

The Space Between Us

Week 2: Look in the Mirror

Psalm 51

Every year, around the end of summer, thousands of people gather in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada for a festival called Burning Man. The event is focused on community, self-expression, and art and each year, it ends with the symbolic burning of a large wooden effigy, referred to as "The Man."

During the week-long festival, people team up to create incredible works of art. Everything from sculptures to buildings to performances, even cars. Well, in 2015, Ukrainian artist Alexander Milov created this sculpture called **Love (show picture and leave up while I talk about it)**. The piece is 58' long, 18' wide, and 24' tall and it's made of metal and mesh and plaster.

But, as impressive as the structure is, it's the message behind it that's so beautiful. Milov says it represents two people who are at odds with each other, but they both have this inner desire to connect. There's space between them, even though they're right next to each other, and there's something inside of both of them that just wants to reach out and close the gap.

I think there's something inside all of us that has this longing for deep, rich, meaningful connections with others. And yet, at the same time, there's something else inside of us that fights against what it takes to make those connections happen.

We're in week 2 of our series called The Space Between Us, and the focus of this series is how we can close the gaps that happen in our relationships. Gaps caused by conflict or misunderstanding or mistakes. And, what we saw last week is that, when there is a gap in our relationship caused by one of those things, reconciliation requires ingredients that you hold and I hold. True reconciliation of a relationship, when things are made right, requires confession and repentance and it requires forgiveness. And, it takes both people adding their ingredients to make it possible.

And I think the reason why so many of us long for connection, but experience separation, is because sometimes it's really hard to add our ingredient; whichever one you're holding. It's hard to forgive people sometimes. It's hard to let go of a hurt. But it's also hard to admit when we've hurt someone else. It's hard to own our mistakes and ask for forgiveness. But, it's so important if we truly want reconciliation, which is why we're talking about confession today.

If there's space between you and someone else, you may need to look in the mirror and see if the gap is there because of something you've done. And, if it is, you have a couple of options. You can ignore it and hope it goes away or the other person forgets about it. And, we probably all know how well that works. Or, you can deal with it and confess it.

And we know there's so much freedom and good that comes from confessing and owning up to our mistakes. It's why James, the half-brother of Jesus, likens it to being healed. It's why we

teach it to our kids and celebrate it when we see it in athletes caught cheating. Confession is healthy and good and wise and it paves the road to forgiveness. And, as a society, we're actually pretty quick to forgive, especially if someone is willing to own up and confess what they did.

But there are a couple of enemies that keep us from doing what we know we should do. What we know is good for us and our relationships. I think the reason we have a hard time confessing when our actions have caused a gap in a relationship comes down to pride and fear.

We don't want to admit that we were wrong. We don't want to swallow our pride and accept responsibility. Our pride makes us think that, if someone's offended by something I did, that's their problem, not mine. Pride makes us think only about ourselves and it drives a wedge between our relationships that only makes the space wider when we're unwilling to own up to the hurt we caused the other person.

Closely related to pride is fear. And, it's not fear of what the other person will think of us if they know what we did. Most of the times, they do. They're wondering if you know what you did. I think the fear that keeps us from confessing is the fear that we won't be loved. There's a desire in all of us is to be fully known and fully loved, but we're afraid we won't be, so we hide from each other. And part of the way we hide is by ignoring or justifying or minimizing the things we've done that have hurt others.

If you walk into Alan Phillips' office, you'll see a sign that says, "Nothing you confess will make me love you less." He says it's from a country song, but I'm attributing it to him because he embodies it so well. But, it touches on our fear, doesn't it? We're afraid that if we confess and own up to something, people will love us less.

But, I'll tell you, what I've found in my life and the lives of others is the exact opposite. There may be pain that needs to be worked through and it's not always easy, but when someone is willing to confess, it's typically a catalyst towards reconciliation, not a deterrent.

And, confession doesn't just help pave the way for the person we hurt to forgive us, it also helps us forgive ourselves. Nona Jones says, "While forgiveness is necessary to release our offender from our future (and we'll talk more about that next week), grace is necessary to release ourselves from our past." Once we humble ourselves, admit our mistakes, and confess our sin, we're able to start forgiving ourselves for what we've done, too. And I think we see all of this come together in our text for today. If you have a Bible, or a Bible app that you like to use, turn with me to Psalm 51.

When you read through the Psalms, you may notice that, every now and then, underneath the chapter, there's a little subtitle. The font is usually smaller and italicized and it tells who the author is and who it's for. Sometimes, it includes the context in which it was written. And, in Psalm 51, it says...(READ subtitle)

Now, if you know the account found in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, you know that David did a little more than commit adultery with Bathsheba. Long story short, King David was out one night walking on the rooftop of his palace when he sees this beautiful young lady bathing on the roof of her house. And, even though he knows she's married and her husband is off fighting for him, David abuses his power, invites her to come over, and Bathsheba ends up pregnant.

Well, in pride, or fear, or both, David calls for Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to come home from the battlefield hoping he'll sleep with his wife and everyone will think the baby is his. But, Uriah has none of it. His integrity keeps him from being with his wife while his brothers in arms are out fighting. David tries again, but Uriah stays strong. Eventually, King David sends Uriah back to the battlefield with a sealed note that contained instructions for his commander to put him on the front lines. It was essentially a death warrant. And, sure enough, Uriah is killed and Bathsheba moves in with King David.

Later, God sends the prophet Nathan to call David out for his sin. David is broken before Nathan, but more importantly, he's broken before God. He confesses his sin and pleads for forgiveness. Psalm 51 pulls the curtain back on that prayer. Look at it with me, starting in verse 1...(READ Ps. 51:1-2)

David humbles himself and pleads for mercy based on God's character, not his own. He appeals to the Lord's compassion and love for his forgiveness, not because he thinks he deserves it. Verse 3...(READ Ps. 51:3-4)

David owns up to his sin. He doesn't try to minimize it or sugar coat it. He doesn't hide it, or hide because of it. He exposes it by bringing it out of darkness and into the light. And, we don't see it as clearly in our English translations, but in the Hebrew, there's an emphasis on the "I" in these verses. David is taking personal responsibility for his sin. This isn't a "I'm sorry **you** were offended by my actions" kind of prayer. He's owning up to what he did.

And, I find it interesting that he says in verse 4, "Against you, you only, have I sinned." I think Bathsheba might have something to say about that. Uriah definitely would if he could. But the point is, any sin we commit, any break we cause in a relationship, ultimately causes a break in our relationship with God. And so, David knows, if I'm going to get right horizontally, I've got to get right vertically.

After humbling himself and owning up to his sin, David pleads for God's forgiveness in verse 7. He says...(READ vs. 7-9)

Hyssop was used by priests in cleansing rituals. If you were cleansed by hyssop, you were considered pure and holy. David knows that God's forgiveness leads to the same thing. That His forgiveness makes us clean, that it blots out the stain of our sin and makes us whiter than snow. So David pleads for that forgiveness and then he prays for restoration in verse 10...(READ vs. 10-12)

David cries out for restoration and renewal. He's longing to be reconciled with God. That the Father will close the gap his sin created so they can be in a right relationship again. And by grace, that's exactly what God does for David, just like he does for us, and David ends the Psalm in praise of the God who redeems, restores, and renews all things.

And, here's what I've found in my life...when I know that I'm forgiven and loved by my Heavenly Father, it gives me the courage to come out of hiding and expose my sin to the light. It gives me the confidence to say to the person I've hurt, "I was wrong, what I did was wrong."

Because my sense of self-worth and identity is not based on getting it right all the time. My worth and value and identity is not in what others think about me, it's in a Father who knows me fully and loves me more than I can imagine. And that love and acceptance and grace that I receive from Him gives me the confidence to be honest with myself and the person my actions hurt. I don't have to hide it or hide from it.

Fred Luter, who was the first black president of the Southern Baptist Convention, put it like this, "Once you have been reconciled to God, you have no problem being reconciled to others."

Once you've humbled yourself before the ultimate judge and experienced the freedom of his grace and mercy and love, you have no problem pursuing reconciliation with others; confessing how your actions have created space between you and seeking to close the gap you caused.

And not only does Psalm 51 gives us hope that the gap in our vertical relationship with God can be closed, I think it gives us a great model for how to close those horizontal gaps through confession and repentance.

First, confession has to **Start with humility**. Humility before God and humility before the person you hurt. If you know that your actions caused pain, don't ignore it, don't get defensive, don't justify it. Humble yourself, swallow your pride, and move towards the person you hurt.

Second, **Own the pain your actions caused**. Don't just say sorry, say what you're sorry for. Name it and accept responsibility for your actions. Own it, but listen...don't carry it. That's why we have to follow David's example and deal with our sin before God first. We need to own up to our sin, but we also need to release it to the Lord who paid the price for it through Jesus.

When you go to God first, you'll know that **your past does not define you; grace does**. That'll help you be honest about your past and how it may have hurt others and caused a gap in your relationship with them.

Third, **Seek forgiveness**. Don't just say, "I'm sorry" and what you're sorry for, but take that hard next step of asking for their forgiveness.

Fourth, **Purse reconciliation**. Don't just assume everything will go back to the way it was. It might not. Trust takes time and rebuilding trust can sometimes take even longer. Rejoice that

God's forgiveness is instant and final, but remember that it's a little bit harder for us. Prove over time a commitment to closing the space between you and keeping it closed.

Finally, **Honor the person by honoring their decision.** David honored and celebrated God for his forgiveness and when you confess, the other person may choose to forgive you. If so, receive that gift because that's exactly what it is. You owed them something, but they canceled the debt. Honor them for it and express your gratitude. Don't take it for granted.

But, you know what, honor the person and their decision even if they're not ready to forgive you yet. You can't force them or coerce them to forgive. You can only do your part, add your ingredient, and hope that one day, your confession paved the road to their forgiveness and the reconciliation you desire.

There's so much more that could be said about this, but as we close out today, I wonder if there's a next step that you need to take to help pave the way for forgiveness and reconciliation in a relationship? A step of confession you need to take that might help close the gap between you and someone hurt by your actions.

Is there a call you need to make? A letter you need to write? A coffee you need to share? It's never too late to do the right thing and maybe today's the day you finally do it.

Or maybe today's the day you humble yourself before God, confess your sin to him and your need for salvation. He's already paid the price for it through Jesus. Now, he just invites you to run into His open arms to experience his mercy and grace and forgiveness.