Procrastinating; late
Judgmental
Rigid
7. Answer these questions:

- Who did you hurt? How?
- How were you selfish?
- How were you dishonest?
- How were you controlling or manipulative?
- How were you accusatory and judgmental?
- How did you manage others’ lives?
- Did you enable or cover-up and prevent others from facing their own consequences?
- Did you exercise self-control or were you emotionally reactive?
- Were you overly responsible or irresponsible?
• Why did you act the way you did?

• What do you wish you had done now that you see things differently?

8. What is your plan to do a searching and fearless moral inventory? What method will you use and when will you start it?

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