

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

July 17, 2016

“When We Tell God, ‘Sorry’”

Love to Pray, part 2

2 Chronicles 7:13-16

You are in the right place this morning. You are not here by accident. The Lord God, who formed you and gave you life, sees you here, right now, and he wants you to experience his love. Look around you for a moment. In this room you will find people who love Jesus, who are gathered for this moment to worship God and call on his name. We aren't perfect. We are broken people, just like everyone else in this world. But there is one big difference: we have found forgiveness and healing. This is the Body of Christ, the church. And today, you are a part of it.

Would you please join me in prayer? “Holy Spirit, thank you for your love and intercession for us. Thank you for your awesome presence to lift us up when we are weak, and to guide us to follow your call. We simply ask that you open our ears to hear, our eyes to see, and our hearts to respond to what you are doing in our lives and in our world. Speak to us your word in this moment now, and we will be filled. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

This past week was pretty amazing. For those who didn't know, I counseled at middle school camp at Lake Louise with 17 campers from the Bellaire area. And I am so proud of these students. Even though they made up 40% of the camp, they were compassionate, inclusive, and made a huge impact on each other. I am particularly proud of the ones who went to camp for the very first time. It takes guts to spend a week in the forest with a bunch of strangers and some aggressive chipmunks. But by the end of the week, they were no longer

strangers. The campers, not the chipmunks! These students became friends, brothers and sisters in Christ.

One thing that is clear is that these students are hungry for relationships. They are hungry for friends, they want to be noticed, and they want to be liked. They are hungry for adults who will be positive role models for them. And sometimes, they are just plain hungry, like right before bed when they raid the cabin snack supply!

One of the great parts of camp is the community that forms as we play and pray together. And this shouldn't surprise us, because God has formed us for relationships, with him and with each other. We began a series last week called "Love To Pray," which is helping us learn how to grow our love relationship with God. Just like the students love to talk to each other....they really love to talk, even after lights out.....we are discovering that prayer is the conversational part of our love relationship with God.

We mentioned last week that prayer is sometimes difficult because we aren't sure when, how, or even if God answers our prayers. Today I want to point out the power of a confessional prayer and how it relates to God's answers. In short, why should we tell God we are sorry?

The scripture we read today in 2nd Chronicles 7 was part of a speech God gave to King Solomon after the dedication of the first temple. Things were going very well at that point. Israel was at peace; they were prospering. And God wanted to remind Solomon of his promise to the people. They would not always face good times. There would be drought and famine and plague, and the people were going to be faced with a decision. Look again at verse 14.

“¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

This was a conditional promise from God, a blessing if Israel was humble and obedient. God explained to King Solomon, and all of Israel, how he was going to discipline them. You may have noticed the memory verse in your bulletin today. It's found in Hebrews 12:5-6. It says, “do not lose heart when [the Lord] rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves.”

I had to practice some discipline in our cabin this week to help the campers have a good time. Left on their own, they would have gotten hurt or broken rules or somehow destroyed the community we worked so hard to build up. Any of you who are parents probably know this. You discipline your children, not to break their spirits, but to protect them and help them grow up to be wise, mature, and responsible.

It's the same way with God. God knows what's best for us. And frankly, God does discipline us. I found this quote in my Love To Pray guide: “God so loves his own that he will chasten them in order to turn them back from their sinful ways and restore a right relationship with himself.”

The truth is, God will not tolerate sin, but the amazing thing is, God will forgive sin. Let me repeat that. God does not tolerate sin, but God forgives sin. So we have to realize, even if we are followers of Jesus Christ, we will backslide. We will fall away. We will make mistakes and have to apologize, to each other, and to God.

Let me give you an example. Thursday, the campers were playing an awesome game called Quidditch, which involved a lot of running and throwing

balls around. It was a combination of soccer, basketball, dodgeball and tag. I know, sounds great, doesn't it? It was. I wish you could have seen it. I got pretty caught up in the game, and at one point, I lunged to tag the camper I was trying to capture. I probably outweighed him by fifty pounds, and he was fast, so in my thirst for victory, I tagged him hard, and in the process, basically shoved him to the ground. It was a nice clean tackle, I suppose, but a tackle nonetheless. In that moment, I was mortified, and immediately I said, "I'm sorry," and asked if he was OK. He was, and the game continued.

But suppose for a minute I hadn't apologized. What if I had rubbed it in? "Ha-ha, loser. Eat dirt!" Or what if I had said nothing? Maybe it would have still been OK, but that relationship would have suffered. The boy could have nursed a grudge against me. Or I could have avoided him the rest of the week, afraid he might retaliate or criticize me. The apology, however small, was a moment for both of us to heal. And, by the way, I did eat dirt later, in the form of a dirt-flavored jelly bean. So I guess there was justice.

In the same way, sin harms our relationship with God. And even worse, sin hinders our prayers. Psalm 66:18 reads, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened [to my prayer]." Does this mean God never listens to sinners? Maybe, but what it certainly means is that sin breaks our relationship with God, and until it is healed, our prayers will be ineffective.

That is why the good news of the gospel is so good. I John 1:9 promises us that "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." We can be restored when we humble ourselves and seek God's forgiveness. When we turn from our sin and seek his face, God lifts us up, and he can continue to pour out blessings in our lives. But

while we are sinning, it's as if we are telling God, "I don't care about our relationship, and I am not willing to change the thing that separates us."

What is it about saying sorry that is so hard? Is it our pride? Is it some internal deceit that convinces us we are perfect and never have to apologize? Is humility a lost art in today's world? I don't know exactly, but I feel it in my heart. We are so afraid of losing face, of others ridiculing us when we admit that we have made a mistake. Have you heard the old one-liner? "I never make mistakes. I thought I did once, but I was wrong." But people, this real truth is: without confession, there is no healing, and without healing, there is no power.

One of the things I noticed at camp was the number of students who were willing to lead prayers. I promised to do a head-stand if the campers in my small group prayed out loud, which they did. I really am proud of them. But one thing I noticed in their prayers was a lack of confession and a lack of power. "God, I hope we have a great rest of the day. I hope our meal tastes good. I hope we continue to have fun. In Jesus' name. Amen." There is nothing seriously wrong with that. It is a prayer prayed from the heart. But it could be so much more.

I want to conclude with a model that will help you direct your prayers. It's a simple four-step prayer that you can use. The order isn't critical, but if you have problems formulating the words to say to God, I encourage you to use this. It's an acronym using the words "ACTS". A-C-T-S.

"A" stands for "Adoration." It simply means praising God for who God is. Think of the Lord's Prayer. "Our heavenly Father, your name is holy." When you start your prayer, start by focusing on something you love about God.

The "C" stands for confession. Simply tell God that you are sorry. Sincerely admit your shortcomings: the things you have done that you shouldn't have, the

things you didn't do that you should have. Spend so time with the "Ben Brothers." Could've, Would've, and Should've. Even if you're not sure where you have messed up, ask God to show you. Use the words of Psalm 139:23-24.

"Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me..."

Then move on to the "T". Thanksgiving. "God, I thank you for my health. My family. My church." Whatever it is that you have, acknowledge God as the source of it. "God, I'm thankful for trials, because they make me trust you more."

And last, "S" stands for supplication. A fancy word for, "please." Ask God for what you want. "Please God, heal my heart. Heal our land. Save my friends." Whatever you are praying for, be bold, and ask God to move according to his will.

I think many of our prayers include the last two elements. "Thank you for this day, God. Please bless our food." "Good bread, good meat. Good Lord, let's eat." We get used to just saying those two things. But when you add the praise and the confession together with thanksgiving and supplication, you have a very powerful prayer. Think about it. "God, you are ruler over all creation. You are the great king. Please, forgive me of my sins." That's pretty powerful to think that the great Judge of Heaven will listen to our sincere apology and forgive us. It's humbling. It's wonderful. And it's something we all need to do.

"There is no privilege of prayer without the purity of heart." "If we expect God to do for us what we ask, we should be prepared to do for God what he asks." God calls us to confess. The truth is, you have probably said sorry to others at some point in your life. Have you said "I'm sorry" to God?

Memory verse

“...do not lose heart when he (God) rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son”. (Hebrews 12:5-6)

Reflection questions

1. How did your parents discipline you as a child? In your opinion, how effective were they?
2. Describe a time when you felt God was disciplining you. What was the outcome?
3. Why is it hard for someone to say, “I’m sorry” and truly mean it?
4. How does a community apologize for their brokenness and sin?
5. When have you seen God restore a broken family or community through repentance?
6. What is one thing you seek forgiveness for in your life?