

## **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.

## 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.

## Study and Understanding

The following scriptures and statements from Church leaders can help in our addiction recovery. We can use them for meditation, study, and journaling. We must remember to be honest and specific in our writing to gain the most benefit from it.

### **Addiction is a symptom**

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

Many of us assumed our addictions are a physical problem. We were surprised to learn that our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are the roots of our addictive behaviors. The difficult combination of our brain, body, and attitude is what seems to keep us stuck. We have come to

see that our addictive behaviors are not our main problem but a harmful solution to our real problems.

- How can this perspective about my addiction help me move forward in writing my inventory?

Create a Note

## Take inventory

In the scriptures, we see many invitations to take a close, honest look at ourselves. A wonderful example is found in Alma 5:14. The prophet Alma asked these inventory questions: “Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” We suggest studying the rest of Alma chapter 5 for more examples of inventory questions we can ask ourselves.

Taking inventory of where we are presently can be very helpful. For example, a business that doesn't regularly take inventory of its assets and liabilities usually doesn't thrive. Taking inventory is an opportunity for business owners to objectively determine what is valuable and should be kept and what is detrimental and should be discarded. If business owners fall into the trap of dishonesty and fool themselves about the real nature of the inventory, they won't be able to make accurate decisions about the value of their goods.

Similarly, it is important for us to take an honest look at our lives and character.

- As I pray and ask God to help me be honest, what does the Holy Ghost teach me about my tendency to deny the reality of my condition and circumstances?

Create a Note

- How have I fooled myself about my weaknesses?

Create a Note

- How have I failed to see my true worth and strength?

Create a Note

## Face our past

“And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins; nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted” (2 Nephi 4:19).

While doing our inventories, there were times when our hearts groaned because of our sins and the pains we may have faced.

- How can trusting God help me as I complete my inventory and face my sins and pain?

Create a Note

### **Trust that He will heal us**

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6).

An inventory can help us see the whole picture. It helps us become aware of our thoughts, feelings, and actions as well as who our choices have affected. Two of the common threads in many of our inventories were fear and an over-reliance on self. The commitment we made in step 3 was to trust God and this recovery process. Our inventories are the next step of recovery and will give us concrete ideas about how to proceed.

- How would my life and choices be different if I let go of pride and instead chose to rely on and trust God?

Create a Note

- What reluctance do I feel about moving forward in my commitment to turn my life and will over to God’s care?

Create a Note

- When I ask God if He will care for me in each step of my recovery, what is the answer I receive in my heart and mind through the Holy Ghost? Keep in mind that God’s manner of caring for us may be different than what we would choose for ourselves.

Create a Note

### **Spiritual sickness**

“Sometimes spiritual illness comes as a result of sin or emotional wounds. Sometimes spiritual breakdowns come so gradually that we can scarcely tell what is happening. Like layers of sedimentary rock, spiritual pain and grief can build over time, weighing upon our spirits until it is almost too heavy to bear. ...

“But just because spiritual trials are real does not mean that they are incurable.

“We can heal spiritually.

“Even the deepest spiritual wounds—yes, even those that may appear to be incurable—can be healed” (Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Bearers of Heavenly Light,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 78).

Consider the three worst things you have done in your life. Were you close to the Savior and His Spirit when you did those things? If you were like we were, you weren't open to His Spirit. Many in recovery call this disconnection being "spiritually sick."

- When I indulge in addictive and wrongful behaviors, am I spiritually sick? Why or why not?

Create a Note

## Resentments

A major portion of our inventories is to record our resentments. These include grudges we've held for people, institutions, and other things we felt harmed us or treated us unfairly. Harboring resentment has been one of the most poisonous and detrimental forces in our addictions. It set us against others and led us to feeling justified in our own harmful or apathetic choices.

We found heavenly help to see others in a new, charitable light as we made the conscious choice to pray for them and ask God to bless them with every blessing that we would seek for ourselves. "Extending forgiveness can take tremendous courage and humility. It can also take time. It requires us to put our faith and trust in the Lord as we assume accountability for the condition of our hearts. Here lies the significance and power of our agency" (Amy A. Wright, "Christ Heals That Which Is Broken," *Liahona*, May 2022, 82).

- Can I choose to take a new perspective about the people I resent? Could they, like me, have been spiritually sick and disconnected from God when they wronged me?

Create a Note

- If I struggle with this, how can I change my approach to praying for these people?

Create a Note

Create a Note