

The New Normal Series
Seeking Forgiveness is Normal
Luke 19:1-10
February 12, 2012

Downstairs in our kitchen someone has placed a sign on the refrigerator that says, “This is a self cleaning kitchen, so clean-up after your self.” For followers of Jesus the normal thing to do when we find we have made a mess in a relationship is to be willing to clean it up. The gospel of Luke contains a story about a man that met Jesus. His experience of Jesus, his encounter of Jesus transformed him to be the type of person willing to clean up the damage he had done against other people. This story is a reminder **our willingness to clean up the mess we make in our relationships is a reflection on our relationship with God (1 John 4:20).**

Read Scripture Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus was chief tax collector. The tax collection system of his day was ripe with corruption. Zacchaeus was the man in charge and in high position of a corrupt system. Therefore he bore much responsibility for people being cheated. But his encounter with Jesus left him a changed man. We know Jesus deeply impacted Zacchaeus because the story ends with Jesus saying “salvation had come to the house of Zacchaeus.” Verse 8 tells us that because of experiencing Christ, Zacchaeus was going to respond in a new way to the people he had injured and offended. This scripture reminds us for we who claim to be followers of Jesus, there is a normal way we handle the mistakes we commits against others. Verse 8 contains what ought to be the normal steps, principles we take when we have in some way brought injury to someone.

Ownership – Clearly and cleanly admit the failure so no one else can be blamed = “Half of my possession I will give...”v.8

In verse 8, twice Zacchaeus says to Jesus two words that are very important. Twice he said, “I will.” We often hear the expression about how we need to take ownership of the mistakes we have made or damage we have caused. But what does taking ownership mean? When Zacchaeus said, “I will give half my possessions to the poor, I will repay anyone I have defrauded,” that is taking ownership of a mistake. Figuratively speaking, he was telling Jesus I have broken some relationships, I have made the mess, and I am willing to grab the broom and the dustpan and clean up the mess I created.

It was normal for Jesus to expect his disciples to not let injured relationships just lay in pieces. So many times when it comes to teachings on relationships from Jesus and others in the New Testament, the instructions from Jesus and others will say things like “go to your brother or sister, Matthew 5:23” or “bear one another burdens, Galatians 6:2” or “speak the truth in love, Ephesians 4:15” The norm for his disciples is to take action and be willing to clean up the mess we make in relationships, especially if we have caused the injury.

One of the things we need to practice as Christians when we make mistakes is own the damage we have caused. We are to be willing to grab the broom and dustpan and get the situation cleared up. But some Christians may find it hard to do that. What keeps us from being like Zacchaeus and saying to God “I will” take care of this?

- Perhaps we have too much pride to admit were wrong. We say things like we didn’t mean a word or action to be taken the way it was.
- Maybe we just try and act like nothing ever happened?
- For some it might be feelings of embarrassment, shame, and fear that if we apologized, our apology would not be accepted.
- Maybe we minimize the incident and say whatever we did was

insignificant. But if we can remember what we did or said then certainly the person who was on the receiving end remembers.

Here is how we really know whether we are seeking to take ownership of any type of wrong we have committed. We focus on the person we have injured; not our reasons why we did whatever we did. We focus on the person we injured; not the excuses to avoid cleaning up the mess.

Confession – Share the ownership of that failure with the one/s you injured or offended = “If I have defrauded anyone of anything...” v.8

In the presence of Jesus, Zacchaeus was also willing to name the wrong he could have committed. He told Jesus, **“If I have defrauded anyone...”** One of the of the most powerful things we can bring to clean up the damage done in a relationship is to have a willingness to describe not just that we were wrong, **but also how we were wrong. To dare to name to the person we have injured, or disappointed, our mistakes, brings credibility that our regret, remorse and insight runs deep within us.**

Zacchaeus was practicing the principle of confession. In the Bible the word confession carries meanings such as to agree, admit and acknowledgement of the truth or what is true.

God has created us in his image. God is truth. Therefore I believe we have been created in such away that we were designed to confess our untruth and wrongs when we commit them. We were designed to be uncomfortable about our failings until we do something about them especially if we are a follower of Jesus. There is just no way a Christian who knows they have brought injury to some one should think it is normal to do nothing to address the situation. That is just off the charts for what is normal for a disciple of Jesus Christ. **God has created in such away that**

confession; not denial and excuses is how we handle our mistakes.

I was fishing around for ideas for this message and I listened to a broadcast from “Back to the Bible.” A Dr. Woodrow Kroll, was speaking and said he has been teaching bible students for over 30 years and he still occasionally will have former students write or call and ask forgiveness for cheating in his class on their test, years ago. God has wired us to be truthful, and to confess our wrongdoing is an expression of truthfulness. Confession is the norm. (pod cast was the week of 2/10/12)

Repair – Restore where you can to reverse or repay in order to correct the situation = “I will repay...” v.8

Zacchaeus informed Jesus he would repay those he had cheated. **He was willing to not just admit he was wrong, but repair the damage done with more than just words.** He was willing to repay money because he had dishonestly taken money.

The principle in this part of the story is that it is just normal for us as Christians **to intentionally try and repair the damage we have done.** We need to voice more than just words of being sorry, that’s not enough. Chances are when we are talking about mistakes we have made in relationships were not necessarily talking about repaying someone money.

Maybe the repayment needs to be in restoring someone’s reputation that perhaps has been damaged by our words or actions. Maybe the repair is a gesture of support because we failed to keep some promise or commitment.

One thing that might hold us back from taking this step like Zacchaeus is concern whether the apology and action to try and restore will be accepted. We might fear our efforts will be rejected. From a biblical perspective I would say that we always should take

the responsibility to offer the gesture to repair any wrong we have committed. The person we apologize to may not in fact forgive us or receive whatever gesture of amends we try and make. They may not want to rebuild the bridge of relationship with us. We cannot control that, God will deal with them. All we can focus on is taking the responsibility to repair what we can repair.

Generosity – Do not be stingy in doing the right thing = “I will repay four fold...” v.8

Zacchaeus was not only willing to repay but he said he was willing to repay fourfold to anyone he had cheated. The common teaching of his day required less than fourfold effort; but Zacchaeus was generous in willing to go above and beyond.

If we want to demonstrate that we're living more normal like Jesus don't be stingy with your efforts to try and right the wrong. If you made a comment that tarnished someone's reputation, don't just apologize to them, go to anyone who might have been affected by the comment and seek to correct the injury. You make break a commitment to help in some way, offer to help again don't just say you're sorry.

Conclusion

Marlene and I spent a few hours Saturday at our home in Milan. We're trying to find renters again. We had three different people show up to inquire about renting our home. And we are being so careful. The first problem is hoping we could get renters. The next problem who do we trust to take care of our home.

This deal about us as Christians seeking to be forgiven and doing the right thing repair any harm we have caused is similar to our situation to rent out our home. God is trusting us to represent him in this world. If his followers will not practice steps like these when we're wrong, we're wrecking the witness of Jesus Christ, and

including his church. But when we practice these steps towards others when we fail, I think people see Christ in us, they see the difference in us just like Jesus saw the difference in Zacchaeus.

On the same day, Rebecca Pippert attended two very different events: a graduate-level

psychology class at Harvard University and a Christian Bible study adjacent to Harvard. She offered the following observations on how the two groups addressed (or failed to address) their faults, problems, and sins:

First, the students [in the graduate-level psychology class] were extraordinarily open and candid about their problems. It wasn't uncommon to hear them say, "I'm angry," "I'm afraid," "I'm jealous" Their admission of their problems was the opposite of denial. Second, their openness about their problems was matched only by their uncertainty about where to find resources to overcome them. Having confessed, for example, their inability to forgive someone who had hurt them, [they had no idea how to] resolve the problem by forgiving and being kind and generous instead of petty and vindictive.

One day after the class, I dropped in on a Bible study group in Cambridge. [The contrast] was striking. No one spoke openly about his or her problems. There was a lot of talk about God's answers and promises, but very little about the participants and the problems they faced. The closest thing to an admission [of sin or a personal problem] was a reference to someone who was "struggling and needs prayer."

"The first group [the psychology class] seemed to have all the problems and no answers; the second group [the Bible study] had all the answers and no problems."

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