

*Note: The Rev. Caleb Kim will deliver the sermon below on Sunday, February 22, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.*

Title: Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit (Beatitude 1) – The Road to Recovery Sermon Series

Today, and over the next seven Sundays, I want us to explore a roadmap to freedom called Spiritual Recovery. This sermon series is based on the two powerful resources: the Twelve-Step program from Alcoholics Anonymous and the Eight Principles found in Jesus' Beatitudes in the Sermon of Mount.

To give you some background of the first resource, the Twelve Steps originate from the worldwide organization known as Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). This life-saving group was founded in 1935 by two men, Bill Wilson and Dr. Robert Smith, in Akron, Ohio. Both of the founding members struggled with alcoholism—also known as alcohol use disorder—and were able to recover. With the help of some early members, Bill and Bob developed a platform known as “AA’s Twelve Traditions,” with the goal of sharing these steps with others in need of recovery. In 1953, the Twelve Steps were introduced publicly, and since then, they have helped save many lives and support people in staying sober.

The second resource for our study comes from the “Celebrate Recovery” program. As far as I know, it was founded by Reverend John Baker and Rev. Rick Warren, who provided key resources for the recovery process. Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centered program that deeply connects with the Eight Beatitudes Jesus shared in the Sermon of the Mount. Over the years, Celebrate Recovery has helped countless individuals overcome their “hurts, habits, and hang-ups.” In each of the beatitudes, Jesus begins with the phrase, “Blessed are...” The word “blessed” means in Greek “happy,” so “to be blessed” means to experience true happiness. In His famous sermon, Jesus declares to His audience: “I want to show you eight ways to experience divine satisfaction.”

Before I dive into the first step of Spiritual Recovery, I would like to take a moment to share a few thoughts about this sermon series.

First, I recognize that some of you may have more knowledge of and experience with A.A.’s Twelve-Step program than others. Please understand that if my descriptions of certain principles do not fully align with how the A.A. fellowship originally intended them, I ask for your grace. My goal in exploring these steps is not only to reflect on the recovery method but also to examine them in light of the Beatitudes and view them from a godly perspective. It is also important to note that beyond A.A., many other wonderful recovery organizations are doing excellent work in this area.

Second, throughout this series, I will be discussing recovery not only in terms of overcoming various addictions but also in terms of restoring the full image of God in our lives. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned, all of humanity, as their descendants, inherited a fallen nature, which caused us to lose the full expression of God's characteristics. This fallen nature is at the root of the many forms of addiction and bondage. But what is the real cause of all our temptations and struggles? It is not simply

that we do too much of something harmful or to become addicted to a particular behavior or substance. The symptoms of addiction can also manifest in other ways—through feelings of fear, anger, hurt, frustration, rejection, shame, or guilt. These emotions are not just signs of addictions but also painful outcomes of our fallen condition. I believe that these deep-rooted issues can be healed through the supreme power of our Creator God. When our relationship with Jesus Christ is fully restored through sincere repentance and unwavering faith, our hearts can be transformed and made whole in God’s holy image.

Third, I want to define addiction more clearly. According to Wikipedia, addiction is “an obsession, compulsion, or excessive psychological dependence.” This type of dependence can take many forms in our lives: drug addiction, compulsive gambling, overeating, shopping, excessive use of online games, or unhealthy emotional patterns like chronic anger or lust. These are just a few examples. For the purpose of this sermon series, I will use the term “spiritual bondage” interchangeably with addiction. Spiritual bondage refers to “the state of being tied up or chained”—being in captivity to something that controls and dictates our actions. This concept is captured in our main text, Romans 7:14-25, which I will explain in more detail shortly.

Fourth, I would like to address the audience of this study. When we talk about addictions, many of us, myself included, may immediately think of certain people we love and care for, and we may pray for their freedom from these struggles. But I want to make it clear that this sermon series is designed for all of us, because we all have some degree of dependency on something, whether we recognize it or not. Each Sunday, we will explore one or two of the recovery steps and apply the biblical principles behind them to our own lives. And as we do, we will be equipped to share these lessons with those around us. My prayer is that through this study, God will give us a deeper understanding of the recovery process and help us become more like Jesus, restoring His full image within our hearts.

With those four observations in mind, I would like to begin today by defining addiction from a spiritual perspective. As I briefly mentioned earlier, we can find this definition in our Epistle for today. The Apostle Paul wrote many letters in the New Testament, and this particular epistle is especially powerful for the Roman believers.

Paul was highly educated in religious matters, trained to be a spiritual elite known as a Pharisee. One of the titles he held was “a Hebrew of Hebrews.” This expression, I believe, is similar to someone being named “Hero or Heroine of the Year” because of their exceptional dedication to their community. Paul, in particular, was “eager for righteousness based on the law” (Philippians 3:6). As a Pharisee and godly leader, he knew many sacred principles, applied them in his daily life, and sought to be righteous before God. To the outward eye, he appeared nearly perfect—but, like all of us, he had his own struggles.

Now, I want us to consider Paul’s words in today’s scripture. He says, “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:18-19). Does Paul’s struggle sound familiar to the experience of addiction? He also confesses, “I do not understand

what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15). And then, in desperation, Paul cries out: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (Romans 7:24).

Can we relate to his desperation? Why do Paul’s words in this text so accurately mirror the struggle within our own hearts? When I first read this part of Romans, I thought it only applied to those who did not have a relationship with Christ. I assumed Paul’s words were not relevant to me anymore, because I am a follower of Christ. But as I reflected on this scripture prayerfully, I realized that Paul’s internal battle described my own—the ongoing conflict of being a sinner who still needs God’s grace and forgiveness in my journey of faith.

In this passage, Paul is clearly describing spiritual bondage, or what we call “sin.” He uses the image of slavery to reveal the grip sin has on him: “I am unspiritual” and “I am sold as a slave to sin” (Romans 7:14). I believe that Paul tried to walk away from some of his sinful habits, but he found himself repeatedly falling back into them. Does that sound familiar?

Once again, let’s define addiction through Paul’s words: addiction is “sin”—spiritual bondage. Like Paul, you and I must admit that, without the help of the Lord, we can still be enslaved to sin, even after accepting Christ as our Savior. We may need to cry out to God, asking Him to rescue us from these strongholds. On our own, we cannot overcome our sinful nature. Left to our own power, we will only get deeper into various forms of addiction, because sin has such a deceitful attraction and negative influence on us. This is why Paul’s words in Romans lead us to reflect on the first step of Spiritual Recovery.

As the first principle of A.A. states, “We admitted that we were powerless over our problems—that our lives had become unmanageable.” In a similar way, Jesus shares a method in the first Beatitude that mirrors the first step of AA. He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). According to Jesus, God’s first blessing is given to those who are poor in spirit.

Please understand, Jesus is not referring to physical poverty. He is talking about spiritual poverty, in other words, recognizing our helplessness and hopelessness. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we don’t often think of ourselves as poor, or powerless, in a spiritual sense. I believe many of us often feel we are rich in spirit, especially because we think we have served the Lord for many years and diligently followed His direction. Yet, the more we grow in our understanding of God, the more we realize how spiritually poor we truly are in comprehending His greatness and holiness.

One major huddle I have noticed in people who struggle with addiction—including myself—is denial. There are two common excuses I often hear. The first is “I can stop anytime I want.” People confidently claim they can stop their behavior whenever they choose. The second defense is, “Others are far worse than me.” People compare themselves to others who they believe are doing worse. But here is the truth: addiction cannot be measured by comparison. Someone once said, “At the beginning, we drink alcohol. However, if we

keep drinking, alcohol drinks us.” Once we are exposed to harmful things, it becomes incredibly difficult to let go.

Do we know what the biggest enemy is when it comes to spiritual recovery? The biggest enemy is often ourselves. If we are honest, we must recognize our helplessness through the lens of God’s mercy. Deception and denial are the primary obstacles we need to overcome. If we don’t admit that we are powerless over any form of dependency except for the power of God, we will remain stuck. Without acknowledging our hopelessness, we cannot move forward to the next steps of recovery. So, this morning, I want us to cultivate the spirit of being poor in spirit.

Once again, to be poor in spirit is to begin with this humble confession: “I must admit that I need help.” Whether we realize it or not, we live in a broken world. In a fallen world, nothing works perfectly. Everything is broken. Have you ever noticed that even our bodies don’t work perfectly? I know I’ve felt that way on many occasions. Everything seems to be broken. We have been broken by sin—both the sin we have committed against God and the sin others have committed against us. So, how much we are broken doesn’t really matter. The truth is, we are all broken in some way or another. And we are all in the same boat. No one is perfect.

Friends, we all have things in us that we don’t like. I am not just talking about the things that God doesn’t like; I am talking about things in our own lives that we don’t even like about ourselves. Let me ask you a question: Do you know the difference between a rotten potato and a decayed avocado? Here is the point: Some of us think, “I don’t need recovery because my rottenness doesn’t stink.” We assume that just because our rottenness doesn’t smell, we are fine. But just because we can hide it doesn’t mean we are not rotten inside.

I remember attending an interesting healing conference some years ago. The first things I saw when I walked in were plastic bats and mattresses in the hallway. I didn’t understand what they were for at first. Later, the host pastor explained their purpose. The program had two parts: counseling and hitting the mattress with the plastic bat. Before anyone was invited to hit the mattress, the counselor encouraged them to remember painful moments from their past and to express their emotions freely. Some people cried as they shared their stories. Some hit the mattress with the plastic bats. Others stomped on it, shouting, cursing, and even rebuking it until they were exhausted.

I believe that revealing our most painful emotions honestly—whether related to bitterness, resentment, revenge, anger, hate, or other deep hurts—is an initial part of the healing processes. Through this personal expression and acknowledgment, we begin to admit that we are powerless over those issues. That is why I believe, in many recovery meetings, participants introduce themselves as an addicted person.

Friends, “what is unhealthy or out of balance in our lives?” Jesus invites each of us today to take these twelve steps to get healthy again. What needs to change in our lives? God wants us to experience relief, release, and freedom. Are we willing to be honest with

ourselves and recognize our situation? Can we admit that we cannot fix our issues on our own and confess to God that we need His help? Are we ready to say, “I am tired of repeating the same mistakes, living with the same “hurts, habits, or hang-ups” that have weighted me down for years?”

No matter how hard we try, we are powerless to change these things with our own willpower. All we need to do is swallow our pride, let go of our self-confidence, and humbly admit that we need God. We cannot do this ourselves. Only through the power of God can we truly recover and be freed from the addictions that are holding us down.

I love how Jesus expresses this in the First Beatitude. The first half is God’s principle: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and the second half is God’s blessing: “For the kingdom of God is theirs” (Matthew 5:3). Isn’t that a beautiful promise? If someone were to ask me why I believe in God, follow Jesus Christ, and rely on the Holy Spirit every day, I would answer without hesitation: “I want to go to Heaven!” Not just here on earth, but also in heaven when I am called to be with the Lord. I want to continue experiencing God’s kingdom. Being poor in spirit is the starting point—the foundation for all the other principles in the Beatitudes.

As someone once said, the Beatitudes refers to the beautiful attitudes we should have toward God. Those who admit, “I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable” or those who realize, “I’m not God, I need help from God,” will experience God’s happiness and blessing in their lives.

Would you be willing to take the first step today?

*\*In this sermon series, I have drawn from the Twelve Steps of A.A. and insights from Rick Warren and his staff, who prepared the “Life’s Healing Choices” sermons.*