Fear Inventory – Expanded Examples

Companion to 04-fear-4-column-inventory.md

This document takes each fear from the Fear Inventory guide and expands it with deeper analysis: more character defects, cognitive distortions that fuel the fear, psychological research, and richer spiritual solutions with specific quotes, prayers, and practical actions.

For the basic 4-question framework and instructions, see 04-fear-4-column-inventory.md.

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1. Public Speaking

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Pride, vanity, ego, self-centeredness, judgmentalism, hypocrisy, insecurity, dishonesty (pretending to have no opinion), cowardice, people-pleasing, self-pity.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Belief in mind-reading:* "I know they think I'm stupid."
- *Catastrophising:* "If I stumble over a word, everyone will lose respect for me."
- *Belief in fortune-telling:* "I'm going to freeze up and embarrass myself."
- *Emotional reasoning:* "I feel terrified, so it must actually be dangerous."

Areas of self affected: Pride (how others see me), self-esteem (how I see myself), personal relations (my role in the group).

Psychology: Fear of public speaking (glossophobia) affects an estimated 75% of people. It activates the amygdala's threat-detection system – what Daniel Goleman calls the "amygdala hijack" – where the emotional brain overrides rational thought. The body reacts as though physical danger is present, even though the threat is purely social. Research

shows this fear is rooted in our evolutionary need for social belonging: rejection from the group once meant death.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I stay silent to protect myself from judgment. But silence breeds isolation, which breeds more insecurity, which makes speaking even harder next time. Meanwhile, I judge others' shares to feel superior, which reinforces the very judgmentalism I'm afraid of receiving.

SDSF breakdown: *(Selfish, Dishonest, Self-Seeking, and Fearful — the four diagnostic dimensions from p.67)*

- *Selfish:* I want to look good more than I want to be helpful.
- *Dishonest:* I pretend I have nothing to say when I'm really just afraid.
- *Self-seeking:* I compare my potential share against others to decide if it's "good enough."
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid of being seen as I really am – imperfect, uncertain, human.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."* (◆ BB p.77)

> *"We have come to enjoy living clean and want more of the good things that the N.A. Fellowship holds for us." (NA, Step Three)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of what others think of me. Direct my attention to being helpful. Let me share my experience honestly, not to impress, but to serve. Help me remember that my words are Yours working through me."

Practical actions:

1. Share at the next meeting, even if it's just one sentence. ***The action breaks the fear.***
2. Before speaking, silently pray: "God, use me."
3. After someone else shares, find one genuine positive thing to say to them.

4. When the urge to judge another's share arises, recognize it as the same defect you fear in others.
5. Remember: the goal of sharing is connection, not performance. A stumbling, honest share helps more than a polished, rehearsed one.

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2. Being Alone

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Insecurity, co-dependency, dishonesty (***presenting a false self to attract people***), self-pity, lust, self-seeking, vanity, diffidence, fear, lack of faith, impatience.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Catastrophising:* "If I'm alone, I'll always be alone."
- *Emotional reasoning:* "I feel lonely, so I must be unlovable."
- *Splitting:* "Either I'm in a relationship or I'm worthless."
- *Personalisation:* "They left because something is fundamentally wrong with me."
- *False generalisation:* "No one has ever really loved me."

Areas of self affected: Self-esteem (I see myself as unworthy), personal relations (demanding others fill the void), sex relations (using relationships to avoid being alone), security (needing another person to feel OK).

Psychology: Attachment theory (John Bowlby) shows that early experiences with caregivers shape how we relate to others throughout life. Those with anxious attachment styles develop heightened sensitivity to rejection and abandonment – they crave closeness but constantly fear losing it. Seligman's learned helplessness research demonstrates how repeated experiences of perceived rejection can train a person to stop trying, believing they are inherently unlovable. The paradox: the desperate pursuit of connection driven by fear of being alone often pushes people away.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I jump into relationships to escape loneliness. I present a false self to be accepted. Eventually the mask slips. The other person doesn't recognize who I really am. The relationship fails. I conclude: "See, I'm unlovable." And I start again.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I use people to fill my emptiness rather than genuinely caring about them.
- *Dishonest:* I pretend to be who I think they want me to be.
- *Self-seeking:* I seek validation, attention, and compliments to feel OK about myself.
- *Fearful:* Underneath it all, I'm terrified of discovering that I'm not enough on my own.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"We found that we had to face the past in order to move forward. We could not live and enjoy life as other people do. We had to have something different and we thought we had found it in drugs." (NA, Ch.3)*

> *"Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life." (* ◆ BB p.63*)*

> *"By surrendering control, we gain a far greater power." (NA Basic Text, p.44)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of being alone. Teach me that I am never truly alone when I am with You. Help me find my worth in Your eyes, not in the arms of another person. Show me how to be whole in myself so I can love others freely, not desperately."

Practical actions:

1. Spend deliberate time alone – in prayer, meditation, or a walk – and practice being OK with the silence.
2. Build genuine same-sex friendships in the fellowship before pursuing romantic relationships.
3. When the urge to text someone just to not feel alone arises, call your sponsor instead.

4. Write a gratitude list of what you have right now, in this moment, alone.
5. Practice the Third Step prayer daily: "Take my will and my life. Guide me in my recovery. Show me how to live."

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3. Financial Insecurity

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Greed, materialism, self-centeredness, dishonesty, pride, envy, self-pity, fear, irresponsibility, self-delusion, impatience, squandering, self-justification.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Catastrophising:* "If I lose this job, I'll end up on the street."
- *Belief in fortune-telling:* "The economy is going to crash and I'll lose everything."
- *Filtering out the positive:* Ignoring current stability and focusing only on what could go wrong.
- *Splitting:* "Either I'm rich or I'm a failure."
- *One-track thinking:* Obsessing about money to the exclusion of spiritual, relational, and physical health.

Areas of self affected: Pocketbook (income, expenditure, assets, liabilities), security (material well-being), ambitions (desire for wealth or status), pride (appearing successful), self-esteem (measuring worth by net worth).

Psychology: Princeton psychologist Eldar Shafir and Harvard economist Sendhil Mullainathan researched the "scarcity mindset" – when people feel they lack something (money, time, safety), it consumes mental bandwidth that would otherwise go to planning and problem-solving. This creates a tunnel vision focused on the immediate crisis, making long-term decisions worse. The cruel irony: the fear of financial insecurity causes the poor decision-making that creates financial insecurity. Their research showed this effect operates regardless of actual wealth – it's the *feeling* of scarcity that hijacks the mind.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I obsess about money. I overwork, neglecting relationships and health. I hoard or scheme. I make fear-driven financial decisions. The anxiety doesn't decrease – it increases with each dollar saved, because the fear was never really about the dollar amount. It was about control. And I can never have enough control.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I prioritize my financial comfort over generosity, over time with family, over spiritual growth.
- *Dishonest:* I hide my financial situation – either exaggerating wealth or hiding debt. I lie about what I can afford.
- *Self-seeking:* I use money to control people and situations. I keep score.
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid that without money, I am nothing. I've confused financial security with spiritual security.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well." (◆ BB p.63)*

> *"We are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves." (◆ BB p.88)*

> *"God, Keep priorities in check. Allocate funds appropriately. God please help me Distinguish between a NEED and a WANT. Don't be materialistic. God allow me to Live in gratitude and GIVE to others." (Sponsorship Workshop Packet, Step 2 example)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of financial insecurity. You have always provided what I needed. Help me trust that You will continue to do so. Teach me the difference between needs and wants. Free me from the prison of hoarding and the delusion that money can make me safe. Direct my attention to being a faithful steward of what You've given me."

Practical actions:

1. Make an honest, written budget. Look at the numbers. Avoidance feeds fear; facts reduce it.
2. Give something away – money, time, or a possession. Generosity is the antidote to scarcity thinking.
3. When financial anxiety spikes, pause and ask: "What do I actually need right now, today?" Usually the answer is: nothing more than I already have.
4. Separate self-worth from net worth. Write down five things that make you valuable that have nothing to do with money.
5. Pray the Seventh Step prayer before making any significant financial decision.

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4. Rejection / Abandonment

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Insecurity, people-pleasing, co-dependency, dishonesty, self-pity, vanity, pride, diffidence, servility, self-seeking, maudlin sentimentality, jealousy, envy, self-delusion.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Personalisation:* "They cancelled plans because they don't really like me."
- *Belief in mind-reading:* "I can tell by the way she looked at me that she thinks I'm too much."
- *Catastrophising:* "If this person leaves, no one will ever love me."
- *Filtering out the positive:* Ignoring the 10 people who showed up and fixating on the 1 who didn't.
- *False generalisation:* "Everyone always leaves eventually."

Areas of self affected: Self-esteem (I am not enough), pride (others see me as disposable), personal relations (demanding loyalty and constant reassurance), security (needing approval to feel OK).

Psychology: Bowlby's attachment theory explains that when parents meet children's needs with rejection, those children develop "rejection sensitivity" – a hypervigilance to any sign of disapproval. Research shows that rejection activates the same brain regions as physical pain (Eisenberger, 2003). People with anxious attachment styles make extra efforts to regain connection (frequent calls, texts, reassurance-seeking), which often overwhelms others and creates the rejection they fear. Brene Brown's shame research adds: "We are afraid that if someone finds out who we really are, they will reject us." The solution isn't performing better – it's being authentically known.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I perform a version of myself that I think you'll accept. I exhaust myself maintaining the act. I resent you for not seeing "the real me" – even though I never showed you. When the relationship eventually fails (because it was built on pretense), I conclude I'm unlovable and start the cycle again with someone new.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I want your approval more than I want an honest relationship.
- *Dishonest:* I hide who I really am. I say what I think you want to hear.
- *Self-seeking:* I manipulate with charm, guilt, or helplessness to keep you close.
- *Fearful:* I'm terrified that the real me isn't enough.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Before coming to Narcotics Anonymous, we felt that no one could understand the things that we had done. We feared that if we ever revealed ourselves as we were, we would surely be rejected. Most addicts are uncomfortable about this." (NA, Step Five)*

> *"This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." (◆ BB p.67)*

> *"We see, by the acceptance of our confidant, that we can be accepted just the way we are." (NA, Step Five)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of rejection. Help me remember that my worth does not depend on any person's opinion. Give me the courage to be honest about who I am, trusting that the right people will stay and that Your love never leaves. Free me from the need to perform for acceptance."

Practical actions:

1. Tell one person one honest thing about yourself that you've been hiding. Start small. Experience being accepted as you are.
2. When you catch yourself adjusting your personality to please someone, pause and ask: "What do I actually think/feel right now?"
3. Practice tolerating the discomfort of someone being upset with you without immediately trying to fix it.
4. Write a list of people who have stayed. Fear of rejection makes us forget the evidence of acceptance.
5. When rejected, pray: "God, thank You for showing me this isn't where I'm supposed to be. Direct me where You would have me go."

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5. Failure

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Ego, pride, perfectionism, vanity, self-centeredness, envy, comparison, dishonesty (hiding mistakes), self-condemnation, self-pity, laziness (disguised as "waiting until I'm ready"), procrastination, cowardice, impatience.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Splitting:* "Either I succeed completely or I've failed completely."
- *Catastrophising:* "If this doesn't work, my life is over."
- *False generalisation:* "I failed at this, so I'm a failure as a person."
- *Mislabelling:* "That mistake proves I'm incompetent."

- *Filtering out the positive:* Ignoring 100 things that went well and obsessing over the 1 that didn't.
- *Presumption of rightness:* "My plan was the only right plan, so any deviation is failure."

Areas of self affected: Self-esteem (I see myself as a failure), pride (others will see me fail), ambitions (I want success and recognition), security (failure threatens my livelihood and identity).

Psychology: Fear of failure (atychiphobia) is linked to environments where love and approval were conditional on achievement. Children exposed to extremely high standards or regular criticism are more likely to develop it (British Psychological Society, 2014). CBT research identifies the core distortion: confusing *doing* with *being*. A failed project becomes "I am a failure." Viktor Frankl's logotherapy offers the antidote: meaning comes not from success but from choosing our attitude and response to whatever happens. Frankl survived the Holocaust and wrote: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I procrastinate to avoid the risk of failing. Or I overwork to guarantee success. Either way, I'm exhausting myself trying to control outcomes. When I do fail, I hide it, blame others, or quit entirely. I never learn from the experience because I'm too busy protecting my ego. Meanwhile, the things I never attempt become evidence of a wasted life, which feeds more self-condemnation.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I want to look good more than I want to grow. I'd rather not try than risk being seen as imperfect.
- *Dishonest:* I hide my mistakes. I exaggerate my successes. I pretend I didn't care about the things that didn't work out.
- *Self-seeking:* I chase achievement for the validation it brings, not because the work itself matters.
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid that without success, I have no value. My identity is welded to my performance.

Better Way – Expanded

Why God's plan doesn't depend on my performance:

The Big Book's actor analogy (◆ BB p.61-62) shows us that we are actors in a play, not the playwright. God wrote the play. God knows the ending. Our job is to play the role assigned – faithfully, to the best of our ability – and leave the reviews to God. The actor who plays Hamlet doesn't succeed or fail based on whether Hamlet lives or dies. He succeeds by playing his part well. And "playing his part well" in recovery means doing the next right thing, not producing a particular result.

> *"We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." (◆ BB p.60)*

> *"Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed." (NA, Step Four)*

> *"We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves." (◆ BB p.84)*

> *"God's purpose cannot be discerned by the characters... It can be discerned a little by the actors. But only God, the playwright, is 100% sure. So if you can't work out the purpose, it's fine! Trusting God means it's OK just to do the next right thing and not understand why." (Step 04 21 Fear solution)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of failure. Help me remember that my worth does not come from results. You did not put me here to be perfect – You put me here to be willing. Take my efforts and use them as You see fit. When I fall short, remind me that I am still exactly where You need me to be. Let me care more about faithfulness than about success."

Practical actions:

1. Do one thing today that you might fail at. Apply for the job. Make the call. Submit the work. Let go of the outcome.
2. When you fail, write down what you learned. Failure that teaches is not wasted.

3. Replace “I am a failure” with “I did something that didn’t work.” Separate identity from outcome.
4. Celebrate effort, not results. Ask yourself: “Did I show up? Did I try? Did I do the next right thing?” If yes, that’s enough.
5. Use the Step 04 21 exercise: for the area where you fear failure, write down (a) what is my role? (b) what would God have me do? (c) what would God have me be?

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6. Authority Figures

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Insecurity, pride, resentment, people-pleasing, dishonesty, self-seeking, rebelliousness, envy, self-pity, fear, anger, obstinacy, servility, cynicism, diffidence.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *False generalisation:* “All bosses are out to get you.”
- *Splitting:* “Authority figures are either tyrants or idiots.”
- *Belief in mind-reading:* “My boss thinks I’m incompetent.”
- *Personalisation:* “She singled me out because she doesn’t like me.”
- *Emotional reasoning:* “I feel intimidated, so they must be threatening.”

Areas of self affected: Pride (they see me as less-than), self-esteem (I feel small around them), personal relations (I can’t be authentic around power), security (they control my livelihood), ambitions (they stand between me and what I want).

Psychology: Research on childhood trauma and authority (Psychology Today, 2024) shows that when early authority figures are abusive, neglectful, or unpredictable, survivors develop “an inherent distrust or fear of authority figures, viewing them as potential threats rather than sources of protection.” The power dynamic triggers fight-or-flight responses – the heart races, breathing quickens, rational thought narrows. Studies on power distance (Pubmed, 2022) show that fear of authority mediates communication breakdown: we

either become overly compliant (fawning) or overly defiant (fighting), neither of which is authentic.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I either rebel against authority or grovel before it. If I rebel, I sabotage opportunities and create conflict. If I grovel, I betray my values to win approval. Both approaches leave me resentful. I gossip about authority figures behind their backs to feel powerful. I avoid people who could help me because asking for help feels like admitting weakness.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I want to be the one in charge, or at least not be told what to do.
- *Dishonest:* I hide my true thoughts and feelings around authority figures. I say what they want to hear or I lie to avoid consequences.
- *Self-seeking:* I either seek their approval desperately or try to undermine their authority.
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid of being controlled, punished, or exposed as inadequate.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done." (◆ BB p.67)*

> *"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." (◆ BB p.66-67)*

> *"We are in the world to play the role He assigns." (◆ BB p.68)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of authority. Help me see these people as human beings, not threats. When I am intimidated, remind me that You are my true authority. When I am resentful, remind me that they are sick, just like me. Give me the courage to be honest and respectful, even when I'm afraid. Direct my attention to doing my part well and leaving the results to You."

Practical actions:

1. Before meeting with a boss, teacher, or any authority figure, pray: "God, help me be honest and useful in this conversation."
2. When resentment toward an authority figure arises, write a quick 4th column: where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?
3. Practice being direct. Say what you mean. Respectfully disagree when you need to. Authenticity builds genuine respect.
4. If you find yourself gossiping about someone in authority, stop and ask: "What am I afraid of?"
5. Remember that every person in authority answers to someone. They have fears too. The sick-man prayer applies.

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7. Change / the Unknown

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Fear, self-will, obstinacy, stubbornness, self-centeredness, impatience, lack of faith, apathy, lethargy, dishonesty (pretending things are fine as they are), self-pity, self-delusion, rigidity, cowardice.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Catastrophising:* "If things change, everything will fall apart."
- *Belief in fortune-telling:* "I know it's going to go badly."
- *Filtering out the positive:* Forgetting that every good thing in my life came through change.
- *Emotional reasoning:* "It feels wrong, so it must be wrong."
- *Splitting:* "Change means losing everything I have."
- *One-track thinking:* Fixating on what I might lose rather than what I might gain.

Areas of self affected: Security (change threatens stability), ambitions (fear of losing progress), self-esteem (I can't handle new situations), personal relations (new people are threatening).

Psychology: Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) identified "status quo bias" – our preference for the current state even when alternatives are objectively better. Neuroscience research shows this is hardwired: the brain conserves energy by defaulting to familiar patterns. Loss aversion (Kahneman & Tversky) means we feel losses roughly twice as strongly as equivalent gains. The result: we cling to familiar misery because the *known* bad feels safer than the *unknown* good. In addiction specifically, this manifests as choosing the certainty of using over the uncertainty of recovery – even when using is killing us.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I cling to the familiar. I avoid new situations, new people, new responsibilities. My world shrinks. The smaller my world becomes, the more threatening change appears. Eventually I'm trapped in a prison of my own construction, calling it "safety." Meanwhile, the opportunities I refused to take become regrets, which feed self-pity, which makes me even more resistant to change.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I want things to stay the way I've arranged them. I want the world to suit me.
- *Dishonest:* I tell myself I'm content when I'm actually stuck. I romanticize the past.
- *Self-seeking:* I resist change because it threatens the identity I've built.
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid that I can't handle what's coming. I don't trust God to see me through.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Acceptance leads to recovery. We lose our fear of the unknown. We are set free." (NA, Ch.3)*

> *"We had to quit playing God. It didn't work." (◆ BB p.62)*

> *"When we give our best, it works for us as it has worked for others. When we could no longer stand our old ways, we began to change." (NA, Step One)*

> *"Trusting God means it's OK just to do the next right thing and not understand why." (Step 04 21 Fear solution)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of the unknown. Help me remember that You are already in the future I'm afraid of. Give me willingness when I have none. Teach me that change is how You work in my life. Let me release what I'm holding onto and open my hands to receive what You have for me."

Practical actions:

1. Do one new thing this week. A different meeting. A different route. A conversation with a stranger. Build the muscle of tolerating the unfamiliar.
2. When facing a change, write two lists: "What I'm afraid of losing" and "What I might gain." The second list is usually longer.
3. Recall three changes in your life that felt terrifying at the time but turned out well. Fear is a terrible fortune-teller.
4. Pray for willingness when you don't feel willing. "God, I am not willing. Please make me willing to be willing."
5. Practice the Just for Today approach: you don't have to accept the whole future. Just today.

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8. Intimacy / Vulnerability

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Shame, pride, dishonesty, fear, distrust, self-reliance to a fault, insecurity, vanity, co-dependency, self-centeredness, uncommunicativeness, anti-social tendencies, lust (substituting physical for emotional connection), evasiveness.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Belief in fortune-telling:* "If I let them in, they'll hurt me."
- *False generalisation:* "Everyone I've trusted has betrayed me."
- *Catastrophising:* "If they see the real me, the relationship is over."
- *Emotional reasoning:* "I feel vulnerable, so I must be in danger."
- *Splitting:* "I can either protect myself or be close to someone, but not both."

Areas of self affected: Personal relations (I can't connect honestly), sex relations (I substitute physical closeness for emotional intimacy), self-esteem (I'm not worth knowing deeply), pride (I need to appear strong and self-sufficient), security (letting someone in means giving them power to hurt me).

Psychology: Brene Brown's research on vulnerability is central here. Her core finding: "There can be no intimacy – emotional intimacy, spiritual intimacy, physical intimacy – without vulnerability." She explains the oscillation: "I am here and I love you… and I'm going to reveal my innermost to you… and I am scared to death that you'll reject me." Brown identifies shame as the barrier: "If vulnerability is the willingness to show up and let ourselves be seen, shame gets in the way." And the breakthrough: "Shame needs three things to grow: secrecy, silence, and judgment. We must connect with others in order to move through shame." Attachment theory adds that avoidant attachment styles – developed when early vulnerability was met with rejection – lead to self-reliance as a defense, not a strength.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I build walls. I use humor, anger, work, substances, or screens to avoid real connection. People experience my surface but never my depth. I feel unknown, which confirms my belief that no one could handle the real me. The walls get higher. The loneliness gets worse. I mistake isolation for independence and call it strength.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I protect myself at the cost of the relationship. My comfort matters more than connection.
- *Dishonest:* I wear masks. I pretend everything is fine. I share facts but not feelings.

- *Self-seeking:* I want the benefits of relationship without the risk of being known.
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid that who I really am is not enough – that if you saw the whole picture, you'd leave.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Although we often appeared attractive and confident on the outside, we were really hiding a shaky, insecure person on the inside. The masks have to go." (NA, Step Five)*

> *"We see, by the acceptance of our confidant, that we can be accepted just the way we are." (NA, Step Five)*

> *"Shame needs three things to grow exponentially: secrecy, silence, and judgment." (Brene Brown)*

> *"The Fifth Step is the key to freedom. It allows us to live clean in the present." (NA, Step Five)*

Prayer: "God, remove my fear of being truly known. Help me take off the masks. Give me the courage to let trusted people see me as I really am – imperfect, wounded, and growing. Remind me that Your love does not depend on my being impressive. Let me find safety in You so I don't need walls for protection."

Practical actions:

1. In your next sponsor call, share one thing you've been holding back. The Fifth Step is practice for a lifetime of honesty.
2. When the urge to deflect with humor or change the subject arises, notice it. Ask yourself: "What am I protecting?"
3. Practice small acts of vulnerability: admitting you don't know something, asking for help, saying "I'm struggling."
4. Write down the fear behind each wall you've built. Name it. Shame loses power when spoken aloud.
5. Remember that the people who matter in recovery didn't stay because of your performance – they stayed because of your honesty.

9. Not Being Good Enough

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Low self-esteem, pride (disguised as humility), self-pity, insecurity, vanity, comparison, envy, dishonesty, perfectionism, self-condemnation, guilt, criticism, negative thinking, self-centeredness (obsessed with self-evaluation), diffidence.

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Filtering out the positive:* Dismissing compliments, focusing only on criticism.
- *Mislabelling:* "I made a mistake, therefore I am a mistake."
- *Catastrophising:* "If I'm not the best, I'm the worst."
- *Splitting:* "People are either winners or losers. I'm a loser."
- *Personalisation:* "Everything that goes wrong is because I'm not good enough."
- *Presumption of rightness:* "I already know I'm not good enough; I just need to find the evidence" – then cherry-picking proof.

Areas of self affected: Self-esteem (the central battleground), pride (desperate to appear competent), ***ambitions (paralyzed between overachieving and giving up)***, personal relations (assuming others see my flaws), security (without adequacy, I won't survive).

Psychology: Imposter syndrome describes high-achieving people who believe they're frauds – successful only through luck, never through competence. Research shows it affects men and women equally (contrary to early assumptions). Brene Brown defines the underlying feeling – shame – as "the painful feeling of believing that we are flawed and unworthy of love and belonging." Shame differs from guilt: guilt says "I did something bad"; shame says "I am bad." Seligman's learned helplessness research shows that repeated perceived failures – even when they're not real failures – can train the brain to stop trying. The belief "I'm not good enough" becomes a self-reinforcing prison: I don't try, so I don't succeed, which confirms I wasn't good enough.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I oscillate between overachieving (to prove I'm enough) and underachieving (because "why bother"). I seek constant reassurance but dismiss every compliment. I tear myself down before anyone else can – a preemptive strike against rejection. I compare myself to everyone and always come up short (because comparison is rigged: I compare my insides to their outsides). I replay past mistakes on a loop, using them as evidence in the prosecution's case against myself.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I'm consumed with self-evaluation. I can't see others' needs because I'm too busy measuring my own worth.
- *Dishonest:* I lie about accomplishments (inflating or deflating). I pretend I don't care about things I desperately want.
- *Self-seeking:* ***I seek validation like an addict seeks a fix – the relief is temporary, and I always need more.***
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid that if I stop performing, I'll be exposed as empty.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed. We are surprised to find that we have good points in our inventory." (NA, Step Four)*

> *"We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines." (◆ BB p.60)*

> *"None of us is perfectly good or perfectly bad. We are people who have assets and liabilities. Most importantly, we are human." (NA, Step Seven)*

> *"The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs." (George Eliot, quoted in Step 04 21)*

Prayer: "God, remove my obsession with measuring my worth. Help me see myself as You see me – not as a collection of accomplishments and failures, but as Your child. Teach me

that 'good enough' was never the standard – willingness was. Free me from the tyranny of comparison. Let me rest in the knowledge that You made me as I am, on purpose, for a purpose."

Practical actions:

1. When the "not good enough" voice starts, interrupt it with one fact: "God didn't make junk." Repeat until the voice quiets.
2. Do one act of service today. Nothing cures self-obsession faster than helping someone else.
3. Stop comparing. When you catch yourself measuring against someone else, pray: "God, bless them and bless me. We're both exactly where You need us."
4. Write a list of 10 things you're good at. Ask your sponsor or a friend to add to it. Let yourself be surprised.
5. Practice saying "I don't know" without shame. Being a beginner is not a deficiency – it's courage.

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10. Losing Control

Why – Expanded

Character defects: Self-will, pride, ego, stubbornness, obstinacy, impatience, dishonesty (denial of powerlessness), anger, fear, self-centeredness, overbearing behavior, manipulativeness, self-delusion, resentment (at outcomes I can't control).

Cognitive distortions at work:

- *Presumption of rightness:* "My way is the right way. If everyone just listened to me..."
- *Catastrophising:* "If I don't manage this, everything will fall apart."
- *Emotional reasoning:* "I feel out of control, so things must actually be out of control."
- *Fallacy of fairness:* "If I work hard enough and plan well enough, things should go my way."

- *Rule-based thinking:* Creating rigid systems to maintain order and becoming furious when they're disrupted.
- *Personalisation:* Believing I have more influence over events than I actually do.

Areas of self affected: All seven areas. Control is the master fear. It touches security (I need predictability to feel safe), ambitions (I need to direct outcomes), pride (I need to appear capable), self-esteem (I need to prove I can handle things), personal relations (I need people to do what I expect), pocketbook (I need to manage finances perfectly), sex relations (I need to control the relationship dynamic).

Psychology: Research on anxiety disorders (Concordia University, 2017) demonstrates that beliefs about the "importance of controlling thoughts" and the "fear of losing control" are central to OCD, panic disorder, social anxiety, and PTSD. People led to believe their risk of losing control was higher engaged in significantly more checking and controlling behaviors. Experimental studies on locus of control (Rotter, 1966) show that an external locus of control – believing one cannot influence outcomes – correlates with depression and anxiety. The paradox of addiction: the disease convinces us we need more control, while the solution (Step One) begins with admitting we have none. Learned helplessness (Seligman) shows the other extreme: when control is removed completely, people stop trying. Recovery finds the middle path: take responsible action, release outcomes.

Self-Reliance – Expanded

The self-fulfilling cycle: I tighten my grip on people and situations. They resist. I squeeze harder. Relationships break. Plans crumble. I interpret the chaos as evidence that I need *more* control, not less. I use charm, anger, withdrawal, overwork, substances – anything to maintain the illusion of being in charge. The harder I try to control, the more unmanageable life becomes. This is Step One in action: my life has become unmanageable *because* of my attempts to manage it.

SDSF breakdown:

- *Selfish:* I want the world to conform to my plans. Other people's needs, preferences, and autonomy are obstacles.
- *Dishonest:* I tell myself I can handle it, that I know best, that I don't need help. I deny my powerlessness daily.

- *Self-seeking:* I micromanage, manipulate, and scheme to produce the outcomes I've decided are correct.
- *Fearful:* I'm afraid that without my management, everything – including me – will fall apart. I've confused surrender with annihilation.

Better Way – Expanded

> *"Our actor is self-centered – ego-centric, as people like to call it nowadays." (◆ BB p.61)*

> *"This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work." (◆ BB p.62)*

> *"Surrendering to the will of our Higher Power gets easier with daily practice." (NA, Step Three)*

> *"We are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves." (◆ BB p.88)*

> *"The solution is not to lose the roles. The solution is to remember we're actors whilst playing the roles. Actors are fine whatever happens to the role." (Step 04 21 Fear solution)*

> *"What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." (◆ BB p.85)*

Prayer: "God, I offer myself to Thee – to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always." (Third Step Prayer, ◆ BB p.63)

Practical actions:

1. Practice letting something go today. Deliberately. Leave one thing unmanaged and watch what happens. Usually: nothing bad.
2. When you catch yourself micromanaging, pause and ask: "Is this my job, or God's?" If it's God's, put it down.

3. Write a “God Box” list: things you are handing over to God today. Put the paper in a box or drawer. Walk away.
4. When plans change, instead of reacting, say: “OK. What’s the next right thing?” Plans are suggestions, not guarantees.
5. Re-read Step One daily. Powerlessness is not a problem to solve – it’s the truth that sets you free.

Why God’s Plan Doesn’t Depend on Your Performance

This is the question underneath the fear of failure, the fear of not being good enough, and the fear of losing control. If the whole point is that God’s in charge, then why would my success or failure matter?

The Actor Analogy

The Big Book describes us as actors trying to run the whole show (◆ BB p.61). We arrange the lights, the scenery, the other players – and when the show doesn’t come off, we’re devastated. The solution isn’t to become a better director. The solution is to realize we were never the director.

The recovery literature from this step guide extends the analogy:

> *“We’ve been sent here, disguised as human beings made of flesh. We’re here to play roles: Father, mother, son, daughter. Teacher, student. Worker, employer, colleague. But we’ve mistaken ourselves for the roles. So the fate of the role becomes our fate. If the job goes well, if the kid does well, if the train is on time, we’re fine. If the job goes badly, if the kid does badly, if the train is late, we’re not.”*

> *“The solution is not to lose the roles. The solution is to remember we’re actors whilst playing the roles. Actors are fine whatever happens to the role. Ask anyone who has played Macbeth or Hamlet how he’s doing after the play is done. He’s fine. He’s having a great time! Ask Macbeth or Hamlet how they’re doing: not so good.” (Step 04 21)*

Why This Matters for Fear

If I am the character, then the character's success or failure is my success or failure. Every setback is a threat to my identity. Every mistake is proof of my worthlessness. Every uncertain outcome is terrifying. This is the root of most of our fears.

But if I am the actor – a spirit playing a role that God assigned – then:

- **Identity** comes from God, not from the role. I am spirit, not the character. My worth doesn't fluctuate with my bank account, my job title, or my relationship status.
- **Purpose** is to do God's will, not to achieve the character's aims. I don't need the promotion, the relationship, or the victory. I need to play my part faithfully.
- **Safety** is guaranteed. As spirit, I cannot be ultimately harmed. The role may suffer, but I am held.

What God Asks of Us

God doesn't ask for results. The Big Book is explicit:

> *"We are in the world to play the role He assigns. 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." (◆ BB p.68)*

The key phrase is "do as we think He would have us." Not "produce what He wants." Not "succeed at what He's planned." Just: do the next right thing. Show up. Be honest. Be willing. Leave the rest to God.

> *"Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all of our activities. 'How can I best serve Thee – Thy will (not mine) be done.'" (◆ BB p.85)*

> *"God's purpose cannot be discerned by the characters... It can be discerned a little by the actors. But only God, the playwright, is 100% sure. So if you can't work out the purpose, it's fine! Trusting God means it's OK just to do the next right thing and not understand why." (Step 04 21)*

The Miracle

When we stop trying to produce results and start trying to play our part:

> *"We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves." (◆ BB p.84)*

> *"We are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves." (◆ BB p.88)*

Fear of failure dissolves – not because we become incapable of failing, but because failure stops being the point. The point is faithfulness. And faithfulness is always within reach, regardless of outcomes.

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous ("Big Book") pp.60-88; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Steps 4 & 7; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Chapters 3-5; Step 04 Fear Solution guide; Sponsorship Workshop Packet 2024; Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence (amygdala hijack); John Bowlby, Attachment Theory; Martin Seligman, Learned Helplessness; Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning; Brene Brown, Daring Greatly (shame & vulnerability); Shafir & Mullainathan, Scarcity (scarcity mindset); Samuelson & Zeckhauser, Status Quo Bias; CBT cognitive distortions research

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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 04-fear-4-column-inventory-expanded.md