

LOVE THAT RESTORES

Series: **LOVEFIRST**

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Love, Forgiveness, Confession, Repentance

2 Samuel 11, Psalm 51

Political scandals seem to be the order of the day. Have you heard about the head of state accused of adultery, fathering an illegitimate child, and murder-for-hire? This guy was a war hero, a supposedly Godly man, a well-respected leader, even an accomplished musician. What on earth could cause somebody like that to fall so far, so fast?

The guy I'm talking about is not a modern-day politician. He's a man named David, and we find his story in the bible, in the book of 2 Samuel, which is part of what's called the Deuteronomistic history of Israel. (Big fancy word...basically, the history of how the kingdom of Israel rose and fell as they obeyed or didn't obey God's law.) And David is one of the heroes of this section of the bible, but in this instance, he's not living up to the hype.

If you know the story of David and Goliath, this is that guy. As a young boy, he fought this beastly warrior and won a victory in battle for Israel, and from that point on, there were those who considered him almost God-like. He had lots of ups and downs over the course of his life, including being exiled from the kingdom at one point, and hated by the current king. But, ultimately, David would become king, and it was during his reign as king that things began to fall apart.

In 2 Samuel, chapter 11, we read this:

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 11:1

Now, this is important because David, who was a king, should have gone off to war, but instead, he decided to stay home and send his commander Joab out by himself to lead the army. And this is where the trouble begins. Over the course of the rest of this chapter, an unspeakable series of events unfolds.

You see, David, having not gone off to war, is hanging out at the palace one day, and he looks out the window and sees this beautiful woman bathing herself on the roof of her house. David, being the war hero king (with an ego to match), decides he should have this woman. So he sends one of his servants to find out who she is.

The servant comes back and explains that the woman's name is Bathsheba, and she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's key soldiers. Now, if David had been using the brain in his head, he would have stopped there. But instead, he was relying on other parts to do his calculating, so he sent for this woman Bathsheba, and because he was the king, he managed to get her to sleep with him.

So, he shouldn't have been watching her bath, he shouldn't have sent for her, and knowing that she was married, he definitely shouldn't have slept with her. There's even some question as to what he might have done to...convince her. That's enough bad stuff, but it gets worse.

A while later, Bathsheba sends word to David that she's pregnant. Now, considering the fact that her husband had been away at war for months, there was only one possibility here. David was the father.

But David wasn't looking for a scandal. He didn't want to be known as the king who fathered the child of another man's wife. So he sent for Uriah and hoped he would come home, sleep with his wife, and be elated when they had a child...a few months early.

But Uriah threw a hitch into that plan. You see, he was a loyal soldier, and the thought of being in his house, eating and drinking and sleeping with his wife felt to Uriah like he would be dishonoring all his friends who were still on the front lines. And so, after meeting with the king, Uriah, rather than going home, slept in the palace where all the king's servants slept.

Now, David had a real problem. Uriah certainly wasn't going to be convinced that Bathsheba's child was his, and David risked word getting out about his fling with the wife of a man he had sent off to war. So what does David do? Well, again, he makes matters worse.

In verse 14, we're told:

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

2 Samuel 11:14-15

In other words, throw this guy to the wolves. Stick him out front and let him be killed.

And that's just what happened. Uriah was killed in battle, and David, the "noble" king, swooped in and took Bathsheba as his wife, and they had a son...a few months early.

And chapter 11 of 2 Samuel ends with these ominous words:

But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

2 Samuel 11:27b

Today, I want to talk about love. We celebrated Valentine's Day yesterday, so it only seems appropriate to talk about love during this season. But I'm not going to talk about the red and pink heart kind of love. I'm not going to talk about the false kind of love that leads a man to do the kind of things David did. I'm not even going to talk about the kind of proper love that a committed couple have for each other.

The love I'll be talking about today, and for the next several weeks, is a different kind of love - a better love, a perfect love. I want to talk about the love of God, and the power of that love to change our lives and to change the world. So today, we begin a series that will continue from now until Easter called **LOVEFIRST**. And for this first talk, I want to look at Love that Restores.

But first, I want to pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

The story of David is a familiar one. You may have experienced something similar. Maybe you didn't have an affair or murdered anyone, but if you're like me, there have been times in your life when you watched your situation go from bad to worse, and you've been your own worst enemy in the process - compounding bad decision on top of bad decision.

And typically, when that begins to happen - when things begin to spiral out of control like that - we go one of two ways. Either we just keep spiraling until we hit bottom, or something happens that snaps us out of our insanity, and we attempt to find some kind of restoration. And often, the thing that snaps us back to reality is a confrontation - somebody calls us out on our actions - and we have to own up to what we've done.

This is what happened to David. In the very next chapter of 2 Samuel (chapter 12), we read that God sent a man named Nathan to visit David. And through the telling of a story too long to go into today, Nathan got David to see just how out of control his actions were. In fact, what David realized is that if anyone else in his kingdom had done the thing he did, he, as king, would have had that person killed.

And in that incredibly confrontational moment, it finally hits David, and he says "I have sinned against the Lord."

You see, in that moment, David's make-believe world stopped spinning, and he faced the reality of his own brokenness. The question then was, how was he going to respond?

There were a few possible responses for a guy like David. They aren't that different for you and me. When confronted with our own brokenness - when outed in some way - we can:

1. Deny

This is very often the default response when we're caught doing something we shouldn't. We just deny it. Or, if we can't deny it, maybe we handle it a different way...we rationalize.

2. Rationalize

In the world of politics and public relations, this is called "spin." In the world of private relationships, it's called "making excuses," and it's a very common response. We make excuses for our actions, we try to explain how they weren't as bad as they seem. We may even try to point a finger of blame at someone else. Whatever our method, the point of rationalization is to, at once, admit to the action, while still trying to deflect blame.

If that doesn't work, or if we feel we can't do that convincingly, then maybe we try another approach.

3. Flee

We run away or we hide. We don't want to confront the issue, so we just try to escape the situation. People accused of murder or some other major offense often try this response. They run from their problems. If they can only get out of town, or out of the country, then maybe they can escape their punishment.

4. Confess and Repent

But there is another response, and it is really the only appropriate response when faced with our own brokenness. That is to confess and repent.

Now, those are two pretty churchy words, so let me explain a bit. Confession is just what it sounds like - just like the police may get a criminal to confess to committing a crime, confession is simply admitting what you've done. In David's case, he confessed by saying, "I have sinned against the Lord." He knew it, and he confessed it.

Repentance is an even more churchy word, but it simply means to turn the other way. Whatever actions, decisions, or thoughts got you into this mess, you do a 180 degree turn, and march yourself back out of it. That's what repentance is.

So, to confess and repent is to admit you've done something wrong, and to turn back from the behavior.

So what did David do?

Well, we already saw that David confessed, right? He confessed that he had sinned against the Lord. But the book of 2 Samuel leaves us sort of wondering if David really repented. There is a series of events where David certainly seems contrite, and there's no indication that he ever had another affair or had any more of his men murdered, so that could be an indication of repentance - of turning away from his behavior. But there's no mention of David's mental state or the heart behind his actions during that time.

For that, we have to look to another book in the bible - and to David's own words. You see, David was a poet and songwriter, and like most poets and songwriters, when David was experiencing extreme emotions, he used his art as a way of expressing himself. And in the book of Psalms, which is simply a collection of a bunch of songs written by David and a few others, we find these words from David. This is Psalm 51, and it is prefaced by these words:

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

So, this is what David wrote, after being confronted by Nathan:

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

*Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.
May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Psalms 51

There are a few parts to David's plea here.

In the beginning of the song, he asks God for mercy for himself. This is both a confessional attitude, and a recognition that he is powerless to overcome his guilt. He needs God's mercy to do that.

At the end, he asks God, essentially, to not let Israel (or Zion) have to take the fall for his actions. He actually asks God to prosper Zion even in the midst of this confession. He doesn't want his people to have to suffer because of what he's done.

But in the middle is the most well-known portion of this Psalm, because it's the part with the greatest hope. David is seeking and believing for restoration. "Create in me a pure heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." He's saying, "I'm broken, I'm defiled, I'm stained. God, will you restore me?"

You see, David believed in a love that restores. He believed that no matter what shape we find ourselves in, God's love has the power to mend broken things, to heal wounded people, and to restore us - to make us whole, and to reconcile our life and our relationship with him.

So, how does restoration happen?

Well, we have to start with our part. That confession and repentance is key. Without it, there is no hope for restoration. But then there's another part that is completely out of our control. You know, when we read that song David wrote, he is pleading with God, he is begging for God to cleanse him, he is desperate for God to restore him. But at the end of the day, God has the power to just say, "Nope. Sorry. What you did was too evil." God could do that, and then, regardless of David's wishes, there would be no restoration.

But that's not the way God works. Instead, God, in his perfect love, offers us a way to be restored to him. We confess and repent, and God responds by accepting and forgiving. He accepts our desire to reconcile with him, and he forgives us from our actions - from the brokenness that got us into this mess.

And while it may have become cliché for people who are caught in scandal to say, "I know God has forgiven me," it's also *true*. So, while the ink is still wet on the juiciest story of the week - while the public is seething with anger over the latest moral failure - God, if asked, has already forgiven. That's how strong his love is for us. And not just for leaders and politicians and powerful people. That's how strong God's love is for *you*.

David was an adulterer, a murderer, and a liar, but God restored him. God used him and his son Solomon to build the temple, where people could worship.

But the full restoration of David would happen about 1000 years later when Jesus, the long-awaited Savior of the people of Israel, was born. You see, in a culture where lineage was almost sacrosanct, the most important person ever to be born was born into the line of David - a once-disgraced king now fully restored.

So what does that say to us - those of us who are willing to admit that we are less than perfect, though maybe we haven't committed the kind of atrocities that David did? What does it say to you when you look in the mirror and think, "Man, I'm really not a good person." What does it say to me when, in a moment of reflection, I realize just how messed up I am?

The old song, "Amazing Grace" comes to mind.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a **wretch** like me*

I don't feel like a wretch every day, but there are days...

And only through the powerful, reconciling, restoring love of God can I ever say,

*I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see.*

You know, beginning this week - on Wednesday to be precise - followers of Jesus all over the world will be observing what's become known as Lent.

If you aren't familiar with Lent or don't know much about it, that's OK. I've actually had to educate myself on Lent over the past several years as well. Even though I grew up in church, the church I grew up in never really talked much about Lent, its observation, or its history. But as I've come to understand Lent, I've also come to understand the significance it can have as a practiced observation.

Lent, very simply, is the roughly six week period leading up to Easter. Technically, it begins on what is known as Ash Wednesday (which is observed this coming Wednesday) and ends on what is called Maundy Thursday - which represents the day of what we call the last supper - Jesus' final meal with his disciples before he was arrested. The word Maundy (which is a strange word) comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, meaning commandment. This was the day that Jesus told his closest followers:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

And so, we use these weeks leading up to Easter to remember not only Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, but also his exhibition of love, and his command for us to love.

The observance of Lent takes place, then, from Ash Wednesday to Maundy Thursday, and traditionally includes fasting - abstaining from food and/or some other luxuries - as well as prayer and a renewed commitment to spiritual things. The observance of Lent through fasting typically excludes Sundays, where the fast is lifted, and people have, sort of, mini-celebrations of Jesus' resurrection. Sunday, by tradition, is considered a joyful day, not a somber one.

And this kind of observance leading up to Easter has been going on, in some form or fashion, since the earliest days of the church. So, as we observe Lent as a church, we are joining with others throughout the ages, and here in our own time, in remembering the life, death, and love of Jesus.

I really look forward to this season, and hope it's a time for all of us to draw closer to God, as we seek to focus ourselves more intently on him.

So you'll be hearing more about Lent in the coming weeks, but I wanted to give you just a bit of background there, and encourage you to educate yourself on this tradition.

So, to begin our season of Lent, even though it technically doesn't start until Wednesday, I would like to initiate something that we are planning to do each week here at Trinity. It will happen at the end of every celebration, and we're calling it a Personal Worship Response. And there are 4 ways we would ask you to respond:

1. Singing

This morning, my friend Edgar is going to lead us in a couple of songs that talk about the love of God. And each week, we'll have this time of just singing and reflecting on what God has revealed to us.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

2. Prayer

As you reflect on the teaching and on anything God may have spoken directly to you, you may want to have someone pray with you. It could be about some difficulty or sickness you or someone you know is facing. It could be something directly related to the talk. It could be just about anything. If you want someone to pray for you, we have some people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that singing is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

3. Communion

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus during the last supper on Maundy Thursday. It is the way he chose for us to remember him. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us. Over here, we have people ready to serve you communion. Aljas is on the left, and he has grape juice in his cup. Bill is on the right, and he has wine in his cup. Feel free to partake of either, as it fits with your tradition.

Again, we'll have this each week. In some church traditions, communion is served during every gathering, in others it's once a month, and in some, less frequently. If you want to take communion every week, it will be here for you. If you choose a different frequency, that's fine. However you choose to do it, just know that this is for anyone who wants to take it. This is a way of remembering Jesus, and if you want to remember him in this way, you are free to do so. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

4. Giving

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. This celebration is our gift to you. However, for those who are part of the new, but growing, Trinity Vineyard family, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

There is a tall box at the back with a slot in it. You can place your gifts in that box at any time as we are singing together.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order or pattern you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. That's why it's called a *Personal* Worship Response. This is your time to respond in whatever way you want to.