

Why Me, God?

Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now – if I have found favor in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin.” – Numbers 11:10-15 (NIV)

Two extremes typify our reaction to discord, tension, and tragedy in our lives. One is this response of Moses, mad at the inconvenience, blaming God for dumping on him rather than resolving to put one foot in front of the other and, in God’s peace, walk through the mess, discovering in the process who he is and the talents God has bestowed on him.

The other extreme is to accept responsibility for all ills and trouble in our lives, blaming ourselves because of a past indiscretion or a general feeling of blameworthiness. “I tell myself it’s because I stole the man’s wallet twenty years ago. When I got cancer I knew that was why.”

Neither is healthy. Both express anger misdirected. Both cause us, compulsive overeaters, to turn to food. So what can we do?

Look at the problem realistically. Turn to God and ask him – not in a blaming way but praying for guidance, for stamina, for God’s presence to walk through the current problem. And look at the past problem in the same light. What have you done in the past that actually may have affected the present? How can you understand the whole situation so you can address it rationally and in God’s power? The twelfth chapter of Numbers tells an interesting story of Moses’ siblings’ feeling him blameworthy. That wasn’t their place. The issue between Moses and God had long passed. It was not their inventory to take. Are you demanding answers or running around looking for a scapegoat? Don’t take inventories for others. Take your own.

Slimming Steps

Look at the resentments you listed in “List my tears, God!” and the reasons for your anger. Beside each, look within yourself and examine what you might have done – or definitely did – that could have caused the situation or worsened it. Write it down, being completely honest with yourself.

Like a Mighty Wind

The wind adopts personas,
props, attributes as roles require —
A breeze docile, gentle,
serene, soothing troubled water.
A whirling dervish prodding, probing,
disrobing treasures, divulging faults.
A gale grabbing grit, hurling
dirt, sandblasting paint chips, debris, trash,
scouring to naked essence.
Blustering gusts portend
long-sought showers,
the gift of life, breaking
heat that bakes the soul.
The Pentecostal wind
adopts personas, grace disguised.

Mirror, Mirror – Don't Look at ME!

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does. – James 1:23-25 (NIV)

The Fourth Step takes courage. Looking in the mirror, either a physical reflection or a self-examination of our lives, sends rampant shivers for compulsive overeaters. We tend to be harsh on ourselves, but certainly not exclusively. We're angry at everyone and everything, convinced the whole world is in collusion against us and always has been. Is it any wonder so many of us waltz through the first three steps, only to pause and start again? 123-oops-123-oops-123.

For some of us, our Fourth Step list of resentments spews out easily. Others stutter through and end with a short list. Ask those low resentment folks about fears or anger or people who have wronged them, though, and sometimes they, too, spew hurts.

Once the resentment list is made, the second part – writing why we resent that person – is easy. We could write pages about why this person, idea, or institution has earned our contempt. Moderation, though, marks the best course.

Limit the pages to a pittance – less than 20 words for each resentment.

How our Fourth Step revelations emerge depends on our various ideas about life. We're so similar in many ways. We're low in self-esteem, though some express that by demanding attention and respect while others deny they possess the human dignity for anybody to do anything for us. We feel we've been treated like doormats, some angrily trying to trip the next offender and others desperately trying to lie flat and still to facilitate the abuse. Still, as we work through Step Four, we find ourselves face to face with ourselves.

What we face are our hurts, our wounds. What is wounded can be our self-esteem, our security, our ambitions, our personal relations, or our sex relations. For some of us, though, these tags feel wrong. None fit exactly. Fear? Oh, yes. That one fits. And fear can be described with the other words. Fear is our self-esteem threatened, our security lessened, our ambitions inhibited, our relations hindered. But how, exactly? Let's look at the words and what they mean.

- 📁 **Self-esteem:** confidence, dignity, morale, self-assurance, self-respect, self-satisfaction, worth
- 📁 **Security:** peace of mind, feeling of safety, stability, certainty, happiness, confidence
- 📁 **Ambitions:** aspirations, desires, dreams, goals, hopes, wishes
- 📁 **Personal/Sex relations:** dealings, communications, relationships, connections, contact, interaction

Finally, we face the real issue. Just how did all this happen through us? What did we do? We've focused always on the wrongs to us, which may have been horrendous. But we can't change the persons we resent. We can abandon ideas or institutions, but we continue to live with ourselves. Compulsive eaters know guilt and shame all too well. Some of it we've imposed on ourselves.

Some, though, we've earned, and it's time to pry out the details so we can be healed. Do you know how you contributed? Maybe. If you don't, one way I've found helpful in leading people through this Step is to ask them to step into the shoes of the resented person. Then they write about themselves from the other point of view. In the end, we see the whole picture, probably for the first time.

Is that awful? Maybe. Temporarily. But it's awe-full as well. It's a source of wonder, of release, of finally letting go. The Big Book says:

This is the how and the why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 62)

Another very helpful tool in identifying how we've acted is called a "turnabout." It's another way of phrasing the questions. For each resentment consider the questions in The Turnabout Table.

As for the woman caught in adultery and brought before Jesus, our accusers drift away. Knowing all our frailties and faults, God loves us. He doesn't condemn you. Don't condemn yourself. Walk triumphantly through the arch to freedom.

The Turnabout Table

1. WHERE WAS I SELFISH? Selfish in this context is not the negative monster we fear as a label. What did I want from this person, institution, or principle? How did I feel deprived or hurt? Write what you wanted or needed in the situation.

2. WHERE WAS I SELF-SEEKING? What behavior did I do to get what I wanted?

3. WHERE WAS I DISHONEST? List all kinds of lies:

- Direct lies: Not telling the truth, a bold-faced lie.
- Lies of Omission: What did I need to say to this person so they knew how I honestly felt about them and the situation? Was I wrongfully silent?
- Lies to Self: What were you telling yourself that wasn't true?

- ✘ I'm not good enough.
- ✘ I'm stupid.
- ✘ I'm not smart enough.
- ✘ I'm unworthy.
- ✘ I'm _____

4. WHERE WAS I FEARFUL?

- Fear of losing what I have.
- Fear of not getting what I want.
- Other peoples' opinions.
- Fear of not getting financial support.

Slimming Steps

Look at your Fourth Step. Do those parts you haven't tried yet. Consider revising those you played down. When you've finished, write what you've learned about yourself.

You are who you are, and you are a loved and valuable child of God. Love yourself.

Incredulous Love

I love you.
You know I didn't always –
hated, loathed, despised –
never ever expected love
to enter in.
I can't dispute
you deserve the wrath.
I let you sabotage my life
to shambles yet clung
to you as my only hope –
such a dope I was – and you.
Your ugly face remains the same
but changed expansively
to something fair,
near radiant at times.
We've blossomed, you and I,
my mirror image.
I stand before you, humble,
calm, amazed to love you.

We Fear Fear Itself

My heart falters,
fear makes me tremble;
the twilight I longed for
has become a horror to me. – Isaiah 21:4 (NIV)

What are you afraid of? Oh, let me count a few of my triggers. Fear. Failure. Embarrassment. Humiliation. A strap showing. A runner in my hose. (More explicitly, people *knowing* there's a runner.) Falling on my face in the middle of the street. Again. Calling somebody the wrong name. Making a fool of myself. Forgetting something important, like the time I was the scheduled speaker and forgot to show up. That's been ten, fifteen years ago, but the fear and humiliation and shame remain. We fear fear and the familiar paralysis it spawns.

Step Four directs us to list our fears, and a fearsome task that is! The Big Book says of fear:

This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It is an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve. But did not we, ourselves, set the ball rolling? Sometimes we think fear ought to be classed with stealing. It seems to cause more trouble. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 67-68)

Stealing? Maybe. I haven't dealt with that one like I have with fear. It's not as crushingly familiar. Why should fear and stealing have *anything* in common? That one doesn't compute. At the same time, though, deep in the recesses of

my mind, I know there's truth in the statement. So why? What have I done to deserve this fear? Stealing is wrong! Is fearing a crime? A sin?

How many times does the Bible say, "Fear not"? More than a hundred times. That's a command, in the imperative mood as far as verb analysis is concerned. In other words, it's an order. I'd love to obey that order – if only I could.

Perhaps there is a better way – we think so. For we are now on a different basis; the basis of trusting and relying upon God. We trust Infinite God rather than our finite selves.... Just to the extent that we do as we think He would have us, and humbly rely on Him, does He enable us to match calamity with serenity. (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, page 68)

So, if we turn our lives and our wills over to God, we really will not fear? What a deal!

Slimming Steps

List your fears. Then describe what life would be if the fears were removed. How is fearing like stealing from yourself?. Why do you have this fear? Where/when did it begin? Where and how did trusting and relying on yourself fail you and cause the fear? What self-seeking actions did you take that made it happen or made the situation worse? What resulted? How did it affect you in the future? What could we or should we have done instead?

He's Being Mean to Me, Mommy!

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. – Genesis 37:3-4 (NIV)

We compulsive overeaters tend to be harsh on ourselves, but certainly not exclusively. We're mad at the world, and we've taken it and taken it and taken it for years. We want to scream with the character in the movie *Network* "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Our self-esteem, security, pocketbooks, ambitions, and personal relationships (including sex) – these are the "injuries" set out in the Big Book for inclusion on the grudge list. The words are too mild, too commonplace, to carry the impact of how shattering the events on the resentment list may be for us.

Family relationships are tough for they are so important to us from the beginning, and they tend to continue through the years. And they're so instrumental in who we are and what made us that way. How do you sort out your Fourth Step inventory for a lifetime of interactions?

Many problems with relationships play out primarily at home. Obvious examples include sibling rivalries and a parent's favorite child, but Narcissistic Personality Disorder,

said to affect perhaps one person in a hundred, leads to many families having a person believing the world revolves around them and lacking empathy to recognize anyone else has needs at all. In those and other families, codependent relationships exist where people have difficulty knowing what they feel, making decisions, receiving recognition, and accepting help. Then there's the fact compulsive overeating is a family disease, and when we begin to find recovery sometimes others in the family resent the change and try to pull us back to "normal." Certainly all these patterns create a real challenge as we work through Step Four and the ones following.

Family issues present a unique challenge, a steep slope, but not an insurmountable one, and when we do begin to heal, recovery happens in the family group as well. The systematic approach to listing resentments, fears, and hurts – then analyzing them – helps deflect the turmoil of emotions in this area. Another aid comes in looking beyond just the Step to the greater goal.

Joseph certainly had reason for resentment against his brothers' causing him physical imprisonment. Our figurative prison binds us just as much. Like Joseph we learn to move past fear, resentment, and hurt to freedom and life.

Slimming Steps

You're not your brother's keeper. You're his brother. Or sister.
What difficult relationships do you have in your family? What would your life look like if these problems were solved?

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Fear Facing

I sought the LORD, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears. – Psalm 54:4

A compulsive overeater has courageously given me permission to print her fear inventory from Step Five. Using a process described in an AA talk by Clint H, she has broken the fears down to the primal source:



I listed everything I could think of that caused me to be afraid.

- ☞ I'm afraid of my husband's being mad.
 - ☞ I'm afraid of stopping doing things just because my husband will be mad.
 - ☞ I'm afraid of my husband's controlling me.
 - ☞ I'm afraid I'll put my very best out before the world in the best possible venue and it will be ignored.
 - ☞ I'm afraid I'll succeed so much I don't know how to deal with it.
 - ☞ I'm afraid I'll fall off the "water wagon" and gain all the weight I've surrendered and more.
 - ☞ I'm afraid I'll be so successful I won't be able to tolerate my husband and his attitude and his eating.
 - ☞ I'm afraid I'll be exposed. I'm not sure what that means.
 - ☞ I'm afraid I'll be in the vise between what a nice girl does and what the emerging me needs/wants.
-

☞ I'm afraid I'll die of boredom.

Then I used each of those fears to start a column taking it to the lowest, most primitive fear.

☞ I'm afraid of my husband's being mad.

☞ If my husband's mad, what happens?

☞ He belittles me.

☞ If he belittles me I lose my confidence.

☞ If I lose my confidence I need affirmation from someone.

☞ The only one I can get affirmation from is my husband.

☞ If I make my husband mad, I'm a little child with nobody to guide me, care for me, and protect me.

☞ If my husband's mad I'm on my own.

☞ If I'm on my own I am responsible for guiding me, caring for me, and protecting me.

☞ If I'm on my own I have to rely on God or me and I might not rely on God.

☞ If my husband is mad I'm alone.

Now to the second fear....

☞ I'm afraid of stopping doing things just because my husband will be mad.

☞ If I stop doing what makes my husband mad, I'm being who he thinks I should be.

☞ If I stop doing what makes my husband mad, I'm nothing but his robot.

☞ If I stop making my husband mad, I'm nothing.

The pattern's getting pretty clear...

☞ I'm afraid of my husband's controlling me.

☞ If my husband doesn't control me I'm alone.

Moving to other issues....

☞ I'm afraid I'll put my very best out before the world in the best possible venue and it will be ignored.

☞ I'm afraid I'm nothing.

And the opposite....

☞ I'm afraid I'll succeed so much I don't know how to deal with it.

☞ If I succeed I'll have crushed my husband and I won't be a nice girl and I'll be alone.

☞ I'm afraid I'll fall off the "water wagon" and gain all the weight I've surrendered and more.

☞ I won't be any better than my husband who lost weight and is gaining now.

☞ But I won't be alone. I'll just be nothing.

☞ I'm afraid I'll be so successful I won't be able to tolerate my husband and his attitude and his eating.

☞ I won't be a nice girl and I'll be nothing and alone.

☞ I'm afraid I'll be exposed. I'm not sure what that means.

☞ Obviously it means nothing and alone.

"I'm afraid I'll be in the vise between what a nice girl does and what I need and/or want" and "I'm afraid I'll die of boredom" seem pretty clear as well. My fears are **I'll be nothing** and **I'll be alone**.

Now I need to meditate and ask God to remove my fears. I ask God to remove my fears (nothing and alone) and to tell me what he wants me to be... *to direct my attention to what he wants me to **be**.*

Observations made by AA speaker Clint H, the source of this exercise, are these:

☞ Fear is volitional. Self-reliance leads to fear.

☞ My fears are always a lie, my ego's way of keeping me in familiar territory.

I'm not good at meditation. I will become good at it, if I can get me out of God's way for it to happen. This one went well.

I'm not sure I *feel* free of fear, but feelings lie, especially when I've spent so many years trying not to feel. I accept that the fears have been removed and that will become obvious in the days to come. The words as to what God wants me to be were "receptive" and "aware." The receptive goes with "nothing" and "aware" goes with alone. I think.



Slimming Steps

What are you afraid of?

Where Two or Three Are Gathered

“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” – Matthew 18:19-20 (NIV)

Did you realize a Step Five discussion is an OA meeting? “Meetings are gatherings of two or more compulsive overeaters who come together to share their personal experience, and the strength and hope OA has given them.” (Overeaters Anonymous brochure *Tools of Recovery*) Certainly two compulsive overeaters meet, but a third presence is required.

The instructions for Step Five describe a gathering of three, not two. God is there. Some place a chair representing the presence of God.

Certainly we’re always in the presence of God, but only about 30 times does the Bible actually mention his presence— from Moses’ meal with his father-in-law described in Exodus 18 through the New Testament letters’ rejoicing at God’s presence in the various churches and John in The Revelation anticipating justice dispensed in the presence of the Lamb. Luke records Gabriel’s announcement of the impending birth of Christ as saying he stood in God’s presence to give the news.

So, just who’s in the chair? What is God like? Here’s a partial list of descriptive phrases:

- ✦ God is the giver of every good and perfect gift and doesn't change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)
- ✦ God is the creator of everything.
- ✦ God made us in his image, (Genesis 1:27) so we find a kinship in him, something that makes it easier for us to know about him.
- ✦ God has made what may be known about him plain to us including his eternal power and divine nature. (Romans 1:29-30)
- ✦ God is fair (just.) (Deuteronomy 32:4)
- ✦ God's omnipotent, can do anything at all.
- ✦ God's omnipresent, everywhere.
- ✦ God's omniscient, knowing everything, every time. He remembers the future as well as the past and present.
- ✦ God is worthy (having worth, having merit).
- ✦ God's righteous.
- ✦ God is truth.
- ✦ God is holy.
- ✦ God's gracious. That's the same root word as grace, the undeserved love he freely gives us.

This God sits with us through the Fifth Step discussions. Many of these words (righteous, holy, gracious) point back to God for the definitions. God defies definition, but despite that he's present with us, hearing our deepest secrets, the take-it-to-the-grave disgraces that he already knew anyway. And he no more condemns us than the OA member sitting in front of us. Thank God!

Slimming Steps

What reactions would the kind of God described above have to a compulsive overeater like you?

God's Here

Yes, I know, it's not just you and me,
God's here, too. Somehow
he doesn't bother me as much as you.
That's weird. I understand. But still...
I want you to like me. I guess I start
at the beginning? I used to take Bubba's
candy and toy cars. The kindergarten teacher
caught me scratching tables.
In second grade I hit a little girl.
What? You want more? Oh. Just different.
The exact nature of our wrongs?
I'm scared all the time. I'm always into me,
not you, not him, not God. I hide my head
in mindless games, an ostrich in the sand,
and hurry to anything that promises oblivion
when, unprepared, I fall face-flat to floor.
Simple things I didn't do haunt me
so I wreck a friendship when she can't recall
my wrong, just knows I avoid her. I lie and cheat
to duck the blame, defame a saint to feel
less odious, to blunt the pain. It's who I am,
the best I've managed yet, abjectly miserable.
So there, you see, I thank you for your time
and kindness to me. I know you hate me now.
You what? How could you love me at all,
much less more? Yes, I feel your love. And God's.
