

Principle 4

Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

“Happy are the pure in heart.” (Matthew 5:8)

Lesson 7

Moral

Principle 4: Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

“Happy are the pure in heart.” (Matthew 5:8)

Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” (Lamentations 3:40)

Introduction

Tonight we are going to really dig in and begin the growth process of recovery. Now, even though Principle 4 may bring some growing pains with it, tonight we are going to look at ways to maximize the growth and minimize the pain.

I wish I could say that you can escape the pain of your past altogether by going around it or jumping over it. But the only way I know to get rid of the pain of your past is to go through it. It has been said that “we need to use our past as a springboard, not a sofa—a guidepost, not a hitching post.”

I know some people who spend their lives rationalizing the past, complaining about the present, and fearing the future. They, of course, are not moving forward on the road to recovery. By coming tonight, however, you have chosen to continue going forward. And if you choose to embark on the adventure of self-discovery that begins with Principle 4 and continues through

Principle 5, I can guarantee you that growth will occur.

Principle 4 begins the process of “coming clean.” Pastor Rick Warren calls this “truth decay.” It is here that we openly examine and confess our faults to ourselves, to God, and another person we trust. We chip away and clean out all the decay of the past that has built up over the years and has kept us from really seeing the truth about our past and present situations.

A Moral Inventory

You may be wondering, “How do I do this thing called a moral inventory?”

That word “moral” scares some people. It scared me when I first worked this step in AA. Really, the word “moral” simply means honest!

In this step, you need to list, or inventory, all the significant events—good and bad—in your life. You need to be as honest as you can be to allow God to show you your part in each event and how that affected you and others.

Tonight’s acrostic will explain the five things you need to do to make a MORAL inventory.

Make time

Open

Rely

Analyze

List

First you need to MAKE time. Schedule an appointment with yourself. Set aside a day or

a weekend and get alone with God! God tells us in Job 33:33 (TLB): “Listen to me. Keep silence and I will teach you wisdom!”

The next letter in MORAL, *O*, stands for OPEN.

Remember when, as a child, you would visit the doctor, and he would say, “Open wide!” in that funny sing-song voice? Well, you need to “open wide” your heart and mind to allow the feelings that the pain of the past has blocked or caused you to deny. Denial may have protected you from your feelings and repressed your pain for a while. But now it has also blocked and prevented your recovery from your hurts, hang-ups, and habits. You need to “open wide” to see the real truth.

Once you have seen the truth, you need to express it. Here’s what Job had to say about being open: “Let me express my anguish. Let me be free to speak out of the bitterness of my soul” (7:11, TLB). Perhaps the following questions will help to “wake up” your feelings and get you started on your inventory!

Ask yourself, *What do I feel guilty about?* The first thing that came to your mind is what you need to address first in your inventory.

Do you know and understand the God-given purpose of guilt? God uses guilt to correct us through His Spirit when we are wrong. That’s called conviction. And conviction hurts!

Now don’t confuse conviction with condemnation. Romans 8:1 tells us, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.” Once we have made the decision to ask Jesus into our hearts, once we confess our wrongs, accept Christ’s perfect forgiveness, and turn from our sins, as far as God is concerned, guilt’s purpose—to make us feel bad about what we did in the past—is finished. But we like to hold on to it and beat ourselves over the head—repeatedly—with it!

That's condemnation. But it's not from God, it's from ourselves. Principle 4 will help you let go of your guilt, once and for all.

The next question you need to ask is *What do I resent?*

Resentment results from burying our hurts. If resentments are then suppressed, left to decay, they cause anger, frustration, and depression. What we don't talk out creatively, we act out destructively.

Another big question that you need to openly ask during this step is *What are my fears?*

Personally, I have a fear of going to the dentist. But even though it may hurt while I'm in the chair, when he's done driving the decay away, I feel a lot better.

Fear prevents us from expressing ourselves honestly and taking an honest moral inventory. Joshua 1:9 (GNB) tells us, "Do not be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go."

Next on the list of hard questions to ask yourself: Am I trapped in self-pity, alibis, and/or dishonest thinking? Remember, the truth does not change; your feelings do!

These questions are only the beginning of your inventory, but don't get discouraged. The next letter offers a reminder that you don't have to face this task alone.

The next letter is *R*, which stands for RELY.

Rely on Jesus to give you the courage and strength this step requires. Here's a suggestion: When your knees are knocking, it might help to kneel on them.

Isaiah 40:29 tells us that Jesus "gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." You *can* do this with His help.

Before we go any farther, I want to remind you that the principles and steps are in order for a reason (other than to create a nifty acrostic!). You need to complete Principle 3—turning

your life and your will over to God—before you can successfully work Principle 4.

Once you know the love and power of the one and only Higher Power, Jesus Christ, there is no longer any need to fear this principle. Psalm 31:23–24 (TLB) tells us: “Oh, love the Lord, all of you who are his people; for the Lord protects those who are loyal to him.... So cheer up! Take courage if you are depending on the Lord.” And remember, courage is not the absence of fear but the conquering of it.

Now you are ready to ANALYZE your past honestly.

To do a “searching and fearless” inventory, you must step out of your denial, because we cannot put our faults behind us until we face them. You must look through your denial of the past into the truth of the present—your true feelings, motives, thoughts, and, as in the *Star Wars* movie Obi-Wan Kenobi says, your “dark side.”

Proverbs 20:27 (GNB) says, “The Lord gave us mind and conscience; we cannot hide from ourselves.” Believe me, I know! I tried! My grandma used to tell me, “Johnny, it’s not enough to be as honest as the day is long. You should behave yourself at night too!”

Some of you heard the word “analyze” and got fired up, because you love to pick apart the details of a situation and look at events from all angles. Others of you have broken out into a cold sweat at the thought of analyzing anything! For those of you whose hearts are pounding and whose palms are clammy, listen closely as we talk about the *L* in moral: LIST.

Your inventory is basically a written list of the events of your past—both good and bad. (Balance is important.) Seeing your past in print brings you face-to-face with the reality of your character defects. Your inventory becomes a black-and-white discovery of who you truly are way down deep.

But if you just look at all the *bad* things of your past, you will distort your inventory and

open yourself to unnecessary pain. Lamentations 3:40 tells us, “Let us examine our ways and test them.” The verse doesn’t say, “just examine your bad, negative ways.” You need to honestly focus on the “pros” and the “cons” of your past!

I know people who have neglected to balance their inventory and have gotten stuck in their recoveries. Or even worse, they judged the program to be too hard and too painful and stopped their journey of recovery altogether—and they slipped back to their old hurts, hang-ups, and habits of the past.

An important word of caution: Do not begin this step without a sponsor or a strong accountability partner! You need someone you trust to help keep you balanced during this step, not to do the work for you. Nobody can do that except you. But you need encouragement from someone who will support your progress and share your pain. That’s what this program is all about.

In two weeks we will look at how to find a sponsor. That’s Lesson 8 in Participant’s Guide 2. It will show you some of the qualities to look for in a sponsor, what the job of a sponsor is, and some suggestions on how to find a sponsor or an accountability partner. A great place to start is at Celebrate Recovery’s Bar-B-Que next Friday night at 6:00. Then again, why wait? Start looking at the Solid Rock Cafe tonight at 9:00. That’s how you begin Principle 4.

Wrap-up

At the information table, you will find some blank Principle 4 worksheets. In a few weeks, we will be talking about how to put them to use in helping you work this key step.

I encourage you to get Participant’s Guide 2 tonight if you have completed Principle 3.

Start working Principle 4. What are you waiting for? Start working this program in

earnest.

If you are new to recovery or this is your first recovery meeting, we are glad that you are here. Pick up the first participant's guide, *Stepping Out of Denial into God's Grace*, and start this amazing journey with Jesus Christ. A healing journey that will lead you to freedom and truth. And by listening during the next two months, when you are ready to begin Principle 4, you will have a head start. You will also have a great understanding of the importance of Principle 4.

Let's pray.

Dear God, You know our past, all the good and the bad things that we've done. In this principle, we ask that You give us the strength and the courage to list them so that we can "come clean" and face them and the truth. Please help us reach out to others who You have placed along our "road to recovery." Thank You for providing them to help us keep balanced as we do our inventories. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.