Lesson 8

Moral

**Principle 4**: Openly examine and confess my hurts, hang-ups, and habits to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (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.

It is here, in principle 4, that we openly examine and confess our hurts, hang-ups and habits to ourselves, to God, and to someone we trust. We step out of the denial that has built up over the years and has kept us from really seeing the truth about our past and present situations. We look back to our past hurt to explain and understand our hang-ups and habits.

**A Moral Inventory**

You may be wondering, “How do I do an inventory?”

Tonight’s acrostic, Moral, will explain the five things you need in order to do an inventory. That word *moral* scares some people. Really, the word *moral* simply means honest! So think of this as an honest look back at our life and what you have experienced. It is not a penance. It is not meant to be a list of all the things you have done wrong in your life.

In this step, you will 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 how you’ve been hurt, how you’ve hurt others, and how that affected you.

**M**ake time

**O**pen

**R**ely

**A**nalyze

**L**ist

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 Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

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: “Therefore, I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (7:11). Perhaps the following questions will help to “wake up” your feelings and get you started on your inventory!

Ask yourself, ***How have I been hurt?*** The first thing that came to your mind is what you need to address first in your recovery. Addressing how we’ve been hurt is important because it directly affects what we believe is true about ourselves, others, or God, and that directly impacts our habits.

Ask yourself, ***What do I feel guilty about?***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 Jesus.” 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 inventory. Joshua 1:9 tells us, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Next on the list of hard questions to ask yourself: ***Am I trapped in false beliefs about myself, God, or others? Am I trapped in dishonesty or lies?*** Being honest about what we believe about ourselves, others or God is necessary to understanding why we struggle with unhealthy habits or compulsive behaviors.

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 further, 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 tells us: “Love the Lord, all his faithful people! The Lord preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in 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 hurts, hang-ups, and habits 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, and thoughts.

Proverbs 20:27 says, “The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord that sheds light on one’s inmost being.”

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.

**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.

If you are new to recovery, the good news is you don’t start on this step. You start at step 1 principle 1. It is important to note that it is best to do your 4th step in a step study. If you have been in recovery for awhile and you haven’t joined a step study, it’s time! Take that next step and dive deeper into the steps and principles.

Let’s pray.

*Dear God, You know my past, all the good and the bad. Both the things I’ve done, and the things that have been done to me. In this principle, I ask that You give me the strength and the courage to list those things so that I can face them and the truth, and begin to heal. Please help us reach out to others whom You have placed along our “road to recovery.” Thank You for providing them to help us keep balanced as I do my inventory. In Christ’s name I pray, Amen.*