

The Twelve Steps – a Spiritual Journey: Step Four: The Inventory

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In the twelve-step journey of healing, there are four sub-groups with three steps in each of them. The first three steps could be summed up with one word: Surrender. Here we said, “I can’t, but God can, so I will let him.” And now we move onto perhaps the hardest step of the entire process – Step Four:

“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

For many years while I was pastoring a church, we saw dozens of people start attending our Overcomers Outreach programs. Not all of them finished. Most of those that didn’t usually stopped when they reached step four. Why? Because it’s hard work! To sit down and do a **searching** (examining closely or thoroughly) **moral** (having to do with right and wrong in our conduct) **inventory** (an evaluation or a survey, as of abilities, assets or resources) can be overwhelming! But we can be encouraged by this truth:

“We don’t begin or finish this moral inventory on our own. God goes with us every step of the way. He uncovers the defects and flaws so that we can see them and grow beyond their influence.” (*Meditations for the Twelve Steps – A Spiritual Journey*).

The Biblical basis for this step is found in Lamentations 3:40-41: *“Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn back to the LORD. Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.”* (NLT). God wants us to search our hearts and our lives, and repent of our sins.

When I first went through the twelve steps and did my inventory several years ago, it was a daunting, almost overwhelming task. To look back at all of my sins, failures and defects of character: From lying, anger and selfishness, to lust, pornography, alcohol, pride, rebellion and more, I could relate well to the words of the Apostle Paul: “Oh what a wretched man I am!” However, I knew that if I wanted to find true and lasting freedom from everything in the past that had me bound, then this was an important step in that journey. But not only must this inventory include the bad and the ugly, it should also include the good as well. For some people, this part of the inventory is even harder than listing all the bad things they have done.

There are two keys that are essential to doing this step well: One is a sponsor, and the other is a pen and a piece of paper. We need the help of a trusted friend, someone who is further along on their journey of freedom than we are, to help us as we work through our inventory. And secondly, we need to write the inventory down. This will help us to truly and accurately see what we have done, and help us to move forward from the place where we have been stuck.

Fourth Step Prayer:

“Dear God, It is I who have made my life a mess. I have done it, but I cannot undo it. My mistakes are mine, and I will begin a searching and fearless moral inventory. I will write down my wrongs, but I will also include that which is good. I pray for the strength to complete the task.” Amen! (*Prayers for the Twelve Steps – A Spiritual Journey*).