

BREATHING UNDER WATER: WE JOURNEY TOGETHER

Step 4: Telling the truth about ourselves.

KEY IDEA: God meets us in truth, not performance.

In this week's experience of *Breathing Under Water*, based on the 12 steps, we begin to take a "moral inventory." This can be a vulnerable experience. In a journal or in conversation with friends and family, we courageously explore some deeper truths about ourselves. It is essential in this journey of discovery to put judgment and self-protection aside and focus on truth-telling and opening ourselves up to healing, grace and transformation. If there are children in your conversation, it will be important to ensure the experience is age appropriate and that the unconditional, grace-filled love of God remains central.

In writing about this step, Father Richard Rohr mentions our "shadow self." This, he said, "is not our evil self, it is just that part of ourselves we don't want to see, our unacceptable self by reason of nature, nurture, or choice." Shadow boxing is when we begin to see, address and wrestle with this part of ourselves.

Below are three questions to consider and discuss:

1. How do you define the difference between living authentically as a child of God and the socially conditioned need to appear "perfect" or "good" to the outside world?
2. Try some "shadow boxing," which Richard Rohr says is "at the heart of all spiritual awakening." Why is shadow-boxing so important to our faith life? Is there a part of yourself that you are hesitant to fully see or address?
3. The goal of addressing our sins is not shame; the value lies in the struggle itself, facing deep truth and finding glimpses of wisdom. What is one time when you struggled to face the truth? What happened? What makes you hesitant or fearful to face some deeper truths? Can you imagine being free of that fear?

Sit in quiet contemplation for several minutes, then make a list of things that are true about yourself – the good and the bad. Consider: when have you used weakness or failure as an excuse not to move forward? How does your faith and God's unconditional love shape the making of your moral inventory?

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GO
DEEPER

In *Breathing Under Water*, Rohr writes: "Somehow, goodness is transferred by radiance, reflection, and resonance with another goodness, more than by any act of self-achievement. We do not pull ourselves up, we are pulled." This week, act as a co-conspirator with God and offer someone you care about a hand up with some reassurance, kindness, and simple goodness.

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FAITH IN
ACTION

FROM AGE TO AGE: Sharing Intergenerationally

When holding this conversation about shadow-self with children, it should be stressed that all human emotions—even the "messy" ones—are normal. It may be helpful to explain that sometimes people feel they must wear masks so that other people will like them or to help them feel like they're doing things right, and that these masks can hide who God created them to be.

Or, you might want to introduce the idea that everyone is a mixture of light and dark – and help identify and list the bright things about yourselves and the things that are in the shadows.



A helpful question might also be: "If you made a mistake today, what would it look like to forgive yourself and start fresh tomorrow?"

IN CONTEMPLATION: THE EXAMEN

Ignatius of Loyola created a spiritual discipline that dovetails with taking a moral inventory. At the end of each day, take time for reflection:

- Place yourself in God's presence. Give thanks for God's love for you.
- Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.
- Review your day — recall specific moments and your feelings at the time.
- Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away?
- Look toward tomorrow — think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God's plan. Be specific, end with the Lord's Prayer.

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