

SOUL AUDIT

“know yourself, accept yourself, forget yourself, give yourself.”

Introduction: This is the first of six exercises that are designed to help a Christian “walk in the light” of certain “realities” (self, God, the church, the world etc.). This process is called **Spiritual Formation**.

1. There are six steps that can be identified in the process of spiritual formation.
 - a. **Sensing the depth of my need. (self awareness)**
 - b. Understanding the extent of God’s grace. (the word of the cross)
 - c. Walking through true repentance. (coming to our senses)
 - d. Experiencing the power of God’s love. (constrained by His love)
 - e. Entering intimate community. (members of one another)
 - f. Committing to meaningful serve. (here am I Lord, send me)
2. Is there a Biblical precedent for looking deeply into oneself so as to know oneself?
 - **1 Cor.2:15** “but he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man.”
 - **1 Cor.11** “²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.”
 - It is possible to look within in such a way that we get stuck with no real insight into our depravity and dignity, but this is not God’s intent in expecting us to know ourselves and except ourselves. We cannot forget or die to ourselves if we do not know who we are.
3. In this exercise our goal is to start a process of self-awareness that will lead us to long deeply for Christ and the grace of the cross.
4. In some ways this step is the hardest and most important. It may take the most time and require the most energy. If it is done well, the other steps will be much easier and may go more quickly.
5. This exercise will take some time and will involve the following elements.
 - a. Understanding how to look into our inner life.
 - b. Study of key Biblical texts.
 - c. Prayer for insight and conviction.
 - d. Meditative waiting on God’s Spirit.
 - e. Seeking insight from intimate friends.
 - f. Journaling
5. Our goal is to move toward the posture of the person described by the beatitudes of **Matthew 5:3-8**
 - a. Note: It is important to realize that our goal (at this point) is not to reform ourselves or to exact repentance but rather to honestly seek to know who we are without fear of rejection or condemnation. This is a life long process as our defense mechanisms are hidden and constantly mutating to remain so.

- b. “Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. – They are aware of their dark side and its deadly effects.
- c. Blessed are those who **mourn**, for they will be comforted. – They are in pain for their condition.
- d. Blessed are the **meek**, for they will inherit the earth. – They are striped of their pride.
- e. Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be filled. – They are desperate for a righteousness that they cannot achieve in the flesh.
- f. Blessed are the **merciful**, for they will be shown mercy. – They have no impulse to judge because they realize that others need grace as they themselves do.
- g. Blessed are the **pure in heart**, for they will see God.” - Their defensive strategies are exposed. They are not double minded seeking to have it both ways. They know that they cannot serve the world and God at the same time.

“Give us wretched sinners and not just ordinary ones. It is the wretched sinners that get better because they know they must.”

Haddon Robinson

- 6. A.W. Tozer’s “Rules for Self Discovery:
 - a. What we want most;
 - b. What we think about most;
 - c. How we use our money;
 - d. What we do with our leisure time;
 - e. The company we enjoy;
 - f. Who and what we admire;
 - g. What we laugh at.”

A. **The geography of the soul**

- 1. My **Public** life is the part of me that is acknowledged by others and myself. I should want this box to expand.
- 2. My **Secret** self is the part of me that I know is there but is not public. This is the area that will offer me access to the hidden self as I become more vulnerable and courageous in the face of the terror of opening the darker side of my soul. As I become more secure I should expect this box to shrink.
- 3. My **Blind** spots is the part of me that others see but I do not. This is also an area of access to the inner soul as friends help me expand my awareness of my true nature. I should want to shrink this box as I grow.

4. My **Hidden** self is the part of me that no one but God knows at this time. It should be my objective to discover what is in this area as I grow.

	Known by self	Hidden from self
Know to others	Public self	Blind spots
Hidden from others	Secret self	Hidden self

B. **The language of the soul** If we learn the language of our own soul, we have a better chance of assessing it.

1. My **Public** life – The part of me that is acknowledged by others and myself will have a preference for a certain style or language of expression. Where do I feel most comfortable? How do I come across to others? This preferred language is not good or bad, it just is a part of my unique personality. Being familiar with my public face or language is important in that it can help me understand my default defense strategies. I will tend to protect my **Hidden** and **Secret** self with my public language. An “Action” oriented person may stay busy to avoid a painful self-audit. A “reflective” person may intellectualize and thus depersonalize a self-audit.

Sensing impulses	Action “just do it”	Duty “do it right”
Intuitive impulses	Empathy “we”	Reflection “it”

2. Gary Chapman’s book, “*The Love Languages of God*” suggests five ways in which I hear God and respond to Him.
 - a. **Words of Affirmation** – Reflecting on the comforting parts of Scripture that remind me of God’s grace, mercy, and love.
 - b. **Quality Time** – Including God (through reflection) in the critical moments of life – disappointments, victories, times of fear, etc.
 - c. **Gifts** – Appreciating the uniqueness of God’s design expressed to, within, and through me.
 - d. **Acts of Service** – Seeing the fruit of God’s Spirit expressed through me for the benefit of others in the name of Jesus and His Kingdom.
 - e. **Physical touch** – Experiencing the material manifestation of God’s care through circumstances and or people.

Note: We each may have a different love language and we should conduct our personal audit in that language. It will be the most natural doorway to our soul’s secrets.

C. **The doors and windows of access to my soul.** This is where I can begin to look for clues to understanding where the hidden files of my soul are stored. If I can find the doors and windows into my inner life, I can begin to conduct an accurate spiritual audit.

1. **Painkillers** – What do I do to kill the pain of my soul? Eating, sexual expression, work, exercise, substance abuse, obsessive relationships, etc. are common painkillers. Pain is a part of everyone’s life. The question is how are we dealing with it? Most of us have learned to expel, deflect, or repress pain in ways that are subconscious or not rationally thought out. We may mistakenly focus our attention only on a particular “pain killer” (obsession with work or relationships) as “the” problem when the painkiller has roots that go deeper into our soul. A lack of faith or hope for example can be at the core of our painkiller.

Painkillers can be a hindrance to an accurate internal audit of my soul. Painkillers dull the pain that can drive me to see myself as broken and needy. What God looks for are people who are “wretched sinners” not just ordinary sinners. Wretched sinners, are in pain and have a strong desire to change. They listen and learn. When Jesus said he came for the sinners not the righteous, he was telling us that pain creates the appetite for peace through the Gospel message. *When I kill the pain, I kill the appetite for change.* This is why I must identify the painkillers in my life and disarm them.

2. **Anger outlets** – How do I deal with the anger in my life? Do I use withdrawal, outbursts of hostility, passive aggressive expressions, etc. *Anger is a trailhead to a path that leads deep into my soul’s most cherished values.* Anger outlets may tell me where the sensitive, hidden, or secret places in my soul are to be found. Anger often suggests a blocked goal in my soul of some sort. When I sense anger, I can ask, what “soul goal” is being frustrated? Does my longing for acceptance, respect, significance, etc. result in frustration and anger? Why does this issue (that results in anger) mean so much to me?

We should note that one of the greatest hindrances to an accurate internal audit of my soul is bitterness (anger turned outward). When I am preoccupied with the faults of others I will not be able to see my own sins (Matt.7:1-5). Bitterness blinds me to my own faults, which prevents me from drinking deeply of God’s grace, which in turn takes away my freedom to forgive and show grace to those around me.

3. **Identity markers** – What do I use to identify myself as a secure or significant person? position, associations, skills, money, etc. How do I want others to view me? Why? Where did I learn this? Am I trying to live up to an image that others (parents, family, coworkers, society, church, etc.) have for me?

My masks can be a significant obstacle to an internal audit of my soul. My true self is often hidden from me. I can be so committed to my image (a false self) that I am unable to recognize the image as false. *I can spend a great deal of time critiquing my image and not my true self.* I recognize a false image by sensing a lack of peace even when my circumstances and reputation suggest that I “have it all together.” Wearing a mask involves fear of exposure, anxiety in the face of “success”, and spiritual exhaustion in service. Fear, anxiety, and exhaustion should cause me to look for the mask.

4. **The use of the tongue** – How do I speak to and about others and myself? My tongue will reveal my heart. Am I “talking trash” from my soul? If I have a hard time hearing myself I might ask those who are around me for feedback about my tongue. I can ask, do I tend to speak about others or myself? Negatively, or positively? Realistically or fancifully? Truth or distortion?

As with each of the other doors, this one can also present a challenge to a good internal audit of my soul. My self-talk and my conversation can guide my mind. My tongue not only reflects my heart but also guides it. *My self-talk not only reflects my self-defense*

strategies, it reinforces them. This is one of the reasons why it is important to be committed to speaking the truth as much as possible. When I do not speak the truth I sin against the Commandment of God but I also reinforce something within myself that hinders me from knowing who I really am.

- D. **The areas of inquiry in my relationships.** Because I am a relational beings I reveal my strengths and weaknesses most dramatically in the context of my relationships.
1. **Family relationships** – What are my earliest memories? They will often be of painful experiences and key to present unresolved anger and defensive strategies. How does my family of origin deal with life? I learn how to deal with life by watching my parents and other authority figures in my early life.
 2. **Work relationships** – What are the patterns in my work relationships? How do I get along with those over me, along side me, and under my supervision? How would my coworkers describe my relationship style?
 3. **Church relationships** – What is my experience with spiritual authority and community? What adjectives would I use to describe my church relationships? Do I contribute to community or hinder it?
 4. **Community relationships** – How comfortable am I in interacting with the community in which I live? Am I enmeshed or withdrawn?
- E. **Take inventory of the soul with the help of this chart.** I start by identifying areas of concern in each of the relational spheres of my life. For example, where do I recognize painkillers in my relationship with my family? Fight or flight might be two examples of behaviors that function as painkillers in my family relationships.

	Pain killers	Anger outlets	Identity markers	Use of the tongue
Family				
Work				
Church				
Community				

F. **Three hot spots**

1. **Money** – Keeping score and feeling secure. Material things constitute one of the most powerful symbols of power, security, peace, etc. in this life. It is no surprise that when Jesus and the Apostles speak of money it is almost always with respect to what it can do to our souls over against how it can be used to help others.
2. **Sex** – Nursing the hunger of my inner self. Our relationship with the opposite sex is a very big part of my life. The way I handle these relationships says a lot not only about my about my character but also about my spiritual health.
3. **Pride** – Keeping up the image. Every inventory will bring me sooner or later to this spot. It is the root of most if not all my struggles.

G. **The goal**

1. The goal is not to build up my ego but just the opposite. I want to find out why building up my ego is so important (to me and the well being of my soul). I want to see the dark side and feel the depravity of my strategies of self-protection, spiritual autonomy, and moral rebellion.
2. Remember that the deeper I go at this step the greater the appreciation and insight in the steps that follow. If this step is shallow the steps that follow will be relatively meaningless and academic. If this step is done properly, the other steps will come more quickly and easily.
3. Take time. This is not easy nor is it meant to be fun.

H. **Time is an important part of this process.** It will take a good bit of time (months or even years) to see clearly who I am and how sin is effecting me. Even as I move onto other steps I will continue to work on this step.

I. **A suggested way to proceed.**

1. Approach the first door and or window (painkillers), mentioned above and knock. Ask the Spirit of Christ to reveal the truth to you as you inquire with the following questions as a guide. The object here is not only to stop at identifying the pain killers (which are often sinful patterns of response) but to go further and allow yourself to feel the pain which often comes from your sin or the sin of others.
 - a. (1) What are you doing to kill the pain in your life? (2) What makes you feel good in the face of boredom? (3) How do you spend your idle moments? (4) What do you think about? Why does it make you feel better? Some common pain killers are: work, ministry, eating, pornography, busyness, obsessive relationships, etc. What would make a pain killer sinful? What is sinful in your pain killer bag?
 - b. Go through each of the four areas of inquiry above, seeking clues that will lead to insights. Be especially sensitive to ways you might be avoiding sinful patterns in your life with other sinful patterns.
 - c. By tracing your pain to its roots you can learn a lot about who you are and what is really important to you. Take a particular painful area in your life and let the Spirit of God guide you back to its roots. Take your time.
 - d. This process could take several days and may be helped by talking with close friends who may uncover blind spots or ask questions that will help us know our pain.
 - e. Keep a journal of your thoughts.
 - f. At the end of this exercise study Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:1-18; I Corinthians 5. What do each of these texts reveal about the importance of pain in our lives and our impulse to kill that pain.
2. Approach the second door and or window (anger outlets), mentioned above and knock. Ask the Spirit of Christ to reveal the truth to you or convict you as you ask yourself these questions.
 - a. How do you express your anger? If you say, "I don't have anger." you may be telling yourself a lot about how you are expressing your anger, ie. repression.
 - b. How do others feel your anger? Ask them.
 - c. What tends to repeatedly upset your inner peace? Make a list of the party crashers of your soul's peace.

- d. Think about the last time you felt really angry – (bitter at someone else or guilt toward yourself)? Why did this effect you and how did you express it? Are you pleased with the way you responded? If not, how do you think you should or could have responded?
 - e. How have you hurt yourself by doing or not doing something? Is there a situation in recent memory where you wish you would have done or said something that you did not? How serious a mistake was this? How might you prevent it from happening again?
 - f. By tracing your anger to its roots you can learn a lot about your inner goals. Anger is usually the result of a blocked goal. Can you identify the goals behind specific experiences of anger that you face? Are these goals sinful or is the attachment you have made to them sinful? Spiritual rebellion is trying to protect ourselves because we do not think that God will.
 - g. This process also may take several days and may be helped by talking with close friends who may uncover blind spots or ask questions that will help us know our pain.
 - h. Keep a journal of your thoughts – especially those things that may be hardest to admit about yourself.
 - i. What do the following texts tell you about the role of anger in coming to know ourselves. Jas.4:1-6, and Eph.4:26.
3. Approach the third door and or window (identity markers), mentioned above and knock. Ask the Spirit of Christ to reveal the truth to you or convict you as you ask yourself these questions.
 - a. What gives you a sense of significance in society? Your vocation or profession? Your talent or ability? Your education or accomplishments? What has a messianic role in your life (It is the object of your self sacrifice, meditation, and preoccupation. It is the major influence on major decisions you make.) Where does this reveal sinful passions in your life?
 - b. How have you felt and responded after loosing a job, recognition, a position, etc.? Does your response uncover self-protective insecurities and sinful strategies? How would you describe the root sins that lie behind our attachments to worldly sources of identity?
 - c. What are you most afraid of loosing? Do these fears reveal sinful idols in your life? What names would you give to those idols?
 - d. Is there a person or persons who have been given the authority by you to establish your identity through their opinion of you? Is this healthy or not? Where is there sin in this matter of giving authority to others?
 - e. What is the role of our identity in Paul's argument of Rom.6-8? How does Paul suggest that we can be defeated by the way we see ourselves? In what way is our victory related to our identity with Christ and His Spirit?
 4. Approach the fourth door and or window (use of the tongue), mentioned above and knock. Ask the Spirit of Christ to reveal the truth to you or convict you as you ask yourself these questions.
 - a. How honest are you in what you report to others? How do you spin information to influence the mind and heart of others? Give some recent examples.

- b. Gossip is sharing damaging information about others when you are not a part of the problem or the solution. Keep a journal of how and when you might have gossiped this week? Do you offer a negative report about those who have hurt you or with whom you disagree? Do you feel remorse for your words? What do you do to indicate that you really are concerned about the way you talk to and about others?
- c. How do you talk to yourself when you fail? How about when you succeed? Do you rehash your failures or successes in ways that comfort or condemn you? Do you see this as sinful or not? How could self-talk be sinful? How is self-talk important to your spiritual health?
- d. When you counsel yourself, what do you say? Do you talk yourself into peace or bitterness?

5. A good Bible Study project for this step would be a careful reading of **Romans 1:1-3:20**.

J. **How will I know when I have completed this step?** At this point it is good to feel bad.

1. This step will be complete when there is a profound and deeply felt awareness of personal sin. I must not settle for identifying superficial acts of sin but also sense the roots of sin (pride, deception, selfishness, etc.)
2. I will have a successful audit of my soul when I see the mixed nature of my motives in all that I do. My genuine desire to minister to others can often be mixed with a desire to find significance in being seen as loving and good.
3. I must come to the place where I realize that I cannot manage my life at the deepest levels of my soul. This does not mean that I have no discipline but rather that my discipline is ultimately superficial and ineffectual in making me acceptable to God.
4. If I feel good about myself, I have not yet completed a full audit. It is not that I should assess all that I am and do as a failure but rather I am to see myself as very needy in the deepest parts of my soul and incapable of helping myself.
5. I should expect to feel frustrated with the flesh and even with my ability to walk in the Spirit on a consistent basis.