

LIFE'S HEALING CHOICES

"The Housecleaning Choice-Coming Clean"

Matthew 5:8

At a convention, Arkansas State troopers was asked to submit the best excuse they'd ever heard for someone trying to get out of a speeding ticket. The winning entry was submitted by a trooper who clocked a semi-tractor truck speeding down the interstate.

The trooper pulled in behind the truck and turned on his lights, but the semi kept on rolling. The trooper got right on his bumper, but the truck kept on going. The trooper turned on his siren, but the semi went even faster. Finally, the truck ran out of gas and rolled to the side of the highway.

The trooper got out of his cruiser and walked up to the trucker's window. The trooper asked, "Did you see me pull out after you and turn on my lights?" "Yes, sir, I did." "Did you see me following you right on your bumper?" "Yes sir, I did." "Did you hear my siren all those miles?" "Yes, sir, I did."

Finally, the trooper said, "Then why didn't you pull over." The trucker responded- "Well, to be honest, about two years ago, my wife ran off with an Arkansas state trooper. I was afraid you were trying to bring her back!"

Wouldn't it be great if you could live your life unafraid of your past? Wouldn't it be great if there was a way that you could put your past in the past once and for all? That's what the 4th healing choice is all about.

Let's review for a moment the steps that hopefully we've already taken. Choice one is **the reality choice**- where we realize and admit that we can't make ourselves better. Choice two is **the hope choice**- where we realize that God has the power to make us better and He is willing to do so because He loves us. Choice three is **the commitment choice**- where we

decide to let go and let God work in our lives. We commit the care and control of our lives over to the Lord.

This brings us to Life's 4th healing choice- **the housecleaning choice** where we choose to receive God's forgiveness for our sins and experience His cleansing in our lives.

The fourth healing choice is found in Matthew 5:8. The pure in heart person is one whose past is in the past. That is.....

1. The joy of a pure heart

When Jesus speaks of the heart, He is referring to the center of our being. To be pure in heart is to be cleansed of all life's impurities. To be pure in heart is where we are free of all the junk that weighs us down....the hurts, hang-ups and habits that plague us.

To have a pure heart means that your heart is cleansed of sin. That is something you and I cannot do on our own. **Jeremiah testified that the human heart, left to its own devices, is desperately wicked above all things.**

You cannot make your heart pure by making your behavior pure. You can't decide that you are going to clean up your act...behave myself and all of a sudden, I have a pure heart. That's because the heart deals, not with behavior, but with desires and motives. You might be able to clean up your act for a while, but if your heart isn't pure, you will fall back into your old pattern of behavior because you still have a heart full of evil desires.

Purity only happens from the inside out. Then your pure heart will change your behavior.

The only way that our hearts can be cleansed is by God's grace....by the blood of Christ....with forgiveness. This is something only God can do. **David realized that only God could make his heart pure. That's why he prayed:**

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” –Psalm 51:10

When we come to God for cleansing, He promises that He will give us a pure heart. Hear His promise from the book of Ezekiel:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” – Ezekiel 36:26

God promises that He will give you a pure heart. And when He gives you a pure heart, He promises to also give you a heart that wants to obey Him.

The joy of the pure heart is that your past is forgiven and now you can see God. To see God means that you can have a relationship with God. You can experience His presence in your daily life. You can see Him at work in your life.

The joy of a pure heart is so important because we all have a past. We all have regrets. We’ve all done things we wish we could go back and change. But we can’t. We feel guilty. And if our guilt isn’t dealt with, we live with the burden of guilt.

A young man called in to one of those call-in radio talk shows hosted by a psychologist and said, “I’m consumed with guilt and don’t know what to do with it. How do I get rid of this guilt?” The answer offered by the talk-show host was very upsetting- “You can’t get rid of guilt. You just have to learn to live with it.”

That’s the answer that the world gives, but it’s no answer. The world’s response to guilt is, you have to learn to live with it....deny it....repress it....blame someone else for it. But the world cannot give us an answer on how to deal with our guilt.

The good news is that God says you don’t have to deal with your guilt. That’s because He deals with it. When He forgives us, He takes away our guilt. Look at and listen to this tremendous promise and blessing of forgiveness:

“What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven. What joy when sins are covered over! What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God has cleared their record.” – Psalm 32:1-2

Now, before we look at how to receive forgiveness of sin and relief from our guilt, we need to look at why we need to have a pure heart. We need to understand.....

2. The negative effects of guilt

Guilt is an overwhelming burden that God does not intend for you to have to shoulder. **First of all, guilt creates fear in us.**

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, writer of the Sherlock Holmes novels, was quite a prankster. One day he played a prank on five of the most prominent men in England. He sent an anonymous note to each man, which simply said, “All is found out. Flee at once.” Within twenty-four hours, all five men had left the country.

Guilt is like a black cloud hanging over our heads. We are afraid that our past is going to catch up with us. We’re fearful that people will find out about our deep, dark secrets. We’re afraid that people will realize we’re not perfect.

Guilt also sabotages relationships. Guilt causes us to respond in harmful ways to other people. We sometimes grow impatient or angry with people because of guilt. We’re upset with ourselves but we take it out on other people.

Guilt causes us to indulge people unwisely. **Parents often feel guilty over poor choices they have made and overcompensate by indulging their children.**

Guilt can also cause us to avoid commitment. We sometimes wonder why we won’t let people get too close to us. We put up a barrier that keeps people at arms length. One of the main reasons is guilt. We’re afraid that if people get too close, they will discover the skeletons in our closets.

Guilt will also keep us stuck in the past. When we are burdened down with guilt, our guilt is holding us hostage over something that happened in the past. We become a prisoner of our past.

Guilt is like trying to drive your car while only looking in the rear view mirror! That rear view mirror is important. It gives us perspective. It is important to check it from time to time while you are driving your car. But if you are only looking in the rear view mirror while you are trying to drive your car forward, you know what is going to happen! CRASH!

Guilt is like that. Guilt won't allow us to move forward with our lives because we're always looking into the rear view mirror of our past. Now, it's important to learn from our past, esp. our past mistakes. It is foolish not to learn from one's past. But even though we ought to learn from our past, we shouldn't live there. But guilt keeps us stuck in the past.

Feeling guilty over the past cannot change the past any more than worry can change the future. Guilt just makes us miserable today.

That is why we need to make Life Healing Choice # 4. We need a pure heart in order to be free from guilt. We need to do this in order to move forward with our lives.

Healing choice # 4 is all about coming clean where I ***openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God and to someone I trust.*** The housecleaning choice brings our painful past out into the open so we can deal with it...be cleansed of it...then put our past in the past and move on to health and happiness.

How does this happen? Let's look at.....

3. Coming clean and becoming clean

You have to come clean in order to become clean. God is the one who will cleanse us. But in order for God to cleanse us we have to come clean. First we need to.....

a. Take a personal moral inventory

We're all probably familiar with the Roman Catholic Church's list of the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, greed, lust, wrath and sloth. But the Catholic Church added seven more deadly sins to the list.

Pope Benedict the 16th was concerned about the "decreasing sense of sin" in today's world, evidenced by the declining interest among Catholics in the disciplined act of confession. The addition of seven more deadly sins was done to help push people into a deeper self-examination.

In order to receiving forgiveness & healing, we have to conduct a rather intense self-examination. It's called taking a personal moral inventory. This is a Biblical concept. Jeremiah wrote:

***"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." –
Lamentations 3:40***

Yes, God calls on us to search our hearts and our lives. It is painful but necessary and worth it.

Let's say that you decide to do some spring cleaning at your house. And you come to that cluttered closet that you dread. You don't like even looking in there, much less think about cleaning it out.

But even though it seems like an overwhelming task, you decide to dive in and clean it out. Not only do you throw out junk, but to your delight, you discover that treasure that you thought was long-lost. And now you have a nice, neat, clutter free closet. The task was daunting, but once finished, you're glad you did it.

Likewise, we need to go through the closet of our personal lives and do some spiritual cleaning. That's because our lives can get cluttered with hurts, hang-ups and sinful habits that are destructive and we need to deal with these and get them out in the open in order to get them out of our lives.

So you begin taking a personal moral inventory. You sit down and analyze your heart and your life. You make a list of all the things in your life. Not just the bad, but the good as well. We'll discover some great things about ourselves that we'd forgotten or never even realized before. That will encourage us.

But we do need to take an inventory. You have to come to grips with the bad stuff in your life that is holding you back and pushing you down. The personal moral inventory is necessary if your life is to be transformed. That's because of what Jesus said. Jesus said that the truth will set us free. Truth is the cost of freedom. But freedom is the reward of truth.

So, make the time and make your moral inventory list. Be brutally honest with yourself about yourself. List everything that comes to light. Both the good and the bad. Open your heart and mind to what God's Spirit will show you. You might want to pray a prayer similar to the one that David prayed:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything you find in me that makes me sad and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” – Psalm 139:23-24

When you make your moral inventory list, you need to write it down. Putting it in writing forces you to get specific. You need to be specific so you can realize what is going on with yourself.

As you look over your list, the next step is to.....

b. Accept personal responsibility for my failings

Years ago there was a comic strip character by the name of Pogo. Pogo was famous for saying- “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

We need to realize that we are our own worst enemy. We have to be honest enough to say that the reason why I have problems in my life is because I am the problem.

How many times do we try to rationalize our problems? We think that if we will just change jobs....or change relationships....or change locations that our problems will go away. But they won't. Because wherever you go and whatever you change, you take yourself and you haven't changed. And you are the problem behind your problems. John wrote:

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." – 1 John 1:8

If we want to stop defeating ourselves, we have to stop deceiving ourselves. We have to own up to our faults, our failures and our sins. Next, we need to.....

c. Ask God for forgiveness

God wants to forgive you. That's His nature. And God can forgive you, no matter how terrible the sin you have committed. This is what the Lord says to us:

"No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow." – Isaiah 1:18

God wants to forgive you. You just need to ask Him to forgive you and give you a pure heart. How do you ask God to forgive?

You don't have to beg God to forgive you. God wants to forgive you more than you want His forgiveness. He is a forgiving God. You don't have to beg for His forgiveness.

You don't have to bargain for forgiveness. Have you ever prayed, "If you'll just forgive me, I'll never do this again?" If you say that and it happens to be your area of weakness, you're probably setting yourself up for failure. You don't have to bargain with God to get His forgiveness.

You don't have to bribe. Don't say to God- "If you'll forgive me, I promise to do a bunch of good things. I'll go to church every Sunday. I'll tithe. I'll work in the nursery." Now, we want you to come to church every Sunday,

tithe and work in the nursery or serve somewhere. But you don't have to try to bribe God out of forgiveness.

You don't have to beg, bargain or bribe because God wants to forgive you. All you have to do is confess your sins and ask God to forgive you. John wrote:

“If we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward; He forgives our sin and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil.” – 1 John 1:9

When you confess your sin, you're agreeing with God. That's what confession means. It means to agree. You're agreeing with God that what you did was wrong. You confess your sin and ask to be forgiven. And you are forgiven.

Once you ask God to forgive you.....

d. Admit your faults to another person

It is necessary to share your moral inventory list with one other person. God says we need to do it. James 5:16 says:

“Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” – James 5:16

You may be asking yourself, “why do I have to tell someone else what I've done? Why can't I just confess it to God and be done with it?” If all you do is confess your sin to God, you will be forgiven. You will be forgiven for the past.

But you need to tell one other person in order to be freed for the future. With the honesty of telling one other person there is healing. There is a wonderful sense of freedom when you tell someone else what you struggle with. A burden has been lifted. A secret has been shared.

There's a saying- "we're only as sick as our secrets." Once the secret is out, the healing process can begin. You will be making yourself accountable to someone else. You will receive encouragement from that person. That person can reinforce to you that God loves you and has forgiven you.

Who do you tell? You don't have to tell everybody, but you need to tell somebody.

Tell somebody you can trust. You don't want to tell someone and then have everybody read about it on Facebook!

Tell somebody who understands the value of what you are doing. Tell someone who is mature enough not to be shocked by what you may tell them. Tell somebody who knows the Lord well enough to reflect His forgiveness to you. Most genuine Christians would be honored to have you share your inventory with them.

Remember the principle we said together in the first sermon- **"revealing my feeling is the beginning of my healing"? Say it with me. Again.**

We have to tell another human being, not to be forgiven, but to be freed, to be healed. Finally.....

e. Accept God's forgiveness and forgive yourself

How can we accept the fact that God has forgiven us? By understanding how He forgives us.

God's forgives instantly. He doesn't make us wait. The moment you ask, you are forgiven. The writer of Hebrews wrote this:

"Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it." – Hebrews 4:16

We can be confident that when we ask God to forgive us, that He forgives us and He does so right then, whenever we need it.

God forgives freely. Paul wrote:

“All need to be made right with God by His grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made right from sin through Jesus Christ.” – Romans 3:24

We don't deserve forgiveness and you can't earn it or work for it. But you can receive it because it is free.

God forgives completely. God's forgiveness is not in stages. God doesn't mete out partial forgiveness. His forgiveness is absolutely total and complete. Paul wrote:

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” – Romans 8:1

How great it feels to live with no condemnation, to know that God loves us in spite of our faults and our failings. Accept His forgiveness. Believe God when He says that He has forgiven you and receive it.

Then forgive yourself. As a Christian, God won't condemn you. So quit condemning yourself.

The pure in heart see God and they can see themselves the way that God sees them. When God looks at us, He sees a forgiven person. He sees a pure person. He sees a new person. That's because we are in Christ. We are now clothed with His righteousness. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus.

So start seeing yourself the way that God sees you- forgiven & pure.

David testified that when God forgave his sin that God took away his guilt. You don't have to live under the burden of guilt any longer. You can receive God's forgiveness and receive a pure heart.

Remember that healing happens one choice at a time. Today I want to invite you to make the housecleaning choice. Come clean and become clean.

Spiritual cleansing happens as we are baptized into Christ. Our sins are washed away and our soul is purified. Come receive Christ as your Savior and be baptized.