

The Road to Recovery, Step 4: Coming Clean

Message for Sunday, January 29, 2011

Scripture: Psalm 32:1-2 and others

Children's Message: Psalm 32:1-2 "What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven!"

Ask if any of them has done something wrong or bad. Listen to the story. Ask if they were sorry they did it.

You just confessed! That's what confession is: to admit I did something wrong. And that's a *good* thing! Not the bad action, but admitting it.

Because once you've confessed, you don't have to worry about someone finding out your secret. Like this story...

A little brother and sister went to spend the summer with their grandparents. One day the grandfather made slingshots for them. "Now be careful with this, and never shoot rocks at animals or people." "OK, Gramps," they solemnly promised. Johnny spent the next few days firing rocks at trees, cans, and make believe enemies. Then one morning he spotted, far across the pond, his grandmother's pet duck. Not really aiming, he let fly a rock. He was horrified as he watched the rock fly through the air and hit the duck right in the head, killing it. "Oh, no! What am I going to do?"

The little boy, fearing his grandparent's wrath, desperately searched for a place to hide the dead duck. Finding the perfect place, he hid the duck under the pile of firewood near the barn. As he stood up congratulating himself on his cover-up scheme, he spied his sister watching him from the front porch. She called out, "Lunch is ready."

All through lunch he was silent. His food sat in his stomach like lead. He waited for his sister to expose his crime. She smiled and sat silently eating her sandwich. Then grandmother spoke, "Sally, will you help me wash the dishes?" "I'd be happy to Grandma," she replied, "but Johnny told me he really wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" Johnny was considering whether to protest or not when she leaned over and whispered to him as she left the room, "Remember the duck!" Johnny sat there in grim silence realizing that bad days were ahead.

The rest of the week was a nightmare for Johnny. He had to skip a fishing trip so he could help make supper, and then he graciously let his sister lick the fudge pan. After man days of doing his sister's chores, he could take it no longer. "Grandma," he tearfully confessed, "I didn't

mean to, but I killed your duck." "I know, Johnny," she gave him a hug, "I was standing at the window. I saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. But I had to wait until you were ready to come to me and ask forgiveness. I wondered how long you would let your sister keep you a slave!"

He was free! He had confessed, he was forgiven, and it was *wonderful*! Do you see why confession is such a good thing?

Have you ever had that sinking feeling where you groan and say to yourself, "Oh, I wish I had done that differently"? I'm going to ask you to be brave and share your story with someone sitting near you. Take a couple of minutes now and do that.

Allow two minutes for people to share.

Now here's the interesting thing: isn't it marvelous that all of us have stories to tell of how we wish we could have done something differently? Every single one of us. All of us have regrets.

Today's message is along this line, but we're going to go deeper, to another level you may not be accustomed to.

We're on the Road to Recovery. This series of messages is intended to help us break out of the ruts we're in. We have habits, hurts and hang-ups that hold us back from being all the God created us to be.

The first week we talked about the Reality Step: Realize I'm not God, and as much as I'd like to fix myself, I don't have the power to do it.

The next week we talked about the Hope Step: Although I don't have the power to change me, God does. Furthermore, God wants to help me.

Last week we talked about the Commitment Step: Since I don't have the power, and God does, I commit my life to the care and control of Christ — all of it, the good, the bad, the ugly.

Today we're on step 4 on the Road to Recovery.

1) Step 4: Housecleaning, taking out the garbage

In the Alcoholics Anonymous tradition, the Fourth Step is this: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

I'm going to rephrase that — instead of "moral inventory" I'm going to say "examine and confess my faults." I'm also going to take it beyond a purely private matter, so that it involves another person. You'll see

why when we look at the Bible principles behind this step.

So the 4th step, the “O” in RECOVERY is: **Openly examine and confess my faults to God, to myself, and to someone I trust.**

If you’ll take this step with me today you’re going to feel a whole lot better a week from now.

2) The reason for this step is because what guilt does to us

Why is this a part of the Recovery process? It’s because guilt keeps us stuck in the past. Guilt keeps us from growing, from becoming all that God created us to be.

We may deny the guilt. We may repress the guilt. We may blame other people for our guilt. We may excuse our guilt. We may rationalize our guilt. Rationalizing is telling myself in my mind that it’s OK when I know in my heart it was wrong.

This step is the key to relief. If you follow this step, you’ll be able to feel what the author of Psalm 32 felt.

Psalm 32:1-2, Living Bible:

What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! What joys when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record.

Guilt causes us to live in fear — fear that someone may discover my secret. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of the Sherlock Holmes novels, was quite a prankster. One day he sent anonymous notes to five of the most prominent men in England. The note simply said this, “All is found out, flee at once.” Within 24 hours all five men had left the country.

Guilt damages your relationships. Example: A lot of marriage problems today are caused by things that happened prior to marriage that a spouse still feels guilty about.

Guilt keeps me stuck in the past: What guilt does is it tends to replay in your mind over and over and over... the things you wish you could change but it’s too late now. Living in the past is like driving always looking in the rear view mirror. You’re going to end up crashing if you do that. Guilt cannot change the past just like worry cannot change the future. But it just makes today miserable.

3) How to do this step

The procedure is very simple, it just requires a lot of courage.

a) Take a personal moral inventory

You get alone by yourself. You get a pencil, and a notepad and you set down and say, “Where have I done wrong? What are the faults in my life that I know need changing?”

Why in writing? Because it helps you to be think more clearly.

Ask God to help you out, to bring to mind those things that nag at your conscience.

Psalm 139:23-24, New Living Translation:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my thoughts.

Point out anything in me that offends you,

and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

When you take this moral inventory, you need to take your time, don’t rush it. I do this every couple of years. It’s a regular habit, a discipline, that keeps me in tune with God. It doesn’t work unless you are ruthlessly honest with yourself.

There is nothing new about this, by the way. The practice of examining oneself has been used by Christians for centuries. To help you along the way, I’ve included in the bulletin the form used by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church. That was back in the 1700s, and he certainly did not invent it.

b) Accept responsibility for my faults

The greatest holdup to the healing for my hang-up is me. The greatest holdup to the healing for your hang-up is you. Don’t rationalize it. Don’t minimize it. Don’t blame others.

The Times newspaper in London was inviting letters from readers answering the question “What’s wrong with the world?” People were delighted with the opportunity to vent their frustrations, complaining about everything under the sun. G. K. Chesterton, a distinguished gentleman and Christian author wrote in, “What is wrong with the world? I am. Yours faithfully, G. K. Chesterton.”

1 John 1:8, Today’s English Version:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.

If I really want to stop defeating myself, I've got to stop deceiving myself. I need to get real, and stop playing head games.

c) I ask God for forgiveness

Read the verse which comes after the one above; it has the promise of forgiveness and healing.

1 John 1:9, Today's English Version:

But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right: he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing.

Jesus came to show us God's love and forgiveness. Trust him. Just come to God in prayer and say, "Lord, this is who I am. I'm not proud of this, but at least I'm being honest with you. Will you please help me to be the person you meant me to be?"

Isaiah 1:18, New Living Translation:

No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool.

4) Admit my faults to another person

"Why," you may ask, "why on earth would I do this? This is very private stuff!" Here's why.

James 5:16, Today's English Version:

So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed. The prayer of a good person has a powerful effect.

Isn't that interesting! How are we healed? By admitting our faults to one another.

Why do I need to drag another person into this? Why can't I just admit it to God? Why don't I just pray about it, make a list, talk to God about it? Why do I need to tell one other person? Because the root of our problem is relational. We deceive each other. We wear masks.

The amazing thing is, when you risk honesty with someone, all of a sudden, this feeling of freedom comes into your life. You realize that everybody has problems and often they have the same ones you do. Everybody needs someone you can be totally honest with. Why? There is something therapeutic about it. It's God's way of freeing us from our chains.

a) Whom do you tell?

- Somebody you trust. Somebody who can keep a confidence, who is not a gossip and who has a reputation for keeping a confidence. You don't need

to tell somebody and then next week it's in *National Enquirer*.

- Somebody who understands the value of what you're doing.
- Somebody who is mature enough that they are not going to be shocked.
- Somebody who knows the Lord. Instead of judging and condemning you, they will reflect his grace to you.

b) When do you do it?

As soon as possible. Don't procrastinate. You're going to take this message outline home, "I'll just think about this one for a while." Then it gets forgotten and it never happens.

I've done the personal moral inventory a number of times. But this week will be the first time I share my list with someone else. It's a bit scary. But even more, I'm excited about what might come as a result of this.

After all, this is what the church is supposed to be like: a place where people can find forgiveness and healing!