

Crucial Steps as You Take Spiritual Inventory and Walk Into Abundant Life

A spiritual inventory can be a valuable exercise in the pursuit of a more Spirit-filled life.

My own experience with spiritual inventories comes from working as a therapist in the addiction field. Many clients who achieve successful recovery say it took “working a program” of 12 steps, or spiritual principles—one of which is a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves (Step 4). In this sense, the spiritual inventory is a tool that helps to facilitate a process of positive core change and deeper connection with one’s “Higher Power.”

But you don’t have to have a diagnosable addiction in order to benefit from taking a spiritual inventory. Twelve-step founder Bill Wilson wasn’t the first person in the Christian tradition to recommend the practice, after all. Spiritual inventories have been around long before the recovery movement and at least since the 18th century, when Christians were using the theologian John Wesley’s “22 Questions” as a tool for spiritual growth. Today, if you Google “spiritual inventory,” a host of variations turns up, depending on the church and denomination.

Whether or not you’re in recovery, then, the following tips for taking a spiritual inventory can help you access more of the abundant life in the Spirit that Jesus wants for you (John 10:10):

- **Prayerfully “examine the messes” in your life and “the areas where your soul needs a bit of housekeeping work.”** That’s the recommendation of authors Jonathan Benz and Kristina Robb-Dover, in the book *The Recovery-Minded*

Church: Loving and Ministering to People With Addiction (InterVarsity Press, 2016). They suggest undertaking this introspective work with the help of a sponsor, accountability partner or spiritual director.

Take a hard and honest look at the issues you're struggling with—the areas in your life where you feel a sense of “crippling brokenness and need for God's grace,” in the words of Benz and Robb-Dover. This exercise can include:

- A review of one's fears (What keeps you awake at night, causes you to worry, or compels you to try to control outcomes in unhealthy ways?)
- The identification of “false gods” (What things do you associate your ultimate happiness with that are just poor substitutes for God Himself?)
- A look at your intimate relationships (How have you hurt others and been hurt by others?)
- **To ensure a systematic and comprehensive inventory process, use the “Fourth Step Inventory” worksheet or another like it.** The Fourth Step Inventory provides a clear, step-by-step guide for assessing and charting your spiritual flaws, resentments, fears and sexual conduct or harm done to others. In the process, the user is able to uncover key aspects of their self that may be obstacles to spiritual growth and change, (such as pride, money or ambition, among other issues).
- **Review the “Seven Deadly Sins” with a view to identifying which of these may be blocking your spiritual progress.** This recommendation comes directly from the *Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous, in its treatment of Step 4. What are the so-called Seven Deadly Sins? Pride. Greed. Lust. Anger. Gluttony. Envy. Sloth. In many cases, one or more of these sins will stand out as recurring personal motifs.
- **Be honest and courageous in your self-scrutiny.** Self-

honesty is key to the effectiveness of any spiritual inventory. Be as honest and thorough in your self-assessment as you can be. The spiritual inventory is an opportunity to hold up the mirror and look squarely at your spiritual blemishes. Inevitably, this takes courage.

- **Be gentle with yourself. Don't beat yourself up.** Contrary to a common misconception in recovery, the spiritual inventory is not one more occasion to beat yourself up about all of the ways that you have sinned or fallen short. There's an important distinction to be made here between seeing and judging. Strive for a clear-eyed assessment of your choices, actions and the consequences—and ditch the temptation to indulge in guilt, shame or self-pity.

Jesus said He came not for the righteous but for sinners—not for the healthy, but for the sick. His aim in coming was (and is) abundant life. The spiritual inventory is a tool for discovering where we are most in need of Jesus' healing work, so that we can experience more of the Holy Spirit in our daily walk with God. {eoa}

Anna Ciulla is the clinical director at Beach House Center for Recovery, where she is responsible for designing, implementing and supervising the delivery of the latest evidence-based therapies for treating substance use disorders. Anna has a passion for helping clients with substance use and co-occurring disorders achieve successful long-term recovery.