

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

Title: Beatitude 4—Coming Clean (The Housecleaning Choice)

– The Road to Recovery Sermon Series

Today is the fourth session of our eight-week sermon series, The Road to Recovery, based on the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and the eight sacred principles found in Jesus' Beatitudes. Each Sunday, we explore one or two recovery steps and consider how to apply them to our lives from a spiritual perspective. Both A.A.'s twelve steps and Jesus' Beatitudes offer powerful guidance, not only for those recovering from addiction but for anyone seeking a meaningful and righteous life in the Lord.

Before we move forward, let us take a moment to review what we have learned so far. We can summarize the first three steps of A.A. and Jesus' Beatitudes with three simple phrases: "I can't," "God can," and "Let Him."

The first step is "I can't," which we call the Reality Choice. Based on Jesus's first Beatitude—Blessed are the poor in spirit—we confront our spiritual poverty and acknowledge that we are hopeless over certain areas of our lives. The first A.A. step states, "We admitted that we were powerless over our problems, that our lives had become unmanageable." In other words, "I can't."

The second step is "God can," which we call the Hope Choice. Alongside Jesus' second Beatitude—Blessed are those who mourn—we are reminded that even in our helplessness, God has supreme power and can restore us from any form of spiritual bondage. A.A.'s step two says, "[We] came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." In other words, "God can."

The third step is "Let him," which we call the Commitment Choice. Supported by Jesus' third Beatitude—Blessed are the meek—we surrender ourselves to God, turning every part of our lives over to His care. And this is not a one-time decision; it is something we do continually, every day. The third A.A. principle states: "[We] made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." In other words, "Let Him."

As we work through the first three steps of recovery, we eventually ask, "How can we let God make the changes in our lives?" In other words, how do we allow God to renovate us—to transform us "from the inside out"? This question leads us to the fourth choice.

Today, I want us to explore a choice that can be the toughest of all the Life's Healing Choices—what I call the Housecleaning Choice. Jesus speaks of this in His fourth Beatitude: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). Do we truly want to have a pure heart? Do we want to see God at work in our lives—in our families, our homes, our businesses, and our relationships? Do we want to experience God's presence and enjoy freedom in these areas? If the answer is yes, then we must be willing to examine our hearts and honestly admit our faults or wrongs to ourselves, to God, and to those we love and trust. To fully restore God's image in our hearts, we need to carefully

follow the principles behind A.A.'s Steps Four and Five, often called "Moral Inventory and Confession."

A.A. Step Four says, "[We] made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." Now, what exactly is an inventory? The Free Dictionary defines it as "a detailed, itemized list... of things in one's possession." Think about it: when someone takes over a new business, they carefully count everything in the stores and warehouses at that moment. Without an accurate inventory, the business cannot operate properly or succeed. In the same way, as A.A.'s fourth step calls us to examine our moral status, the Psalmist in today's Psalm calls us to examine ourselves before God in prayer: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me..." (Psalm 139:23-24).

Like the Psalmist's prayer, we need the courage to make a spiritual inventory of our lives, "both outside and inside" before God. If we want to overcome our spiritual bondage, we must remember this: whatever patterns or struggles weigh us down did not form overnight. As the popular saying goes: "Rome was not built in a day." In the same way, many of our problems have accumulated over the years. This is why honest self-examination is so important. We need to look carefully at the background of our struggles and understand how they have developed from some previous point until today.

A.A.'s fourth step also calls for a "fearless" evaluation on our spiritual journey. Now, being "fearless" does not mean that we will have no feelings of fear. Some of us may feel shame or embarrassment as we begin to look back at painful experiences from our past. At times, we may even want to avoid those memories altogether. Being honest about our spiritual bondage can make us frustrated or even terrified. And the truth is, we probably will not be able to deal with everything all at once. This kind of spiritual inventory is often an ongoing, open-ended process. That is why this self-moral inventory requires time, patience, and prayer. In many ways, this process is like looking closely at ourselves in a bathroom mirror. Personally, I do not always enjoy standing in front of a magnifying mirror, because it clearly reveals every wrinkle and every sign of aging on my skin.

As we recall the stories of our lives from childhood up to the present, we may experience several different responses. First, we may find reasons to thank God and appreciate Him even more for the strengths He has given us. Second, we may begin to recognize our weaknesses. We may see what has kept us in bondage and where we have gone wrong over the years. Third, we may discover the negative influence of behaviors that have been passed down through our families. A couple of years ago I preached a sermon series on the topic of "generational curses." The Bible presents two different perspectives on this subject. Some believe that there is no connection between our ancestors' failures and our personal responsibility. According to this view, individuals are accountable only for what they themselves have done. Others believe that the consequences of our ancestors' sins can continue to affect future generations. Even though those ancestors may be gone, certain patterns of weakness can still linger among their descendants. If we take this second perspective and begin to reflect on our family history, we have two possible reactions.

The first reaction is to blame our ancestors for passing down something dysfunctional. It is understandable to feel anger or frustration when we recognize generational brokenness. But there is a second option—and this is the one I encourage all of us to choose. Instead of using our ancestors' background as an excuse for our wrong choices, we can become new models for those who come after us. With the Lord's help, we can be pioneers who break unhealthy cycles in our families. We can begin something better—something healthy and faithful—and pass that legacy on to future generations.

Another thing we may encounter by looking back on the stories of our lives is a sense of guilt. In today's epistle, the Apostle Paul clearly explains the difference between repentance and guilt. In his day, Paul was one of the greatest preachers, and he repeatedly called the believers in Corinth to purify themselves from anything that contaminates body and spirit. We can imagine how guilty the believers might have felt as they heard his powerful message. Guilt has a way of keeping us stuck in the past. It can prevent us from moving forward with confidence and courage. When I think about this, I am reminded of an interesting story about guilt...

If we want to truly enjoy life, we must learn how to handle our shortcomings in a healthy way. That is why Paul shows us a better path in his letter: "Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance... Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:8-10). Spiritual mourning—our honest inventory of the heart—is a great blessing from God. It leads us to repentance, opens the door to His forgiveness, and sets us free to live in His grace.

As I reflect on this part of Scripture, I am reminded anew that in Christ Jesus, "the love-hate relationships" we may have with certain addictive behaviors or destructive habits can be resolved. As I have mentioned before, all of us—as sinners—have, in one way or another, some form of addiction. When we look at the root of the hopeless and helpless situations we face, we may realize that, to some degree, we do not truly want to give them up. Even when we dislike the consequences of certain behaviors, at some level, we do not want to completely turn away from them. Until we humbly examine these issues in our hearts and honestly repent of our sinful tendencies, these struggles will remain hidden, yet they will continue to negatively impact our lives. However, when we begin to take a sincere and truthful spiritual inventory of ourselves and place it in God's care, we can experience true freedom from spiritual bondage.

The fifth step of A.A. states, "[We] admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." This step is often called "Confession." Some of us may have heard the familiar introduction used in A.A. meetings: "Hello, my name is... I'm an alcoholic." After introducing themselves this way, participants often share their stories, their struggles with addiction, and how they are finding a solution. One quotation from A.A. that has greatly inspired me is: "You are only as sick as your secrets." Confession, whether public or private, involves revealing our secrets, our spiritual bondage, our sinful tendencies—to God, to ourselves, and to other human beings.

As Protestant Christians, we sometimes think of confession as something that belongs only to the Catholic tradition. We emphasize that God alone forgives, so we tend to confess our sins individually before Him. This is true: Jesus Christ is indeed the only Mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). At the same time, Scripture also encourages confession to others. The Apostle James says, “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). This shows us that confession is not just a Catholic practice.

When we find trusted people and share our real struggles with them, we can experience profound peace, relief, joy, and love—emotions that secrecy and shame often prevent us from feeling. Someone once said, “Modern society has lost a sense of sin.” I could not agree more. That is why, to some degree, I appreciate the Catholic practice of private confession to a priest. Please understand this clearly: the Bible does not say that confessing to human beings—whether priests, ministers, or elders—is required for forgiveness. God alone forgives all our sins—past, present, and future—when we repent and believe in Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life for this very purpose.

In today’s Gospel, we see the importance of confession in the story of Jesus healing the daughter of a synagogue leader named Jairus. A huge crowd was following Jesus that day, and among them was a woman who had suffered from a serious illness for twelve long years. She had sought countless treatments and remedies from doctors, but nothing helped—her condition only worsened. She became desperate and helpless. Can we relate to that kind of desperation? I would like to think that, by God’s grace, she had been encouraged to come to Jesus, the ultimate source of healing.

Surrounded by a crowd, she did something remarkable. By faith, she reached out and touched Jesus’ clothes, believing that His power was greater than any human ability. And indeed, her faith brought healing. Jesus felt that power flow from Him and looked around to see who had been healed. Then, the woman came forward and told Him the whole truth. She may have introduced herself not only to Jesus but also to the crowd, saying something like: “My name is so and so, and I have suffered from this sickness for twelve years.” She might have shared the full story of her journey to recovery, including her long inward battle, through faith in Jesus Christ. When she finally confessed, Jesus said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” (Mark 5:34). We can imagine how terrifying that must have been for her. As a woman in her culture, the illness she had struggled with for so long would have been deeply shameful, and she may not have wanted anyone else to know. Yet, despite her fear, she stepped forward in faith and courageously confessed her problem.

Once again, I want to remind you that the audience of this series is not only people who are in recovery, but all of us as sinners, because every one of us is broken in some area of our lives. Every one of us has our own struggles, and we often do not want others to know what they are. It is perfectly okay if we do not share them with everyone. But we must bring our deepest and most hopeless problems to our Highest Priest, Jesus Christ, and to our Wonderful Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, who knows and sees everything about us. It can be very painful to examine our spiritual inventory and confess it before the Lord our Creator. Yet it is in this honest confession that true healing begins.

According to the Book of Revelation, there are two kinds of books before God's throne (Revelation 20:11-15). The first is called "the Book of Life." If our names are written in that book, we will enjoy eternal life with the Lord in Heaven. The other book contains the record of everything we have done in this world. Our spiritual bondage or sin may be recorded there. The author of Revelation gives us this warning: anyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life will be "thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14). That is why it is so important for us to deal with our spiritual inventory in a godly manner. Whether we like it or not, God's appointed day for our spiritual accounting is coming, and no one will be able to escape it. Scripture says, "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Before Soon Hwa and I leave for vacation, we have a little ritual. We call it cleaning the house—just in case something happens and someone has to come into our home and go through our things... One of the main reasons we do is to make sure that nothing is left that might embarrass us if someone had to enter our home. And besides that, it is always nice to come home to a clean house. Likewise, it is important for us to keep our hearts pure before God, because we do not know when we will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The good news is God did not wait for us to clean up our wrongs first. "While we were sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The only way to have a pure heart is through the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross for our sins. Even though we are invited to examine our hearts and confess our sins before Christ, purity of heart is ultimately a gift of God's grace. We cannot earn it on our own. The only way to receive a pure heart is to surrender to Christ through sincere repentance and genuine faith. God knows everything about us. He knows that we do not want spiritual bondage in our lives. He knows that we want to be freed from the strongholds that bind us. He knows that we truly desire Him to purify our hearts and to give us real freedom. And as He does, we will begin to see God at work in and through our lives, as He forms the character of Christ within us.

Once again, we need to remember that this does not happen overnight. It is an ongoing process. We are called to surrender ourselves to God until the day we are called to be with Him. And we have a role to play throughout this lifelong journey. As we have learned, our role is to evaluate what we are doing and examine our lives through the Word of God regularly, and to cooperate with Him by sincerely confessing our wrongs whenever we fail—asking for His forgiveness and His strength. If we fall down in the process, we need to get back up. If we fall down again, we need to get back up again. And if we fall down yet again, we need to get back up once more. That is what we must keep doing. We ask God to help us stand up again and continue moving forward in the direction He has shown us.

When we fail, when we sin, when we fall—confess it, repent, and move forward. Please do not misunderstand me: God is not soft on sin. He does not simply say, "No big deal" when we sin. It is a big deal. God hates sin. That is why Jesus had to die for us. But here is the good news: God hates sin, but He loves sinners. He loves us and promises to forgive us and to make our hearts pure. That is a critical reason why Christ wants us to continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), which leads

us to the next step in our spiritual recovery: Sanctification or Renovation. So come to Jesus just as we are. Repent of your sins and receive His forgiveness and receive the strength to stand up and keep moving forward. This is the foundation of the fourth Life's Healing choice in our spiritual recovery—the Housecleaning Choice: examining our hearts and confessing our sins.

I am aware that some of us, including myself, are living with painful memories: things we have experienced ourselves or things our loved ones have experienced. Some of these things may even still be happening in our lives or in the lives of those we love. There are some of us—again, myself included—who may have come to the conclusion that it is simply too late for us or for our loved ones. We have tried over and over again to become free from something—old patterns of thinking, destructive behaviors, or long-standing hang-ups. We have cleaned things up, only to fail again and again. At times we may even think, “These recovery steps may work for other people, but they no longer work for me. It is just too late.”

But this morning, the Lord Jesus Christ is here to tell each one of us: it is never too late. If we examine ourselves and place our spiritual bondage—our sin—into God's hands, He who is faithful and just will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). When we confess our sins to God and truly repent, the blood of Jesus erases the ugly records of our spiritual bondage from the books and restores God's beautiful and holy image within our hearts.

To conclude, we need to ask one last question of ourselves: “Why should we care about Jesus' Fourth Beatitude?” In other words, why does this beautiful attitude toward God matter to us today? Jesus promises that those who desire a pure heart in spirit will see God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in their daily journey. We can and will understand God's will in whatever circumstances we face. We can and will find God's wisdom in the challenging situations of life. We can and will experience God's heavenly joy in our hearts. And one day, when we are called to be with Him, we will be welcomed into the presence of God—into His Kingdom. Amen.

**In preparing this sermon series, I have drawn on materials and insights from various ministers, particularly those related to the Twelve Steps of A.A. as well as the “Life's Healing Choices” series prepared by Rick Warren and his team.*