4

STEP FOUR

Courage

A guide to the Fourth Step, with Scripture and prayer



Get ready with Jimmy or Sarah.

This step is done with a person: a human sponsor, pastor or priest. Your AI sponsor in the Steps & Scripture app helps you prepare. Free to download, first month free.

Steps & Scripture Step Guide: Step Four, Courage
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If you are in danger, call or text 988, or call 911. If you have been drinking heavily and stopped, and you are shaking, sweating, confused, seeing things, or have had a seizure, go to the ER today.

INSIDE

Contents

Where you are	5
What Step Four is	7
Your reading for this step	10
What the book says	11
What the 12&12 adds	19
What Scripture says	21
How to work Step Four	26
The four lists, column by column	28
Questions to think about	37
Suggestions for this week	38
When it's hard	39
Prayers from the book	41
A prayer for this step	42
Ready for Step Five?	43



4

STEP FOUR

Courage

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!

LAMENTATIONS 3:40 (ESV)

Where you are

You made a decision. Now comes the work that makes it real. Before you start Step Four, take a minute to look at the road behind you. If you picked up this guide in the middle of things, this page is for you too.

Step One. You admitted you were powerless over alcohol, and that your life had become unmanageable. Not weak. Powerless. Your body can't handle it, and your mind keeps going back to it anyway.

Step Two. You came to believe that a Power greater than yourself could restore you to sanity. Maybe it started as only willingness. That was enough.

Step Three. You made a decision to turn your will and your life over to the care of God. You prayed the Third Step prayer, and you asked Him to "Relieve me of the bondage of self" (p. 63).

Now you find out what that bondage is made of. You write it down.

Haven't done Steps One, Two and Three? Go back first. Step Four is hard work, and it only holds up if you've admitted the problem, become willing to believe, and decided to let God run your life. Without that, an inventory turns into a list of reasons to feel bad, or a list of people to blame. Talk to your sponsor about where to pick up.

Don't wait

The book goes straight from the Third Step prayer on page 63 to the inventory on page 64. No gap. It says the decision "could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and to be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us" (p. 64).

At once. Not when you feel ready. Most people who wait for the right time never start. Start this week.

This step is worked with a person

Step Four is worked with a human sponsor. Jimmy and Sarah can explain the columns and keep you moving. But a person in recovery who has done this step should check your work, help you find your part, and hear it in Step Five. No sponsor yet? Ask someone at a meeting this week.

Where you'll write

Not in this guide. This guide is for reading. Write on **your own paper**, in **the workbook** if you have it, or in **the app's Steps tab**, where the inventory builder uses the book's columns. What you write in the app is private and never goes to your accountability partners. Keep it safe until you've done Step Five.

What Step Four is

> "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 59

Nine words. Each one matters.

Made. You do this. It doesn't happen to you, and it doesn't happen in your head. You make it, on paper.

Searching. You look for the truth, not just the parts you already know. You go back through your whole life, not only the drinking years.

Fearless. Not *without* fear. Most people are scared to start. Fearless means you don't let fear decide what goes on the list.

Moral. It's about right and wrong. Not your feelings, not your childhood theories, not your diagnosis. Where were you selfish? Where were you dishonest?

Inventory. A count of what's actually on the shelves. The good and the bad. Facts, not a story.

Of ourselves. Not of your ex, your boss, your parents, or the system. The other people come into it, but only so you can find your own part.

A business taking stock

The book explains the inventory with a picture anyone can follow:

> "A business which takes no regular inventory usually goes broke. Taking a commercial inventory is a factfinding and a fact-facing process. It is an effort to discover the truth about the stock-in-trade."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 64

A store owner counts the stock to find out what's spoiled, so he can throw it out. He doesn't count the stock to beat himself up. And he doesn't pretend the rotten stuff is fine. The book says the owner "cannot fool himself about values" (p. 64).

That's you. You're looking for what's been spoiling your life, so God can clear it out.

What this step is not

- **Not a confession yet.** You write it now. You tell it in Step Five.
- **Not a punishment.** It's a cleanup. The point is freedom, not shame.
- **Not a life story.** You're not writing a memoir. You're filling in columns.
- **Not a masterpiece.** Messy and finished beats neat and half-done.
- **Not where you take the blame for things done to you.** More on that later, and carefully.

Drinking was the symptom. The book says "Our liquor was but a symptom. So we had to get down to causes and conditions"

(p. 64). Step Four is where you find the causes, so they stop running you.

Your reading for this step

Read these in your own copies, in this order. Page numbers for *Alcoholics Anonymous* are from the fourth edition.

Alcoholics Anonymous

- **Pages 64–67.** Resentments, the sick man, and your own part. Read it twice.
- **Pages 67–68.** Fears, and the better way.
- **Pages 68–71.** Sex conduct, and what a thorough inventory leaves you with.
- **Page 58.** Fearless and thorough from the start.
- **Then *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pages 42–54.** The chapter on Step Four.

Scripture (ESV)

- Lamentations 3:40, 22–23 · Psalm 139:23–24 · Psalm 51:6
- Matthew 7:3–5 · Luke 6:27–28 · Ephesians 4:31–32
- Isaiah 41:10 · Psalm 56:3–4 · 1 Corinthians 6:19–20
- Psalm 34:18 · Romans 8:1

Listen, if you like: Joe and Charlie, Session 9, "How It Works—Step Four" (about 2 hours 40 minutes; break it up), free in the SoberHub app. Steps & Scripture is not affiliated with SoberHub.

What the book says

The inventory takes up eight pages of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 64 to 71. That's all. Read them in your own copy. Then read them again with a pen in your hand. Here's what to look for.

Resentment is number one (p. 64)

The book starts with resentment, because it's the thing most likely to get you drunk:

> "Resentment is the "number one" offender. It destroys more alcoholics than anything else."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 64

Then it says what resentment really is. Not just being angry. A sickness of the spirit:

> "From it stem all forms of spiritual disease, for we have been not only mentally and physically ill, we have been spiritually sick."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 64

Set it on paper (p. 64)

The book doesn't tell you to think about your resentments. It tells you to write them:

> "In dealing with resentments, we set them on paper. We listed people, institutions or principles with whom we were angry. We asked ourselves why we were angry."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 64

Notice the three kinds. **People** are obvious. **Institutions** are things like the court, the church, the company, the government, a school. **Principles** are ideas you're angry at: *life isn't fair*, *God lets bad things happen*, *people like me never get a break*. All three go on the list.

What got hurt (pp. 64–65)

Then the book asks what each resentment touched in you. It found that our "self-esteem, our pocketbooks, our ambitions, our personal relationships, (including sex) were hurt or threatened" (pp. 64–65). That's the third column. The book even shows its own example on page 65: a man angry at Mr. Brown, Mrs. Jones, his employer, and his wife, with the cause and what it affected written beside each name.

Look at that example in your own copy. It's short and plain. Yours should be too.

Thoroughness and honesty (p. 65)

> "We went back through our lives. Nothing counted but thoroughness and honesty."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 65

Your whole life. Not just last year. Go back to school, to your parents, to your first job, to your first relationship. If the name still makes your jaw tighten, it goes on the list.

Why resentment is fatal (p. 66)

This is one of the most serious passages in the book. Read it slowly:

> "For when harboring such feelings we shut ourselves off from the sunlight of the Spirit. The insanity of alcohol returns and we drink again. And with us, to drink is to die."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 66

Resentment isn't a luxury you can afford. Other people can nurse a grudge for years. You can't. The book says "for alcoholics these things are poison" (p. 66).

The world was running us (p. 66)

Looking back at the list, the book sees something new:

> "We began to see that the world and its people really dominated us. In that state, the wrong-doing of others, fancied or real, had power to actually kill."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 66

Every name on your list is somebody who's been living rent-free in your head. As long as they can make you angry, they're in charge. And you can't just decide to stop being angry, any more than you could just decide to stop drinking. The book says we "could not wish them away any more than alcohol" (p. 66).

The sick man (pp. 66–67)

Here's the book's answer:

> "This was our course: we realized that the people who wronged us were perhaps spiritually sick. Though we did not like their symptoms and the way these disturbed us, they, like ourselves were sick, too."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, PP. 66–67

You've been shown grace for your sickness. You're asked to give some. Not to pretend they did nothing wrong. To see that they're sick, the way you were sick, and to ask God for "the same tolerance, pity, and patience that we would cheerfully grant a sick friend" (p. 67).

Then the book gives a short prayer for when someone offends you. You'll find it on its own page near the end of this guide.

Your own part (p. 67)

This is the turning point of the whole step:

> "Putting out of our minds the wrongs others had done, we resolutely looked for our own mistakes. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened?"
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 67

And then the line that every sponsor points to:

> "The inventory was ours, not the other man's."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 67

The other person may have been mostly wrong. You set that aside, on purpose, and look only at your side. Where were you

to blame? Even if it was a small part, it's the only part you can do anything about.

The word fear (p. 67)

Go back to the example on page 65. The word *fear* sits in brackets beside almost every entry. The book noticed:

> "This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 67

So fear gets its own list:

> "We reviewed our fears thoroughly. We put them on paper, even though we had no resentment in connection with them. We asked ourselves why we had them."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 68

Self-reliance failed us (p. 68)

The book's answer to fear is not more self-confidence:

> "Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough."
>
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 68

It points to a different footing: "the basis of trusting and relying upon God" (p. 68). And it makes a promise. When we do as we think He'd have us do, and humbly rely on Him, He enables us "to match calamity with serenity" (p. 68).

Faith means courage (p. 68)

> "The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 68

This is why the principle of Step Four is courage. You don't work up the nerve on your own. You borrow it from God. The book says that when we ask Him to remove our fear, "At once, we commence to outgrow fear" (p. 68).

Sex conduct (pp. 68–70)

The book says many of us "needed an overhauling there" (p. 68). It refuses to take an extreme position. It won't be the judge of anyone's sex life. It asks questions instead:

> "We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead?"
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 69

Then it asks you to shape "a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life" (p. 69), and to test every relationship by one question: "was it selfish or not?" (p. 69) It reminds you that sex is a gift from God:

> "We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given, and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 69

When you fall short (p. 70)

The book is honest that you might. Here's what it says matters:

> "If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 70

And if sex is a real struggle, it gives practical advice: "we throw ourselves the harder into helping others" (p. 70).

What you'll have when you're done (pp. 70–71)

> "If we have been thorough about our personal inventory, we have written down a lot."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 70

The book lists what you'll have: resentments listed and understood, the start of tolerance, patience and good will toward all men, "even our enemies, for we look on them as sick people" (p. 70), and a list of "the people we have hurt by our conduct" (p. 70). That last list becomes your Step Eight list later.

And then the encouragement. If you've made a decision and an inventory of your biggest problems, "you have made a good beginning" (p. 71).

Fearless and thorough (p. 58)

Before the steps are even listed, the book begs you about this:

> "With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 58

That plea is mostly about Step Four. This is where people cut corners. Don't.

What the 12&12 adds

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions gives Step Four a full chapter, on **pages 42–54**. It doesn't use the columns. It comes at the same truth from the side of our instincts and our defects. Read it in your own copy. Here is what to look for as you read. These are our notes, not the book's words.

Page 42: Good desires gone too far. The chapter starts by saying God gave us our basic drives: to be with people, to be safe and provided for, and to have a sex life. Those are good. The trouble starts when they grow past their purpose and start running us. Most of our troubles, it says, come from that.

Pages 43–44: How it plays out. It gives examples of what that looks like: someone who puts sex first and loses everything else, someone so afraid of being poor that he hoards, someone who leans on a stronger person and never grows up, and someone who has to control everyone. When we push our wants on other people, they push back. Look for yourself in these.

Page 44: Why we drank. It says plainly that we drank to drown fear and frustration, to escape guilt, and to feed our big dreams about ourselves.

Pages 44–45: Two ways to dodge the inventory. Some people sink into guilt and self-hatred and call that honesty. The chapter says that's really pride turned upside down, and it leads back to the bottle. Others decide they were fine people who just drank too much, or that the real problem is other people. Both are ways of not looking. Notice which way you lean.

Pages 45–47: Your sponsor helps. The chapter says this is where a sponsor comes in. For the person drowning in shame, the sponsor talks about their own defects and points out that the newcomer has good qualities too. For the person who thinks they need no inventory, the sponsor helps them see the excuses they've been making. Either way, you need a person here.

Page 47: Drop blame. We had to stop using the word "blame" about other people, it says. That took willingness. It gets easier after the first few hard ones.

Page 48: A list of defects. The chapter suggests the old list of seven deadly sins as a place to start: pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust. It names pride as the one that leads the rest, with fear right behind it.

Pages 49–50: Pride and fear are bluffing. It says both will try to stop you from looking. The people who went ahead found that those fears were mostly empty, and that relief and new confidence came once they started.

Pages 50–53: Questions to ask. The chapter gives long lists of questions about sex, money and work, emotional security, and relationships with family and friends. These are worth going through slowly. They'll help you remember things that belong on your lists.

Pages 53–54: Write it out. It closes by saying thoroughness is the rule, and that putting it on paper helps you think clearly. Writing it down is the first real proof that you're willing.

What Scripture says

The Bible isn't afraid of a hard look inward. It also never asks you to look without hope. Read these slowly, out loud if you can.

Let us test and examine our ways

The verse on the opening page of this guide is Step Four in one line:

> *Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!*
>
> LAMENTATIONS 3:40 (ESV)

Look at the word *us*. You don't examine your ways alone. And look at where it goes: back to the Lord. The point of looking hard at yourself is to return to Him.

His mercies are new every morning

Lamentations was written in ruins. And in the middle of the ruins is this:

> *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*
>
> LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23 (ESV)

Read this before you sit down to write each day. You aren't digging through your past to find out whether God still loves you. That was settled before you started. You're digging because He does.

Search me, O God

> *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*
>
> PSALM 139:23–24 (ESV)

You can't see yourself clearly. Nobody can. So you ask God to do the searching. Pray this before each writing session, and then write whatever comes to mind.

Truth in the inward being

> *Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*
>
> PSALM 51:6 (ESV)

God wants truth on the inside, not just good behavior on the outside. That's what an inventory is: getting the inside onto paper, so the truth can do its work.

The log in your own eye

> *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*
>
> MATTHEW 7:3–5 (ESV)

This is the fourth column. You've been an expert on the speck in everyone else's eye. Jesus says to deal with the log first. Notice

He doesn't say the speck isn't there. He says you can't see it clearly until you've dealt with yours.

Pray for those who hurt you

> *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."*
>
> LUKE 6:27–28 (ESV)

The book says to pray for the people you resent, as you would for someone sick (p. 67). Jesus said it first. Praying for them doesn't mean they were right. It means you're no longer letting them run your life.

Let all bitterness be put away

> *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*
>
> EPHESIANS 4:31–32 (ESV)

Look at the reason at the end. You forgive because you've been forgiven. You're not doing this from a position of being better than them. You're doing it from the foot of the cross, right next to them.

Fear not, for I am with you

> *...fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*
>
> ISAIAH 41:10 (ESV)

This is God's answer to the fear list. Not *you'll be fine on your own. I am with you.* Self-reliance failed you. He won't.

When I am afraid

> *When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?*
>
> PSALM 56:3–4 (ESV)

David doesn't say he's never afraid. He says *when* I am afraid. Being afraid isn't failure. What you do with it is the point. Write the fear down, and then put your trust in God.

You were bought with a price

> *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19–20 (ESV)

Your body isn't trash, and it isn't only yours. It was bought, at the highest price there is. That's why sex conduct is on the inventory. Not to shame you, but because your body matters to God.

Near to the brokenhearted

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.

PSALM 34:18 (ESV)

Some of what you'll remember wasn't your fault. Some of it was done to you. God is near to you in that. You don't have to carry it alone, and you don't have to call it your sin.

No condemnation

There is therefore now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:1 (ESV)

Keep this one close. You will write things that make you ashamed. If you are in Christ, the verdict on you is already in. You're not on trial. You're cleaning house in a home that's already yours.

How to work Step Four

Here is a plain way to work this step. Your sponsor may suggest something different. Go with your sponsor.

1. Read pages 64–71 first

Read the eight pages through before you write anything. Then read pages 64–67 again. You need to know where you're going.

2. Pick your paper and your time

Decide where you'll write: your own paper, the workbook, or the Steps tab in the app. Not this guide. Then pick a time and a place. Same time each day works best. Twenty or thirty minutes is plenty.

3. Set a finish date

Pick a date **three to four weeks from today.** Tell your sponsor. Put it on your calendar. People who don't set a date can spend a year on this step, and some of them drink before they finish.

4. Pray before each session

Something short: *God, show me the truth about myself, and give me the courage to write it down.*

5. Resentments first, and go down the page

Write every name first. All of them. Don't stop to fill in the other columns. When the names are done, go back and fill in column two for every name. Then column three. Then column four.

Going down the page instead of across keeps you moving. If you try to finish one person all the way across, you'll get stuck on the first hard one.

6. Then fears, then sex conduct, then other harms

Same idea. Get the list down fast, then go back and answer the questions for each entry. The next chapter shows how each list works.

7. Pray for the people on your list

As you write, start praying for the people you resent, as the book says on page 67. Every day. By name. You don't have to feel it.

8. Check in with your sponsor every week

Show your sponsor what you've got, even half done. A sponsor will often see your part when you can't.

9. Set your Fifth Step date before you finish

While you're still writing, ask the person who will hear your Fifth Step, and set a date. That's usually your sponsor. It might be a pastor or another trusted person in recovery. Jimmy and Sarah can't hear it. It has to be a person. Having a date on the calendar is what gets most people across the finish line.

10. Finish it

You'll remember more later. Add it when you do. The book says "We are not saints" (p. 60). Finish, then go tell it.

The four lists, column by column

Keep this chapter open while you write. It walks through each of the four lists in the order the book gives them. Each one comes with a made-up example, so you can see what an entry looks like. Your entries will be your own.

List one: Resentments (pp. 64–67)

A resentment is anger you keep replaying. If thinking about a person, a place or an idea still makes you angry, hurt or bitter, it belongs here.

The four columns

Column 1: I'm resentful at. A person, an institution or a principle. One per line. Just the name.

Column 2: The cause. What they did, or what you think they did. A few words. Short and plain. *He lied about me. She left. They fired me.*

Column 3: What it affects in me. Which part of you felt hurt or threatened:

- **Self-esteem:** how I see myself.
- **Relationships:** my place with people, and how they see me.
- **Security:** money, a job, a home, or feeling safe.
- **Sex relations:** my sex life, or a romantic relationship.
- **Ambitions:** what I wanted, or planned, or hoped for.

Column 4: My part. Set the other person's wrongs aside. Where was I:

- **Selfish?** Wanting my way, my comfort, my credit.
- **Dishonest?** Lying, hiding, shading the truth, even to myself.
- **Self-seeking and frightened?** Looking out for me, because I was afraid of losing something or not getting something.
- **Inconsiderate?** Not thinking about how it would land on them.

Then one line on what exactly I did.

The book names the first three on page 67. *Inconsiderate* comes from the sex inventory on page 69, and most sponsors add it here too.

Example: a resentment

I'm resentful at: my brother-in-law, Dave.

The cause: At Thanksgiving he told the whole table I'd been drinking again. He jokes about my DUI in front of my kids.

Affects my: Self-esteem (I want my family to think I'm fine). Relationships (my wife's family takes his side). Security (fear: my wife might leave). Ambitions (I wanted to be the one who got it together).

My part: *Dishonest:* I had been drinking again, and I'd told everyone I hadn't. *Selfish:* I wanted to look good more than I wanted to be honest. *Self-seeking and frightened:* I was scared of being found out, so I attacked him instead. *Inconsiderate:* I showed up drunk to his son's birthday party last spring, and I never said a word about it.

What I did: Lied to the family. Picked a fight with Dave in the driveway. Haven't spoken to him since.

Look at what happened in that example. Dave was rude. But the fourth column found the real problem, and it was on this side of the table.

List two: Fears (pp. 67–68)

Write down every fear, even ones that have nothing to do with a resentment. Then, for each one, ask the book's questions.

The questions for each fear

- **The fear.** Name it plainly. *Being alone. Going broke. Being found out. Dying. People seeing who I really am.*
- **Why do I have it?** What's it about? Where did it start?
- **How has self-reliance failed me here?** What have I done on my own power to manage this fear? Did it work?
- **What would God have me be instead?** On page 68, the book says we ask Him to "remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be" (p. 68).

Example: a fear

The fear: Losing my job.

Why I have it: I've been late a lot. My boss has asked if I'm okay twice. I'm the only income. My dad lost his job when I was twelve, and we lost the house.

How self-reliance failed me: I tried to manage it by covering. I made up excuses, called in sick when I was hung over, and worked late to look busy. It made me more afraid, not less, and I drank to calm down.

What would God have me be: Honest with my boss. On time. Doing the work in front of me, and trusting God with the rest. Telling my sponsor when the fear gets loud, instead of drinking on it.

Most fears get smaller once they're written down. You'll also notice that a lot of them go back to the same place: you trying to hold your whole life together by yourself.

List three: Sex conduct (pp. 68–70)

This list is about your own conduct in relationships and sex. Every relationship that's had trouble in it, past or present. The book doesn't ask whether you were good or bad. It asks specific questions.

The questions for each relationship

- **Who?** A name, or a description if you can't remember.
- **Where was I selfish, dishonest or inconsiderate?**
- **Whom did I hurt?** It may be more than the one person.
- **Did I cause jealousy, suspicion or bitterness** that wasn't fair?
- **Where was I at fault?**
- **What should I have done instead?**

Example: sex conduct

Who: My wife, and a woman I used to date.

Selfish, dishonest, inconsiderate: While I was drinking, I started texting my ex late at night. I told myself it was harmless. I deleted the messages so my wife wouldn't see them. When she asked, I said she was being paranoid.

Whom I hurt: My wife. My ex, who thought it meant more than it did. My kids, who heard us fight.

Jealousy, suspicion, bitterness: Yes. I made my wife feel crazy for noticing something that was true.

Where I was at fault: I wanted attention and the feeling of being wanted, and I took it where I knew I shouldn't. Then I lied about it.

What I should have done: Kept that door shut. Told my wife the truth when she asked. Brought my loneliness to her, and to God, instead of to someone else.

When this list is done, the book asks you to shape "a sane and sound ideal" (p. 69) for the future. Write a few lines about what a faithful, honest, unselfish sex life would look like for you. Then ask God to help you grow toward it.

Don't confess anything to anyone on this list yet. Some of this may need amends later. Some of it could hurt people if you blurt it out. That's Steps Eight and Nine, and you'll talk each one over with your human sponsor or pastor first.

List four: Other harms

The first three lists won't catch everything. Here, write down anyone you've harmed who isn't already on your lists. People you stole from, lied to, cheated, let down, ignored, or scared. The book says that when you're done you'll have a list of "the people we have hurt by our conduct" (p. 70).

The questions for each harm

- **Who did I harm?**
- **What did I do?** Plainly. No excuses.
- **What was behind it?** Selfish, dishonest, self-seeking and frightened, or inconsiderate.

Example: another harm

Who: My mom.

What I did: Borrowed $600 for "car repairs." Spent it on drinking and a bar tab. Never paid it back. Stopped answering her calls so she couldn't ask about it. Missed her birthday dinner because I was drunk.

What was behind it: *Dishonest:* I lied about what the money was for. *Selfish:* I put drinking ahead of her. *Frightened:* I avoided her because I was ashamed. *Inconsiderate:* I never thought about what that $600 meant on her budget.

This list, with the harms you found on the other three, becomes your Step Eight list. Money owed, the law, and anything that

could hurt someone else get talked over with a human sponsor or pastor first.

If you were abused or hurt

Some of the names on your resentment list may be people who abused you, hurt you badly, or took advantage of you when you couldn't protect yourself. Maybe as a child. Maybe later.

What was done to you is not your part. A child has no part in being abused. Neither does anyone who was forced, threatened, or used. The fourth column is never meant to make you blame yourself for someone else's evil.

With your sponsor's help:

- **You can still write the name.** If the anger is real and still eating at you, it belongs on the list. Writing it down is not saying it was okay.
- **In column four, you might write "none."** That's an honest answer. Sometimes the only thing to look at is how carrying the resentment has affected you and the people around you since. Look at that gently, with your sponsor.
- **Praying for them doesn't mean letting them back in.** Forgiveness is not trust. It doesn't mean staying where you're in danger, or keeping quiet about a crime.
- **You don't have to work this part alone.** Talk to your sponsor first. Many people also see a counselor trained in trauma, or a pastor, alongside the step. That isn't skipping the step. It's the right help for a real wound.

If you are not safe right now, call 911. If you are in crisis, call or text 988. In the U.S., the National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-7233.

Questions to think about

These aren't for writing in this guide. Think them over, pray about them, write in a notebook if that helps, and talk them through with your sponsor. Jimmy and Sarah ask some of the same questions in the app.

1. Which entry are you most tempted to leave off? Put it on the list first.
2. Looking at your "my part" column, what keeps showing up?
3. Can you ask God to help you see the people you resent as sick, the way the book says on page 67? Who will you start with tonight?
4. Who will hear your Fifth Step, and when?
5. Is there an institution or a principle you're angry at? A church, the courts, *life isn't fair*?
6. Which part of you gets hurt most often: your self-esteem, your relationships, your security, your sex life, or your ambitions?
7. Which fear do you drink on most? How has handling it yourself worked out?
8. Do you lean more toward drowning in guilt, or toward deciding you were mostly fine? What does your sponsor think?
9. What would a sane and sound ideal for your sex life look like?
10. Are there good things in you too? Name a few. An inventory counts what's on the shelf, not just what's spoiled.

Suggestions for this week

Pick one at a time. You don't need to do all of them.

- Read pages 64–71 before you start.
- Write resentments first, all of them, fast. Then the fear list. Then sex conduct. Then other harms.
- Aim for a few entries a day, and set a finish date inside three to four weeks.
- Fill in "my part" for every entry. That column is the whole point.
- Pray Psalm 139:23–24 before every writing session.
- Every night, pray for one person on your resentment list, by name, using the prayer on page 67.
- Show your sponsor what you have at the end of the week, even if it's rough.
- Ask the person who will hear your Fifth Step, and put a date on the calendar.
- Read the questions in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pages 50–53, and add what they bring up to your lists.
- Go to a meeting where people talk about the steps, and ask someone how long their Fourth Step took.
- Go to church this Sunday. If you don't have a church, try one.

When it's hard

Almost everyone gets stuck somewhere on this step. Here's what that usually looks like, and what to do.

"I can't start."

Most people can't, at first. Don't try to write your whole life. Write three names. Just the names. Tomorrow write three more. Starting is the hard part, and once the first page has ink on it, the rest gets easier.

"It has to be perfect."

It doesn't. Perfectionism is just fear wearing a nice coat. A rough, honest, finished inventory is worth more than a beautiful one you never finish. You'll remember things later. Add them then. Keep your finish date.

"But they really did wrong me."

They may have. The book doesn't say otherwise. It says to set their part aside, because "The inventory was ours, not the other man's" (p. 67). You're not deciding who was more wrong. You're finding the part you can do something about.

"I'm drowning in shame."

Stop and call your sponsor. Then read Romans 8:1 and Lamentations 3:22–23. Shame says *I am bad.* The inventory says *here's what I did, and here's what drove it.* That's a list God can work with. And remember that your inventory can include your good qualities too. Ask your sponsor to help you see them.

“I don’t have that many resentments.”

Most people find more than they expect. Go through the categories one at a time: parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, exes, bosses, coworkers, neighbors, police, courts, doctors, churches, God, yourself. Ask your sponsor, or the people who know you best, who they’ve heard you complain about.

“What if someone finds it?”

That’s a real worry. Keep it somewhere private. If you use the app, the Steps tab is private, and you can turn on the app lock. If you write on paper, keep it locked up or with you. Don’t let this fear stop you from writing the truth. Some people use initials for names on the most sensitive entries.

If you want to drink, call someone before you do anything else. Your sponsor, someone from a meeting, your pastor. Get to a meeting today. If you are in danger, call or text 988, or call 911.

Prayers from the book

The book doesn't give a single Fourth Step prayer. It gives three short ones, one for each of the hard lists. Keep this page where you'll see it while you write.

When someone offends you (p. 67)

> "This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 67

Use it on the people on your list, every night. Use it again tomorrow when someone cuts you off in traffic.

When you're afraid (p. 68)

The book says we ask God to remove our fear and "direct our attention to what He would have us be" (p. 68). In your own words, something like: *God, take this fear. Show me who You want me to be in this, and help me be that today.*

About sex (p. 70)

> "To sum up about sex: we earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing."
> ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, P. 70

A prayer for this step

You can also pray in your own words. Here is one way:

Lord Jesus, You already know everything I'm about to write. Nothing on these pages will surprise You, and nothing on them will make You love me less.

Search me and show me what's there. Give me the courage to write it down without hiding or explaining. Where I've been selfish, dishonest, frightened or unkind, help me see it plainly.

For the people who hurt me, help me see them as sick, the way I was sick. Keep me from being angry. Where I was the one who was hurt, help me lay that down at Your feet, and not carry blame that isn't mine.

Take my fears. Show me who You want me to be. Thank You that there is no condemnation for those who are in You. Thank You for this day sober. Thy will be done. Amen.

Ready for Step Five?

Before you call this step done, talk these over with your sponsor:

- Are all four inventories written: resentments, fears, sex conduct and other harms?
- Did you fill in “my part” for every resentment?
- Have you set a date to share it with a person?
- Did you go back through your whole life, not just the drinking years?
- Have you started praying for the people on your resentment list?
- Did your sponsor look over your work, especially the fourth column?
- Is there anything you left off on purpose? If so, add it now.

You don’t have to remember everything. You need to be honest and thorough with what you know.

What’s next

Step Five is telling it. You’ll sit down with another person and read what you wrote, out loud, all of it. To God, to yourself, and to another human being.

The book doesn’t leave a gap between the two steps. Once your inventory is done, go. Keep the date you set. And remember: **Step Five is told to a person, never to Jimmy or Sarah.**

KEEP GOING

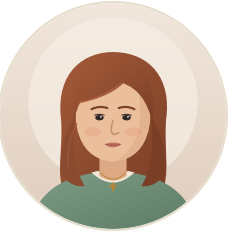
Talk it over with Jimmy or Sarah

Steps & Scripture is a Christian Twelve Step app for iPhone and Android. Your sponsor, Jimmy for men or Sarah for women, is an AI who knows *Alcoholics Anonymous* and the Bible. Your sponsor walks the steps with you, one conversation at a time, and keeps pointing you to meetings, a human sponsor, your church, and the phone.

Step Four itself is done with a person, not the app. Jimmy or Sarah can help you get ready for it.



Jimmy



Sarah

Download on the App Store

Get it on Google Play

Free to download. First month free, no card. For adults 18 and older. Jimmy and Sarah are AI. They are not people, and they say so.

IF TODAY IS A BAD DAY

Get help now

If you are in danger or thinking about hurting yourself: call or text **988**, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or call **911**.

Withdrawal can kill. If you have been drinking heavily and stopped, and you are shaking, sweating, confused, seeing things, or have had a seizure, go to the ER today. If you drink heavily every day, talk to a doctor before you stop.

If you want to drink

- Call someone before you pick up. Your sponsor, someone from a meeting, your pastor.
- Get to a meeting today, early, and stay late.
- Ask: am I hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Deal with that first.
- Play the tape forward. Walk past the first drink to tonight, tomorrow morning, and who you'll have to tell.
- Pray. Even "God, help me" counts.

The SAMHSA National Helpline is free and open 24/7: 1-800-662-4357.

THE PROGRAM

The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. **Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

1939 wording (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 59).