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LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: 5. Forgiveness..Humans Before God
2 Samuel 12:1-14 Psalm 51

A Sunday school teacher was teaching about forgiveness. She began her lesson by asking, “What do you have to do in order to be forgiven?” One little boy raised his hand and answered, “First you’ve got to sin!”

We all sin, we all do wrong and fail to do right, whether we intend it or not, and we all have to find a way to deal with our sin. Guilt is awareness that we’ve done wrong; shame is the fear of being found out and our sins revealed. Guilt and shame cause us to expend a lot of energy covering up our sins, covering our tracks so no one will reveal us and humiliate us.

The story of David and Bathsheba illustrates how we humans fall into sin and how we can find our way back to God. Read carefully and you’ll see a sequence of steps all too familiar.

The first step is the sin itself. In David’s case it begins with him watching Bathsheba bathing naked in the courtyard next door. He did not heed the flashing lights and blaring sirens of his conscience telling him that what he was now wanting to do, planning to do, plotting to do, scheming to do was wrong ...and warning him to stop before he made it worse, before he did what he could not undo. Sinfulness makes us ignore our conscience and cast off self restraint to the point that we plan to do what we know is wrong.

I remember a story about a young boy lingering around a street vendor’s cart full of apples. He’d step away and then slink to the cart. The vendor got suspicious and finally asked the boy, “son, you trying to steal one of my apples?” “No, sir,” the boy said, “I’m trying not to!”

My grandfather once told me if you find yourself in a situation you know is wrong, turn your feet around and follow them out.

David’s craving for Bathsheba made he think he must have her, no matter the cost, and yet he knew the cost. Moving from coveting to adultery, David breaks the tenth and seventh of the Ten Commandments. David then receives word that Bathsheba is pregnant and David starts scheming how to avoid the consequences of his sin, to avoid paying the cost.

First he calls home from the battlefield Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, one of David’s most trusted soldiers. David offers Uriah a night of rest at home, hoping that Uriah would lose no time making love to his wife, and that way, when the time came, Uriah and everyone else would assume the baby was Uriah’s. But Uriah, true to his fellow soldiers and loyal to his King, David, refused to go to his house live it up with his wife while his troops were still in battle.

Having failed in that scheme, the next day David got Uriah drunk, hoping to lower his resistance and send him home, but still Uriah’s faithfulness foiled David’s plan.

So David plots Uriah’s death, instructing General Joab to send Uriah into the fiercest part of the battle, and then to pull back his troops. Uriah will die a hero in battle, apparently braver than other soldiers who retreated. Indeed, Uriah is killed by the enemy. In devising Uriah’s

murder, David broke the sixth commandment. “Thou shall not murder.” Notice how one wrongdoing leads to another.

David is secure from revenge – how can there be any prosecution when the prosecutor is dead? And by all appearances, Uriah took a risk in battle and was killed, just a casualty of war, nothing more.

David knew he was guilty and he must do anything to conceal his guilt. When he killed Goliath the giant he did it publicly and glorified in it. But in killing Uriah, he did it privately, covertly, for he was ashamed of it.

Step two in the sin sequence is enjoying the benefits of the deed for a while and justifying it. David seems to have gotten by with it. And after a respectable period of public mourning, David marries Bathsheba. For a while. Life feels good. David justifies his deed on several counts. As King he was entitled to many wives and by “rescuing” Bathsheba from widowhood and poverty, he was “compassionate,” and honoring his loyal soldier Uriah by taking care of Uriah’s widow. Yeah, right! But don’t we also convince ourselves that we deserve what we want, what we did, and the benefits of our sin were pleasing, and we didn’t hurt anyone, and nothing bad happened to us after all, so what’s the big deal?

The next step of sin is the dreaded moment of discovery and the pain of shame, the pang of guilt and humiliation before others. In David’s case, God sends the prophet Nathan to uncover David’s deed and reveal it, name it for what it is. Nathan’s tells the story of the rich rancher taking his poor neighbor’s lamb to slaughter for a meal to serve his guest. David is outraged and demand justice, “This jerk deserves to die, at least he’ll pay back fourfold what he stole! Who is this greedy, thieving, scoundrel anyway?”

“Nathan loomed in David’s face, poked him with this finger, and said, “You are the man!” And tells David God knows all about his adultery with Bathsheba and his complicity in Uriah’s death. And though you did all this in secret, God will now reveal it publicly!”

In most cases our sins are not dramatically revealed and our shame may be nothing more than our conscience speaking to us. “I know what you did! How could you do that? What are you thinking? What are you doing?”

Step four is this sin sequence is a time of calculated damage control or bargaining. We may deny the sin, proclaim our innocence, or we try to cover up the deed, redirect our accusers. We may stonewall, try to buy some time to develop a plot, or we may cut some kind of a deal with God, a plea bargain, to contain the damage, such as making a limited confession or pleading “no contest.” Maybe that would work?

Three hard words to say are “I am wrong.” Likewise, “I have sinned.” We like to believe we’re innocent and to admit our wrong-doing, our sin, our guilt, is to destroy the fiction of innocence. So we shift the blame to someone else, claim that we were a victim, or we were just following orders, doing what we were told. And our wrong doing isn’t really sin; it’s just an error in judgment. It wasn’t until Nathan exposed the crime that David came clean and admitted it.

Sometimes we manage to stop the process at step four – calculating, bargaining our innocence. But usually we can't fool people and we sure can't fool God. And in the long run, a cover up is not what we need.

In David's case there is a fifth step: Confession. David quickly decides that the best thing for him to do is to confess. He says to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). David's deeds were terrible. How amazing it is, yet how helpful it is, that the Bible records King David's story and his public confession.

Psalms 51 is David's humble prayer for cleansing and pardon:

Have mercy on me, O God...blot out my transgressions...wash me from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin.Create in me a clean heart, O God...and put a new and right spirit within me!Do not cast me away from your presence, do not take your holy spirit from me...restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit!

David took responsibility and professed, "I did it. The consequences are mine." There were consequences. There always are. Even the most complete forgiveness doesn't cancel the consequences of our wrongdoings—not for David and not for us. David and Bathsheba's son died, just as God said it would and the later sons of David lived lives of turmoil and terrible things happened as they battled one another and their father David.

The Bible says, "your sins shall find you out" (Numbers 32:23). That does not mean that your all sins will be revealed, but rather that your sinfulness will catch up with you sooner or later in some way or another.

Thankfully, after step five, Confession, there is a step six, "Restoration." The rest of the story is that God *does* restore David! God exercises judgment AND grace.

- Nathan reveals David, "Thou art the man!" and announces God's judgment on the house of David.
- David faces the facts and confesses, "I have sinned against the Lord!"
- And then, amidst judgment's darkness, comes a glimmer of grace... Verse 13: *Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."*

God does not desire the death of the sinner – but rather that we should turn from our sinfulness and live!

God's forgiveness and restoration does not mean that we'll escape all the consequences of our sins, but if we will confess our sins and ask God's forgiveness, God will give us the grace to bear our consequences and to grow in faith and trust in God because of them, grow stronger and more ready, willing and able to resist temptation and not repeat our mistakes. God's Holy Spirit in us gives us power to stop the sequence of sin early, we avoid the steps we don't want to endure.

We often use I John 1:9 as a call to confession before we read our prayers of confession: *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* But we must face our sins before we can admit them, confess them.

God's forgiveness of our sins produces a healing that is often sudden, miraculous, emotional, and cathartic! Things are right between God and us again; right between our neighbors and us; right inside us! Our hearts are made clean and a new and right Spirit is within us!

It is a wonderful feeling, isn't it? A cleansing feeling! We want everyone to have it! So next week we'll look at forgiveness, humans before one another.

The good news of the gospel is that *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, so that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!* (john 3:16)

God's love overflows in forgiveness! And God offers grace and mercy and peace to all who will confess their sins and accept his forgiveness in Jesus Christ!

By God's grace we are privileged to know God and live in God's will; forgiven, restored, renewed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit!

But to know God's wonderful gift of forgiveness we have to admit our wrong doing, confess our sins to God and also to confess that there are things we ought to have done but failed to do. And we must seek God's restoration.

You cannot talk your way out of situation you behaved yourself into. To regain other's trust and good graces you must show consistent, sustained, changed attitude and behavior over time.

The good news is God is at work in you to help you to do just that. God is at work in you both to will and do his good pleasure

God honored David's prayer of confession in Psalm 51 and did indeed give David a new heart and put a new and right spirit in David. David went on to serve the people of Israel as King and he ruled wisely, with humility and wisdom, aware of God's undeserved grace and careful not to abuse the second chance God had given him. The Israelites, aware of what David had done and what God had done, honored and served the Lord God, the One who is always ready to forgive us, restore us, and welcome us home.

The God who has proved that by giving us Jesus Christ our savior,
and who has sustained us, preserved us, renewed us in the Holy Spirit.

We are now privileged, even obliged to witness God's grace by forgiving others as God has forgiven us. See you next Sunday for...FORGIVENESS: Part 2: Humans before one another.

Amen.