

Step 4: Make a searching and fearless written moral inventory of ourselves.

Key Principle: Truth

The purpose of step 4 is to look at our past to better understand our weaknesses and recognize what is preventing us from becoming like the Savior and serving others. For example, fear, justification, and denial cloud our ability to see things clearly. But we can't change something if we aren't fully aware of it. Our inventories help us understand everything that is getting in the way of our recovery process. Writing our inventories requires us to be honest with ourselves about who we are and where we have been so that we can then ask God to help us change, become better, and heal.

We have all experienced very difficult things. Our hearts have been broken, and we have painful emotional scars. We turned to addictive substances and behaviors that numbed the pain, and then we made choices to continue seeking this temporary relief. These behaviors caused even more pain, which gave us more reason to use addiction to cope. The pains of life and our addictive behaviors became mountains of shame that we tried to hide, forget, or deny.

Our addictions, fear, and denial crippled our ability to reflect honestly about our lives. We denied or didn't understand the damage and havoc our addictions caused in our relationships. So we did all we could to forget, justify, or lie to ourselves to cope with our pain. Consequently, we couldn't recognize many of our mistakes or we tried to forget them. We had lied to ourselves so convincingly that much of our past was now out of view to us. Our sponsors and others in recovery groups asked us to do the hard work and admit to ourselves what we may have forgotten or were unwilling to see. Only then could we understand that we need the Savior to heal us.

The prospect of reviewing our past and then writing it down seemed overwhelming and at times even impossible. It took a lot of effort and work to do this. We had to search our hearts and minds to remember our past experiences, and it was difficult for us to write them down. The important thing was to sit down and start writing. This forced us to practice our newly strengthened trust in God. Our hope that we could be healed, forgiven, and freed from bondage gave us courage to try. We asked God to help us overcome our fear. We asked Him to

help us remember and face our mistakes and pain with courage. He heard us and was there for us.

Our sponsors were essential in helping us bravely move forward with this step. Because they had taken this step themselves, they were able to encourage us and help us see our past clearly. We didn't do it perfectly, but we did our best. And in the end, it was enough. By recognizing and discovering the destructive elements in our lives, we had taken a necessary step in correcting them. We also found it helpful to recognize the good in our past and include in our inventories the positive things we had done and strengths we had developed. Step 4 helped us give God an honest account of who we are, including both our weaknesses and our strengths.

These written lists of our resentments, fears, harms, and strengths become a critical asset in our recovery journey. As we eventually progress to steps 6 and 7, we will use our inventories to review the weaknesses that keep us perpetually stuck in destructive cycles. For instance, it was pride and fear that held us back from owning our mistakes, which caused us to damage relationships and trust. Then, as we approach steps 8 and 9, the people from our inventories are those we will have the opportunity to forgive and make amends to.

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Action Step

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.

Write an inventory with a sponsor's help

This step is where we start to exercise our faith through our works (see [James 2:17–18](#)). For many of us, this is the hardest step. It may be challenging, painful, and overwhelming, and we may feel we need to account for everything in our past. However, writing our inventories does not have to be an insurmountable task. We can sit down, pray, and begin to write, even if we write about only one question or event at a time.

Please review the examples and principles in the appendix (for example, the worksheet). We can use one of these examples as a template to help us begin. If

we overcomplicate this process, it is much harder for us to start or to make progress. So when writing our first inventory, it may be best to keep things simple. We can always come back to it again as we continue to work the steps. Please work with your sponsor as you write your inventory. God blesses us as we do this work, and we will never regret it.