

Pastor Jeff Williams
w/ Trishaa Krause
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“Road to Recovery” Part 4 – “Coming Clean”

We are on a series called the Road to Recovery, and this is Part 4. We’ve talked about three steps in the last three weeks. The first one was to realize *I’m not God. I admit that I’m Powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing, and my life is at times unmanageable.* Step #2 was *earnestly believe God exists* and that I matter to Him, that He has the power to help me recover. We’re taking each letter in the word “Recovery” and tying it to one of our steps. Last week “C” was to *consciously choose to commit all of my life and will to Christ’s care and control.*

This morning, we focus on Step #4. “O” is *Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone else.*

In the Book of Psalms, Chapter 32, Verse 1-2, there’s a scripture that has been very helpful to many people. It says, “The truth says blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him, and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

So the scripture says if you want to be blessed in life, you’ll work these steps. If you want to know serenity, if you want to know peace, if you want to live a life free from guilt, you will work this step. This is the step, Step #4, that decides whether you are serious about recovery or not. This is the one that decides whether you’re just talking about it or whether you really want to be healed, whether you really want to remove guilt from your life because guilt is a devastating thing in people’s lives. Guilt over resentments; guilts over hurts; guilts over things that we’ve done in the past; guilt destroys lives.

Guilt destroys confidence. It’s hard to be a confident person, to feel good about yourself, when you’ve got this cloud of guilt over your head, when you feel like there are things that are unforgiven, that are unconfessed. Those secrets are there, and if anybody finds out about those secrets, “Oh boy. I’m in trouble.” So we carry around that guilt with us.

The writer of the Sherlock Holmes series once did a practical joke, a little prank, on some people of Notoriety of England. He sent five men, five prominent men in England, a letter. The letter was an anonymous letter, and it said this: “All is found out, flee immediately.” He didn’t sign it. He sent it to five of these men. They opened up the letter, and it said, “All is found out. Flee immediately.” Within 24 hours, all five men were out of the country (laughs).

What would you do if you got a letter like that tomorrow morning? Maybe I’ll send a couple just to see because I know where you live. You open it up, and the letter says, “All is found out. Leave immediately.” Or somebody says, “I really have something I need to talk to you about. Let’s meet on Tuesday.” Your mind just goes. Remember the commercial on TV for milk? The guy is drinking his milk, and his wife says, “Okay. The cat’s out of the bag, I know about it.”

He’s thinking, “What? You know that your wedding ring is fake?...” He starts to confess all these things.

She says, “No, you drank the last of the milk.”

After he's confessed all these sins, right?

So, that kind of guilt just steals our confidence. Guilt damages our relationships. It makes us respond to people in wrong ways.

Have you ever received a nuclear reaction response from somebody to a question that should have brought nowhere near that kind of trigger-reaction? You know there's something more beyond the surface. You know there's more. I'm the recipient of something here that goes much deeper than what'd you'd been talking about or experiencing.

Guilt keeps me stuck in the past. As long as those issues are unresolved, I am stuck in the past. You say, "Well, I just want to bury it. I want to move on." You know what? It's hard to bury something that's alive. It's hard to drive a car when you're always looking in the rearview mirror. It's hard to go through life if you're always looking in the rearview mirror, always looking in the past: unresolved matters, carrying that guilt around you.

I talked about the reason for the step, and I'm going to talk about the how of the step. The reason in Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sin does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy, but if you conceal your sins, you will not prosper. I've asked Trisha Krause to come this morning and share a little bit of her story, and then I'm going to continue in the message in talking about how to do the step. There's some very practical ways of how to take this step forward. Trisha has been a part of our church since about February, and Trisha is somebody who has been in recovery for a period of time. I thought rather than just having me talk about it, I would have somebody who has gone through and lived through some of these things share with you this morning. Trisha, why don't you come on up right now? She's just going to share a few minutes and tell you her story. I think when you see the honesty and hear some of the benefits and rewards that come from this, it might prompt you to take the same step.

Trisha Krause:

(The following is bravely given from Trisha. Understand she struggled through tears to deliver this message and share part of her testimony for the congregation.)

Hi, my name is Trisha Krause, and I'm very nervous. The testimony I'm giving today relates to the topic of Jeff's talk on the fourth and fifth steps of recovery. I came into the 12-step recovery group 16 years ago in 1982. Through those 16 years, I've learned a lot about myself, my family, and my spirituality. Doing a four-step isn't easy, but I recommend it to everyone. The one I'm working on now is called an "Assets Inventory" instead of just a "Moral Inventory." It's my seventh, fourth step, and my testimony today is part of the fifth, to share it with God, myself, and another human being; today, it's a lot of other human beings.

A brief sketch of my injured family involves alcoholism, sexual, emotional, and physical abuse. At first, I wasn't going to share what happened in my family or a portion of what happened, but I decided if I'm giving a talk, somebody has to know exactly what I'm recovering from.

At the age of 3, I was molested by my dad as his fingers "slipped" while drying my sister, myself, and my brother after giving us a bath. I remember that the same

thing happened the week before. It hurt, so I told Mom that he dried us off too roughly. It appeared to me that she was angry with me because she now would have to be the one to do the work of giving us a bath. He never gave us a bath again, so that was good. At age 6 ½, I was sick with the flu, and a card party was going on in the house. Dad came into the bedroom, took off his clothes and said I could look, even though at that age I already knew private parts were not supposed to be seen. Then he told me he wanted to “love me” and started to kiss me all over. My nightgown had to come off. He taught me about oral sex that day and called it “love.” Too many people think incest isn’t incest unless a child’s been raped, and that’s not true. What I was taught that day was definitely an adult function, not what children do when they play “Doctor.” Playing “Doctor” is normal. Thank heaven he told me that if I told Mom, she would be angry. My instinct, and my instant thought, was “Good, she should be, and so am I,” but I didn’t tell her. There was a party going on, and I didn’t want all the relatives that were there to know what my dad had just done. So that’s a portion of two of the instances.

Both of my parents have the diseases of alcoholism, and both of them sexually abused me. My mother also emotionally abused me, especially from ages 14-21. I’m going to just throw this out that I think the most damaging part was my mother’s abuse. I’m going to cry a little bit.

I married and had two wonderful children, but all was not wonderful with me. I was playing house. I was pretending to be an adult married woman. No one was really happy. I finally divorced and got into the 12-step programs a year later. Every person I dated after my divorce was an abuser, and I didn’t know why. A friend suggested Al-Anon. I went to a meeting and felt like a 7-year old child emotionally. Eventually, I took my first, fourth, and fifth step and began to feel better. This Assets Inventory was necessary for me to accomplish because it has only been recently that I’ve been able to admit that I have Assets. My own inheritance from the way I was brought up was to either think of myself as a saint or the worst person God ever created. By the way, my mother told me that was true, that in my case, this was the only time that God had ever made a mistake was in creating me. That’s part of the emotional abuse.

Should I tell you about the China thing? She (my mom) told me that if I would just admit that I was the most unworthy, worst person ever created, every single person on the planet would then become happy. I, in my imagination, imagined a man in China on the other side of the world knowing that I had now admitted that I was the worst person ever created, and his life would suddenly become wonderful and happy. That just didn’t make sense to me, so I never admitted it, thank heaven.

Balance was hard for me to conceptualize in myself. I needed therapy to get in touch with my feelings. Now I’m learning to use my intelligence and my feelings to bring peace and serenity into my life. My spirituality began when a therapist brought it up. At that time my own belligerence scoffed at the idea. I was certain that church was something that adults only talked about so the kids would keep in line. It wasn’t something adults actually believed in. It was suggested to me that I get a new idea of who God is. That led to my friend Jesus, who’d stand by my right side and laugh with me when I’d be human and make some silly mistake.

As I was writing this down, I was making a silly mistake. I got a portable dishwasher and ran that dishwasher while I was writing this out. But I forgot to turn the water on, so it got all done with its cycle...and here we are laughing again. Back to the fourth and fifth steps, with all six previous fourth steps, it was suggested with this one, I'm write down what's good and right about me in my life, what are my values, my talents, the wrongs I've done to myself, and my behaviors and patterns.

I'm a work in progress, and with God's help, I'm going in the right direction. When I get to making amends, it'll mostly be with myself. It's beginning now. My own private life is improving. I've gotten a part-time job with an artist, which I love. My bills are getting more manageable. My earnings are up, and my peace and serenity are, for the most part, on an even keel. I'm really grateful for that.

I want to touch on the subject of forgiveness. It was suggested to me that after doing a fourth and a fifth that we say aloud every name on the fourth and fifth that we might still hold a resentment toward, just say their name and what we would wish for them: peace and serenity, loads of love, loads of money, whatever you can think of. I've done that, but I had to do six, fourth steps before I could get to the forgiveness angle; and that's A-ok.

One after the other, I wish blessings on all of my abusers. I want to add a desire that we all remember today. I know they abused me, but I see them as wide-eyed four-year olds being abused by their parents, and as a consequence they learned how to abuse me. So, it doesn't make sense to me to be resentful toward them.

As part of my fifth step, I'm not sharing the whole thing with you people because it's, the fifth step is actually supposed to be done with one person besides yourself and your higher power or your God. I value myself as a human being. I'm a 3-D person as well as spiritual and have God's presence in my body.

In the past, He was located in a southwest corner of the universe. That's where I'd have to go to see Him and talk to Him. So that's a neat change in my life. I do things, I feel things, I can think; I value honesty, intelligence, patience; I'm a frugal person; I'm a Taurus; prayer, physical work, planning, helping others with moderation, fun projects; I love the earth, I love camping; I love people, I enjoy taking care of myself, I do go to the dentist and the doctor; I value loving myself, my church, the program, the steps, my adult children, my family (tearing up-"I want to quit now."), my friends and acquaintances; program books and therapy; and Jesus-He's not the last, but the least. Without Him and His help, when I was 7 years old, I wouldn't have been able to separate the spiritual from the physical world and help myself to survive. He planted the idea in my head that even though He was there to help me, because it's a 3-D world, I would have to do the part of saying "no" to my dad, so I said no.

The rest of the fifth step, I already said is going to be shared with my sponsor in a private meeting. I'm going to review it alone and with God invited to listen in. I want to express gratitude to all the many people Jesus has put in my life to get me to this point, and thank you all for listening.

Pastor Jeff:

Isn't that a great thing how God can take a life, and He can bring healing and restoration. Some of you out there, we don't know all of your past, but we know that the same God who is bringing healing in Trisha's life will bring it into yours, and you simply ask. You work these steps, and you will find over time that God has done a great work in your life.

Let's talk about how to do that, how to do this step. Let's turn our bibles to John, Chapter 4. In John, Chapter 4, we find the story of the woman at the well. How do you do this step? Number 1 is to take a moral inventory, to sit down with a piece of paper and a pencil or a pen, probably a pencil, and begin to write out honestly and completely, taking a moral inventory of the things that I have done and the things that I haven't done. It's being thorough; it's being honest. Sometimes it's painful. You ask, "Why write it down?" Because when I write it down, I get specific. When I write it down, it gets detailed. If it's just, "Oh Lord, forgive me. I've done some bad things." That's too generic. It's too general. But there's something about the process of writing it down that helps me to be more complete, more thorough and think things through.

In the Book of John, the fourth chapter, Jesus comes across a woman who life has been very hard on. She has gone through many different relationships, marriages. Jesus comes across this woman, and they have a conversation. At one point, Jesus asks her to go get her husband. She responds to Jesus, "I don't have a husband." Jesus says in verse 17, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is that you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true."

So Jesus goes on to reveal something to her about herself. So she is taken back, and she says, "How do you know all of this? I perceive, Sir, you are a prophet."

The conversation continues, and she begins to actually dodge the issue, skirt it and change the subject a little, which is very common when it comes to talking about a subject that is painful or embarrassing to us. We tend to avoid it. It's painful, so we avoid *pain*.

It's like years ago when I had a sliver in my toe. I didn't want to deal with that sliver because I knew it was going to hurt, so my mother-in-law, who is an expert sliver-taker-outer, had said to me, "I'll heat up a needle and get that sliver out for you in a matter of seconds, so you won't have to deal with that pain anymore." I said, "You know, but that would hurt. I don't want to be pricked and probed with a needle. I'll just deal with it. It'll work itself out." But what I found was it didn't work itself out. Time didn't heal. Time covered up. The longer that remained in my life, that infection began to set in, and it became even more painful until I finally submitted and said, "Okay, let's do it."

She put her big light, her sewing light, on my toe. The family spontaneously, as if rehearsed, began to gather around this minor surgery. I put the pillow over my head, and I said "Go." She began to work, and after a little bit of pain, she said, "I got it."

You know what? I didn't feel 100 percent. What I said to myself was the process of healing had begun. That painful memory, that painful hurt that had been causing

that uncomfortableness in my life has been taken from me, and now healing could take place.

What we're talking about is setting the stage so healing can take place, so the healing can begin because there are certain wounds; friends, that time does not cover up, and there are certain kinds of injuries that time doesn't heal. That's what we're talking about.

Notice after Jesus talks to her, we're not privileged to have the whole conversation, but listen to her response, and guess what transpired with me? She goes back to her village after speaking with Jesus. It says she left her water pot, the reason she'd come in the first place, to draw water. In Verse 29, it says, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" What just took place? I believe an inventory was done. I believe there was a time of tears; there was a time of confession; there was a time of going over her past, and those things that had caused her pain and caused other pain, and Jesus said, "Let's get it out. You've been walking with this limp long enough. Let's deal with it. It's going to be uncomfortable. It's going to be painful, but when we are through, God is going to bring healing to your life."

So she comes back, and she says, "Let me tell you a man who told me everything I've ever done." He knew all about her, and still He loved her unconditionally. You can just sense within her voice and within her words exuberance and a freedom and a joy that was present in her life.

The scripture says in Psalm 139, if we could turn there, Verse 23-24, these words, "Search me, oh God. Know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." So that's what we're talking about. We're talking about doing a search of our own life, and that's messy. It's untidy, and it's unpleasant, and it's painful, but it's necessary.

If you're not willing to take that step, probably the pain is not great enough yet for you. Maybe it will be in time. But those who have taken that step will testify as Trisha did that it's one of the ways that God brings healing into our lives.

Secondly is to *accept responsibility for our faults*. It's a key. Accept responsibility for our faults. Let's turn to the Book of Second Samuel, Chapter 12. When I say accept responsibility, there's all different kinds of ways we deal with things. The woman in the skit this morning, she couldn't accept the fact that she was responsible for some of the pain in her life. She blamed everybody else. That's one of the things we do. We blame other people. If they hadn't have said that, or if they hadn't have done that, my life wouldn't be the way it is; I wouldn't have this problem. So we play the blame game, and it has happened since the beginning of time. It happened in the Garden of Eden. God confronts Adam and Eve, and he says to Adam, "What is this thing that you've done?"

Adam says, "This woman that you put here, she gave me the fruit, and I ate it. It's your fault because you put her here."

So He goes to Eve, and you think Eve's going to buck up and say, "Yeah, yeah, I'm responsible?" But she says, "No, it was the serpent that you put here in the Garden, not me. It's not my fault."

Not only do we pass the buck, but we minimize things. “It’s not that bad. Other people have worse problems. I can work through it.” We have denial. “I don’t really think there’s a problem.”

The first thing she said in her skit was when it talked about listing resentments, “I don’t have any resentments.” Then she went on to reveal that she had a lot of resentments. There’s a lot of pain. We try to escape, right? We don’t want to deal with those problems. It’s uncomfortable, so I’m going to escape. I’m going to change jobs, or I’m going to change geographic location, or I’m going to move out. The problem is that *we’re* part of the problem, and everywhere we go, we’re there too. You can leave a situation, you can leave a person, you can leave a geographic location, but if you and your problems or your behaviors have been a source of the problem, you take you with you wherever you go. So the problems are going to persist until they’re dealt with in the right way. So we blame and we minimize; we deny, and we dodge; and we rationalize, and we justify. All those things, you and I all do them.

In the bible, David committed a sin. He lusted after Bathsheba even though he could have had any woman in the kingdom probably. He had a wife. The scripture says he even had concubines, but he saw Bathsheba, and he said, “I want Bathsheba.”

Bathsheba was married to Uriah, the Hittite. He saw her one day, and he sent the army off to battle, David was up on the roof, and he asked, “Who is she?”

They said, “That’s Bathsheba, that’s Uriah the Hittite’s wife.” And he sent for her.

They had relations. She conceived a child. When he found out the news of her pregnancy, he panicked. Instead of confessing his sin and forsaking it, or going to Uriah and saying, “This is what I’ve done. This is what happened. I beg for your forgiveness,” he decided he would call Uriah to his palace, and then he sent Uriah, his faithful soldier, his own death warrant back to the fields. The note said to put Uriah the Hittite on the front lines because David knew if he went on the front lines, if he was one of the first troops in, he was going to get killed. So the commander-in-chief sends word back through a messenger to King David that says, “The battle’s taken place. We’ve suffered many casualties, and if King David gets upset or gets mad at you when he hears this news, you tell him this, Uriah the Hittite is dead also.” In order for that commander-in-chief to fulfill King David’s orders to make sure Uriah is dead, he had to send many men too close, strategically, and many men lost their lives. So now he was responsible for murder, and he covered that up. Then he took Bathsheba to be his wife. He was going to go on living like that, concealing his sin, but remember what the scripture says, “If you conceal your sin, you will not prosper.”

He was going to go on living life like that, and finally God sent a messenger to him, a prophet by the name of Nathan. Nathan told David a story. He told him about two men. He says, “One was very rich and had all kinds of goats and all kinds of sheep and was a very wealthy man. There was another man and he had one ewe lamb, just one lamb. He saved to buy it. That lamb was like the family pet. They would eat with the lamb. The kids played with the lamb; it was like a family pet. It had a name, it was petted, and it was loved. The rich man had a friend that came to town. He had all kinds of lambs to choose from, but he insisted instead that that poor man give his lamb to be cooked and eaten for his friend even though he had all kinds of

lambs. He took that one lamb from this man's family, killed it, and served it to his friend. What do you think should be done to that lamb?" Nathan said, and David was outraged. He said, "Why, that dirty, rotten scoundrel. A guy like that deserves to die. I mean he had all those lambs to choose from, and he took from this man who only had one lamb." He said, "That isn't right, and that man deserves to be punished. In fact, that man deserves to die for his crime." David was adamant about it, and Nathan looked back at him just as adamantly about it, and he said, "David, you are the man." He said, "I'm talking about you David. You took that one innocent little wife of Uriah the Hittite. You could have any woman, and you took his one lamb, and then you had him sacrificed. David, you are the man."

Now what is David's response going to be to that? Is David going to minimize? Is David going to pass the buck? Is David going to rationalize? Is David going to justify it? Is he going to deny it? Is he going to try to escape? What's he going to do? Look at Verse 13 of Second Samuel, Chapter 12, "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'" When he said that, I'm sure he was crying. I'm sure that he was ashamed. I'm sure that guilt began to overtake him, but one thing David did at this point, and some might say it was far too late, he finally owned his sin. He finally said, "I take responsibility for what I've done. I have sinned against God." That's step #2, *to accept responsibility for the things that we have done.*

In Trisha's story, there were certain things that somebody else had done to her that she was not at fault for, but other things she could say, "I was at fault for." You and I know there are certain things that others have done to us that we are innocent of, but then we too have wronged others and hurt others. In those cases, God says, "Own it. Stop playing the game, own it, take responsibility for it."

Step #3, *ask for God's forgiveness.* The word says in First John, Chapter 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

That word "confess" is a very important word. Confess comes from a Greek word of two words "homo logeo:" homo meaning same; logeo meaning word. Confess means to say the same word or agree with God. I'm saying the same thing about my sin that God says about it. That's confession. I'm saying, "Okay God, you are right. What I did was wrong. I'm confessing that to you." You're not just admitting it, not just owning it, but confessing it to God, and I'm asking for His forgiveness.

Fourthly, *I admit my faults to another person.* I want us to turn to the Book of Joshua, Chapter 7. There's a story there of a man named Achan. Achan was an Israelite soldier, and this was the time when Israel was going to take possession of the promise land. They'd fought the Battle of Jericho, and they'd won. It was a great time of triumph in the history of the nation of Israel. They'd crossed the Jordan; they'd circled the Jericho for seven days; and on the seventh day, they went around seven times; they gave the shout, and the walls fell down; and you know the story. After that, there was still some land that needed to be conquered. They were going to invade the city of Ai, a small town. So the spies go out and send this report, and they come back and say to Joshua, "Piece of cake. Shouldn't be any problem. We don't have to send more than 3000 soldiers over to Ai." This battle is sort of like a David and Goliath thing. Oh boy, that's bad news. You know what happened in that story.

It's like we're going to go in there, and this is going to be a walk in the park. So the troops, 3000 men, go into Ai, and they just get spanked. They get the snot kicked out of them. They came back with a dog with its tail between its legs saying, "We don't understand what's going on. How could we just have defeated Jericho, and now little Ai, this little bitty nothing, just defeated 3000 of our best guys? Something's wrong."

Joshua tore his robes, and he went into his tent, got down on his knees and began to pray. God says, "There's sin in the camp. There's a problem. There is sin in Israel." You see what had happened is God had said that the booty that was captured in Jericho was to be set aside for the Lord's treasury, and everything else was to be destroyed. There was gold and silver and other kinds of precious things that were to go to the treasury, but other things were to be destroyed. This stuff was holy to God. Achan finds out about it. He finds out where the stuff is. He goes there, and he steals some of it. He takes it to be his own. That was a sin. Through a process of elimination, it comes down to Achan being the guy, and Joshua confronts Achan in front of Israel. This is what he says, Verse 19, "My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him praise. Tell me what you have done, and do not hide it from me." Notice when he says this, he says for Achan to admit his sins to Joshua and to the others, what was that going to do? It was going to give glory to God. Confessing your sins, saying the same thing God says about my sin gives glory to God.

Joshua says, "I want you to do it, and I want you to be honest, and I don't want you to withhold the truth from me at all Achan. Tell me what happened."

Achan replied, "It is true. I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done. When I saw the plunder, the beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighting fifty shekels, I coveted them and I took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

Do you see that? I saw, I coveted, I took. That's what we're talking about. Being honest enough to admit to another person, "This is what I have done. I saw. I coveted. I stole. I cheated. I did this. I did that," and you confess those sins and give glory to God.

We talked about the scripture last week that says no matter how deep our sins are, Isaiah 1:19, God is able to remove them. I want to talk about a practical side of this for a moment. In the Book of James, Chapter 5:16, it says, "Admit your faults to one another, and pray for each other that you might be healed." You pray that somehow God uses this kind of honesty, and this kind of moral inventory, and this kind of confession to bring about healing in our lives, but there is certain discretion you must use. You don't just go blabbing out to everybody.

Tricia was discreet. Some things she told us, and other things she said were private and couldn't be shared with us. So, a couple real practical bits of advice for those of you really serious about recovery and really serious about taking this next step. I want to talk about the "who" for a moment. Who? Who do I admit this to? I admit it to myself; I admit it to God and somebody else, who *is* that person? I think it'd probably be wise if you found one person. Everybody needs one person, but we don't really need more than one person if it's a trustworthy person, one person who

is trustworthy because you don't want to pick up the morning paper and find out it's in there. You don't want to open up the church bulletin and see "Oh there it is." We should be discreet. Pick somebody who can keep a confidence, somebody you can trust implicitly with the kinds of things that you want to share, somebody that's not going to take that and talk to brother or sister so and so and say, "Let me share a prayer request with you. I found out some things about Billy Sue that I thought you might want to be *praying* for." Not that kind of thing. Somebody who understands the importance of what you're trying to do and is saying, "You know what? I will take what you tell me to the grave." That kind of trust is what we are talking about.

So I've made the list, I know who I'm going to confess these things to, somebody I can trust. I don't want to be on the National Enquirer when I go through the grocery store the next week. What do you say? You say the truth. You say just what Achan said, "This is what I have done. *I*." Ownership. "I did this. I did that. I said this. I didn't do that." If you are the recipient of a fourth step, your responsibility is simply to listen, maybe offer some encouragement or let them know that God is able to forgive, but your job is not to be a counselor at that point. It's not to psycho-analyze and comment on everything they've ever done or said. It is simply to be a friend and listen. I've sat through many of these steps. To be honest with you, I've sat through many from this congregation who have come to my office and read the step, and I really don't remember the details of what you've said to me. What I remember is the courage it took for you to list those things and to admit that to another person. I've also seen the healing and the inner strength that comes forth from that decision that you've made.

When to do it? As soon as possible. God's working on your life, he's having you take inventory. The time to act on it is as soon as possible, as soon as it's done, as soon as you have somebody that you can trust.

When you're taking inventory, when you're cleaning your house, and you're bringing out all those things that are unpleasant, you don't want to just leave them lying there, do you? If I come to your house, and everything is just torn up, and everything is in shambles, and you say to me, "Well, we're taking a little inventory in our house here. We're doing a little spring cleaning." I say that's fine. If I come back six months from now, and everything's the way it was six months ago, I say, "This is now fall, you may want to finish that job up."

As God starts to bring some of these things to the surface, and you sense that you've got some guilt that you need to get rid of, don't put it off. Do it as soon as you possibly can.

Fifthly, and I think this is a really important step, is *to accept God's forgiveness and forgive myself*. Once I've confessed it, I've admitted it, accept it. Accept God's forgiveness. What is God saying? God says, "If you will confess your sin to me, I will forgive you, and I will cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Accept it. Either God is true, or He's not true. Either He will do what He said, or He is lying to you. If God says I will forgive you, I will cleanse you, I will heal you, you can take it to the bank, it's going to happen. He will do it.

Some of you have forgiven other people. You've released other people of debts, but you've not forgiven yourselves. Am I right? For some people, the person you hold

the most grudges against, and the most resentment against, is none other than you. When God says forgive others, He does not exclude you from that equation. When He talks about not harboring resentments and hatred and bitterness toward somebody, you're not disqualified from that. He wants you to extend forgiveness to yourself as well. Accept that forgiveness. Some people try to bargain for forgiveness. We're not talking about that. "God, if you'll forgive me, then I'll do this. I'll do that." Some people beg for forgiveness. You don't have to beg God for forgiveness. He wants to forgive. Some people try to bribe God and make a deal, "If you forgive me, I won't cuss. I won't do this. I won't do that." It's not a matter of bribing. It's not a matter of begging. It's not a matter of bargaining. It's a matter of believing. It's accepting God and His word.

If you'll do that, you'll accept that forgiveness, you're going to feel a weight drop off your shoulders like you wouldn't believe.

Let's pray together that God will help us to do that.

Father, as I look out over the congregation this morning, I do see a lot of pain. I do see a lot of hurt. As we come to you this morning, your word says that we all stumble in many ways. All of us here Lord need guilt removed. We need freedom that confession brings. We need the healing that admitting our sins can bring, the healing of your Holy Spirit. We've followed these principles, we've made these kinds of decisions, we've taken the splinter out so the healing process can begin in our lives, but it takes courage. Our prayer right now is for courage to be able to do the right thing. Father as we receive the communion this morning, we receive with thankful hearts. We thank you for the one who had the courage, though He had committed no sin, He went to the cross to bear ours. We ask that you will bless this bread and this cup as we receive them and Lord that you would use this time to minister to those who are hurting in our congregation. Use this time to minister to those who are hurting in our congregation. Use this time to impart wisdom to those who are seeking direction. Use this time to impart courage for those who know what they should do and need strength to do it. I pray these things in Jesus name, Amen.