

PREPARING FOR THE FIFTH STEP

THE FIFTH STEP:

“Admitted to god, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs”

It is not enough for me simply to write inventory. I must also read it to a spiritually understanding person for my inventory to be transformed from guilt to experience, from weakness to strength, and from fear to hope.

If I don't report to someone on my shortcomings, I become God in my own life as I did when I drank! This is the exact nature of my wrongs: I thought I was God - I thought I was in charge.

Let us read the inventory we have just written in today's "homework" assignment to our sponsor or a spiritually understanding person. Let us do the same for future "homework" inventories.

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

THE FIFTH STEP:

“Admitted to god, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs”

Homework: Writing Inventory on the Fifth Step
By Dennis F.

Read the “Big Book” (pp. 72-75) and the “12 & 12” (pp. 55-62)

There was a purpose to my drinking. There was a reason I drank alcoholically for ten years and not eleven or nine years.

It was through a fifth step (and pitches I gave) that I began to understand the lessons I had to learn before I became a candidate for sobriety. Through a fifth step I finally understood the reality of my life when I was drinking.

“What I used to be like” is not described in a drunkalogue, it is described best in the reasons for my spiritual disobedience that led to my alcoholism. (“His drunkenness and dissolution are not penalties inflicted by people in authority; they result from his personal disobedience to spiritual principles.” (“12 & 12” p.174).

The first lesson I had to learn from my drinking was that “willpower” was not always the answer to stopping drinking. If you had told me then that “surrender” was the answer, I would have said, “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

I learned this lesson the only way I could, “defeat through drinking.” This is the first reason I am grateful for my ten years of alcoholic drinking: God let me learn this lesson without killing myself or others.

The second lesson I had to learn before I could realize it was a privilege to walk through the door of an A.A. meeting was that my “intellect” could not control my alcoholic drinking.

After I gave up trying to stop drinking through “willpower,” I tried to control my drinking through my “intelligence” and the minds of the best shrinks I could hire. (“The idea that somehow he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker.” “Bog Book,” p.30)

Whenever I controlled my drinking, I never enjoyed it and I only enjoyed it when I didn’t control it.

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If you had told me then that intuitive thinking after having had a spiritual awakening was the answer, and not my intelligence, I would have said that I don't know what you were talking about.

I learned this lesson the only way I could, "defeat through drinking." And this is the second reason I am grateful for my ten years of alcoholic drinking: God let me learn this lesson without harming others or myself.

The final lesson I had to learn before I could become sober was to seek my sobriety from a Higher Power rather than happiness based on relationships with females. ("(b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism. (c) That God could and would if he were sought." "Big Book," p. 60)

I had become obsessed with the idea that if I had the right relationship with a woman I would not want to drink alcoholically.

Through my alcoholism I had lost the ability to love and was in the basement of my disease pursuing the insatiable satisfaction of my lust.

If you had told me that no human power could relieve my alcoholism but only a Higher Power could rescue me, I would have said that I don't know what you were talking about. I learned this lesson the only way I could, "defeat through drinking." I had gone through all the human relationships I could: family, buddies, girlfriends, shrinks, teachers - there was no one left.

Finally, the night of my last drink, I made a drunken plea to a God I wasn't sure was there: I asked for sobriety as drunk as I was.

And a miracle happened. I didn't have another drink. I walked away from the middle of a drunk without finishing it.

This is something I had never done before. I had blacked out or passed out from drinking at least twice a week for ten years. God was letting me know he was surely there!

This experience has led me to my definition of bottom, whether we come from skid row or Ph.D. studies in music, as I did: bottom is that place when I am even willing to ask a Higher Power I really don't believe in to rescue me!

This is the third lesson I am grateful for my ten years of alcoholic drinking: God let me learn this lesson while preserving my life and guarding the lives of others from the damage my drinking could inflict.

So my Fifth Step taught me the purpose of my drinking: to give up my reliance on my will power, my intelligence, and on others in place of a reliance on a power greater than myself!

I had discovered the exact nature of my wrongs: I thought I was in charge - I thought I was God in my own life!

Step 5

I came to these discoveries with the help and guidance of a loving step sponsor. It is important to read your inventory to someone who is spiritually tuned in to you but not someone who is emotionally involved with you, such as a wife.

One of the advantages of a written fourth step is that we have something to read to someone else in a fifth step.

Our books mention in three places that our inventory should be written:

“If we have been thorough about our persona inventory, we have written down a lot. We have listed and analyzed our resentments.” (“Big Book”: discussion of the 4th Step, p.70)
“We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk” (“Big Book” p. 75)
“Therefore, thoroughness ought to be the watchword when taking inventory. In this connection, it is wise to write out our questions and answers. It will be an aid to clear thinking and honest appraisal. It will be the first *tangible* evidence of our complete willingness to move forward.” (“12 & 12”: Discussion of the 4th Step, p.54)

Therefore we have no reason not to read our inventory to someone.

“Hence it was most evident that a solitary self-appraisal, and the admission of our defects based upon that alone, wouldn’t be nearly enough. We’d have to have outside help if we were surely to know and admit the truth about ourselves - the help of God and another human being. Only by discussing ourselves, holding back nothing, only by being willing to take advice and accept direction could we set foot on the road to straight thinking, solid honesty, and genuine humility.” (“12 & 12.”: Fifth Step, p. 59).

I believe that there are two reasons why we have a sponsor: “When we are honest with another person, it confirms that we have been honest with ourselves and with God,” and “What comes to us alone may be garbled by our own rationalization and wishful thinking.” (“12 & 12,” p. 60)

My relationship with my sponsor reinforces spiritual principles in my life. Every time I read an inventory, I receive the three blessings that are promised in the Fifth Step of the “12 & 12”: an end to loneliness and a sense of belonging to A.A. (p. 57); a feeling that I could be forgiven and that I am able to forgive others (p. 58); and a desire for true humility: a clear recognition of what and who I really am, followed by a sincere attempt to become what I could be (p. 58).

The Fifth Step suggests to me that I surrender any feelings of pride by being willing to read my fourth step or tenth step inventories (and these “Homework” inventories) to my sponsor or a spiritually understanding person.

In my opinion, there are ten reasons why we read our inventories to others:

1. “Most of us would declare that without a fearless admission of our defeats to another human being we could not stay sober.” (“12 & 12,” p. 56). I believe this statement applies to daily written 10th step inventory as much as 4th step inventory.
2. It is the reading of inventory to another human being that gives us a sense of belonging to A.A. Our isolation and loneliness disappear.

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3. Forgiveness. We feel a sense of forgiveness and an ability to forgive others. (“12 & 12,” p. 58)
4. We gain humility through humiliation. Humility “amounts to a clear recognition of what and who we truly are, followed by a sincere attempt to become what we could be.” (“12 & 12,” p. 58)
5. “No defect can be corrected unless we clearly see what it is” (“12 & 12,” p. 58). The Fourth Step gives us a look at ourselves. The Fifth Step gives us an awareness of our need to change. The Sixth and Seventh Steps will change us provided we know what needs to be changed through our fifth step.

“More realism and there fore more honesty about ourselves are the great gains we made under the influence of Step Five” (“12 & 12,” p. 58)

6. “Going it alone in spiritual matters is dangerous” (“12 & 12,” p. 60). Without reading our inventory to another person, we deprive ourselves of the advice and directions another person can give us. No one can see their own shadow. “When we are honest with another person, it confirms that we have been honest with ourselves and with God” (“12 & 12,” p. 60)

We are protected from “our own rationalization and wishful thinking” (“12 & 12,” p. 60) when we talk to another person.

We also need someone else’s appraisal in order to be protected from “too much guilt and remorse” (“12 & 12,” p. 59) and to help us see through the smoke screen of “anger and hurt pride” (“12 & 12,” p. 59).

7. If I refuse to read my inventories to another person, I do not surrender the exact nature of my wrongs. The exact nature of my wrongs is that I thought I was God in my own life. I thought I was in charge. I thought I did not need another human being to read my shortcomings to, God knew and that was sufficient. It was easy for me to fool God if I didn’t have to go through the embarrassment of “facing another person” (“12 & 12,” p. 60). I need to read my tenth step inventories throughout my life or I will become my own sponsor. I will become God in my own life again.
8. If I hold nothing back in the reading of my inventories, my “sense of relief will mount from minute to minute. The dammed-up emotions of years break out of their confinement and miraculously vanish as soon as they are exposed. As the pain subsides, a healing tranquility takes its place. And when humility and serenity are so combined, something else of great moment is apt to occur. Many an A.A., once agnostic or atheistic, tells us that it was during this stage of Step Five that he first actually felt the presence of God. And even those who had faith already often became conscious of God as they never were before” (“12 & 12,” p. 62).
9. A spiritual experience occurs within me every time I read my inventories (4th and 10th step inventories) to a spiritually understanding person. I become transformed.

Step 5

Once we read our inventories, “we can look the world in the eye. we can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience. The feeling that the drink problem has disappeared will often come strongly. we feel we are on the Broad Highway, walking hand in hand with the Spirit of the Universe (“Big Book,” p. 75).

10. (illegible) I can help where no one else can who has not had the same experiences I have had. The experiences that make up my alcoholic talent are contained in my fourth step where I offered all of my life to God.

A fifth step transforms my fourth step: what was once guilt over the past becomes experience to help another alcoholic; what was once weakness in dealing with the problems of the moment now becomes strength; and what was once fear of any thought about the future now is hope.

The fifth step, which passes from my mouth to another human being’s ears and then to God comes back to me as experience, strength and hope - my main connection with humanity is to be a giving person by helping the alcoholic who still suffers.

The writing of inventory produces “awareness” of my need to change. The Fifth Step confirms that awareness, and produces healing and forgiveness as I admit the exact nature of my wrongs to God and another human being. (It is the Sixth and Seventh Steps that will actually change me.)

Step 5

Let us now write inventory on our willingness to admit our wrongs in a fifth step.

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a). The Story: I sometimes put off reading my tenth step inventories to my sponsor.
- b). What Did I Do Wrong? I get wrapped up in the affairs of the world rather than giving first place to spiritual development.
- c). What Should I Do Instead? Read my inventories more often so that I can grow and be transformed and be more helpful to others.

After reading your fourth step to someone, and, as a means of checking that your fourth step was searching and fearless, I suggest that you take a sheet of paper and answer the following questions:

1. What is the exact nature of my wrongs?
2. Do I now have a sense of belonging to A.A. and a personal relationship with God?
3. Am I now able to forgive others and myself?
4. Am I ready for a sincere attempt to become what I can be?
5. Have I omitted anything or skimmed anywhere on my work in the first five steps?

I suggest that you do not destroy your inventory until your eight step is completed. You will need your inventory to compile a list of names to make amends to.

After the eighth step, I suggest that you burn your inventory because it is your past. The only reason I wanted to hang on to my inventory was “ego”: “see what a great work I have written.” When my step sponsor pointed that out and I saw that he was right, I burned it as a way of being purified of living in the past.

I like to make a habit each day to admit to someone else that I am not in charge so that I am reminded of the exact nature of my wrongs - trying to play God.