

Working Step Four -- Facing Fear With Kindness

Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:16,18)

Many of us identify a fearful person as a coward, someone who is not assertive, or someone cowering at intimidation. But fear can also be expressed by unrealistic bravado, excessive talking, workaholicism, and lying, to name a few. Fear is revealed in cover-ups and phoniness. It keeps us from being fully honest about who we are, prompting us instead to project false or only partially true images of ourselves. Fear makes us deny – consciously or unconsciously – that anything is wrong. “It’s all good” is a sure sign that it’s not. We are to actually be responsible and so we avoid meeting issues straight on and choose rather to evade and deceive. When all of that fails, we express our fear by lashing out and going on the offensive against someone. “Get them before they get me.”

In order to inventory our lives honestly we have to look at where we are afraid. When we honestly peel back the layers and come to the core of our being, we discover that our deepest fear is that God really isn’t good and couldn’t possibly be good to me. We talk about unconditional love coming from God but we just don’t believe it to be true when we look deep inside our soul and find troubles there – particularly trouble of our own making. With full knowledge of all we’ve done God loves us. This is God’s love given to us.

Love is patient, Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects. Always trusts. Always hopes. Always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

When King David did an inventory of his heart and found murder and adultery and lying and self-righteous pride there he knew he deserved nothing from God and yet he was able to rely on God’s kind love and write these words: **I am confident that I will see the Lord’s goodness while I am here in the land of the living. (Psalm 27)**

When we do a step 4 inventory we easily list ways others let us down. We were hurt or betrayed, attacked or molested, lied to or beaten, stolen from or cheated. Sometimes that was the pattern of our lives for a number of years. We came to believe that life was unsafe for us and began to live in fear.

When our emotions hinge on the actions and opinions of other people, we will always react in fear because we can never be sure when we might be rejected or criticized or ignored. Life based on human interaction is only as secure as the humans we entrust with our lives. But a God based life is

different. God loves us perfectly, weaknesses and all. We can live confidently and dare to be safely vulnerable and kind in the knowledge that God will guide us and protect us. **O God, have mercy on me. The enemy presses in on me. My foes attack me all day long. My slanderers hound me constantly, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. This I know: God is on my side. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?** (Psalm 56)

To inventory honestly, we must ask ourselves when we reacted in fear because we failed to believe and rely on God’s tender care for us. Living in reliance on God’s tenderness allows our own hearts to be filled with healing for our own pain as well as express compassion for the suffering of others. **God says, "It was I who taught you to walk; I took you up in my arms; but you did not know that I healed you. I led you with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to you like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to you and fed you."** (Hosea 11)

To the extent that we experience God’s love, we won’t want to lash out at others or live isolated in our fear because we will see that neither of these options work for us. To live without fear is to first focus on experiencing more of God’s kindness. That requires taking a risk to believe that God really is good, will always treat us with love, and will meet all of our needs as we come honestly and place ourselves in His care. **Now that you realize how kind the Lord has been to you, put away all evil, deception, envy, and fraud. Long to grow up into the fullness of your salvation, cry for this as a baby cries for his milk. (1 Peter 2)**

In our inventory, we must ask ourselves when we looked first to others for safety and care rather than looking to God. We’ll find those occasions when we experienced anger and fear in the face of disappointment. To live without fear we must intentionally accept the kindness and tenderness that is offered by God every moment of life. We look first to God for the peace of mind we need. We look first to God for the compassion we lack. We must experience again and again the acceptance, forgiveness, and patience of God who enjoys us and supports us. We inventory how we are growing in a healthy dependence on God, rather than our circumstances for safety and loving kindness. We inventory to learn how we are growing to living more gently and practicing letting go with forgiveness.

Perfect love casts out fear. Where is fear still impacting my life and how am I welcoming God’s kindness and tenderness to transform me and my life with other humans in relationship?

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How does fear show itself in my relating with others?
2. How do I respond to fear from others?
3. How does God mean for friendship and relationship with Him to impact on how I relate to others?