

Let us begin with Step 4, as we look into the 12 Steps with God

Step 4 – Examine – We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**Tonight, we are going to begin looking past the major sin our lives to examine all our sin...
...we are going to begin the tough work of self-examination – searching and fearless.**

If you have genuinely trusted Christ as your savior, and now enjoy the assurance of eternal life, you have only begun the transformation. But remember, regardless of why you are here tonight, if you are saved and know Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have the Holy Spirit living in you. As Jesus was reminding His disciples in Acts, we should also remember His words...

Acts 1:8, “*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you*”

...and it is this power, the Holy Spirit in us, that empowers the self-examination we are talking about tonight.

There are still many temptations to slip back into an old pattern of life filled with selfish and sinful issues and/or addictions. In order to continue walking down a godly road we believe it is necessary to come back to a place of self-evaluation and invite God to do His own probing inquiry.

Psalm 26:2, “*Examine me, LORD, and put me to the test; refine my mind and my heart.*”

Does the thought of praying this verse make you uncomfortable? If so, then you probably already understand the need to pray it. If we are trying to distance ourselves from our sinfulness, then honesty with God is absolutely necessary. In this verse, we are asking God to examine us closely – testing, refining, and purifying us – something only He can do.

Let us be honest with ourselves for a minute. If you were strong enough to avoid sin on your own, would you need help? Let us go just a bit farther. If another person you know could help you with your sin, would you need God? The fact of the matter is that the only one who is capable of defeating sin is God himself. Part of us wants to avoid God because of our sin, and part of us yearns for God because He is our only help.

Check out what Jeremiah says in the midst of a sorrowful cry about his peoples’ own sin.

Lamentations 3:40, “*Let’s examine and search out our ways, and let’s return to the Lord.*”

There is something particularly difficult about putting ourselves under the microscope. We already know what we are going to find and bringing it up and putting it in God’s hands is a real blow to our pride. Yet, because of our new nature and the presence of the Holy Spirit, we long to be in close communion with our Lord. Thus, this verse is particularly relevant. To return to the Lord is preceded with self-searching.

The apostle Paul really boils it down in his second letter to the Corinthians when he writes,

2 Corinthians 13:5, “*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith, examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless you indeed fail the test.*”

Did you notice what he says? Check out your own life? You should find Jesus easily. If you do not find Jesus, you are not saved. You are not “in the faith.”

This verse rests in the midst of a small section wherein Paul is demonstrating the proof of the power of God speaking through himself to the church in Corinth. The ultimate appeal to finding truth, whether about prophetic veracity or our own sinfulness is to look for and to Jesus.

So, is he in your life? Oh sure, we just finished steps one through three on the matter of salvation. You may have said the words. You may have prayed the prayer. If you are genuinely saved, you will find Jesus in your life very quickly. If you do not find Jesus, and if you are questioning salvation, go back to the first three steps. Salvation is not a result of saying the right words or praying a scripted prayer. Salvation is an absolute trust in Christ's finished work on Calvary's cross where He died with your sin upon himself, and where He freely offers you life for eternity.

Psalm 139:23, “Search me, God, and know my heart; put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts!”

Just like Psalm 26:2, this verse calls for God to do an examination of our lives. With verse 24, it frames the conclusion of Psalm 139...a remarkable Psalm that speaks of our omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent God – who better to search and know our hearts and thoughts!

Wouldn't it be great to speak this verse in prayer with confidence? As God probes your mind and heart, are you glad about what He will find, or ashamed? It is time we let God help us clean up our lives.

Consider and Confess:

Ok, where are you at? Have you reached perfection? What still needs to change? Don't be overwhelmed. Even the most righteous of people still have sin in their lives with which they have to deal. The correct perspective is not in how much sin remains, but whether we are faithfully addressing sin in our lives.

1. Is the big sin in your life being addressed and left behind? Are smaller sins or sins that you are not thinking about coming to light?
2. If you hesitate to ask God to go through your life with His fine-tooth comb, you must ask, why do I not want Him in there? What will He find? Be honest.
3. A helpful exercise may be to physically write out your sins on a paper and begin working through your Bible and find a corresponding Scripture that addresses each sin. Maybe an admonishment, a righteous alternative, an illumination on its reality, etc.
4. Sin is genuinely like cancer. It causes real spiritual health problems and easily spreads. Ignoring it does not make it go away. Acknowledging it is the first step to curing it. Will you go ahead and make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself?

Looking Forward:

Know this, you can hide sin from people, but God already knows you better than you know yourself. He is well aware of your sin and He is more interested in you dealing with it than you are.

Now it is a matter of being honest with yourself and simply acknowledging what God already knows.