



STEP BY STEP

Step 4: *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

Welcome to Step by Step. Over the past few weeks we have spent time on steps 1, 2, and 3, where we've basically learned how to access God's Power to help us *not* turn to *other* higher powers to deal with life. In step 3, we took all that we've learned and made it into a prayer where we gave ourselves over to the care of God as much as we understand Him. Now that we have turned away from our old way of dealing with life and have turned to God's way, we are ready for step 4, where we begin to take a hard look inside our hearts and lives to discover why we do the harmful things that we do. We cannot do this step without thoroughly working step 3, surrendering to our loving Father in heaven. If we hang on to reservations and excuses, we're simply not ready. But learning about step 4 isn't a bad thing, even if you're not ready for it. Maybe it will give you the motivation to move over and let God in the driver's seat. Working step 4 can be the beginning of a transformation to where if anyone should speak badly of you, no one would believe it. Because what we begin to do in step 4, and continue through steps 5, 6, and 7, is to not just look at the problems in our lives, but get down to the roots of those problems and with God's help, yank them up like we would a pesky weed in a garden. Many have talked about the work begun in step 4 as "housecleaning." Turn to your neighbor and tell them, "It's good to live in a clean house." So the scripture I picked out for tonight, Luke 11:24-26, is about cleaning up your house Jesus-style.

But before you clean house, you gotta kick the demon out. Hell is the place created for demons, you don't have to live there! You may have invited him in to have some fun, but that fun is long over and gone. Tell your neighbor, "It's time to kick that demon out." Be cleansed from that unclean spirit. Pray until something happens. Pray until something shifts in your soul. Pray until that stronghold is broken. But your efforts and your prayers can't get that demon out. There's only one who can deliver you, who can clean you up. Who is the power that you can depend on? Who is the highest power? Whose your Savior? Whose your Redeemer? Bridge of water, Waymaker, Alpha, Omega, Beginning, End, First, Last. Ask your neighbor, "Have you asked Jesus to clean your house?" Now wait for an answer, and if they say no, drag them to the altar. Tell them they have until midnight to turn to Jesus so they can be free of all that anger, all that obsessing and compulsiveness, all that jealousy and resentment, free of all that fear. Don't you want a clean house? First you have to kick that demon out, and you can only do that through Jesus.

Who in here is not ashamed to raise their hand if you have kicked out the demon of addiction? Who has been clean from drugs and alcohol for 90 days or more? Let's give them a hand everybody. Congratulations and I really mean that. But in the same breath I want to warn you, because Jesus is warning you. Jesus is sharing a story warning us about getting rid of evil without replacing it with good. It warns against a smugness about the defeat of evil. Imagine a tenant who hasn't paid rent and is kicked out on the streets. The landlord cleans up the house but doesn't board it up or secure it. After sleeping under a bridge for a few days he returns with seven friends, breaks into the abandoned house and messes it up beyond what it was in the first place.

We have far too many 3-step Christians. You've repented, came to believe, and surrendered to Jesus, but that's where you've stopped. Evil has been expelled, but not replaced with good. Watch out, because that kind of complacency is an open door for unclean spirits of all kinds to move in and make things worse than they were in the beginning. The chapter, *Recovery and Relapse* in the Basic Text of NA says it like this:

We never fully recover, no matter how long we've been clean. Complacency is the enemy of members with substantial clean time. If we remain complacent for long, the recovery process ceases. The disease will manifest apparent symptoms in us. Denial returns, along with obsession and compulsion. Guilt, remorse, fear, and pride may become unbearable. Soon we reach a place where our backs are against the wall.

The first 3 steps are the cornerstone of recovery and the A,B,C's of Christianity. Repent, Believe, Surrender. But don't stop there! Jesus urges us to be vigilant about our walk with Him! The 4th step enables us to become aware of our sinful tendencies, the desires of our flesh that we most often turn, so that we can resist the devil when he returns. If you want to get rid of rats or roaches, the first steps are to expel them from your house. But if you continue to leave food out, and keep garbage around, they will return. Get rid of the trash and the rats stay away. The goal of Step 4 is to clean house in a way that our unclean spirits do not return.

In Ephesians 4:26-27 we read, *In your anger do not sin; Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil a foothold.* The word translated "foothold" is the Greek word *topos*, an expression commonly used for inhabited space. The bible tells us that Jesus was born in a manger because there was no room (*topos*) in the inn. Then when Jesus grew up he said that he will go to prepare a *topos* for us in heaven. Here in Luke 11:24, Jesus says that *when the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'* The devil wants a place to crash, a space to stay in. Are you opening up your sofa for unclean spirits to stay in your house? Are you letting the sun go down on your anger, allowing resentments to fester and bitterness to grow? This is fertile ground for demonic activity. Are you letting fear of what others think dictate how you live your life? This will certainly lead to disappointment, frustration, and a place where you seek to escape all the pressure. Are you allowing past hurts and broken relationships determine your future? The devil loves to use your past to ruin your future. But the good news of the gospel is that the One in you is more powerful than the one in the world! And when you do a thorough step 4, a searching and fearless moral inventory, unclean spirits lose their power over you. Your life becomes uninhabitable space for evil. For example, when you've worked through your resentment towards your mom, forgiving her for the ways she has hurt you and taking ownership for your part in the dysfunctional relationship, then when she says something critical, you can let it go. You've cleaned your side of the street and the devil no longer has a foothold.

In steps 1 and 2, when we admit we're powerless and come to believe in Christ, we kick out the unclean spirits. We take it a step further and invite Jesus in to be Lord when we make a decision to turn our will and life over to God. Step 4 is where will being inviting him into all the rooms of our house, cleaning out all the footholds that the devil could hold onto in the future. Are you ready to get rid of those footholds? Are you willing to do some hard work to get a clean house? As the ushers pass out these 4th step inventories, I'm going to walk you through how to make a "searching a fearless moral inventory of yourselves." Just a word of warning, what I'm doing here is just an intro. If you are serious about this, then you need to partner up with a sponsor, a mentor, who can work this step with you. I'll get more into that next week, but if you're interested, fill out a Connect Card indicating that and I'll help connect you.

On page 64, the Big Book talks about how, *A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a fact-finding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade. One object is to disclose damaged or unsalable goods, to get rid of them promptly and without regret. If the owner of the business is to be successful, he cannot fool himself about values.*¹

What if we did the same thing with our lives? What if, rather than simply justify and rationalize why we're not "making a profit," instead we made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves to determine the root causes of our problems? This exercise is not to determine whether we have resentments or desires of the flesh. We all do, they are hidden in every one of us—some of us more deeply hidden than others. The question is what do we do about them? How do we become aware of the unmet needs & idolatry that lie behind our sins rather than remain under their power?

When you go to the doctor, you tell her your symptoms, then they search for the root cause. If they just put a bandaid on the sore, rather than finding out why you're getting sores, you'll just keep getting them. This inventory works in the same way. The left column is for the symptoms, then the next columns begin to get at the root causes. Some of you think that it's all everyone else's fault. As you list people in the left column you might notice the thought creep in that if only those people would straighten up, then everything would be smooth and you wouldn't have all the problems that you do. But the good news is that while you can't control them, you can take responsibility for how you respond. There's actually something you can do to clean your own house.

Something Tim Keller said really turned the light on for me here: *The reason that you are bitter, the reason that you are enslaved to bitterness, is not what that person did to you (even though what the person did was wrong). But what your heart is making of the thing you lost. Your friend robbed you of something. What you lost, you feel like you've got to have.*²

¹ Alcoholics Anonymous. AA World Services: NYC, 1976. p. 64

² Tim Keller. "Enslaved to non-gods" (sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church)

And what we’re doing here in this inventory is getting at the root of our bitterness, identifying what we feel we must have from other people. We begin by listing those whom we are angry with: people, places, and things. Write out the entire list and do nothing with other columns until the first is done. Next we go down the list and write a little of why we’re angry. Finish column 2. Next is getting beyond the symptoms and on to the root causes, the part where you’ll probably need the help of a sponsor to do thoroughly.

List the names of people, places, or things with whom we were angry.	Why are we angry?	AFFECTS MY:				
		(Which desire of the flesh is threatened?)				
		Approval	Security	Comfort	Control	Power

What we wrote in column two probably has something to do with what the other person did to us. What we begin to investigate in column 3 is the *real* reason we got angry. Again, Tim Keller offers incredible insight here. In his book Counterfeit Gods, he writes: *If you are angry, ask, ‘Is there something here too important to me, something I must have at all costs?’ Do the same thing with strong fear or despair and guilt. Ask yourself, ‘Am I so scared, because something in my life is being threatened that I think is a necessity when it is not?’*³ Desires of the Flesh are the topic of this third column, which was the topic of the first sermon in this series, you can download the text or audio online. Galatians 5:16 says, Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Paul, Peter, John, and James all use this language as the catch-all for what is wrong with us.⁴ Without a deep grasp of the gospel, we believe that fulfillment/happiness/salvation comes by meeting one of these “desires of the flesh” with something other than Jesus. The Greek word is *epithumia*. The root *epi* usually means “over,” while *thumia* can be defined as “desire.” So, one way of translating *epithumia* is “over-desires.” It’s talking here about the same thing that Bill Wilson talked about in the AA literature, that we all have basic instincts and desires, but when they become *over-desires*, is when we get into trouble. Usually without thinking, we become driven by them--sometimes we even become addicted to them. Our desires for comfort, control, security, and approval, can become our gods and terrorize our lives. Step 4 is our vigorous and painstaking effort to find out what these self-defeating behaviors have been in the past and are today. We want to find out exactly how, when and where our natural desires have warped us. We’re ready to look honestly at how these things have caused unhappiness for ourselves and others. It’s not that we want to get rid of our instinctual drives. If I discover that I have become obsessed about what other people think about me, the goal is not to ask God to remove the drive for approval. But once we’ve detected these patterns in our lives, through doing this inventory, we’ll be ready to find my approval first and foremost in my relationship with God.

³ Tim Keller. Counterfeit Gods. p. 169

⁴ Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff

What I've found is that when one or more of our basic needs are not being met, we have two paths we can take. We can try to gratify that desire by turning to God, and finding our happiness and peace from Him--or we can turn to other things to gratify the desires of the flesh. Those other things can be relationships, job, money, drinking, drugging, sex, etc. When we are turning to these to meet our needs that only God can meet, they are acting like a counterfeit god. And when that counterfeit god does not satisfy us (and they never do, ultimately). We act out through anger, resentment, fear, jealousy, etc. We will never find freedom from this vicious cycle by biting our tongue when we are angry or telling ourselves we don't *really* want our neighbor's car when we're being envious. And if we are alcoholic, we cannot stop drinking by being strong and relying on our self-control. All of these are mere symptoms of our sin-disease. The way that we can begin to find freedom to walk in the Spirit is by starting at the left of the list and moving right. We start with the symptoms--who we're angry with, what fears we have, the last time we relapsed. Then, with the help of a sponsor, we begin to see what basic desires of the flesh were going unmet in this situation as well as what counterfeit god we have been turning towards to meet that need. Then, when we realize what our needs are, instead of turning to those unclean spirits filling our lives, we can turn them over to Jesus. And when we do that, we have access to a power greater than ourselves to relieve us of the insanity of this vicious cycle, we are filled with the Spirit of God. And when that happens we bear the fruit of the Spirit and live in peace with our neighbors. Tonight and throughout this series you may be convicted that there are some unmet needs in your life. Are you convinced that Jesus is mighty to save? Will you repent from turning to unworthy things? Turn to Jesus tonight.

We began with the teaching of Jesus in Luke 11 and we'll end with it as well. The story he offered us was about getting rid of the unclean spirit from our life and cleaning house. But then 7 more came with the demon of our past and wrecked things worse than before. He started out great by getting the demon out. He continued on the right track by cleaning house. But the point of the story is what he failed to do. The landlord didn't get a new tenant in there to protect the house. The key is to connect with a power greater than you and greater than your disease. A couple of verses earlier starting with 21 Jesus brings out this point, *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder.*

How many know that the strongest man wins? Have you ever seen a cage fight where a guy loses and he says, "Yeah, I lost, but I'm still stronger." No you're not. You lost! You got knocked out! The guy who knocked you out is stronger and tougher than you are. Jesus is saying that it doesn't matter how strong you are, demons are stronger, and for addicts, the disease of alcoholism and addiction is stronger than you. But some of you are tough! You've been to prison, you watch cage fighting, you're a big man! You're like, "I'm strong, I can take anybody! I don't know how to do jujitsu, but I could if I had to." You think you're tough, but it doesn't matter how big and bad you are, Satan and

his demons are bigger and badder. That's why we need a Power greater than ourselves and our sin. Tell your neighbor, "Jesus is greater." Jesus is the strong man! Too many times guys don't know this because in all the pictures you've seen of Jesus he is skinny, has long hair and is wearing a dress. You're like, "I could take him, don't know what help he'd be to me. Somebody breaks into my house, I'm not calling Jesus. If somebody takes all my stuff, then I'll call Jesus and he'll come and hug us, but he won't fight for us." But here in this passage, Jesus is the strong man. And there are some in here tonight who have encountered the strength of Jesus. Some have had 8 demons holding you down and Jesus broken their curse, chased them out and freed you from your chains! You were at the end of your rope, with no more hope, you sought help through medicine, religion, and psychiatry and all they led to was jails, institutions, and death. But when you hit bottom you found Jesus there, the one who was arrested, rejected, beaten, persecuted, and crucified, and yet rose up! And he took your broken body and raised you up! With nail-pierced hands he threw the Lord of demons all the way to hell! The might of Jesus Christ stilled the storm and gave you peace! There was no human power that could have relieved your disease, but the Power of Christ broke the chains! He is the King of kings, Lord of lords, Warrior of warriors. Some of you have already been plundered and others have the demons marching in and banging on the door. You need a strong man to protect you and that one is Jesus. You need a Power greater than yourselves to restore you to sanity, to protect you from yourself, and the highest Power is Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man.⁵

He goes on to say that whoever isn't far him is against him. There are only two teams, those who are working against Jesus and God's will for their lives, and those who are turning to Him for their needs and seeking His will for their lives. Whose team are you on? Are you willing to go to any lengths to pursue God's will for your life? Are you willing to do the hard work required to clean your house and make it uninhabitable for your disease and your demons? Do you still believe that you're strong enough to handle it, or have you invited the highest power, Jesus Christ to be your strong man? Tonight is the night. Let's pray.

⁵ Humor and ideas from Mark Driscoll. "Jesus vs. Satan" preached at Mars Hill Church on 10/10/10.