



**Transcript**  
Part 2 - "Taking Inventory"  
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Well, if you weren't here last week, we're in Part Two of a series. And if you're new to our church, we basically take messages or ideas and talk about them until we run out of things to say, and then we go on to the next thing. So, we're at the very beginning of this series called *Recovery Road*. We're not like the current events church, which means we don't try to talk about everything that's going on in culture. But every once in a while something happens at a national level, and when it intersects with Scripture, when it intersects with what we believe Jesus taught, then I feel like it's my responsibility, and I think all pastors' responsibility, to say, *Wait a minute. Let's forget what we were going to do and let's talk about what everybody is thinking about anyway*. So, since we're in the middle of supposedly a national recovery, and since the Scripture addresses specifically the subject of recovery, we thought we should talk about recovery. So this is the second part of an "I don't know how long" series, *Recovery Road*. I'm thinking I might just preach on this until the whole country recovers. What do you think? This could go through the end of the month, I don't know.

Anyway, now in thinking about recovery, I started thinking about who are like the recovery experts, because there are people who do recovery things all the time. And it dawned on me about a week and a half ago, wait a minute, I've met a lot of recovery experts through the years. In fact, some of you that are here now, you're at all of our campuses, some of you are watching online and specifically, I'm talking about my friends and your friends who have recovered from alcohol and drug addiction, who are part of a Twelve-Step Program. I've given out chips at CA meetings and NA meetings and been to AA meetings. And if you have been a part of that, you are the recovery experts.

So I called a friend of mine who had been through AA many, many years ago and I said, *I know that the whole AA thing is sacred for people who would go back and say that's what saved my life, and so the last thing I want to do is sort of hijack those ideas in a sermon. Do you think it's okay if I talk about this in big church?* He said, *Andy, I feel like you talk about it in big church all the time. Most of us who've been through AA think you have been through AA*. So in light of that, what I want to propose, and then we'll just dismiss, is I think the people who have been through AA, CA and NA, all those things and have recovered, they know what they're doing. So my proposal is that we put the entire country through AA, through the 12-Step Program.

And if we all go through it, then I think we'll recover. And if maybe not the whole country, at least let's put Congress through the Twelve-Step Program. Wouldn't that be great? I mean wouldn't it be great? Now be careful. Wouldn't it be neat on CSPAN to sort of see this big room with all 535 members of Congress, the House, and the they're all holding hands in a big circle and they say something like, *Hi, we're the Congress of the United States of America and we're spendaholics, or we're taxaholics, or we're stay in office no-matter-what-aholics*. Or whatever, you fill in the blank as a Republican or Democrat. I don't care. Wouldn't it be neat to kind of just see them kind of confess as a group and embrace the Twelve Steps? I think we would recover, because that program has been proven over and over. And here's where I want to be sensitive, but I came up with maybe—I took the first step of



the Twelve-Step process and I reworded it for them. Wouldn't it be cool if they all said something like this: *We are powerless over our spending addiction. Wouldn't that be a great confession? Our debt has become unmanageable.* That would be great.

And what about . . . here's the second step of the Twelve-Step process, and we're actually going to talk about this so next week, so don't miss next week. But imagine if all the leaders in our country came around this idea: *We have come to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.* Wouldn't that be awesome to just all 535 of them drop to their knees and throw their hands up in the air and say, *This is too big a problem for us to solve, we can't fix this, we need a power higher than ours*—and just declare their dependence on God. How cool would that be? Instead, of course now we're trying to eliminate prayer from everything. But the point is, those of you who've recovered through Twelve-Step, you understand this. You really do understand the secret.

Now you know, it's fun to clap and to laugh and, *Yeah, get them, Andy!* But what we discovered last week, and those of you who were here last week didn't clap a second ago, because you knew what was about to happen. Last week, just as we got all amped up and all geeked out about, *Yeah, yeah, yeah; tell them, tell them, tell them,* Jesus interrupted our "vote the bums out" party and he asked us a really difficult question. If you weren't here last week, Jesus actually came and spoke. It was great. No. We opened the Scripture and Jesus asked us this really penetrating question. He said, *Hey, hey, hey; wait a minute. Why is it you are so focused on the speck of dust in his eye and you ignore the plank in your own eye?* To which we said, *Because it's way more fun to talk about the speck of dust in his eye than it is to actually deal with the planks in our eyes.*

So last week we left off here: We said that recovery actually begins with "we," not "they." That while we wait around for Washington, or you wait around for somebody you don't even know, that you've never met, that never returned your letter or phone call anyway—you know, while you wait around for somebody out there called "they" to fix the country, the truth is recovery begins with me and recovery begins with you. Recovery begins with we, not they. And you know what? The response from last week's message was so overwhelming, especially those of you who follow me on Twitter and tweeted your response, and just all the things, all the planks in your eyes and things you were going to quit doing and the things you were going to give up.

It was really amazing how we just said, *You know what, that's true. I don't need to sit around and complain. Recovery begins with me.* The only one that made me nervous was the guy that tweeted that he was going to go home and burn all of his pot. I'm like, *Okay, exactly how do you plan to burn it?* It's like I thought that's what you did with pot anyway. But anyway, I don't know. Alright, so the whole point is the whole recovery thing, again, and this is why it's such a big deal to me, you see we may not be a Christian nation—and we talked about that last week, Christian is not even an adjective anyway, so there are no Christian nations, there are just Christians.

You can talk about that later. Even if we're not a Christian nation, there are so many Christians in this nation, if just the church . . . I mean if you're not a church person or a Christian and you were here, invited by a guest that promised you lunch, then you can kind of listen to this whole message as an outsider. You're not



accountable for any of what I'm about to say. You can try it for free, but you're not accountable, because you don't believe what we believe and we totally get that. But there are so many Christians in this country, if we would just get our acts together, there would be an immediate lift financially, there would be an immediate lift in terms of what happens in families, there would be an immediate lift in terms of tax revenue, because we would all pay our taxes, like Jesus told us to pay our taxes. I mean if the church just got around this, the Christians did, we don't have to wait. There are so many of us, and if you're not a Christian, you don't have to worry about us imposing some kind of Old Testament Sharia law, you know, you don't have to stone your children if they rebel, you don't have to worry about that. We're talking about what Jesus taught in the New Testament.

If Christians would just come around the simple ideas in the New Testament, there would be an immediate lift; there would be more money. It would just be absolutely incredible if we decide it begins with us, if I decide it begins with me not you, we not they. And so that's where we began last week. Today I'm going to drill down on that a little bit more, because some of you weren't here and some of you thought, *Whew, I'm glad that's over. I wonder what next week is about.* Now next week we're going to go a different direction, but today I want to stay there. And the reason is, as I went through . . . a friend of mine gave me the big book, the Twelve-Step book years ago. She actually gave us her copy and had it all marked up, so I went through and read the things she had underlined. It's such a powerful thing, but I'll tell you the step that just jumped out at me that I actually want to talk about today, because this is the starting point, this is the beginning point for individual recovery. And I think, as you will see, recovery for our entire nation.

Here's step four of the Twelve-Step process: **We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.** We made a searching, like a scathing—and I love this word—and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. That anyone who has ever recovered from an addiction, anyone who has ever recovered really from anything was willing to look in the mirror and face, face on what they saw, and they quit making excuses. And they quit rationalizing, and they quit blaming, and they quit pointing fingers, and they quit talking about their mamas. And if only their daddies, and if only the economy. And they just looked in the mirror and they made a fearless, moral inventory.

They owned the issue personally, and that was the road to recovery. That is always the road to recovery—individually or as a family or as a community or as a nation. Jesus teaches us that. That's what we talked about last week. The Old Testament teaches that, as we're going to see today. But it begins, in fact, anyone who has ever recovered, especially from alcohol or drugs or really any kind of addictive behavior would tell you this—that you will never completely recover until you're completely honest with yourself. You can partially recover, as we're going to see, but you will never completely recover from anything that enslaves you until you are first absolutely, completely honest with yourself.

So, the bottom line for today's message is simply this: that recovery begins with a fearless, moral inventory. You know it's kind of weird, on one hand; I shouldn't even have to say that. There shouldn't even have to be a message on this. I mean who would argue with that? I mean if you have kids, you know how you would love it if your kids would just own and take responsibility for their decisions. Right? The good and the bad. I mean



if you're married, you just would love it if your husband would take this seriously. You would love it if your wife would take this seriously. You would really love it if your boss was here, or your mom, or your mother-in-law.

I mean we look around at other people and we go, *I wish they would just quit blaming, quit making excuses and just say I'm sorry, and then no other words would come out of their mouths.* But we have a very, very difficult time and we'll talk about why in a minute—we have a very difficult time taking responsibility for our bad decisions. We just do. We take partial responsibility but we're so psychologically astute we all understand the inner child, we all understand dysfunction, and we all understand why we do it. I mean we become so educated that we've used our knowledge and our insight in terms of personal dynamics to excuse our behavior, and we take partial responsibility.

But very few of us have the courage to take a full-blown, fearless, moral inventory of our lives. And so we embrace part of our shame, we embrace part of our guilt, but we don't embrace all of it. Consequently, we limp; we never fully move beyond it. In our country, our motto is sort of this: If it wasn't for [blank], I wouldn't have. If it wasn't for [blank], I mean yes, I did some things I shouldn't have done, but if it weren't for [blank], I wouldn't have. It's very difficult for us to look at somebody and say, *It was my fault.* Period. That's it, without an excuse. Very, very, very difficult. There is just something in us that rises up—that wants to blame and excuse. And here's what everybody in this room and everybody listening online who has ever recovered from anything serious would tell you: You never recover blaming. You never recover pointing your finger. You never recover explaining away. You only recover when you do a fearless, moral inventory and you own it, you own it, you own it, you own it, you own it.

Now here's why—because when you partially accept responsibility with one finger pointing in a different direction, things get lodged in your heart. And what happens is I create a story, and we've all done this, I create a story as to why I did what I did. So I say I'm sorry for what I did, but if it hadn't been for \_\_ I wouldn't have. So now I have confessed partially, but I've not confessed fully. And the part that I don't fully own of my behavior and my responsibility, it gets stuck in my heart. It gets lodged in my heart. And time goes by, and every once in a while I kind of feel that shame and I feel that guilt, but when I feel that guilt and that shame, do you know what I do? Instead of confessing it, I start telling my story. *Yeah, but I was young and I didn't know any better. My parents said, I shouldn't do this anyway, and the guy told me, and if it hadn't been for her, and she deceived me, and he told me a lie.* Whew. Then we move on.

Then something happens. You hear a message like today, or a message like last week, or you read something in a book, or you hear a story, or you hear a name. And that name surfaces all that stuff, and here it comes, here it comes, here it comes. And you start telling your story, telling your story, telling your story. And you carry it around. Here's what every single person who does that eventually discovers: getting away with insures you will never recover from. Getting away with: *I confessed just enough for people to know I'm not a totally irresponsible person, but I never owned all of it so I got away with it. I got away with blaming; I got away with explaining away. I got away because the way I tell my story I get so much sympathy and people are going, Oh, you couldn't help it; oh, I understand. So I got away with it.* But, as long as you get away with it, you will never ever



fully recover from it. And because I love you—and you say, *Andy, you don't love me; you don't even know my name.* True, but I love you collectively. Because I love our church, because if you're a Christian, I just want you to reach your maximum potential in terms of what Christ is able to do and through your life. At some point, we have to quit internally talking our way through the reasons why we did what we did and why we're not fully responsible and in that way getting away with it.

Because, as long as we get away with it we will never, ever fully recover from it. But I've got to tell you, this doesn't come natural—in fact, it's terrifying. In fact, at the end of the message today I am going to throw out some illustrations and it's going to surface in some of us—the thing that we want to think about the least. And as it begins to bubble up, and we feel that old, nagging pain, and all those nagging memories, our natural reaction is to say, *No, I'm not going there.* But if you do, if you do, you may walk away with something that will keep you from ever fully recovering from something—because recovery begins with me. And recovery begins with a fearless, fearless looking at it right in the face—moral inventory of my life.

See, when my kids were really little, and I've told you this before, but it's been . . . some of you may not have heard this. When my kids were really little, one of the things I started to do, because as a pastor and being a preacher's kid and just growing up around just stuff, and having heard every story, I was just almost paranoid that my children would get something lodged in their hearts. When they would go to bed at night I would put my hand on their hearts and I would begin to ask them these questions: *Hey Andrew, Allie, Garret—is everything okay in your heart?* And they were so young they didn't even really know what that meant. So I would say, *Are you mad at anybody? Did anybody hurt your feelings today? Did you tell a lie? Did you tell sort of a lie? Did you just lie?* No I didn't do that.

I would go through this series of questions, because I just know as an adult when something gets lodged in your heart, it gets stuck there. You know what happens? You're dinged. You're wounded. You always compensate. It creates in you that weird anger; you don't know where it comes from. It results in that weird depression and you're wondering where that comes from. Things get lodged in our hearts. So I would go through these; I would be relentless. *Is everything okay in your heart?* And finally, you know, they got old enough to where it's like, *Is everything . . . Everything is okay in my heart, Dad. I'm not mad, I'm not mad at you, I didn't lie and nobody could . . .* And I thought, *You know what, I don't care. They've learned to monitor, or they're learning to monitor their hearts.*

No one teaches us to do that. What we learn in our culture is excuse, blame, cram, and just keep going, and as long as you do that, my friend, you will never fully recover. And you're sitting around some people today who could stand up and share their story. They would say, *I tried every way imaginable to work around and to work through my addiction, but at one point in my life I finally broke and I went to my knees and I made a fearless . . .* Do you know why the word fearless is important? Because the reason you haven't already done this is because you're afraid. The reason that you even have to hear a message on this—the reason you've been carrying around that whatever it is for years and for generations and for decades in some cases, is because it's honestly, honestly—it's terrifying. It's terrifying to fully embrace, to fully embrace the consequences or the shrapnel or the effects of the bad decisions that we've made. Now, it's not because there's something wrong with you. Here's what Christians believe, and if you're not a Christian, you should know this. Christians believe that when sin came into the world it broke everything. What



Christians don't agree on how broken things really are. Some Christians believe that things are so broken and so shattered there is not a thread or a shred of good in any man or woman. Other Christians believe that it got broken, but it's not so shattered that you still can't find traces of good or traces of the thumbprint of God. I don't know.

All I know is that we are messed up. I'm messed up and you are messed up. We could all hold hands and say we are messed up; we're broken. And part of our brokenness and part of the human condition makes it very difficult to own and to embrace our responsibilities for some of the decisions that we've made, especially if somebody else comes along and gives us a good excuse to use and to replay for the rest of our lives. One of the best verses in the whole Scripture that illustrates this comes from a little piece of narrative, and I'll tell you the story really quickly. Back around 600 BC there was a prophet named Jeremiah. You've probably heard of Jeremiah. There's a book in the Bible named Jeremiah and it's his prophecies. If you read the book of Jeremiah it's very confusing and mostly depressing, and the reason is because Jeremiah was prophesying toward specific events, and the events aren't in the book of Jeremiah. [The book of] Jeremiah is just sort of his rantings as a prophet toward things that you don't understand unless you read other parts of the Old Testament. So here's what was going on.

During the time of Jeremiah, the nation of Israel was under God's judgment. If you've read the Old Testament, you kind of have a feel for this, that when the nation of Israel would disobey God and worship other gods, God would allow the surrounding nations to invade and conquer Israel. Then when they would repent, God would gear up and show up once again in this sort of theocracy and then demonstrate his power, and he would protect the people militarily. That's just how the world worked back then.

Well, during this period of time when Jeremiah was a prophet, the nation was under God's judgment and Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon—really he was an emperor of Babylon, really the superpower of the whole world—had put a man named Jehoiachin in as the king of Israel. And he said, *Jehoiachin, you can be the king of Israel but you pay me taxes, you do everything I say, and you can't have a standing army.* Well, Jehoiachin decided, *Enough of this.* And he had read enough of his own Old Testament history to say, *Hey, we're Israel; we're not going to put up with this anymore.* So he starts to raise an army, and they're about to declare war on Nebuchadnezzar. That would be a little bit like Georgia declaring war on the rest of the United States. It's not going to go well.

So, Jeremiah goes to see Jehoiachin and he says, *Jehoiachin, are you crazy? We're under God's judgment. You can't win this war. You are going against God, not to mention common sense.* Jehoiachin says, *Get out of here Jeremiah. I'm doing this anyway.* Well, Jehoiachin barely gets the war started. Nebuchadnezzar marches right into Jerusalem, puts Jehoiachin in chains, and puts a guy named Zedekiah on the throne. I mean this took about a minute. There was just no hope they could win. So now Zedekiah is the king and Jeremiah goes to Zedekiah and says, *Zedekiah, just cool your heels. We are under God's judgment. Your responsibility is to bring the nation back to repentance and to God, and if you do that, God will honor his covenant with Israel.*

Well Zedekiah, time goes by, and he thinks, *You know what, I think we can take on Nebuchadnezzar.* He starts raising an army. He's going to declare war on the super power, on Nebuchadnezzar. And Jeremiah is like, *I mean I understand you don't know lots of history, but this was like just a few weeks ago we tried this. Do you not remember*



*that we've already been through this once? And Zedekiah is going, Yeah, but this time we're going to throw off Nebuchadnezzar. We're going to do our own thing, we're going to be an independent nation, we're going to be a super power. And Jeremiah is going, No we're not, because we're under God's judgment. This is not the time to raise an army. This is the time to bring the people to repentance.*

Zedekiah would not listen to Jeremiah and history repeated itself. And Jeremiah is so frustrated. He's like, *What is up with people? People are crazy. I mean this is absolutely unbelievable.* So part of the book of Jeremiah is Jeremiah just going, *God, what is up with people? I mean people are crazy. It's just unbelievable.* And in Jeremiah, chapter 17, he makes a statement that I think helps us understand the dynamic of our own hearts and certainly helps explain some of what we experience around us every single day—and this is not good news. Okay? But, it is true news, and it is news that if you internalize and understand as a filter for the rest of your life, it will help you understand you. And it's news that if we embrace corporately, and certainly as a nation, we could make incredible progress.

Here's what Jeremiah said in the midst of all that chaos. He said this, and maybe you've heard this before or read this before.

*Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)*

*<sup>9</sup> The heart [as in your heart, my heart, all hearts,] is deceitful [Check this out.] above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

He uses the word deceitful, not dishonest. You know there is a difference between dishonesty and deceit, right? You've had people just lie to you, and you figured out they were lying, and you can pretty much tell a lie and you can identify a lie. Deceit is different, because deceit is generally a little bit of truth and a little bit of a lie. And it's very difficult sometimes to sort out what's true and what's not true if somebody is actually using deceit. And he uses this word: he says your heart, my heart is by nature of the fact that we have fallen and there is sin in this world—when sin came into the world it broke our hearts—the heart of man is deceitful above all things. In other words, Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of God, says your heart and my heart is the most deceitful thing on the planet. Not only do our hearts deceive other people, it's worse than that. And here's why this is such a big deal for us: Your heart and my heart has the potential and the ability to deceive ourselves. We deceive ourselves. We lie—this is crazy, we lie to ourselves and then we believe it. That's why you start telling a story to excuse your behavior and after a while you just go into story mode. You have learned to believe the story you manufactured, and over time that feels like reality to you and you will never ever be able to make progress. Never be able to make progress, until you come to terms with the fact: I am lying to myself.

He says it's deceitful above all things and check this out, it's beyond cure. This means you don't ever pray so much that your heart isn't deceitful, you don't ever commit so much that your heart isn't deceitful. Part of your brokenness—just like your body is slowly decaying over time, your heart is permanently broken and it is beyond cure. It's like a virus that can't be cured. You just have to learn to manage through it and pay attention to the symptoms.



That the heart of man is deceitful and it is beyond cure. It is natural for you, it is natural for me, it is instinct for me, it is instinct for you not to do a fearless, moral inventory. It is natural; it is instinctive to me to create a story so I can bypass the truth about me like you bypass the truth about you.

Then he throws up his hands and he asks this question: *Who can understand it? Who can understand it?* See, you've experienced this. You look back on some decisions you've made in the past and haven't you said, *What was I thinking? Why did I do that? Why did we purchase that? Well, what were we thinking, borrowing so much money? What were we thinking? Why did I move in? Why did I ever trust him? Why did I call her back? Everybody said don't call her back, my mama said don't call her back. I think an angel of the Lord might have. Everybody said don't call her back. I called her back. What was I thinking?*

And Jeremiah says, *Don't be surprised; this is a permanent condition.* You will, if you're not careful, for the rest of your life look back on decisions you've made and think, *What in the world was I doing?* He said, *It's because your heart is deceitful.* And that's not a criticism. It is an observation, which means, which means, which means, which means all along the way for the rest of your life, for the rest of my life, there are times that we have to sit down and do a fearless, fearless, fearless, moral inventory, because at the end of the day, recovery begins, recovery begins with a fearless, moral inventory. Now, if this was a typical church and I was a typical preacher, at this point in the sermon I would say, *So friends, today as you leave, I want you to just think about this verse. And I want you to go home and maybe spend some time and do a fearless, moral inventory. Let's close in prayer.* And we'd all get out fourteen minutes early. It would be great, wouldn't it? But that's not how we roll around here, is it?

So, I want to kick-start your fearless, moral inventory, because some of you are afraid, and I'm afraid. I mean this is honestly . . . when I'm preparing this message it's like, *God, can we just do something else? We already kind of talked about that last week anyway.* And then I bumped into this recovery statement and I thought, *No, no.* This is something we must learn to do, and it's not something we do once. In order to counterbalance and to counteract the deceitfulness of our hearts, our ability to deceive ourselves, at some point along the way a fearless, moral inventory is important.

So what I want to do, I want to kind of kick-start it for you. I'm going to make you really uncomfortable . . . some of you. If you're not a Christian, I just want to say this one more time: If you're not a Christian, if somebody brought you or you're watching online because they said, *Hey, if you watch, we'll take you out,* or whatever, this is all optional. I don't condemn you for doing any of this or not, I don't have any business telling you how to run your life. Absolutely, you're right, it's none of my business, you're right, and I'll second that. If you're a Christian, not so easy, because our Savior has said, and here's what is so amazing, our Savior has said . . . In fact, I love this quote from Phillip Yancey, he said, "God took an extraordinary risk by announcing forgiveness ahead of time." So here's what's amazing: If you're a Christian, forgiveness for your sin is available to you ahead of time. There is no reason for us to cower and there is no reason for us to shrink back. We have every reason to do a fearless, moral inventory of our lives and expose it to the light of God's truth, because that's how you recover.

So let me kick-start it for you. Some of you are racist. You do not like black people. You do not like white



people. You do not like Hispanic people. And you have never faced that in your life. And it comes up—it's sort of just this group. And any time a white person does something or a black person or a Hispanic person, you're natural gut reaction is to go, *Uh-huh, there it is, there it is, there it is*. You have never recovered from what your grandmamma or your mama said, or some experience you've had; you have never recovered. You have never recovered from what you learned in your fraternity or sorority. I don't know where it came from, you've never recovered, and you know it's wrong, and you dare not say certain things out loud, but it is stuck right here and you need to move past it. And you see, as soon as I start down that road there's something in you that wants to tell your story. You had an experience and I don't discount that. I would feel the same way you do if I were you. I have no doubt about that. The question is how long are you going to live like that? When are you going to move past that? When are you going to expose that to the light of God's truth and say, *God, I'm not making any more excuses. Okay? I have a problem. I want this to go away. No more stories.*

Some of you, some of you, because of what you were taught as kids, you don't like poor people. You have never felt any compassion for poor people. You've never felt any compassion toward people God feels compassionate toward, because you were taught well, poor people are lazy, poor people drink too much, poor people . . . I don't know what the story is. You've held onto childhood stories, you've held onto things that just aren't true, and when you feel motivated or somebody challenges you to give to something or to do something for people who are poor, you start rehearsing those stupid tapes and you decide not to be generous. You feel no compassion. You are stuck, it is stuck in your heart, and you're compensating for it and you're limping, and you need a fearless, moral inventory.

Some of you don't like rich people. You pull up in our parking lot and you see a really cool car that you think you'll never be able to afford, and when he or the family gets out you automatically don't like them. *I don't like them*. Do you know them? *No, but look at their car; I don't like them. How could I like somebody that drives a car that I'll never be able to afford?* And you don't know where that comes from. You've judged them, you've misjudged them, you look at their jewelry, you look at their house, you look at whatever and it is stuck. You are stuck. You have never confronted the fact that you just don't like wealthy people or people that you feel like are wealthier than you. Did you know that's a problem? You're stuck, you need to address that, you need to deal with that, you need to find out what is that in you and don't tell yourself anymore of those dumb stories. *Well, when we were fifteen, there was this rich guy and he . . .* Well you were fifteen. Hey, you are forty now. You're fifty; you've got to move beyond that.

Some of you really, really don't like gay people. And you know what's so bad about the gay people one is you actually use your Christianity to support the fact that you don't like a group of people. Now I'm just guessing, but I think, my hunch is that Jesus does not like it when we use him to support our disdain for a group of people he died for. I just don't think that he would like that. Now whoo, now we're into it. Hey, I just don't want—you know what, I just don't want you to walk around the rest of your life with stuff all stuck down in your heart that you've never felt and you've never fully addressed. Why would we do that? Why would we play those tapes, why would we continue for the rest of our lives to immediately and automatically feel something toward a group of people we don't even know, regardless of what that group is like?



That's why when Jesus came he said, *Whosoever. Whosoever.* So if Jesus died for everybody, for those of us that are Christians, we do not have any margin for discounting a group of people that God loves. And we've just never done enough inventory to realize you know what, I'm a racist. You know what? I'm homophobic, or whatever the word is. In fact, you know the primary complaint about the local church in this country is that we're homophobic. Where did that come from? I think we might have deserved that somehow. And you know what? You may accidentally be part of the problem.

Now let's go somewhere else. Some of you, there are events in your past that you felt really bad about at the time, but you never fully embraced your responsibility for those events. You know where I run into this—where we run into this a lot is women who have had abortions when they were teenagers because they got pregnant and mama paid for the abortion, and daddy seconded the abortion. In fact, the other families, you know the boy's family, they were all for the abortion and the lady at the clinic said, *It's okay, you're not ready to have a baby.* And everybody gave you a story to tell. And for the rest of your life you have carried angst, angst, angst. And every time it starts to surface or you hear a message like this, it starts coming up. And you immediately start telling yourself those stories: *But I was only 15 and I couldn't raise a child, and my mama said it was okay.* And down it goes. And then a few years later or a year later or six months here it comes again.

Did you know God, who loves you, did you know that God, who loves you, can handle that guilt and that shame? But not until you hand it to him. And did you know it doesn't matter if it's legal or not, if you're carrying yuck about that, then please don't spend the rest of your life shoving it down and telling yourself and repeating what your mama, who did the best that she knew, and for all accounts she did the right thing the way she saw the world. It doesn't matter if it's still agonizing to you. Go somewhere, sit with somebody, face it, get it out, embrace your guilt and then experience the recovering, grace-filled love of your heavenly Father.

Some of you, you fathered a child and you legally dodged all of your responsibility. But every time you hear the name of your son or your daughter, every time you run into a circumstance that reminds you of that, it comes up and immediately you start telling the story why she tricked you and it was her fault and it wasn't your fault. And da-da-da and push it, push it, push it. And God, who loves you, says, *Whoa, whoa, whoa! You're just going to limp through the rest of your life; bring that to me.* Some of you split up a home, some of you injured someone, and you know what, you'll never recover, because you've never taken full responsibility for what you did. Why would you do that? You see, it's terrifying, isn't it? It's terrifying to think about facing those things. That's why this statement is so powerful: Fearless, fearless, fearless moral inventory.

Some of you need to go home and fill in and complete these sentences: The real reason I'm unemployed is . . . The real reason—you've blamed the economy, you've blamed your employer, but you've never taken responsibility for your part in being unemployed. The real reason I don't pay my taxes is . . . You've got all kind of cool, Republican subterfuge, and you've got all this stuff going on, on why you don't pay your taxes—you've never faced it. The real reason I dropped out of school . . . The real reason you dropped out of school. You've been telling that story for twenty-five years of why you quit school and it is not the truth, and you have learned to believe the story



you manufactured fifteen years ago. And anytime you meet somebody with a college education or went further than you in school, you feel compelled to explain why you didn't finish school. And it's not even the truth and you limp. You've been dinged. You've never recovered from the decision years and years and years and years ago.

The real reason I'm selling my house, the real reason I'm taking this job, the real reason I filed for divorce, the real reason I married him. Ladies, some of you are in terrible marriages and you're blaming him, blaming him, blaming him, blaming him. The day you said, *I do*, you knew it was a mistake. Before he had ever done—before he had had time to become a bad husband you knew it was a mistake, and you've never owned that. You have 25,000 reasons why he's a terrible husband and you've never owned the fact that you did something you knew you shouldn't be doing. You've never done a fearless, moral inventory in your marriage.

The real reason we moved in together, the real reason I start every day with a drink, the real reason I hide pills in my closet, the real reason I hired her, the real reason I took that job, the real reason why I'm not more generous. A fearless, I don't care how it makes me feel, I don't care if it's terrifying, I don't care if it leaves me in a puddle on my bathroom floor crying my eyes out, I'm not going to carry this crap anymore. I want the full-on grace and forgiveness of God, and I've never received it because I've never really fully asked for it.

Wouldn't it be cool in the next couple of weeks if one of our congressmen stepped out on C-SPAN and made this announcement? *For the past, you know, twelve years I've served. I've served the District of the predominantly poor; and I've made living, I've leveraged my whole career around being an advocate for the poor. But today I want to confess: I don't even like poor people. I'm not comfortable around poor people. I have so much Purell that I can't wait to wipe my hands and get in my limo and drive off. I am a hypocrite, and my district deserves better than that, and I'm stepping down.* Imagine if one of our congressmen or women stepped out and said, *I have to resign because the truth is I am so beholden to special interest groups that every time I look at a Bill, every time I'm in a meeting, every time I have to make a decision, the primary filter isn't the people I represent anymore. Over time, I don't know how it happened, it didn't start this way, now the primary filter through which I look are the people who legally have learned and been able to control me. Our nation deserves better than that and I'm facing up to that reality, stepping down.* Imagine if a man finally stepped out and said, *You know what, I've been lying to my wife and my kids for five and a half years. I've been having an affair and I'm facing the reality. If I would lie to my wife and if I would like to my kids, who am I to think I would not lie to the people of the United States of America. You deserve better than this. I'm stepping down.*

You know, some of you are thinking, *Gosh, half of Congress would be gone if we start doing that.* Hey, can you imagine, come on, come on, come on, can you imagine the moral lift in this nation if our nation's leaders did a fearless, moral inventory and then took appropriate response? And if you're tempted to go, *Yeah*, guess what? Recovery begins with me, not you, with we, not they. Recovery begins when a group of people, especially, I believe, the church, those of us who say forgiveness is just waiting on the other side of that kind of personal transparency. When the church leads the way and says, I'm going to quit telling those silly stories, I'm going to quit hiding behind what's happened to me. I'm going to quit hiding behind what my mama told me, my grandfather told me. I'm going to quit hiding behind all that and I want to be fully alive in my faith, and I don't want anything to hold me back. And



yeah, it's terrifying; it's terrifying at an emotional level. You are scared to death of what you'll feel. It is liberating and it is necessary if you, if we, if the nation is ever going to fully recover.

Let me pray for you.