Faults — the character defects the inventory reveals

"When we saw our faults we listed them. We placed them before us in black and white. We admitted our wrongs honestly and were willing to set these matters straight." (p.67-¶2)

References: Column 4 Instructions | The Chain | SDSF | Self-Seeking | Selfish | Dishonest | Afraid | Harm | Faults Reference | Examples

Print it: ▤ Faults quick reference — the sponsee handout: mistake vs. fault vs. wrong, how to name the patterns, the say-it-straight table, and a fault → opposite checklist.

What Are Faults

Faults are the specific character defects — the names we give to the patterns we see when we look at our inventory. The Big Book uses several terms for the same thing: *defects of character, shortcomings, faults, flaws in our make-up, the root of our troubles, bondage of self. (BB, p.xxv-164)*

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions calls them what they are:

> *"The chief activator of our defects has been self-centered fear — primarily fear that we would lose something we already possessed or would fail to get something we demanded." (12&12, p.76)*

The Distinction: Mechanism vs. Name

SDSF and The Chain describe the *mechanism* — how the spiritual disease operates:

> ***Fears → Delusions → Attitudes → Actions***

Faults are the *names* of what appears at each link. "Controlling" is a fault. "People-pleasing" is a fault. "Self-pity" is a fault. Each one lives somewhere in the chain — some are

primarily fears, some are delusions, some are attitudes, some are actions. But they are all character defects, and they all flow from the root:

> *"Selfishness — self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles." (p.62-¶2)*

Why It Matters

The Big Book instruction is plain: *"When we saw our faults we listed them." (p.67-¶2)*

Naming the fault does three things:

1. **Step 4** — It makes the invisible visible. A fault without a name operates on autopilot.
2. **Step 5** — It gives the sponsor and sponsee a shared language to discuss what's really going on.
3. **Steps 6 & 7** — The faults list becomes the working list: *"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." (Step 6)*

How Faults Relate to SDSF and The Chain

Every character defect lives somewhere in The Chain. Some defects span multiple links.

Chain Link	Role	Example Faults
Afraid — Fear	Root cause	Cowardice, distrust, insecurity, anxiety, timidity
Dishonest — Delusion	Bridge	Self-deception, denial, self-justification, rationalization
Selfish — Attitude	Reinforcement	Entitlement, self-pity, contempt, arrogance, envy
Self-Seeking — Action	Visible output	Manipulation, gossip, stealing, people-pleasing, controlling

Most faults span more than one link. *Controlling*, for instance, is an action (Self-Seeking) driven by an attitude of entitlement (Selfish), enabled by the delusion that I can arrange reality (Dishonest), powered by the fear of inadequacy (Afraid). The fault is one word. The chain behind it is four layers deep.

How to Identify Faults — During Step 4

As you write Column 4 for each resentment, the SDSF questions expose the material. The faults are already there in what you wrote — they just need to be named.

After writing each resentment's Column 4, ask:

- What defect of character is showing up in my **actions** (Self-Seeking)? — *Is it controlling? Manipulating? People-pleasing? Gossiping?*
- What defect is embedded in my **attitude** (Selfish)? — *Is it entitlement? Self-pity? Contempt? Jealousy?*
- What defect enabled my **self-deception** (Dishonest)? — *Is it denial? Self-justification? Rationalization?*
- What defect is at the **root** (Afraid)? — *Is it cowardice? Distrust? Insecurity?*

Use the Faults Reference as a prompt. Scan the lists and ask: *Do I see this in my inventory?* Tim M's instruction: "Pick the list you like. See if you have any defects you have not written about yet."

Watch for patterns across resentments. If the same fault — say, controlling — shows up in resentment after resentment, it is a core defect. These are the ones that will form your Step 6-7 working list.

How to Identify Faults — During Step 5 (Hearing the Inventory)

When a sponsee reads their written inventory aloud, the sponsor's job is to listen for patterns and help name the faults the sponsee may not see.

What to Listen For — Practical Guide

When you hear Self-Seeking (actions):

You hear…	The fault is likely…
“I loaned her money so I wouldn’t feel uncomfortable”	People-pleasing, dishonesty, cowardice
“I gossiped about him”	Malice, retaliation, self-justification
“I ignored her”	Contempt, avoidance, indifference
“I padded my expense account”	Dishonesty, stealing, entitlement
“I drank too much and fought with him”	Self-will, anger, loss of control
“I put on an act to attract them”	Manipulation, dishonesty, performing
“I was clingy and needy”	Codependency, desperation, self-erasure
“I used sarcasm as my weapon”	Retaliation, contempt, cowardice (hiding behind humor)

When you hear Selfish (attitudes):

You hear…	The fault is likely…
“No one interferes with my life”	Entitlement, arrogance, isolation
“He got what he deserved”	Self-righteousness, justified anger, retaliation
“If I say no, she’ll hate me”	People-pleasing, cowardice, dishonesty
“My pain is the most important thing”	Self-pity, victimhood, entitlement
“I only care about myself”	Selfishness (naked, honest — name it)
“Sacrifice anyone to get ahead”	Ruthlessness, greed, contempt
“No one has my back except me”	Distrust, isolation, self-reliance

When you hear Dishonest (delusions):

You hear…	The fault is likely…
“I had to protect myself from him”	Self-justification, victim mentality
“She has no right to an opinion”	Contempt, denial, arrogance
“A relationship will fix me”	Self-deception, codependency, magical thinking
“I can live behind a mask without consequences”	Denial, vanity, self-deception
“It wasn’t okay for me to be honest”	Cowardice, people-pleasing (disguised as virtue)
“I don’t need anyone”	False pride, isolation, denial

When you hear Afraid (fears):

You hear…	The fault is likely activated…
“Afraid to lose control”	Controlling, manipulation
“Afraid she’ll leave me”	Codependency, people-pleasing, jealousy
“Afraid I’m not good enough”	Perfectionism, performing, overworking
“Afraid I’ll be alone”	Codependency, clinging, self-erasure
“Afraid I’m a nobody”	Vanity, boasting, performing
“Afraid God won’t love me”	Distrust, isolation, impenitence

Pattern Recognition Across Resentments

As the sponsee reads through multiple resentments, listen for the same fault appearing over and over in different contexts. A defect that shows up once is a mistake. A defect that shows up in every resentment is a character defect — a pattern embedded in the personality.

Flag it: “I notice that controlling shows up in your resentment with your employer, your wife, your father, and your sister. That’s a core pattern.”

Map it to an archetype. The six Chain Archetypes can help the sponsee see their overall pattern:

Archetype	Core Faults	Look For
The Defender	Justified anger, retaliation, self-righteousness	“He got what he deserved” repeating
The Controller	Controlling, manipulation, entitlement	“My way or no way” across relationships
The People-Pleaser	Dishonesty, cowardice, self-erasure	Can’t say no; loaning/giving what they can’t afford
The Fortress	Isolation, distrust, contempt	Sarcasm, humor as weapon, closed mind
The Performer	Vanity, dishonesty, codependency	Shape-shifting to fit each relationship
The Victim	Self-pity, manipulation, entitlement	“My pain is special” across resentments

Why Certain Defects Show Up Together

Defects cluster because they share a root. The Chain explains why:

- **Fear of rejection** activates people-pleasing, dishonesty, and cowardice — all at once. You can’t people-please without lying, and you can’t lie without being afraid of the truth.
- **Fear of inadequacy** activates controlling, perfectionism, and overworking — the trifecta of “not enough.” Control the outcomes. Perfect the performance. Outwork the competition.
- **Fear of exposure** activates secrecy, denial, and vanity — the hiding pattern. Keep the mask on. Deny the cracks. Project the image.

When you see a cluster, the sponsee doesn’t have six separate defects — they have one fear wearing six masks. Name the fear, and the defects make sense.

Naming the Defect for the Sponsee

The sponsee will often use euphemisms — softer words that conceal the defect. Part of the sponsor’s role is to gently name the defect honestly. (See *The Euphemism Problem* below.)

The Euphemism Problem

We soften our defects with nicer-sounding names. The inventory calls us to see past the euphemism to the actual defect.

> *"We name ourselves 'people pleasers,' for example. Doesn't really sound all that bad, does it? It just means we're nice to people, right? Not quite. To put it bluntly, it means we're* ***dishonest and manipulative. We lie about our feelings, our beliefs, and our needs, trying to soothe others into compliance with our wishes.****"*

> *"We might call ourselves 'easygoing.' But does 'easygoing' mean we* ***ignore our housework, avoid confrontations, and stay put in a comfortable rut? Then a better name for it would be 'laziness,' or 'procrastination,' or 'fear.'****"*

Common euphemisms and what they really mean:

Euphemism	The actual defect
"People-pleasing"	Dishonesty and manipulation
"Easygoing"	Laziness, procrastination, or fear
"Strong-willed"	Controlling, stubborn, self-will run riot
"Passionate"	Angry, demanding, intolerant
"Independent"	Isolated, distrustful, refusing help
"Sensitive"	Self-pitying, over-sensitiveness, thin-skinned
"Generous"	People-pleasing, buying approval, giving to get
"Perfectionist"	Controlling, fearful, self-obsessed
"Protective"	Controlling, distrustful, dominating
"Loyal"	Codependent, enabling, refusing to set boundaries
"Honest" (used as weapon)	Cruel, contemptuous, lacking compassion
"Spiritual" (used as shield)	Self-righteous, avoiding accountability

The inventory is not the place for gentleness with ourselves. Call the defect what it is.

Common Faults from the Twelve Examples

Every worked example in the BBA guide reveals specific character defects. Here are the most prominent, mapped to the Chain:

#	Who	Key Faults	Primary Archetype
1	Mr. Brown	Anger, retaliation, entitlement, controlling	Defender
2	Mrs. Jones	Selfishness, contempt, enabling, inconsideration	Controller
3	My Employer	Dishonesty, stealing, entitlement, laziness	Controller
4	My Wife	Entitlement, contempt, jealousy, controlling	Controller
5	Susie	People-pleasing, cowardice, dishonesty	People-Pleaser
6	Mr. Brown Alt	Gossip, self-righteousness, retaliation, envy	Defender
7	My Father	Self-pity, manipulation, acting out, self-harm	Victim
8	My Sister	Contempt, stealing, dishonesty, isolation	Defender/Victim
9	God Doesn’t Care	Distrust, isolation, sarcasm, contempt, self-will	Fortress
10	Not Fulfilled	Manipulation, dishonesty, codependency, performing	Performer
11	Unloveable	Self-erasure, manipulation, codependency, vanity	Performer
12	Not OK Without Money	Greed, dishonesty, contempt, using people	Performer

Faults by Chain Archetype

The six Chain Archetypes each produce a characteristic cluster of defects. When you see the cluster, you’ve found the archetype.

The Defender — faults of aggression and self-protection

Fault	How it shows up
Justified anger	Feeling righteous about retaliation
Retaliation	Fighting back, punishing, gossiping
Self-righteousness	“He got what he deserved”
Contempt	Looking down on the person I resent
Combativeness	Nursing grudges, quarrelsomeness
Self-justification	Making my wrongs sound reasonable

The Controller — faults of domination and entitlement

Fault	How it shows up
Controlling	Arranging people and situations to suit myself
Entitlement	“My private life is none of their business”
Manipulation	Managing situations to get my way
Dishonesty	Lying about expenses, covering tracks
Procrastination	Avoiding what I don’t want to do
Stealing	Taking what isn’t mine — time, money, credit

The People-Pleaser — faults of self-erasure and dishonesty

Fault	How it shows up
People-pleasing	Lying about my feelings to keep the peace
Cowardice	Afraid to say no, afraid to be honest
Dishonesty	Agreeing when I disagree, hiding my real needs
Enabling	Giving what I can’t afford to avoid discomfort
Codependency	Making others’ comfort my responsibility
Self-neglect	Ignoring my own needs to serve others’ wants

The Fortress — faults of isolation and self-reliance

Fault	How it shows up
Distrust	Refusing to rely on God or others
Isolation	Withdrawing from relationship and community
Contempt	Using sarcasm as a weapon
Self-will	“No one has my back except me”
Impenitence	Refusing to search out and face my sins
Closed-mindedness	Rejecting help before considering it

The Performer — faults of image and codependency

Fault	How it shows up
Vanity	Constructing a persona to be impressive
Dishonesty	Shape-shifting to become whatever is needed
Codependency	Needing others to complete me
Manipulation	Performing generosity, charm, or competence for approval
Greed	Sacrificing anyone to get ahead
Self-erasure	Losing my real self behind the mask

The Victim — faults of self-pity and manipulation

Fault	How it shows up
Self-pity	“My pain is the most important thing”
Manipulation	Using suffering to control others’ behavior
Entitlement	“He owes me because of what he did”
Self-harm	Acting out to force others to care
Blame	Making my problems someone else’s responsibility
Martyrdom	Suffering loudly to extract guilt and compliance

Defects and Their Opposites

Every defect has a corresponding virtue — the spiritual opposite. Seeing the opposite shows what the solution looks like. This connection bridges directly to Steps 6 and 7: becoming *ready* to let the defect go (Step 6) and asking God to *replace* it with the virtue (Step 7).

(Source: Moral Inventory Checklist — Defects & Opposites)

Defect	Opposite (Virtue)
Afraid	Brave, trusting God
Angry	Accepting responsibility
Arrogant	Humble
Attention-seeking	Humbly being of service
Blaming others	Honestly admitting my mistakes
Catastrophizing	Seeing reality clearly
Codependent	Healthy detachment
Controlling	Letting go of control
Cowardly	Courage to do the right thing
Demanding the world be my way	Accepting God’s world as it is
Denial	Admitting the truth about reality
Dishonest	Honest
Entitled	Grateful
Gossiping	Using speech to help not harm
Impatient	Patient
Jealous	Trusting
Judgmental	Judging favorably
Lazy	Disciplined
Low self-esteem	Healthy self-esteem (from God)
Lustful	Pure
Not trusting God	Faithful
People-pleasing	Courage to displease when necessary
Perfectionistic	Courage to be seen as imperfect
Resentful	Forgiving
Self-absorbed	Selfless

Defect	Opposite (Virtue)
Self-pitying	Grateful
Self-righteous	Humble
Selfish	Generous
Stubborn	Flexible
Unforgiving	Forgiving
Unwilling to admit wrong	Honestly admitting mistakes

The Twelve Spiritual Principles — one for each Step — provide the broader framework:

1. **Honesty** (Step 1) — 2. **Hope** (Step 2) — 3. **Faith** (Step 3) — 4. **Courage** (Step 4) — 5. **Integrity** (Step 5) — 6. **Willingness** (Step 6) — 7. **Humility** (Step 7) — 8. **Love** (Step 8) — 9. **Discipline** (Step 9) — 10. **Patience** (Step 10) — 11. **Awareness** (Step 11) — 12. **Service** (Step 12)

(Source: Twelve Spiritual Principles (Virtues))

Connection to Steps 6 and 7

The faults list you build in Steps 4 and 5 becomes the working list for Steps 6 and 7.

The Progression

Step	What happens	The fault is...
Step 4	Discover the fault through inventory	Identified
Step 5	Name and confirm it with another person	Named
Step 6	Become entirely ready to have God remove it	Surrendered
Step 7	Humbly ask Him to remove it	Handed over
Steps 8-12	The fault is removed as a byproduct of spiritual action	Replaced with virtue

Joe's Insight — Resentments Reveal Assets

> *"The greatest resentments we have show the greatest assets in ourselves we are holding on to. Until we let go of these assets (i.e. our attachment to them), we will never let go of the resentment."*

The defect is not just a flaw — it is an asset we are *attached to*. The controller is attached to competence. The people-pleaser is attached to approval. The performer is attached to image. Step 6 is becoming willing to let go of the *attachment*, not just the behavior.

Lauren's Three-Question Exercise

For each defect, ask:

1. **How has this protected me?** — What am I after? What am I trying to avoid?
2. **If I continue to do this, how will it affect my life?**
3. **How would my life be different if I let go of this?**

How Defects Are "Removed"

> *"Show me a different way / show me a new way." (Lauren's short form)*

Defects are not "zapped forever." They are *removed to the side of the road* — still available, but no longer acted upon. The removal happens through:

1. **Adopting new beliefs, thinking, and behaviors** (virtues that replace the defects)
2. **Recognizing the perceived benefit** we get from the defect — and being willing to let it go
3. **Tolerating the pain of substitution** — the new way is uncomfortable at first
4. **Asking God** for the strength to maintain the new pattern
5. **Taking action on Steps 8-12** — defects are removed as a byproduct of living the spiritual life

Three blocks to Step 6:

- The **perceived benefit** from the defect (it "works" — it protects me)

- The **perceived drawback** of the virtue (honesty feels dangerous; boundaries feel mean)
- The **painful substitution** (the discomfort of doing it differently)

The Self-Reinforcing Loop

> *"When our failings generate fear, we then have soul-sickness. This sickness, in turn, generates still more character defects." (12&12, p.49)*

Fear produces defects (the chain). The defects produce consequences. The consequences produce more fear. The cycle accelerates. This is why untreated defects don't just persist — they *worsen*. And this is why the spiritual solution — handing the fear to God — is the only intervention that interrupts the loop at its source.

Deeper Understanding

Why We Resist Naming Our Faults

Naming a fault makes it real. As long as "controlling" is unnamed, it operates as "being responsible." As long as "people-pleasing" is unnamed, it passes for "being nice." The euphemism protects the ego from seeing itself.

The Big Book anticipated this resistance:

> *"No one likes to admit that they are defective. So very naturally we cling to the idea that we have no such problem." (paraphrased from p.30)*

The inventory overcomes the resistance by making the defect *undeniable*. When the same fault shows up in twelve resentments across twenty years, it is no longer debatable. The pattern is in black and white.

The Difference Between Faults, Sins, and Mistakes

The Big Book distinguishes between these:

- A **mistake** is something I should have done differently — a one-time error. *(ref. p.67-¶2 "our own mistakes")*
- A **fault** is a defect of character — a recurring pattern that has become part of how I operate. *(ref. p.67-¶2 "When we saw our faults we listed them")*
- A **wrong** is where my fault caused harm to another. *(ref. p.67-¶2 "We admitted our wrongs honestly")*

Mistakes become faults through repetition. Faults become wrongs when they collide with other people's lives. The Fourth Step traces the progression: the same fear, producing the same delusion, hardening into the same attitude, generating the same actions, in resentment after resentment.

The Same Fault Looks Different at Different Stages

Example #7 (My Father) shows this clearly: the same fear of not mattering produced different expressions at different ages:

- **Child:** Acting out, self-harm to get attention (the fault is manipulation through suffering)
- **Adult:** Confrontation, name-calling, making him cry (the fault is retaliation through cruelty)

The fear never changed. The fault evolved. A child's manipulation becomes an adult's cruelty. The inventory reveals the evolution and traces it back to the unchanging root.

Character Defects as the Actor Playing God

The Big Book's actor metaphor from pages 61-62 provides the deepest context for character defects:

> *"Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show." (p.61)*

Every character defect is a way the actor tries to run the show:

- **Controlling** — directing the other players
- **People-pleasing** — rewriting the script to avoid conflict

- **Self-pity** — demanding a better part
- **Anger** — punishing actors who forget their lines
- **Performing** — replacing the assigned character with one of my design

The solution is the same in every case: surrender the role. Stop trying to run the show. Accept the part God has assigned.

> *"We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be." (p.68-¶3)*

For the comprehensive reference lists of character defects from multiple sources — Big Book, Step 5, RapidStep10, Tim M, St. Augustine, Al-Anon — see Faults Reference. For the mechanism that produces these defects, see The Chain. For the diagnostic framework, see SDSF.

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous ("Big Book") pp.60-68; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Steps 4, 6, & 7; Big Book Awakening Step 4 Guide; Column 4 Deep Dives; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text

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From the Big Book Awakening Step Four guide at bigbook.it/step-4/ · a page of the guide, not the workbook itself: the workbook's own pages are linked from "Originals & sources." · source faults.md