Fear Inventory (4 Column Inventory)

Read Big Book pg.67 “Notice the word fear…” to pg.68 “…outgrow fear.”

Why Fear Inventory?

Fear is central to addiction and recovery. The Big Book makes this clear:

> *“This short word somehow touches about every aspect of our lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. 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.” (◆ BB p.67)*

We are “driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity” (◆ BB p.62). The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions puts it this way:

> *“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. Living upon a basis of unsatisfied demands, we were in a state of continual disturbance and frustration.” (12&12, Step 7)*

The NA Basic Text describes the same experience:

> *“As we approach this step, most of us are afraid that there is a monster inside of us that, if released, will destroy us. This fear can cause us to put off our inventory or may even prevent us from taking this crucial step at all. We have found that fear is a lack of faith, and we have found a loving, personal God to whom we can turn.” (NA, Step Four)*

Fear inventory is how we get these fears out of our heads and onto paper – where we can see them, understand them, and find a better way to live.

Instructions

Stepwork Notebook: Carry over all your fears from Resentment Inventory (4th column) and add other fears, if applicable. Answer these 4 questions for ALL fears.

1. **What is the Fear?**
2. **Why do I have this fear?** (List character defects that cause, or lead to, this fear)
3. **How has self-reliance failed me?** How do I set the ball rolling? (What are the things I do to try to not feel this fear?)
4. **What's a better way?** (What would God have me do instead? Reliance on God?)

Understanding Fear

What Is Fear?

Fear is the emotional response to perceived threat – real or imagined. In addiction and recovery, most of our fears are not about actual danger. They are about what *might* happen. We project the future and react to our own projections.

The Big Book identifies fear as something that "set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve." In other words, fear doesn't just make us feel bad – it causes us to *act* in ways that create the very outcomes we're afraid of.

Where Does Fear Come From?

- Fear comes from **demands** – demanding the world be a certain way
- Demands come from **playing God** – wanting something other than God's will
- Playing God is wanting the universe to suit us rather than fitting ourselves to be of maximum service to God and others (◆ BB p.77)

Self-reliance is the engine of fear. We rely on ourselves to control outcomes, and when we can't (which is most of the time), fear is the result. "Self-reliance was good as far as it went, but it didn't go far enough" (◆ BB p.68).

Digging to Core Fears

Surface fears point to deeper, core fears. When writing fear inventory, ask “why does this scare me?” and keep asking until you hit bottom.

For example:

- Scared of losing a job? Why? Fear of poverty, loss of status, failure, loss of identity.
- Scared of old age? Why? Fear of death, loss of identity, physical pain.
- Scared of losing a relationship? Why? Fear of failure, ridicule, loneliness, emotional pain.

Common core fears include:

- Loneliness / disconnection / separation
- Loss of identity
- Worthlessness
- Powerlessness
- Physical pain
- Emotional pain
- The state of fear itself
- Guilt
- Shame

The NA Basic Text captures what running on fear looks like: “We were frightened and ran from the fear. No matter how far we ran, we always carried fear with us. We were hopeless, useless and lost.” (NA, Ch.3)

Examples

1. Fear of: Public Speaking

Why: I'm judgemental of others, so I fear others judge me. Hypocritical. Sounding stupid. Ego. Pride. Self-centered. Insecure. Anxiety.

Self-Reliance: I stay quiet, I don't talk or share at meetings. I judge others "bad" shares to feel better about myself.

Better Way (God): Would have me share my experience to try to help others. Find positive things to say about others. Get over myself. Trust and rely on God through the fear/action of sharing.

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2. Fear of: Being Alone

Why: Insecure. Lonely. Feel Unwanted. Not being good enough. Co-dependent. Seek validation from men. Lack healthy boundaries.

Self-Reliance: I get into relationship after relationship to avoid being alone. I seek attention/compliments from everyone/men/women. Surround myself with the opposite sex. Lie to myself and say that women/men hate me. Use people. Settle for less than I deserve in relationships. Avoid commitment. Keep walls up.

Better Way (God): Would have me seek Him and build a strong relationship with Him before I entertain a man/woman. Not put myself out-there for attention. Seek platonic friendships only. Do not text opposite sex. Be genuine. Have healthy respectful boundaries with men/women. Find self-worth and validation through God's eyes and not people's eyes.

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3. Fear of: Financial Insecurity

Why: Greed. Materialism. Self-centered. Lack of faith. Need to feel in control. Pride – afraid of looking poor or struggling. Dishonesty about money. Living beyond my means to impress others.

Self-Reliance: I hoard money or obsess over it. I overwork and neglect relationships and health. I manipulate situations to protect my finances. I lie about my financial situation. I avoid looking at bills or debts. I scheme and cut corners. I resent others who seem to have more. I use money to control people or situations.

Better Way (God): Would have me trust that He will provide what I need. Be honest about my finances. Live within my means. Be generous and give freely. Prioritize spiritual wealth over material wealth. Make a budget and stick to it. Ask for help when needed. Remember that "God will provide what we need, if we keep close to Him and perform His work well" (◆ BB p.63).

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4. Fear of: Rejection / Abandonment

Why: Insecure. Low self-worth. People-pleasing. Co-dependent. Dishonest – I pretend to be someone I'm not so people will like me. Self-pity. Need for approval and validation. Pride – can't handle being told "no."

Self-Reliance: I bend over backwards to please people. I say yes when I mean no. I avoid honest conversations. I stay in toxic relationships to avoid being alone. I change who I am depending on who I'm with. I isolate before others can reject me. I hold grudges when I feel slighted. I manipulate others with guilt or charm to keep them close.

Better Way (God): Would have me be honest and authentic, trusting that the right people will stay. Accept that not everyone will like me, and that's OK. Stop seeking worth from others' opinions. Build genuine relationships based on honesty, not performance. Trust God's plan for my relationships. Remember: "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) – but honesty is the way through.

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5. Fear of: Failure

Why: Ego. Pride. Perfectionism. Self-centered – I want to look good. Comparison to others. Need for approval. Shame. Self-esteem tied to achievement and performance rather than who I am.

Self-Reliance: I procrastinate to avoid the risk of failing. I don't try new things. I cut corners to guarantee results. I blame others when things go wrong. I take on too much to prove myself. I quit before I can fail. I tear others down so I feel better about my shortcomings. I avoid situations where I'm not already competent.

Better Way (God): Would have me do my best and leave the results to Him. Take action in spite of the fear. Be willing to be a beginner. Understand that failure is how I learn and grow. Let go of perfectionism. Trust that God's plan doesn't depend on my performance. "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).

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6. Fear of: Authority Figures

Why: Insecure. People-pleasing. Low self-worth. Resentful of being told what to do. Pride – don't want to be seen as less than. Past experiences with controlling or abusive authority. Dishonesty – hiding my true self around people in power. Self-seeking – wanting their approval.

Self-Reliance: I avoid or rebel against bosses, police, doctors, or anyone in charge. I become a chameleon – overly compliant or overly defiant. I gossip about authority figures behind their backs. I sabotage myself at work to "get back" at the boss. I lie or hide things to avoid consequences. I resent rules and structure. I refuse to ask for help from people who could help me.

Better Way (God): Would have me see authority figures as human beings, not threats. Be honest and respectful. Do my best work regardless of who's watching. Trust God as my ultimate authority. Stop seeking validation from bosses or institutions. Practice the prayer: "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).

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7. Fear of: Change / the Unknown

Why: Need for control. Lack of faith. Comfortable in misery – at least it's familiar. Self-centered – I want things my way. Anxiety. Catastrophizing. Lack of trust in God or the process. Rigid thinking.

Self-Reliance: I resist change even when it's clearly needed. I cling to old relationships, jobs, habits, and ways of thinking. I stay in my comfort zone. I overthink and over-plan to try to eliminate uncertainty. I avoid taking Steps because it means things will change. I isolate rather than face new situations. I romanticize the past. I create chaos to feel in control.

Better Way (God): Would have me trust that He has a plan I can't see. Be open-minded and willing. Take the next right action and let go of the outcome. Remember that every good thing in recovery came through change. "Acceptance leads to recovery. We lose our fear of the unknown. We are set free" (NA, Ch.3). Embrace the slogan "Just for today." Pray for willingness when I don't feel willing.

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8. Fear of: Intimacy / Vulnerability

Why: Shame. Past hurt. Distrust. Pride – don't want anyone to see the "real" me. Self-reliant to a fault. Fear of being hurt again. Insecure. Dishonest – I hide behind walls and masks. Co-dependent – I confuse intimacy with losing myself.

Self-Reliance: I keep people at arm's length. I use humor, anger, or deflection to avoid real conversation. I change the subject when things get personal. I avoid committed relationships or rush through them superficially. I use sex as a substitute for intimacy. I pretend everything is fine when it isn't. I numb feelings with work, substances, food, or screens. I ghost people when they get too close.

Better Way (God): Would have me be honest about who I am and how I feel. Allow trusted people in. Take the risk of being known. Work with a sponsor and be fully transparent. Practice vulnerability in meetings by sharing honestly. Remember that "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). Let God be my security so I don't need walls for protection.

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9. Fear of: Not Being Good Enough

Why: Low self-esteem. Comparison. Perfectionism. Shame. Self-pity. Insecure. Self-centered – obsessed with how others see me. Pride disguised as humility. Past messages

from family, teachers, or peers that I'm not enough.

Self-Reliance: I overachieve to prove my worth. I underachieve because "why bother." I seek constant reassurance and compliments. I tear myself down before anyone else can. I criticize others to feel superior. I avoid opportunities because I'm "not ready." I replay past mistakes obsessively. I lie about accomplishments. I isolate and withdraw when I feel inadequate.

Better Way (God): Would have me know that my worth comes from Him, not from performance or other people's opinions. Be of service – the fastest way out of self. Accept myself as a work in progress. "Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed" (NA, Step Four). Stop measuring myself against others. Trust that God made me as I am for a reason. Do the next right thing and leave the evaluation to Him.

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10. Fear of: Losing Control

Why: Self-will. Lack of trust. Need to manage everything and everyone. Ego – I think I know best. Anxiety. Past experiences of chaos or helplessness. Dishonest with myself about how much I actually control. Self-centered – the world revolves around my plans.

Self-Reliance: I micromanage people and situations. I manipulate outcomes through charm, anger, or withdrawal. I plan obsessively and fall apart when plans change. I refuse to delegate or ask for help. I use substances, food, or behavior to regulate my internal state. I argue and insist on being right. I struggle to let others lead. I avoid surrender because it feels like weakness.

Better Way (God): Would have me surrender daily. Accept that I was never actually in control to begin with – Step One makes that clear. "Our actor is self-centered – ego-centric" (◆ BB p.61) – the solution is to let God be the Director. Practice "turning it over" – not once, but as often as needed. Let go of outcomes. "Surrendering to the will of our Higher Power gets easier with daily practice" (NA, Step Three). Remember that the only thing I need to control is my willingness.

The Solution to Fear

> *"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. 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."*
>
> *"We never apologize to anyone for depending upon our Creator. We can laugh at those who think spirituality the way of weakness. Paradoxically, it is the way of strength. The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead we let Him demonstrate, through us, what He can do. We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be. At once, we commence to outgrow fear."* (◆ BB p.68)

The Fear Prayer

When fear arises, the instructions from the Big Book are simple:

1. Ask God to **remove our fear**
2. Ask God to **direct our attention to what He would have us be**

The promise: **at once, we commence to outgrow fear.**

Blank Template

Use this template for each fear on your list:

1. Fear of: _____

2. Why: _____

3. Self-Reliance: _____

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4. Better Way: _____

Sources: Alcoholics Anonymous (“Big Book”) pp.60-68; Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Step 7; Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Chapters 3-4; Sponsorship Workshop Packet 2024

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.md