

Back to the Basics of Recovery

Session #2 – Steps 4 and 5

WELCOME to the second session of Back to the Basics of Recovery. Together, we are taking the Twelve Steps based on the directions found in the “Big Book” and the personal experiences of the Twelve-Step pioneers.

Our names are _____ and _____, and we will be your guides for this meeting. During this session we will take Step Four and make preparations for Step Five.

We will use a simple assets and liabilities checklist to identify the personality traits that have kept us “shut...off from the sunlight of the spirit.” By ridding ourselves of these short-comings, we will expand our “consciousness of the power of God in our lives.”

Step Four reads:

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

In the fourth paragraph on page 63, the “Big Book” authors tell us what we need to do now that we've made our decision to proceed

“Next we launched out on a course of vigorous action, the first step of which is a personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted. Though our decision was a vital and crucial step, it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us. Our (Self-destructive behavior) was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions.”

(pg. 63, para. 4, lines 1-2; pg. 64, lines 1-7 edited)

Please note that the authors say AT ONCE. They instruct us to take the Fourth Step immediately after the Third Step prayer. We must identify and remove those things that have been blocking us from the spiritual solution to our difficulties.

The “Big Book” authors start by comparing a personal inventory to a business inventory. In the first paragraph on page 64, they state:

“Therefore we started upon a personal inventory. This was Step Four. A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsaleable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret.”

(pg. 64, para. 1, lines 1-7)

So, we are going to conduct the equivalent of a commercial inventory on our lives. What is a commercial inventory? For those who have taken an accounting class, either in high school or college, we learned that the equation for double-entry bookkeeping is: **Assets = Liabilities + Owner Equity**. So, according to the “Big Book” authors we are going to look at our assets and liabilities. That's what a commercial inventory is all about. It's an examination of what is working and what is not working in our lives. It provides us with the opportunity to accent the positive and eliminate the negative.

Then, in the second paragraph on page 64, the authors clearly explain what we need to do in order to conduct a commercial inventory:

“We did exactly the same thing with our lives. We took stock honestly. First, we searched out the flaws in our make-up which caused our failure. Being convinced that self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we considered it's common manifestations.”

(pg. 64, para. 2, lines 1-6)

So, the “Big Book” authors ask us to start with the liabilities side of the ledger. First, we look at our shortcomings.

Before we get into the details on how to take this Step, we want to emphasize a few things. First, there is no right or wrong way to take a commercial inventory. There are several assets and liabilities checklists in use today. You can use any one of them.

Second, the commercial inventory described on page 64 precedes a three-column example described on page 65. Because this examination of our assets and liabilities comes first, we assume the “Big Book” authors are asking us to utilize this simple checklist before attempting the more difficult inventory on the following page.

Third, Dr. Bob, a Twelve-Step pioneer from the 1930's and 1940's used an assets and liabilities checklist to take thousands of people through the Fourth Step. Dr. Bob believed that, initially, new comers should be taken through a simplified version of the inventory process. Later, they can work the step in more detail.

We have provided everyone with an example of the assets and liabilities checklist that was used by many of the pioneers. It is the same format as the one published in the June 1946 issue of a recovery newsletter.

All we have done is remove some of the vertical lines, so we can list the people, institutions and principles we need to talk about to the right of the appropriate liabilities.

Character Liabilities: (See page 10 in the handout.) We are now going to define these liabilities in order to provide a clearer understanding of their meaning.

RESENTMENT is the consequence of being angry or bitter toward someone for an extended period of time over some real or imagined insult. It is a hostile or indignant attitude in response to an alleged affront or personal injury

FEAR is being afraid of losing something we have or not getting something we want. It manifests itself in many ways such as phobia, terror, panic, anxiety and worry.

SELFISHNESS is concern only for ourselves, our own welfare or pleasure, without regard for, or at the expense of others.

DISHONESTY involves theft or deception. It includes taking things that don't belong to us, cheating people out of what is rightfully theirs, and lying to or withholding the truth from others.

FALSE PRIDE is either feeling better than or less than someone else. Feelings of superiority include prejudice about race, education or religious beliefs; and sarcasm-putting someone else down to make us feel better about ourselves. Feelings of inferiority include self-pity-dwelling on one's own problems, and low self-esteem-the lack of self-worth or self-respect.

ENVY has to do with things-wanting someone else's possessions.

LAZINESS means lacking the will or desire to work. Procrastination, which is postponing or delaying an assigned job or task, is a form of laziness.

Dr. Bob used this format to take newcomers through the Steps as quickly as possible. In many instances, he completed the process during the person's three-to-five day stay at St. Thomas hospital in Akron, Ohio. Today, many millions have recovered by following Dr. Bob's "keep it simple" approach.

The "Big Book" authors also urge us to take the Steps quickly. We must discover "the truth about the stock-in-trade" in order to remove those behaviors that have cut us off from the "sunlight of the spirit." In the third paragraph on page 65, the authors provide us with some of the details:

"We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty. When we were finished we considered it carefully."

(Pg. 65, para. 3, lines 1-3)

Please note that the authors ask us to be thorough and, in the very next sentence, they tell us what to do when we are finished. Since this is all in one paragraph, we assume they are asking us to complete this inventory in one sitting.

Keep in mind this is only a suggestion. You can spend as much time on this inventory as you wish, just as long as you discuss it with your sharing partner before the next session.

Now, let's look at what we put on paper. From pages 64 to 71, the authors present us with a list of liabilities we need to eliminate and assets we need to accentuate. In the third paragraph on page 64, they ask us to examine our resentments:

"Resentment is the 'number one' offender. It destroys more (of us) than anything else. From it stem all forms of spiritual disease..."

... In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principals with whom we were angry...."

(pg. 64, para 3, lines 1-3, 6-9, edited)

Then, in the second paragraph on page 67, the authors instruct us to look for our own mistakes to see if we need to make amends:

“Referring to our list again. Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened? Though a situation had not been entirely our fault, we tried to disregard the other person involved entirely. Where were we to blame? The inventory was ours, not the other (person's). When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set those matters straight.”

(pg. 67, para. 2, lines 1-11, edited)

To see where we were at fault regarding the incidents and events on our checklist can be both revealing and healing. To stop blaming others and take responsibility for our actions can result in a “revolutionary change in (our) way of living and thinking.”

Let's look at the third sentence in this paragraph again. It reads,

”Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened?”

These short-comings are based on self-will. In addition, they are the opposites of unselfish, honest, forgiving and faithful, which are some of the characteristics of God's will.

We can use this test for self-will vs. God's will to determine if we need to “set right the wrong” by making amends: (Refer to handout page 16)

Test for self-will	Test for God's will
Selfish	Unselfish
Dishonest	Honest
Self-seeking	Forgiving
Frightened	Faithful

Regarding our resentments, the “Big Book” authors provide us with specific instructions on what we are to do. We must get beyond them if we “expect to live long or happily in this world.”

In the third paragraph on page 66, the authors explain that when we hold on to grudges, we are actually allowing others to control our lives.

“We turned back to our list, for it held the key to the future. We were prepared to look at it from an entirely different angle. We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill. How could we escape? We saw that these resentments must be mastered, but how? ...”

(pg. 66, para. 3, lines 1-7)

If we don't deal with our resentments, the future will just be a repeat of the past. Each time we are reminded of an old hurt, the old pain returns and we feel it again and again. In the past we may have engaged in self-destructive behaviors to numb this pain, but now we are going to take the actions necessary to relieve this pain.

The first thing we do is discuss our resentments with our sharing partner or partners. The healing process starts when we talk about the hurt. But we cannot fully recover until we forgive those who have offended us. We overcame resentment with forgiveness.

We must change our attitude about the experience. We do this by seeing the source of our pain in a new light. We see the person as a sick individual, who needs our prayers and not our anger. Whether it is a person who is still in our lives, someone who has passed on, someone we may never see again, or ourselves, the process is the same. We must forgive. Starting with the first line on page 67, the "Big Book" authors write:

"Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves, were sick too. We asked God to help us show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully give a sick friend. When (someone) offended we said to ourselves, 'This is a sick (person). How can I be helpful...? God save us from being angry. Thy will be done.'

"We avoid retaliation or argument. We wouldn't treat sick people that way. If we do, we destroy our chance of being helpful. We cannot be helpful to all people, but at least God will show us how to take a kindly and tolerant view of each and every one."

(pg. 67, lines 1-8; para. 1, lines 1-5, edited)

Ask the people to go to page 11 in the "Handouts for the four sessions"

Now it is time to begin the Fourth Step by making a list of resentments. We realize that the sharing partners are supposed to work on this list together, but if you would like to get a head start on the sharing process, you can start filling out a checklist right now. This way you can discuss your inventory as soon as we close this session. For those of you who are uncertain or hesitant about doing this, your sharing partner will ask the questions and fill out the sheet for you when you get together.

In the open space to the right of the word, "Resentment", we write down the people, institutions and principals with whom we are angry. We record the first two or three names that come to mind.

To protect our anonymity, we write down the generic equivalents of the specific names of those we are inventorying. For example, instead of, "Susan" we can write "Family Member" and instead of "Bill" we can write "Friend Number One."

We deal with the resentments that are bothering us right now. In the days ahead, we will conduct additional inventories to take care of those things that may still be troubling us then.

Our objective is to immediately get to the “causes and conditions” that are currently blocking us from God and our fellows. We do this by making amends to those we've harmed and forgiving those who have harmed us.

(Take a few minutes so everyone can work on their Resentment List.)

Next, the authors ask us to look at our fears. In the first paragraph on page 68, they write:

“We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them. Wasn't it because self-reliance failed us? Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough. Some of us once had great self-confidence, but it didn't fully solve the fear problem, or any other.”

(pg. 68, para. 1, lines 1-7)

In the third paragraph on page 68, the “Big Book” authors inform us that we will lose our fears if we have faith in the “Power of God”:

“... We can laugh at those who think spirituality is the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All (people) of faith have courage. They trust in their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let (God) demonstrate, through us, what (God) can do. We ask (God) to remove our fear and direct our attention to what (God) would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear.”

(pg. 68, para 3, lines 2-10 edited)

Now it is time to make a fear list. Let's start with those fears that have “no resentment in connection with them.” To the right of the word, “fear”, we write down the people, institutions or principals that have caused us to be afraid.

Then we look back over our “Resentment” list. If, in addition to the anger, we have fear or a phobia regarding someone or something, we write down the generic equivalent of the person or the thing we are afraid of to the right of “Fear”.

(Take a few minutes so everyone can work on their Fear List.)

In the first paragraph on page 69, the authors mention some additional shortcomings we need to address:

“We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest or inconsiderate? Whom did we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we a fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.”

(pg. 69, para. 1, lines 1-6)

Now is the time to make a Harms list. According to the “Big Book” authors we need to look at our “Selfishness,” “Dishonesty,” “Inconsideration,” “Jealousy,” “Suspicion” and “Bitterness.” On the checklist list we have provided you, we have substituted “False Pride” for

“Inconsideration,” “Envy” for “Suspicion” and “Laziness” for “Bitterness.” These liabilities come from the June 1946 issue of a recovery newsletter.

If we have hurt anyone, we put their name to the right of the harm that applies. Then we check to see if resentment and/or fear also apply.

(Take a few minutes so everyone can work on their Harms List.)

So much for the liabilities side of the ledger. Now, what about the assets?

The “Big Book” authors list assets throughout Chapter 5. We've already explained that the asset that corresponds to the liability of “Resentment” is “FORGIVENESS” and the asset that corresponds to the liability of “fear” is “FAITH.” Additional assets that correspond to the remainder of the liabilities are “UNSELFISHNESS,” “HONESTY,” “HUMILITY,” “TRUST,” “CONTENTMENT,” and “ACTION.”

(Refer to handout page 13)

We have now looked at both sides of the ledger. Our inventory consists of a list of liabilities to watch for and assets to strive for.

Keep in mind that it is not necessary to talk about every resentment, selfish act, or person you have ever lied to in order for the inventory to be thorough. The objective is to get to “causes and conditions.” Sometimes it takes only a few incidents to make clear which shortcomings have kept us blocked from intimate, two-way relationship with the “One who has all power.”

In the process of sharing the inventory, we may find that we need to “set right the wrong.” If that is the case, we circle the name of the person, organization, or principal that needs to be addressed. The circled names become our Eighth Step amends list.

After we have finished talking about the events or circumstances represented by the names to the right of the “liabilities,” we unfold the checklist so we can look at the Assets side of the sheet. The sharing partner will usually end the session by describing the Assets we already have (those with the least numbers of NAMES and the Assets that will be strengthened (those with the greatest number of NAMES) as we make our amends.

To see how this is done, let's look at the handout subtitled, “Checklist with Eight Step Amends List.” See page 14 Using this example as a guide, please follow along as I summarize the sharing session for this person. Based on the NAMES on this sheet, I would say something like, “This inventory shows that, for the most part, you are a humble, trusting, and contented person with considerable self-respect. In addition, you will become more forgiving and loving as you let bygones be bygones, and you will become more unselfish, honest, and industrious as you make amends for your selfishness, dishonesty, and laziness.” The Liabilities with NAMES to the right of them are the shortcomings we turn over to God in Steps Six and Seven. As mentioned previously, the circled NAMES are our Eighth Step amends list.

Next to the circles, we can add NOTES to identify the specific type of amends we are to make in Step Nine. (Refer to handout Page 15) The Amends mentioned in the “Big Book” are: “Direct Amends,” “Living Amends,” “Amends-in-Kind,” and “Amends to Those Who Cannot be Seen.” We'll talk more about the amends process next session.

So, on one sheet of paper, we now have everything we need to take Steps Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine.

We look at assets as well as liabilities because many of us have lost much of our self-esteem and self-worth as the result of our addictive or compulsive behaviors. Even though we've done some very foolish and destructive things, we still never have to repeat those actions, provided we are willing to admit our faults and correct them. If we are willing to admit our faults and correct them. If we are genuinely sorry, God has already forgiven us. Now, we need to forgive ourselves.

So, it is time to make a searching and fearless moral inventory. As a result of doing this, we will clean up the wreckage of the past so we can strengthen our connection with the "Spirit of the Universe."

We have completed our presentation on the Fourth Step, but before we end this session, we need to discuss one more detail – the person or persons with whom we share our inventory.

Step Five reads:

"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

On page 72, starting with the ninth line in the second paragraph, the "Big Book" authors tell us why we need to admit our faults to another person:

"... The best reason first: If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome (our difficulties). Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably they (relapsed). Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock...."

(pg. 72, para. 2, lines 9-13; pg. 73, lines 1-5, edited)

Since we're not good judges of character, especially our own, we confide in someone else. Only another person can see us as we really are.

This individual can be the member of the Twelve-step community who is helping you through these sessions, but it doesn't have to be. The "Big Book" authors provide us with other options.

Starting with the fourth paragraph on page 73, they give us directions on how to choose the person or persons with whom we share our inventories.:

"We must be entirely honest with somebody if we expect to live long or happily in this world. Rightly and naturally, we think well before we choose the person or persons with whom we take this intimate and confidential step.Though we have no religious connection, we may still do well to talk with someone ordained by an established religion...."

“If we cannot or would rather not do this, we search our acquaintance for a close-mouthed, understanding friend. Perhaps our doctor or psychologist will be the person. ...”

(pg. 73, para. 4, line 1; pg. 74, lines 1-4, 7-9; para. 1, lines 1-4 edited.)

Of critical importance is confidentiality. The “Big Book” authors list some of the people who are legally bound to keep a secret. This “privilege” protects communications between certain individuals and ensures that the communications will remain confidential. The people listed in the “Big Book” who have this legal protection are religious, medical, and mental health professionals. Attorneys also have this “privilege”.

This “privilege” is not absolute-there are exceptions. This legal protection does not include Twelve-Step sponsors or sharing partners. This is why we must be very careful about what we share during our Fifth Step.

If you feel uncomfortable talking about some parts of your checklist with your partner, all we ask is that you make a commitment to this person as to when, where, and with whom you will share those portions of your inventory.

If you are willing to make this commitment, you can take the rest of the Steps with us today. In the second paragraph on page 74, the “Big Book” authors explain the circumstances under which this Step may be temporarily postponed:

“Notwithstanding the great necessity for discussing ourselves with someone, it may be one is so situated that there is no suitable person available. If that is so, this step may be postponed, only, however, if we hold ourselves in complete readiness to go through with it at the first opportunity. ...”

(pg. 74, para. 2, lines 1-6)

The “Big Book” authors give us specific instructions for taking the Fifth Step. In the first paragraph on page 75, they tell us that, as soon as we decide who we are going to talk to, we take action immediately:

“When we decide who is to hear our story, we waste no time. We have a written inventory and we are prepared for a long talk. We explain to our partner what we are about to do and why we have to do it. (Our partner) should realize that we are engaged upon a life-and-death errand. Most people approached this way will be glad to help; they will be honored by our confidence.”

(pg. 75, para. 1, lines 1-8 edited)

Then the “Big Book” authors announce that, once we admit our shortcomings, our lives will change. On page 75, starting with the second line in the second paragraph, they describe some of those changes.

“...Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. 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 (our) 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.”

(pg. 75, para. 2, lines 2-11, edited)

We are now well on our way toward recovering from our addictive and compulsive behaviors. The authors tell us we are in the process of having a spiritual experience. As a result of this “psychic change,” our obsessions are being removed.

Please, let the “God-consciousness within” guide you through the inventory process. If you do, you'll find these steps simple and straightforward.

As we have already said, there is no right or wrong way to do the Fourth and Fifth Steps. Just do them.

Are there any questions?