

In summary, the Fourth Step asks us to make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. We are seeking to uncover the hidden acquired defects of character that are part of the false self. After we have found them, then we discover how, when, and in just what instances these defects controlled our lives. This inventory is of ourselves, not other people. We uncover and discover our faults by listing them. We place them before us in black and white. We must have courage to honestly do this. Faith can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The purpose of writing the Fourth Step is to make us aware of the acquired character defects. As we list and analyze these defects, we will begin to comprehend their futility. The written inventory will be used as a basis in Steps Five through Nine.

Go through the following examples and be honest and as specific as you are able to at this time. This is your inventory. You are about to uncover and discover the acquired character defects, so do it in a thorough and fearless manner. Your very life may depend on the thoroughness of this Step.

Questions for Writing

Under each question, attempt to start with the specific things you have done or said. List as many things under each question as will help you to convince yourself that you have acquired this defect. The answers to these questions are to be brief.

For example – With whom am I angry?

My wife – she doesn't do the things I want her to do.

My boss – he is not paying me enough

Joe – a friend to whom I loaned money, and he didn't pay me back.

You may wish to choose one of these categories to begin a Fourth Step Inventory.

Anger, Resentment, Prejudice

With whom am I angry? Do I blame others for the trouble I made for myself? Whom do I wish to hurt because I feel they have hurt me? Have I contempt for anyone? Whom?

Self-Centeredness

Do I act as though the world revolved around my welfare and desires? How? If I am a parent, do I use my family to suit my needs and desires? How? Do I insist on doing things I like to do, or am I willing to do the things others enjoy?

Do I do anything with my family or others to keep myself in the limelight? If others don't give me special attention in a group, do I feel snubbed?

Conceit

Do I insist on things being done my way? Do I think I am "expert?" In what areas? Do I think I can manage most things better than those in charge? Am I consistently critical of the boss? The police? Other authorities? Am I impatient with others who do not meet my standards?

Greed

Am I really content with the things I have? Am I constantly running after more and better things? Does the good life mean having more things, more money? Am I honestly concerned with doing something to help those who are less fortunate than I? Do I give gladly or grudgingly to the work of God and SA?

Fourth Step Prayer

(Paraphrased from Alcoholics Anonymous pp 66-67)

"I realize that those who wronged me were spiritually sick. Though I did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed me, they, like me, were sick too. I ask God to help me show them the same tolerance, pity, and patience that I would cheerfully grant a sick friend. This is a person. How can I be helpful to them? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done. Amen"

Fourth Step Guide

“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

In the previous three Steps we have built for ourselves a beginning foundation in this Program of recovery. In Step One, we admitted we were powerless over lust and recognized that our lives have been, are now, and will remain unmanageable by us alone. Step Two made us aware that we could be restored to sanity by a Higher Power (God as we understood Him) if we rightly relate ourselves to that Higher Power. The Third Step convinced us that we have no choice but to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.

At this point, we should be convinced that our handling of our past has led to frustration, broken relationships, anger toward ourselves and other people and resentments. Since lust is but a symptom, we now have to get down to the causes and condition of why self-centeredness, in all its various destructive forms, has been the root of our troubles. Thus, we are face-to-face with the Fourth Step.

The Fourth Step allows us to uncover and discover the acquired character defects which are a part of the false self. These defects are NOT a part of the real you (the True Inner Self). The false self (the phony you) has picked them up from other people, institutions and society in general. Usually it is not important that you become aware of the fact – that these defects of character are acquired. Only when you detach yourself from these acquired character defects can you start to uncover and discover, in a fearless manner, these acquired character defects that have controlled you in the past.

These acquired character defects are misdirected instincts. These instincts often far exceed their proper functions. Our excessive desires for sex, material and emotional security, and for an important place in society, desires which by their very nature can never be fulfilled, cause us practically all the trouble there is.

Nearly every serious emotional problem can be seen as a case of misdirected instincts. Whenever we become a battle ground for the instincts, there can be no peace. Every time we impose our instincts unreasonably upon others, unhappiness follows. These defects lock us into those around us. So, in order for us to live happy lives, we must uncover and discover these acquired defects of character.

At this point, we should have arrived at the following conclusions: the acquired character defects have been the primary cause of our lusting and our failure at life; we must now be willing to work hard at the elimination of the worst of these defects or both sobriety and peace of mind will elude us; and that all the faulty foundation of our life will have to be torn out and built anew on bedrock.

Since the Fourth Step is but the beginning of a lifetime practice, we should first have a look at those personal flaws which are acutely troublesome and fairly obvious. Using our judgment, we make a rough survey of our conduct with respect to our primary instincts for sex, security, and society. With sex, we uncover how the selfish pursuit of sex damaged other people and ourselves. In the area of security, we question the financial and emotional insecurities that have led to financial instability, and the personal relationships which bring continuous or recurring trouble. In terms of society, we insisted upon either dominating the people we knew or depended upon them far too much.

Thoroughness ought to be the watchword when taking our inventory. The object is to search out the flaws in the false self which caused our failure. Being convinced that the false self, manifested in various ways, was what had defeated us, we will find some of the following acquired character defects in our inventory: self-centeredness, resentment, anger, prejudice, conceit, greed, lust, indifference, phoniness, fear, pride, financial insecurity, dependence, domination, emotional insecurity, dishonest, procrastination, perfectionism, impatience and others that might apply.

These acquired character defects (misdirected instincts) will balk at our uncovering and discovering them. The minute we make a serious attempt to prove them, we are liable to suffer severe reactions. The thinking mind may come up with some of the following false thoughts: any serious defects have been caused chiefly by our lusting, our problems have been caused by the behavior of other people, the defects are us, justifying the need for defects in order to continue living, and a half-hearted inventory is OK. In order for us to combat these false thoughts, we must know that the character defects are indeed acquired and are NOT a part of the True Self.