

Steps Four & Five — Al-Anon

Al-Anon Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

The Inventory and the Admission

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

A Dual-Lens Intensive for SUD Recovery & Codependency · SUD RECOVERY · Inventory of what the disease produced in your life · CODEPENDENCY · Inventory of your own patterns inside the disease system · The Warehouse and the Light

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

A business cannot move forward without knowing exactly what is in its warehouse — the assets, the liabilities, the expired stock that should have been written off long ago. Steps Four and Five are that honest accounting. Four turns on the lights. Five carries the inventory out of the warehouse and into a relationship, where its power to isolate and shame is permanently broken.

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 6 · READING

What Are Steps Four and Five? The Inventory and the Admission

Step Four: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." Step Five: "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

If Step Three was the decision to turn the wheel over, Steps Four and Five are the work of understanding what you have been driving — and choosing to stop pretending otherwise. Together, they form the great clearing of the recovery journey: an honest reckoning with the self, followed by the profound relief of no longer carrying that reckoning alone.

The word "inventory" in Step Four is drawn deliberately from the world of commerce. A business that wants to know where it stands must count everything in the warehouse — not just the items it is proud to own, but the damaged goods, the expired stock, the items that should have been written off long ago. The inventory is not the moment to throw things away. It is simply the moment to see clearly, for the first time, what is actually there.

The word "fearless" is aspirational rather than descriptive. Almost no one approaches Step Four without fear. What the step asks is not that you feel no fear, but that you proceed despite it. "Searching" is equally precise: this is not a surface scan. It asks you to go into the rooms of your history that you have kept locked, to look at the things you have never fully examined, and to bring them into the light of honest accounting.

Step Five is the completion of what Step Four begins. An inventory that remains in the notebook — read only by you, admitted only to yourself — retains its power to shame. Shame thrives in secrecy. It loses much of its force the moment it is spoken aloud in a safe relationship. Both steps apply with equal force to those in SUD recovery and those recovering from codependency — but they look different in each context, and that difference matters.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your emotional reaction to the phrase "searching and fearless"? What do you most fear finding in your inventory?

2. Have you ever done a Step Four before? If yes, what was that experience like? If no, what has kept you from it?

3. What do you understand "the exact nature of your wrongs" to mean? What is the difference between a wrong and a mistake?

4. Why do you think admitting to another person — not just to yourself or your Higher Power — is included in Step Five? What does that specific requirement add?

5. How do you understand the relationship between secrecy and shame in your own life? Can you point to something that lost its power once you spoke it aloud?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Inventory Avoidance & Resistance

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have avoided or postponed doing a thorough Step Four inventory, despite knowing it is needed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When I begin to examine my past honestly, I quickly feel overwhelmed and stop

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I prefer to focus on what others have done to me rather than examining my own patterns and contributions

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. The idea of writing down my wrongs and sharing them with another person feels unbearable

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I find justifications for why my situation is too complicated or unique for a standard inventory

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have started a Step Four inventory before and left it unfinished — and have not gone back to it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I believe that looking at my past honestly will make me feel worse, not better

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am more comfortable analyzing other people's behavior than examining my own patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 1: Resentment Inventory

The Emotional Fuel That Powers the Disease

Why Resentments Matter

The Big Book calls resentment 'the number one offender.' Resentments are not just painful feelings — they are active threats to recovery. They keep us in the past, justify our behavior, and drain the energy needed for healing. Naming them is not dredging up the past. It is disabling the fuel line.

SUD Recovery

For people in SUD recovery, resentments were often used to justify continued use — 'after what they did, who wouldn't drink?' The inventory doesn't ask whether the injury was real. It asks how the resentment has been used.

Codependency

For people in codependency recovery, resentments often run deep and legitimate — years of promises broken, chaos absorbed, self-sacrifice unrewarded. The inventory gives these resentments a proper place rather than letting them drive behavior from underground.

Resentment #1

Person, institution, or situation:

What they did (the specific event):

What part of me was hurt?

My part in this situation (if any):

How has carrying this resentment affected my recovery?

Resentment #2

Person, institution, or situation:

What they did (the specific event):

What part of me was hurt?

My part in this situation (if any):

How has carrying this resentment affected my recovery?

Resentment #3

Person, institution, or situation:

What they did (the specific event):

What part of me was hurt?

My part in this situation (if any):

How has carrying this resentment affected my recovery?

Resentment #4

Person, institution, or situation:

What they did (the specific event):

What part of me was hurt?

My part in this situation (if any):

How has carrying this resentment affected my recovery?

Resentment #5

Person, institution, or situation:

What they did (the specific event):

What part of me was hurt?

My part in this situation (if any):

How has carrying this resentment affected my recovery?

Resentment Inventory Summary

1. Looking across all your resentments: is there a pattern? What type of injury appears most frequently?

2. Which resentment has had the most influence on your use or codependency behaviors? What did it justify or fuel?

3. Where were you able to honestly name "my part"? What did that exercise reveal?

4. Are any of these resentments ready to move toward forgiveness — not excusing what happened, but releasing the grip it has on you?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 2: Fear Inventory

What Lies Beneath the Behavior

Fear as Engine

Almost every pattern in the inventory — resentment, harm done, control behavior, dishonesty — has a fear underneath it. The fear inventory doesn't excuse the behavior. It illuminates its source, which makes change possible in a way that willpower alone never can.

Fear of abandonment or rejection

SUD Recovery

Drove use to manage the pain of disconnection

Codependency

Drove staying in the relationship regardless of cost

How does this fear show up in my life?

What behavior — use, control, avoidance — did this fear produce?

Fear of not being enough

SUD Recovery

Substances boosted confidence or numbed the inadequacy

Codependency

Drove caretaking as proof of value

How does this fear show up in my life?

What behavior — use, control, avoidance — did this fear produce?

Fear of my own feelings

SUD Recovery

The substance was the solution to the emotional flood

Codependency

Focusing on others was the escape from one's own pain

How does this fear show up in my life?

What behavior — use, control, avoidance — did this fear produce?

Fear of failure or success

SUD Recovery

Use prevented either outcome from fully materializing

Codependency

Success felt threatening if loved one was still suffering

How does this fear show up in my life?

What behavior — use, control, avoidance — did this fear produce?

Fear of being truly known

SUD Recovery

If they saw everything, they would leave

Codependency

Self-concealment to maintain the role of the 'stable' one

How does this fear show up in my life?

What behavior — use, control, avoidance — did this fear produce?

Fear of losing control

SUD Recovery

Substances paradoxically felt like control over pain

Codependency

Hypervigilance as the response to an out-of-control environment

How does this fear show up in my life?

What behavior — use, control, avoidance — did this fear produce?

PART 2 OF 6 · READING

Step Four — The SUD Lens: What the Disease Left Behind

For the person in SUD recovery, Step Four is an encounter with the debris field that addiction creates. Addiction — by its very nature — produces wreckage. Not because the person with the disease is fundamentally bad, but because a brain and will reorganized around substance use will, over time, make choices that violate the person's own values, damage the people they love, and create patterns of behavior that they would not have chosen in a clearer state.

The traditional categories of a Step Four inventory include resentments, fears, and harms done to others. Resentments are the emotional armor of addiction — the grievances, real and perceived, that the disease uses to justify continued use. What Step Four examines is not whether the injury was real, but how the resentment has been used — as fuel for continued using, as a way of keeping others at fault so the disease can remain unexamined.

Fears are the driving engine beneath most addictive behavior. Fear of not being enough. Fear of abandonment. Fear of intimacy. Fear of failure. Fear of feeling. Step Four asks you to name the fears that have been running your life from behind the scenes — the ones the substance was managing before recovery removed that management.

Harms done to others is the inventory that carries the most weight, and the most shame. Step Four does not ask you to be destroyed by this inventory. It asks you to see it clearly, because you cannot amend what you refuse to acknowledge.

There is another category that is critically important: harms done to yourself. The self-neglect, the self-abandonment, the compromised values, the places where you treated yourself with less care, dignity, and respect than you would ever treat someone you loved. Step Four is one of the first places in the program where you examine that teaching directly.

Reflection Questions

1. What are your three deepest resentments? Name the person or institution, the event, and what part of you was hurt or threatened.

2. What are the fears that most drove your substance use? What were you trying to manage, avoid, or medicate?

3. Make a brief list of the people your using most harmed — including yourself. Who paid the highest price?

4. Where in your inventory do you feel the most shame? What makes that particular area hardest to look at?

5. The inventory is "searching and fearless" — not exhaustive and perfect. What would "good enough to begin" look like for you?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Inventory Awareness — Patterns & Harms

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can identify specific people I have harmed through my use (SUD) or control behaviors (codependency)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am aware of resentments I carry that have been fueling my disease or codependency without resolution

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can name the fears that have most driven my addictive or codependent behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I recognize patterns in my behavior that repeat across relationships and situations

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am honest with myself about the ways I have enabled, covered up, or justified harmful behavior — my own or someone else's

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can distinguish between the inventory of what I have done and the inventory of what has been done to me — and I know both matter

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am aware of harms I have done to myself — through self-neglect, self-betrayal, or the violation of my own values

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have identified at least some of the survival adaptations I developed in childhood or in the alcoholic system that now cause problems

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 3: Harms Done Inventory

Looking Honestly at the Damage — Without Being Destroyed by It

The Purpose of This Inventory

This is not a shame exercise. It is a clarity exercise. You cannot repair what you refuse to see. And you cannot amend what you have not acknowledged.

SUD Recovery

For SUD recovery: the harms may include financial damage, dishonesty, neglect, emotional unavailability, harm done in active use, and the secondary harms produced by chaos and unpredictability.

Codependency

For codependency recovery: the harms may include damage from control behaviors, the harm done to children by modeling codependency, the harm of enabling, and the emotional harm of martyrdom and resentment expressed sideways.

Family Members

Parents, siblings, children, extended family

Specific people harmed and what I did (or failed to do):

The emotion I feel when I acknowledge this harm:

Romantic Partners / Spouse

Current or past intimate relationships

Specific people harmed and what I did (or failed to do):

The emotion I feel when I acknowledge this harm:

Friends & Social Community

Friendships damaged, trust broken, social harm

Specific people harmed and what I did (or failed to do):

The emotion I feel when I acknowledge this harm:

Colleagues & Professional Life

Workplace relationships, professional integrity, employment

Specific people harmed and what I did (or failed to do):

The emotion I feel when I acknowledge this harm:

Broader Community / Others

Strangers, institutions, community members

Specific people harmed and what I did (or failed to do):

The emotion I feel when I acknowledge this harm:

PART 3 OF 6 · READING

Step Four — The Codependency Lens: Taking Honest Stock of Self

For the person doing codependency recovery in AI-Anon, Step Four contains a surprise that many people resist before they receive it: the inventory is of yourself. Not of the alcoholic. Not of the drinker's behavior. Not of what was done to you. Of you. Of your patterns, your contributions, your defenses, your damage, and the places where your responses to someone else's disease became their own source of harm.

This surprises — and sometimes outrages — many AI-Anon members who come to the program feeling, correctly, that they are the ones who have been hurt. The answer is not that their suffering is their fault. It is that the only person whose behavior they can actually change is themselves — and change requires honest knowledge of what is there to change.

The codependency inventory examines specific patterns. Control — the ways you have attempted to manage, fix, rescue, or override someone else's disease. People-pleasing — the ways you have suppressed your own needs, preferences, and truth in order to keep the peace. Enabling — the specific behaviors, large and small, that shielded the alcoholic from the natural consequences of their disease.

Perhaps most importantly, the codependency inventory asks you to look at what you have tolerated — at the ways you have participated in your own diminishment by staying silent, staying small, or staying in situations that harmed you. This is not blame. It is agency: the recognition that you have more power over your own life than you have been exercising — and that Step Four is the beginning of using it.

Reflection Questions

1. What control strategies have you used in response to someone else's drinking or using? Make a specific list — not to judge yourself, but to see clearly.

2. Where have you enabled the disease? What consequences did you absorb, prevent, or cover up — and what did that cost both of you?

3. What are your deepest resentments in this situation? Name the person, the event, and what core need or value was violated.

4. What "survival adaptations" — people-pleasing, hypervigilance, dishonesty, self-suppression — have you used? Where did each one come from?

5. In what ways have you participated in your own diminishment by tolerating what you tolerated? What would honest self-respect have required?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 4: Codependency Pattern Inventory

A Step Four for the Person Who Loves an Alcoholic

For Both Audiences

This exercise is designed primarily for those in codependency recovery — but many people in SUD recovery carry codependency patterns in other relationships. If any of these patterns feel relevant to you, include them in your inventory.

Enabling Behaviors

Absorbing consequences, paying debts, covering stories, making excuses — behaviors that shielded the alcoholic from the natural results of their using.

Specific examples of this pattern in my life:

Who was harmed by this pattern — including yourself?

Control Behaviors

Monitoring, searching, threatening, hiding substances, restricting access — behaviors designed to manage someone else's disease.

Specific examples of this pattern in my life:

Who was harmed by this pattern — including yourself?

Self-Abandonment

Neglecting your own needs, health, and preferences in service of managing someone else's. Saying yes when you meant no.

Specific examples of this pattern in my life:

Who was harmed by this pattern — including yourself?

Dishonesty with Self and Others

Minimizing the seriousness of the situation to yourself, to family, to employers, to doctors. The family secret.

Specific examples of this pattern in my life:

Who was harmed by this pattern — including yourself?

Martyrdom and Hidden Resentment

The sacrifice performed with a score being kept — help given but tallied, care extended but resented.

Specific examples of this pattern in my life:

Who was harmed by this pattern — including yourself?

Over-Responsibility for Others' Emotional States

Taking responsibility for how others feel, adjusting your own behavior to manage their mood, walking on eggshells.

Specific examples of this pattern in my life:

Who was harmed by this pattern — including yourself?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 6: Harms Done to Myself

The Inventory That Is Most Frequently Skipped — and Most Needed

Why You Are on the List

Most people in recovery can list the people they have harmed without prompting. Far fewer spontaneously include themselves. But the inventory of harms done to yourself is among the most important — because it is often the foundation of the patterns that produced all the other harms.

Physical Health

Neglect of your own body — nutrition, sleep, medical care, physical safety risks

How have I harmed myself in this area — specifically?

What would caring for myself in this area look like — now, in recovery?

Violation of My Own Values

Times you acted against your own moral code — dishonesty, betrayal of your own principles

How have I harmed myself in this area — specifically?

What would caring for myself in this area look like — now, in recovery?

Abandoned Dreams & Potential

Opportunities surrendered, paths not taken, gifts not developed because of the disease — your own or someone else's

How have I harmed myself in this area — specifically?

What would caring for myself in this area look like — now, in recovery?

Self-Betrayal in Relationships

Staying too long, silencing yourself, accepting treatment below what you deserved, abandoning your own needs

How have I harmed myself in this area — specifically?

What would caring for myself in this area look like — now, in recovery?

Self-Esteem & Self-Respect

The ways you have spoken to yourself, judged yourself, and treated yourself as less deserving than others

How have I harmed myself in this area — specifically?

What would caring for myself in this area look like — now, in recovery?

PART 4 OF 6 · READING

Step Five: The Admission — Why Speaking It Aloud Changes Everything

Step Five is not a bureaucratic requirement. It is a piece of psychologically precise wisdom about how human beings heal from shame — and about why no amount of private self-examination, however thorough and honest, can do alone what is done when we speak our truth aloud in the presence of another person who truly hears us.

The neuroscience of shame is unambiguous: shame is a social emotion. It is generated in relationship. It is maintained by secrecy, because as long as the shameful thing remains unsaid, the belief that it would destroy the relationship if known remains safely untested. It is healed by the experience of being fully known and remaining in relationship.

"Admitted to God" is the spiritual dimension of Step Five — the moment of complete honesty in that relationship. "Admitted to ourselves" is the second — and for many the most challenging. It means dropping the last internal defenses and acknowledging, without qualification or excuse-making, what is true about your history and your patterns. "Admitted to another human being" is the third — and the one that makes the step complete.

The choice of that person matters. This is typically a sponsor, a spiritual director, a therapist, or another trusted person who has demonstrated the capacity to hear difficult things without judgment, without flinching, and without using what they hear as a weapon. They are there to witness. And witnessing — being truly heard by another human being — changes the chemistry of the experience from isolation to connection, from shame to relief, from hidden to known.

Most people who have completed Step Five describe a specific, unmistakable experience afterward: lightness. Not perfection. But a felt sense of having set something down — something they had been carrying alone for a very long time.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your relationship to shame? How has the fear of being truly known shaped your relationships and your recovery?

2. What do you most fear saying aloud to another person? What is the worst thing you imagine they would think or do if they heard it?

3. Who would you choose to hear your Step Five? What qualities would that person need to have? If no one comes to mind, what does that tell you about your current support system?

4. Have you ever experienced the lightness that Step Five promises — the relief of being fully known and remaining in relationship? Describe that experience.

5. How does the understanding that shame is healed in relationship — not in private — change how you think about the risk of Step Five?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Admission Readiness & Vulnerability Capacity

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have a sponsor, counselor, or trusted person I would be willing to share my Step Five with

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have had at least one experience of being fully honest with someone and finding that it deepened rather than destroyed the relationship

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I am willing — even if afraid — to admit the exact nature of my wrongs to another person

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can say "I was wrong" or "I made a mistake" without excessive self-punishment or defensiveness

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have told someone in my support system something I had never previously admitted — and survived it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am able to receive feedback or challenge from a sponsor or counselor without shutting down or leaving the relationship

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand the difference between admitting my wrongs (Step Five) and making amends (Step Nine) — and I'm not confusing one for the other

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe that the experience of being fully known and still held in relationship is possible for someone like me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 8: Preparing for Step Five

Choosing the Person, Setting the Conditions, Facing the Fear

Preparation Is Not Procrastination

There is a difference between thoughtful preparation for Step Five and the kind of indefinite delay that keeps the inventory sealed in a notebook forever. Prepare, and then do it.

Choosing My Step Five Person

1. Who is your primary candidate for your Step Five listener? What makes them qualified?

2. What concerns do you have about this person? Are these concerns evidence-based, or are they fear speaking?

3. If your primary candidate is not available or appropriate, who is your backup? Write two names and your reasons.

4. What do you need to say to this person before you begin — to clarify your needs and set the conditions for the conversation?

Facing the Fear of Step Five

1. What is the single thing in your inventory that you most fear saying aloud to another person? Name it here — in this private space — as clearly as you can.

2. What do you imagine the listener will think, feel, or do when they hear that? Is this based on evidence about this specific person, or on a more general fear?

3. Have you ever told someone something difficult and had the relationship survive or deepen? What was that experience like?

4. What is the cost of NOT doing Step Five — of keeping the inventory private and the secret sealed?

The Practical Plan

1. When specifically will you make contact with your Step Five person to schedule the conversation?

2. Where will the conversation happen? What environment would allow both of you to be present without distraction?

3. How will you prepare yourself the day of Step Five — prayer, meditation, a conversation with your Higher Power?

4. What will you do in the immediate aftermath of Step Five — who will you call, what self-care will you practice?

PART 5 OF 6 · READING

Shame, Guilt, and the Moral Inventory: Understanding the Emotional Architecture

The language of "moral inventory" and "wrongs" carries enormous potential for shame — and it is essential to understand the difference between shame and guilt before beginning this work.

Guilt is the feeling that you have done something bad. It is connected to behavior. It says: "What I did was wrong." Guilt, when healthy, is motivating — it activates the desire to repair, to make amends, to do things differently. It is the conscience working as intended.

Shame is the feeling that you are something bad. It is connected to identity. It says: "I am wrong. I am defective. I am unworthy." Shame does not motivate repair — it motivates hiding. This is why many people avoid or abandon Step Four — not because they are unwilling to look at their behavior, but because the inventory immediately activates a shame response so intense that self-protection overrides the process.

The way to keep the inventory in the realm of guilt rather than shame is to continuously distinguish between what you did (behavior) and who you are (identity). You are not your disease. You are not your worst moments. You are a person who, under the influence of a disease or a wounded family system, made choices that caused harm. Those choices can be examined, owned, and in most cases repaired. They are not your permanent definition.

The inventory tradition in AI-Anon consistently emphasizes that this is not a shame exercise but a freedom exercise. The honest moral inventory, done with the right support and the right framing, is one of the most liberating experiences a person in recovery can have. The things that have been hidden in the dark are always more manageable in the light. The inventory is not an indictment. It is a lantern.

Reflection Questions

1. In your experience, what is the difference between guilt and shame? Can you identify a specific memory that generates guilt and another that generates shame?

2. Where in your inventory do you feel shame (I am bad) rather than guilt (I did something bad)? What would it take to shift from shame to guilt in that area?

3. How does the concept of "survival adaptations" rather than "character defects" change your relationship to what you are about to inventory?

4. What is the most shameful thing you have never told anyone? Not to share it here — but to acknowledge that it exists and that it is exactly what Steps Four and Five were designed for.

5. If a dear friend came to you with the exact same inventory you are carrying, what would you feel toward them? What does that tell you about the compassion you owe yourself?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Shame & Self-Judgment Patterns

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. When I think about the things I have done in active addiction (or codependency), I feel deep shame rather than manageable guilt

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I believe that if people truly knew my history, they would reject me entirely

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I regularly punish myself through self-criticism, self-neglect, or negative self-talk for past behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have difficulty separating what I did from who I am — my worst actions feel like my permanent definition

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I find it nearly impossible to extend to myself the same compassion I would extend to a close friend in the same situation

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. The thought of admitting my exact wrongs to another person generates overwhelming fear of judgment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I carry secrets from my past that no one knows, and the weight of keeping them is significant
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I sabotage my recovery progress — consciously or unconsciously — because I don't believe I deserve to be well
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 5: Shame vs. Guilt Mapping

Learning to Work from Guilt Rather Than Drowning in Shame

The Difference That Changes Everything

Guilt says: 'What I did was wrong.' Shame says: 'I am wrong.' Guilt is workable — it leads to repair. Shame is corrosive — it leads to hiding. The inventory works best when you can stay in the territory of guilt and resist shame's invitation to collapse.

DIMENSION

SHAME (destructive)

GUILT (workable)

Focus

Who I am — my identity

What I did — my behavior

Message

"I am bad / broken / defective"

"I did something that caused harm"

Response

Hide, disappear, collapse

Repair, amend, change behavior

Relapse risk

Very high — shame drives use

Lower — guilt motivates change

Step Five

Makes admission terrifying

Makes admission possible and healing

Mapping My Own Shame and Guilt

1. Pick three items from your inventory that generate the strongest emotional response. For each one, identify: is this shame (I am bad) or guilt (I did something bad)? Write out the distinction clearly.

2. For the items that generate shame: what would it take to shift from "I am bad" to "I did something bad that I can address"?

3. Where has shame been used against you — by others, by your culture, by the disease? How has that external shaming shaped your internal experience?

4. Write a statement of compassion for yourself as you approach this inventory — the same compassion you would offer a friend carrying the same history.

PART 6 OF 6 · READING

Living Four and Five: Ongoing Inventory and the Lifelong Practice of Admission

Steps Four and Five are often described as one-time events — the comprehensive moral inventory done once, the Step Five admission completed once, and then you move on. This is accurate as far as it goes. But the principles of Four and Five do not retire after their initial completion. They become a way of living — an ongoing practice of honest self-examination and timely admission that prevents the kind of accumulation that makes the first inventory necessary.

Step Ten acknowledges this directly: "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it." This is Four and Five on a daily scale — the practice of not letting resentments, fears, and harms pile up unexamined until they require another comprehensive clearing.

The daily practice of inventory does not require a lengthy written exercise. It is, rather, a habit of honest self-reflection built into the rhythm of the day. Many people in long-term recovery use the evening as a natural review point: Where did I act from fear today? Where did I slip into control mode? Where did I harm someone — through action, inaction, tone, or dishonesty? Where do I owe an amend or a conversation?

For those in codependency recovery, the ongoing inventory has a specific application: continuing to monitor for the return of control behaviors, enabling patterns, and the redirection of one's emotional energy from one's own life into someone else's. "I caught myself monitoring his phone yesterday" is a much more workable inventory entry than "I've been living inside his disease again for six months without noticing."

The life that becomes available to the person who lives Steps Four and Five — not just as historical events but as ongoing practices — is one of genuine freedom. Not the freedom from difficulty, but the freedom from the weight of the unexamined, the unspoken, and the unacknowledged.

Reflection Questions

1. What would a daily inventory practice look like in your life? What time of day, what format, what questions would you ask yourself?

2. Where do resentments, fears, or patterns currently accumulate in your life that you are not examining in real time?

3. The willingness to say "I was wrong" and "I need help" — how comfortable are you with each? Which is harder? Why?

4. For those in codependency recovery: where are you currently slipping back into control behaviors, enabling, or emotional overconsumption of someone else's situation?

5. What does "freedom from the weight of the unexamined" feel like to you — or what do you imagine it would feel like? What would you do with that energy?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Inventory Capacity & Recovery Strengths

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can look at my past honestly without being destroyed by what I find

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have experienced moments of genuine self-compassion — the sense that my past does not define my worth

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand the difference between shame (I am bad) and guilt (I did something bad), and I can work from guilt

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have a working relationship with a Higher Power that I can bring my inventory to in prayer or reflection

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have witnessed others in the program complete their inventory and experience relief — and I believe that relief is possible for me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I regularly practice some form of self-reflection (journaling, prayer, meditation, conversations with a sponsor)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have grown in my willingness to be honest in the program since I began attending meetings

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe the inventory is an act of self-respect and freedom, not self-destruction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 7: Assets Inventory — What Is Right in Me

A Complete Inventory Counts Both Sides of the Ledger

The Other Half of the Warehouse

A thorough moral inventory counts everything — not just the liabilities, but the assets. Many people in recovery are practiced at self-condemnation and novices at self-recognition. A complete Step Four includes an honest accounting of your strengths and the qualities that your Higher Power can work with.

Honesty & Courage

The willingness to face difficult truths, to do this inventory, to show up in recovery despite resistance

How does this asset show up in your life — give a specific example:

How can this asset support your Steps Four and Five work?

Capacity for Love & Loyalty

The depth of care for others that, even when it went sideways in codependency, originated in genuine love

How does this asset show up in your life — give a specific example:

How can this asset support your Steps Four and Five work?

Resilience & Survival

Everything you have survived, endured, and recovered from — evidence that you are stronger than the disease

How does this asset show up in your life — give a specific example:

How can this asset support your Steps Four and Five work?

Self-Awareness & Insight

The growing capacity to see yourself clearly — the work of this very inventory is evidence of this asset

How does this asset show up in your life — give a specific example:

How can this asset support your Steps Four and Five work?

Service & Care for Others

The ways you have genuinely helped, supported, and contributed to others — even imperfectly

How does this asset show up in your life — give a specific example:

How can this asset support your Steps Four and Five work?

Growth & Willingness to Change

The fact that you are here, doing this work, shows a capacity for growth that not everyone has or exercises

How does this asset show up in your life — give a specific example:

How can this asset support your Steps Four and Five work?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 9: Daily Inventory Practice

Seven Days of Living Step Four — One Day at a Time

Step Ten in Action

Step Ten says: 'Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.' This seven-day practice is Step Ten — the daily application of Step Four's principles.

Day 1: Resentment Check

Where did I notice resentment today — in a thought, a conversation, a reaction? What injury was underneath it? Did I own my part?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

Day 2: Fear Beneath Behavior

Where did fear drive my behavior today — in avoidance, control, people-pleasing, or dishonesty?
What was I afraid of?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

Day 3: Harm Done — Small and Large

Who did I harm today, even in small ways — impatience, half-truth, unkindness, neglect? Is there a prompt amend to make?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

Day 4: Codependency Patterns

Where did I try to manage, rescue, or absorb something that wasn't mine to manage? What triggered that pattern?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

Day 5: Shame vs. Guilt Check

Where did I slip into shame ("I am bad") today? Can I move to guilt ("I did something I'd do differently") and then to action?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

Day 6: Self-Care and Self-Respect

Did I practice genuine self-care today — physically, emotionally, spiritually? Where did I abandon myself, and why?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

Day 7: Weekly Integration

Looking at the full week: what patterns repeat? What do I need to bring to my sponsor or Step Five person?

Morning Intention: What am I bringing into this day with awareness?

Evening Review: What did today's focus reveal?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 10: My Steps Four & Five Commitment

From Intensive to Action — The Inventory and the Admission

From Knowing to Doing

You have done significant work in this intensive. The final step is converting all of that into a living commitment — one that names what you are doing next, when, with whom, and why. A commitment without specifics is a wish. A commitment with a date and a name is a plan.

What This Intensive Revealed

1. From the reading: what is the single most important insight about Steps Four and Five that changed or deepened your understanding?

2. From the assessment: what was your most significant discovery about your own readiness, resistance, or patterns?

3. From the worksheets: which inventory exercise was hardest — and therefore most important? What did it reveal?

4. What is the one thing you now know that you did not know when you began this intensive?

My Steps Four & Five Declaration

Write your personal declaration — in your own language — committing to the work of Steps Four and Five.

I am committing to a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself. I will look honestly at my resentments, my fears, my harms done, and my patterns. I will admit the exact nature of these things to my Higher Power, to myself, and to [name]. I am doing this because...

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

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

The things you are carrying do not have to be carried alone any longer. You have counted the warehouse. Now carry the inventory into the light — one honest conversation with one safe person — and discover that the thing you most feared would destroy you is exactly the thing that, finally spoken, begins to set you free.