

Step Four – HOW to take inventory

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Almost everyone dreads starting their 4th step. The first three steps were abstract and probably didn't take a lot of time or menial work, even if they were emotionally difficult. It's obvious that Step 4 will be different. You've probably heard people talk about the "pain" of doing their 4th step, or of "living in their defects." The prospect of listing all our resentments seems guaranteed to cause agony, and it seems like it's going to take a long time.

But neither of these things is necessarily true. The discoveries made during the 4th step will *free you* from resentment, and there is nothing in the literature that says you must spend months working on it.

In fact, **the worst pain of the 4th step comes from not doing the work.** As the 12&12 says: "...With genuine alarm at the prospect of real work, we... loaf and procrastinate or at best work grudgingly and under half steam." (p 49) Don't fall into this trap! Start working, and get it over with fast. It may seem like a daunting task, but every step of it is easy enough. You will find it easier if you keep your higher power in the loop. Whenever you get stuck, pray for the willingness to write the next name, or the next resentment, or whatever.

If you can regularly set aside an hour at a time to work on it without getting distracted, it will be over very quickly. Don't take a year to do a day's work.

It is usually suggested that you complete each column before moving to the next column.

Column 1: WHO DO I RESENT?

Make the most complete list you can of people and institutions you resent. There is no reason this should take you more than one sitting. It may help to remember people chronologically, or in categories.

Family members:

Parents	Siblings	Grandparents
Cousins	Aunts	Uncles
Children	Friends of the family	

Friends/Acquaintances:

Grade school	Summer camp	High school
College	Grad School	Roommates
Exes	Enemies	

Business:

Co-workers	Employees	Business Partners
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Authority Figures:

Bosses	Teachers	Doctors
Cops	Lawyers	Judges

If your list feels incomplete, pray for the names to come to you. Sound dumb? Do it anyway!

Column 2: WHY DO I RESENT THEM?

Write out why you resent each person. Resentments will naturally range from major to minor. Don't omit anything just because it sounds petty. Try to get into your mindset at the time the resentments were the strongest, and transcribe the angry tapes that played in your head.

Keep it simple! If you find that you are writing giant resentment histories, try to summarize resentments. (For example, if someone was mean on numerous occasions, it's sufficient to write "she was mean to me a lot" or even "he's an asshole" instead of cataloging all the separate instances of the same resentment-causing behavior.)

Don't psychoanalyze yourself in this column. Stick to what they did ("He stole from me.") or what they are ("he's a thief"), not the underlying causes of your resentment ("I resent him because I am terrified of being poor"). That will come out in column 4.

If your list feels incomplete, **pray** for the resentments to come to you.

Column 3: WHAT DOES IT AFFECT?

For each person, check off the areas of your life the resentments – or the actions that spawned them – affected.

Column 4: WHAT'S MY PART?

For each person, write your answers to the following four questions (if you draw a blank, pray for the answers to come):

How was I SELFISH?

What did I want from the person or situation? What expectations, reasonable or not, did I bring to the situation? What did I take? What did I withhold?

How was I DISHONEST?

What lies did I tell? Did I misrepresent myself? What false premises enabled the resentment to develop? Did I pretend to feel something I didn't? Did I cheat or betray a confidence? Was I hypocritical? Did I play dumb, or feign innocence? Did I lie by omission? Did I harbor ulterior motives? Did I lie to myself through delusion or rationalization?

How was I SELF-SEEKING?

What did I do in pursuit of my selfish desires? Did I manipulate people? When my ego was hurt, how did I act out in response? Did I slander or gossip? Justified or not, what harms did I cause, and what unskillful behaviors did I engage in?

How was I FEARFUL?

What fears underlie the resentment, relationship, or situation?