

Note: The Rev. Caleb Kim will deliver the sermon below on Sunday, April 26, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's, Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: Beatitude 7–Maintaining Momentum (The Growth Choice)

– The Road to Recovery Sermon Series

Today we continue our sermon series, “The Road to Recovery,” based on the Beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the Twelve Steps from Alcoholics Anonymous. Each Sunday, we explore one or two of A.A.’s recovery steps alongside a Beatitude and apply both to our spiritual recovery. So far, we have focused on the first nine steps of A.A.

Some of us may feel that we are almost at the end of our recovery and just need to take a few more steps. In a sense, that may be true. We must continue practicing the steps we have learned in our walk with God. At the same time, we must remember that this Twelve-Step program is not merely a course to complete in order to receive a certificate. The ultimate goal of these steps is to bring ourselves fully under the lordship of Christ. Jesus is not a means to fulfill our own agenda; He is the center of the entire journey toward spiritual freedom. These twelve principles of recovery are “not a self-centered program but a Christ-centered way of life,” offering spiritual guidance that we apply to the challenges of our daily lives until we finish our spiritual race.

As I have mentioned before, A.A.’s Twelve-Step Recovery program can be compared to a reformation project. Through this spiritual training, our old self is transformed into a new self and restored to the full image of God. This is why these principles can be divided into three stages: acknowledgment, renovation, and maintenance.

I once read an interesting story about a pet store delivery truck driver... After reading this story, I thought, “This sounds like a picture of life.” As I have stated before, we as human beings all have messy areas in our lives. In one way or another, each of us struggles with shortcomings. Sometimes we must keep part of our minds alert just to prevent our spiritual bondages from crashing down.

So far, we have learned that to begin our recovery from spiritual strongholds, we must first humble ourselves. Step One through Step Four of A.A. focus on admitting our helplessness and understanding our addictions. Steps Five through Nine involve renovating our minds with the help of Christ. On a regular basis, we are called to take an honest moral and spiritual inventory of ourselves, ask God to remove our weaknesses, and make amends to those we have harmed whenever possible. The final stage of the A.A. program is the maintenance—the ongoing care and practice needed to preserve the results of our spiritual renovation.

The main idea of today’s message, in connection with the principle of maintenance, is “The Growth Choice.” This morning, we will focus on Steps Ten and Eleven of A.A., alongside Jesus’ Seventh Beatitude: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthews 5:6), and explore how these principles guide us in our spiritual recovery.

A.A.'s Step Ten states: "We continue to take personal inventory, and when we are wrong, promptly admit it." Does that sound familiar? We have already done some inventory work before. However, this inventory is somewhat different from the previous one. The first type of inventory, reflected in A.A.'s Step Five, invites us to look back over our life stories from childhood to the present. It is broad in scope, covering a wide range of experiences over long periods of time. The second type of inventory, related to Step Ten, is more specific and focused on the issues we face today. It is an ongoing, continuous process of self-examination. This process can be compared to looking closely at ourselves in a mirror. By God's power, during our time of devotion, we can continue taking personal inventory and see the truth about ourselves—both the strengths and the areas where we need growth.

In our Gospel reading today, I believe Peter was invited to take a personal inventory through the repeated question of Jesus Christ (John 21:15-19). The question was simple: "Peter, do you love me?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." When Jesus asked the same question for the third time, I believe Peter must have paused to reflect on why it was being repeated. In that moment, he took a personal inventory of his spiritual journey.

Peter was one of the three closest disciples. For example, he was present when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. He may even have considered himself a leading successor in Jesus' ministry. Before Jesus was arrested, He told the disciples more than once that He would be going somewhere they could not follow. At that time, Peter responded, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37). Yet, three times, Peter denied that he was one of Jesus' disciples. When the rooster crowed, he realized how weak he truly was, and he wept bitterly.

Later, in that conversation with Jesus by the shore, Peter humbly examined his journey of faith. He made an honest confession—that Jesus knew everything about him, including how deeply he loved his Lord. Peter began to realize that how helpless he had been without the help of the Lord and that he could do nothing on his own. This became a turning point in his life—a moment when he learned to rely completely on the power of Christ. Peter approached Jesus, who knew him fully, seeking not only forgiveness but also the courage and strength needed to carry out God's mission in the days ahead.

Later, through the power of the Holy Spirit, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a great crowd and delivered a powerful message. When the people heard his words, they were "cut to the heart" and repented of their sins (Acts 2:37).

We can imagine that, when Peter was asked the same question again and again, he might have felt embarrassed, recalling memories he would rather forget. Many of us can relate to that sense of vulnerability when we take a personal inventory of our spiritual journey before God. As I mentioned earlier, this kind of spiritual inventory needs to be practiced regularly. What we learn from Jesus' conversation with Peter on the beach is crucial: Jesus did not intend to shame Peter with His repeated questions. Instead, He

wanted Peter to keep examining his heart, to face his shortcomings honestly, and to rely fully on the power of the Lord.

Whether we like it or not, some of our struggles—our addictions or harmful habits—can return repeatedly. People may relapse in their recovery, fall back into self-defeating behaviours, or return to places of temptation. “The alcoholic goes back to drinking; the overeater regains the weight; the gambler returns to the casino; the workaholic fills up their schedule again.” As sinners, it is easy to slip back into destructive lifestyles if we do not carefully guard our minds.

One major reason we fall back, even when we know the right course, is our compromising attitude toward our struggles and our pride. At the beginning of recovery, we humble ourselves before God, desperately asking for His power, grace, and guidance. But once things seem better or more under control, we can begin to give ourselves too much credit. “Now I am doing better at the start of my recovery. God has forgiven my shortcomings, so He will pardon me again. I am making these changes because of my dedication.” In a way, this is partly true. Yet, our initial humility often disappears. Pride can lead us back into risky behaviours, bringing trouble. The Bible warns us against this: “Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3).

I strongly believe that the crucial time in recovery is not when we complete all the steps, but when we face temptation and risk slipping back into old patterns—whether partially or completely. What truly matters is whether we will take a personal inventory, admit our failings, and turn away from returning to spiritual bondage.

This brings us to next key guidance for maintaining our spiritual recovery. Let me read Step Eleven of A.A. to you: “We seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.” One phrase I want to highlight is “our conscious contact with God.” Some of us may recall Step Three of A.A., which states, “turn our will... over to ... God as we understood Him.” As Christians, we sometimes think that God can make us godly instantly if we simply pray, “God, make me holy!” We may expect that holiness will be poured into our minds immediately. Of course, our mighty God can act in mysterious ways if He chooses. But most of the time, God calls us to do our part while He works in His.

Someone once said, “There is a price to godliness, and godliness is never on sale.” We are called to actively work out in our own lives, yet we must remember that the strength to change comes from God. There is no magic pill to renew our minds instantly. To overcome our old habits, we must continue taking personal inventory before God and intentionally put new, godly practices into our hearts. Without cultivating an intimate relationship with the greater power, we call, God, we cannot truly understand His will or carry it out faithfully in our journey of faith.

Our Psalm for today gives us a beautiful example of conscious contact with Almighty God. The Psalmist says in verse 2: “Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the

Lord, and who meditates on His law day and night.” Here, he emphasizes the importance of meditation. Meditation is a key tool for maintaining our recovery. The word “meditate” conveys the idea of fully digesting something. In fact, it can be compared to how cows chew their food repeatedly until it is fully nourished and absorbed. The Psalmist also highlights how often we should meditate on God’s Word by adding the phrase “day and night.” He encourages us to meditate on the Word continually—“all the time,” or “anytime.” A practical way to do this might be to open the Bible at the beginning and end of each day. In this way, we start and finish our day on the right path. Since our minds are spiritual battlefields between God and evil, investing time, energy, and effort in meditation is truly valuable.

Our enemy Satan, the Liar, has three favorite tools: “noise, crowds, and hurry.” He uses these to distract us, disrupts our quiet time, and weaken our relationship with Jesus. Think of King David, the author of many Psalms, including today’s. Despite a busy schedule filled with many responsibilities, David made time to meet with God. Even in the middle of the night, he would rise to read the Holy Word. On behalf of all people, he asks: “How can a young person stay on the path of purity?” (Psalm 119:9) Whether young or old, we face the same challenge: how can we live holy in this ungodly world? David’s answer is simple and powerful: “By living according to the Word of God.” He declared, “I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11). God’s Word gives us the strength to overcome sinful desires.

There is a modern term from technology called “GIGO,” which stands for “Garbage In, Garbage Out.” It captures a fundamental truth: “the quality of input determines the quality of output.” The same principle applies to our minds. What we put into our minds shapes what comes out. That is why, in our epistle for today (Philippians 4:8-9), the Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of what we hear, see, and read in our daily lives. We cannot overcome sinful patterns in our minds on our own. The only way to transform our thoughts is to fill our hearts with what is true, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and trustworthy. These virtues come from the Word of God. When we meditate on His Word, our thoughts are transformed into godly desires, and those desires gradually shape us to reflect more of God’s image.

Now, there is a second tool that the Bible highlights as essential for maintaining our spiritual recovery: prayer. The Big Book of A.A. provides guidance on this. As far as I know, many A.A. members regard the Big Book as their spiritual guide—much like the Bible. Through the principles in this book, countless men and women have found recovery from alcoholism. The Big Book recommends three types of prayer: “Morning, Night and Check-in.” Members are encouraged to “start the day with an act of surrender,” to “review the day, and resolve to make any wrongs right” and to “check in with God through the day as needed.” This approach closely mirrors what the Apostle Paul advises in our epistle for today: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6). Prayer is not just a ritual; it is a vital tool for maintaining our recovery.

How are we doing with our New Year's resolutions? Some of us might say, "I've already broken them, and now I don't even remember what they were!" We often justify our failures because of human limitations. In a sense, that is understandable—we cannot achieve perfection on our own. Yet we should not use this as an excuse to relapse or fall back into old habits. When we trust in the Lord and bring our lives to Him in prayer, He continues to provide the strength, endurance, and wisdom we need to maintain our recovery. Our spiritual race is ongoing. It is never too late to rise, recommit, and move forward in the race set before us.

Someone once said, "Spiritual growth is a choice. Spiritual growth is intentional." We must actively choose to continue growing. As I mentioned earlier, there is no quick fix for our spiritual bondage, and no instant way to transform our minds and hearts completely. The shortcomings we want to overcome have developed over the course of our lifetime. To address these weaknesses, we need to strengthen our conscious contact with our higher power—the Lord Almighty—through the intimate fellowship of prayer. This is a new habit we must build over the course of our lives. Our pattern of recovery depends on our desire to know God and live in a closer fellowship with Him than before.

To keep growing, we need to focus on our goals, not our habits. By "habit," I mean those habits, hurts, hang-ups, sins, weaknesses, and failures—the things in our lives that we don't like. What I am saying is this: if we want to grow, we have to focus on what we do want, not what we don't want. Why is this so important? There is a natural pull toward whatever we focus on. Obviously, we don't move toward things that don't have our attention. So, we must intentionally direct our attention toward good things, not bad things. We have to change our minds.

When I was a little kid, my mom loved to make desserts... This story illustrates the point: whatever we focus on, we move toward. If we focus on the wrong things, we end up moving in that direction. Whatever we want to change in our lives, we must first focus on the good we do want.

Friends! Our past is past. It may influence us, but it does not define us. We are not our past—it is over. What matters today is not where we have been, but the direction our feet are headed right now. This is exactly what Paul expresses in Philippians: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12). Did you notice how he continues in the following verses? "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

As we enter this Spring season, let us ask ourselves: "What growth have we recently seen in our lives?" God wants us to challenge ourselves to grow in maturity in Christ. As we approach the conclusion of A.A. Twelve Steps, we have spent much time looking back. Now, in focusing on maintaining our recovery, we need a renewed spiritual desire to move forward along the path God intends for us.

Part of this journey is experiencing God's constant presence with us. Hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness, as expressed in Jesus' seventh Beatitude—as I have often emphasized, is not a one-time act— but a continual, lifelong process. God's invitation is always personal. So, why not dedicate our whole hearts to God's righteousness, just as the deer pants for streams of water (Psalm 42:1)? When we meditate the Word of God, pray to Him, and cultivate a sincere desire to grow into His image, we are practicing conscious contact with our Higher Power. In doing so, God not only helps us understand His will, but also empowers us to carry it out faithfully in our spiritual journey.

**In this sermon series, I have drawn from various A.A. Twelve-Step sermons, based on the texts, Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:9-16; John 21:15-19; Philippians 3:12-14; 4:4-9; Matthew 5:6, as well as and insights from Rick Warren and his team, who prepared the "Life's Healing Choices" sermons.*