

Three Ways to Know Your Thoughts, Intentions, & Will

Part 1: Three Ways

The first step of this process of life change and spiritual transformation is *self-examination*. There are four parts or *levels* of self-examination, each of which is reflected in its own column on the Step 1 worksheets of the *BNL* process. The *first* column asks you to record things you've done or said in one or another part of your life that you're examining. The *second* column invites you to record thoughts, opinions, or beliefs that are linked to what you've done or said.

People who are new to the *BNL* process sometimes find it difficult to fill in the second column of the Step 1 worksheets—the *Thoughts* column. They discover that their underlying thoughts, opinions, or beliefs aren't readily apparent to them. If this is true for you, don't be surprised. Thoughts are often subconscious.

If your thoughts are not readily apparent to you during Step 1 of this process, there are several things you can do.¹ One is to ask God for help. The *BNL* program suggests that God is present with you all the time. In fact, there's never a time when He *isn't* present with you. What's more, the *BNL* program suggests that any time you wish to make a change in your life for the better, and you start into the process of self-examination, God is the one who actually inspires you to make that start. He's also there with you during self-examination, unveiling things to you along the way. So ask for His help to know the thoughts, opinions, or beliefs that are linked to your actions. Record any that come to mind.

Another thing you can do to become aware of your thoughts is to look over the things you've written in the *previous* column of the Step 1 worksheet—the *Actions* column. Read the things you recorded in that column a few times over, remembering your experiences of them as you do so. While you're doing this, see if any thoughts, opinions, or beliefs bubble to the surface. Record any that do.

As an example, imagine a husband who's had a nasty fight with his wife. During their fight he said that her way of doing things is stupid. So in column *one* of the self-examination worksheets he writes, "I said my wife's way of doing things is stupid." When he gets to column *two*, he isn't sure what thoughts, opinions, or beliefs are linked to his actions. So he reads what he's written in column *one* and recalls his experience of it. He does this several times over, and as he does, a thought comes to mind: "*Her way is stupid!*" He records that thought in column *two*.

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¹ This article presents three ways to become aware of your thoughts, intentions, and will during self-examination. There may be others you think of yourself.

If you try either of the above methods, and you're still having difficulty accessing your thoughts, you can try a third exercise called, *Speak with the Enemies in the Gate*.²

For this exercise, imagine you live in a big, beautiful city where God and angels dwell. You are standing in the gate of that city looking out over the landscape. It's a desert wasteland. As you look over the landscape, imagine that one or more demonic spirits appear. Imagine that *they* are the ones who've been inspiring the actions and words you're currently examining in yourself. (But don't worry, these demonic spirits can't hurt you. You are safe where you are. The gateway to the city is a "neutral zone" between all that is good and bad, healthy and unhealthy, loving and hateful, heaven and hell.)

Take a good look at these demons: What do they *look* like? What do they *sound* like? What do they *smell* like? Etc.

Next, pose any questions to the demons you might wish to ask about the issue at hand. What would you like to know from these spirits? And for purposes of this exercise, be sure to ask them what they *think*. What thoughts, opinions, or beliefs do *they* have relative to the situation at hand? What do *they* think about any of the people who are involved? Etc. Record their "responses" in column *two*, paying special attention to the ones that seem accurately to represent thoughts, opinions, or beliefs that have been present in your own mind.

These are three different ways to become aware of your thoughts during self-examination. But there's more. Each one of these methods can be used in column *three* and/or column *four* of the *BNL* process as well. Any time you have difficulty discovering your aims, plans, or intentions (column *three*) or what you would do if you could get away with it (column *four*), one or more of these methods can help—asking for God's help, reading and remembering what you've written in the *previous* column, and speaking with the enemies in the gate.

One final note: You may find these exercises to be helpful, especially when you're first getting started with the *BNL* process. As time goes by, accessing your thoughts, intentions, and what you would do if you could get away with it will become quicker and easier. But even then, there may be times when you have difficulty accessing these things. Any time you do, just return to one or more of these exercises for help.

Part 2: Discovery of "Positives" During Self-Examination

For just a minute, let's go back to the example of the husband who had a nasty fight with his wife. As part of their interaction, the husband told his wife that her way of doing things is stupid. His underlying thought was, "*Her way is stupid!*"

Well, imagine that in an *another* part of their conversation, the wife addressed her husband in a mean or hurtful way. As the husband is going through column *two*

² This method is based on the Bible, Psalm 127:5, where it is written, "They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate"; also Revelation 22:14-15.

of self-examination, one of his thoughts might be, “*She had no right to address me the way she did.*”

Notice: There may be *truth* in that thought! The wife may, in fact, have had “no right” to say what she said.

The point of this example is that not everything you discover during self-examination will be unhealthy, problematic, or dysfunctional. Some of it may be true, useful, and functional. In the present example, the husband’s thought, “*She had no right to address me the way she did,*” helps him realize one of the reasons he was upset with his wife during their conversation. It alerts him to something he may want to raise with her later on, after he’s finished processing the issue between himself and God.³

Continuing with this example, as the husband moves into column *three* of self-examination, he may discover that one of his *intentions* is simply to get his wife to stop addressing him the way she did. Then, in column *four*—the *Will* column—he may discover that he genuinely wants things to improve in their relationship. Each of these “positive” discoveries helps broaden his perspective on his own feelings and inner reactions, and it will help him in his efforts to resolve things with his wife later on.

Again, the point is that not everything you discover during self-examination will be unhealthy, problematic, or dysfunctional. Some of it may be true, useful, and functional. So let the process of self-examination unfold as it will, using any information you gather to the greatest possible benefit.

And remember: The main point of self-examination is not to discover all the *positive* thoughts, intentions, etc., that may be going on inside of you; rather, it is to uncover any harmful or destructive things that are present in one or another part of your life, and getting in the way of forward movement and progress. Self-examination helps you discover these things en route to a new and better way of life. That is its main aim and purpose.

One final thought: If you discover some of these “positives” in your thoughts, intentions, and will, and you decide to record them in the different columns of the Step 1 worksheets (along with all the negatives), you may wish to mark each of them with an asterisk. Doing this will set them apart from other things you record during self-examination. This in turn will make a final review of Step 1 more focused, efficient, and helpful later on.

³ As an aside, one way to decide what to say or not say when reconciling differences with someone is to be sure it passes three tests: Is what I’m about to say *kind*? Is it *true*? And is it *useful*? The BNL program also suggests that any communication you make will have its greatest chance for success if it is (5 things): *open, honest, complete, clear,* and above all, *kind*.