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Rick Myatt

MORE LIKE GOOGLE MAPS THAN A TREASURE HUNT  
2 Samuel 12

Years ago Laurie and I bought an exercise bike. Or I should say we thought we bought an exercise bike. What we actually bought were the parts to an exercise bike along with a big instructional manual explaining how to assemble the parts into a usable piece of equipment. The store where we bought it said we could pay a fee to have someone assemble it for us, but the fee was very high and I figured, how hard could it be? Lord, what fools these mortals be.

When we received the boxes of parts, including plastic bags full of nuts, bolts, screws and other implements of the dark arts, I bravely plunged into the task of assembling the beast. Given my often admitted ineptitude in regard to all things even slightly mechanical there was a certain amount of skepticism in some quarters that this would ever be a successful endeavor. Nevertheless I carefully studied the instructions and diagrams, then assiduously followed them to the tiniest detail and the promised bike began to emerge. I was quite proud of the impressive progress I was making. However, at one point Laurie entered the room, took one look at the project and said, “you’ve put that part on backwards.” I was confident that she was wrong. She wasn’t looking at the instructions and I had been doing serious exegesis of them. But she insisted I had it wrong. I was loathe to even consider this possibility for a couple of reasons. The first was I didn’t want to disassemble what I’d already put together and have to reassemble it. Second, it is a pretty tough pill to swallow to admit that your wife can take one look at something and recognize how it is supposed to go when you can’t see it after spending considerable amounts of time studying and following the directions. I insisted I had it right, grabbed the instructions and began to point out how it would all fit together. However, as I went through the upcoming steps I came to a horrifying realization. She was right. I had put the part on backwards.

At that point I could have stood on my pride, kept insisting I was right and created a train wreck, or I could admit I was wrong, undo it and start over. Unfortunately the only way for the thing to ever work was for me to admit I had messed up, no matter how humiliating the admission. That is often the case in life. How hard it can be for us to admit our wrong, and yet it turns out that this is the essential step in getting almost everything in life correct. We will see David demonstrate this reality in 2 Samuel 12.

## NATHAN DEKED DAVID

This incident follows David's terrible failure in chapter 11 when he committed adultery with the wife of one of his most loyal soldiers, got her pregnant, then essentially had her husband killed to cover up his actions. Though he was kidding himself, David has convinced himself that he has gotten away with it. However, we know from his own writings that guilt was eating him up inside.

God gave Nathan, a loyal prophet and advisor, the unenviable task of confronting David. God sent Nathan to David to let David know that God knew all about his crummy actions. This would have been an unpleasant and unwelcome task for Nathan because he considered David a friend. It also had the potential of being dangerous. He had no guarantee that David would respond well. He had already had one man killed to cover up his crime, it would not have been inconceivable to think he might be willing to do it again. Nathan showed some courage in being willing to take the risk.

However, he was also wise enough to know that a frontal attack is not always the best. He came up with a way to deke David, to fake him out and lure him into a trap. In hockey a player carrying a puck dekes an opponent when he makes it look like he is going to move one way then he suddenly goes a different and unexpected direction. That's just what Nathan did to David. He told a story that captured David's attention, one that sounded like a real incident. A wealthy man had a visitor, and the ironclad rules of hospitality required him to prepare a meal for his guest. The wealthy man had abundant flocks and herds, but instead of killing one of his own sheep for the meal he took the pet lamb of a poor man and fed it to his visitor. It tells you a lot about how things worked in that day that David did not consider this story to be preposterous. It took no convincing for him to believe that such a thing actually happened.

David walked right into the trap. Caught up in the story was furious at such awful selfishness and callous injustice. Verse 5 says he "burned with anger." He said that greedy wealthy man should die. At the very least he was going to pay back the poor man 4 times the value of the lamb he had taken. By his own words David condemned himself. Nathan skewers him when he says, "You are the man." He was the wealthy man who had more wives than he needed, but if he wanted more he could have his pick. But instead he took the one beloved wife of a noble man, a man who was his own loyal friend, then killed that man. What he did was lightyears worse than the fictional rich man in Nathan's story. David was the deer in the headlights. Nathan had him dead to rights. By his own admission David

deserved to die. Uriah was dead, so there was no way David could pay him back 4 times for what he had taken from him.

There would be consequences for David. Even the consequences were actually grace. David deserved to die. The penalty in the Law of Moses for adultery was death. The penalty in the Law for murder was death, so David should have had two death sentences on him. God showed him mercy by not immediately demanding his life. But his choices would have consequences. He had killed by the sword, and as a result his own family would be impacted by the sword. One from his own family would bring division and death to his house. Furthermore that one would take some of David's women the way David took Uriah's. Only while David tried to keep it a secret this person would do it openly to humiliate David.

### DAVID RESPONDED CORRECTLY

According to verse 13 David said, "I have sinned against the Lord." Well duh. Among others. He also sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, his own wives, his children and the entire nation that followed him. However, David was correct that his ultimate sin was against the Lord.

Very often when people are caught they are sorry, but their real sorrow is that they got caught, not that they did wrong. David's admission that his sin was against the Lord was acknowledging a much deeper confession. He was wrong before God, and he admitted it. The reality of the depth of his confession is evidenced by what happens in the aftermath of this incident.

The baby that was born to Bathsheba as a result of the adulterous affair became ill. David prayed fervently that the baby, his child, would recover. But it was not to be. Sadly the baby died. David's reaction to the death of the child tells us a lot. Everyone expected after the baby died that David would have a total grief melt down. Instead he accepted what happened. He could have raged at God. He could have wallowed in self-pity and in the unfairness of an infant dying. Instead he accepted it and trusted God. In verse 23 he accepted that he could not bring the baby back, then said, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." That is a powerful and hopeful statement that the little baby and his father would be reunited. The child was alive in the presence of God, and some day they would be once again together there.

David was grieved, but he did not rebel against God. He knew he had done wrong, admitted it and submitted himself to the will of his loving heavenly Father. Psalm 51:3-4 reveals David's response. "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.” David admitted his sin and told God he was right in judging him however God decided. He asked for mercy and forgiveness in that Psalm then said in verse 10, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” In other words, he wanted to get back to being the guy who loved God with all his heart and obeyed him passionately.

God answered his prayer. David was forgiven and restored. Eventually the Lord gave him and Bathsheba another son they named Solomon. The Lord said he should be called Jedidiah, which meant “loved by the Lord.” Amazingly this child would also be known as Solomon, and he would be the one God chose to continue the line of David, all the way to Messiah. Out of a sinful series of acts somehow God accomplished something great. He redeemed a terrible situation with his grace and goodness.

## IMPLICATIONS

### CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

We can’t know from this account what David was feeling while these events were taking place because the story doesn’t reveal much about it. David seemed to be obsessed with covering the thing up and doesn’t seem to be wallowing in guilt. But the fact is, he was drowning in guilt. In Psalms that he wrote he revealed what was going on inside him. Psalm 32:3-4 says, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”

David hid his guilt. He stuffed it, with the result that it began eating him up inside. It sapped his strength the way a blistering hot summer day might. Last summer Laurie and I visited Michael and Carissa in Mississippi, then took the train to New Orleans and flew home from there. We had a day in New Orleans that we used as an opportunity to visit an old friend, but in the morning we had some free time. I wanted to go to a store there that sells antique coins and guns. We decided we would walk the 3 blocks or so from our hotel to the store, spend some time there, then maybe walk around the French Quarter for a bit. But it was July. In New Orleans. By the time we walked just a couple of blocks in that blistering heat we understood exactly what David meant by his strength being “sapped as in the heat of summer.” Oh, come on, Rick, it wasn’t that bad was it? You know how people say, “It was hot, but it was a dry heat”? This was not a dry heat. This was a suffocating, enervating hot, wet blanket. We just wanted to get back inside out of

the sun some place that had air conditioning. We had zero strength for strolling around the Quarter.

David said his desire to hide his sin had that kind of effect on him. It took every ounce of energy out of him. He was left with a guilt-ridden, joyless existence. In Psalm 51:11 he cried out to God, “Do not cast me from your presence.” He felt distant from the God he had always loved and walked with, and that felt terrible. In verse 12 he said, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” His joy needed to be restored because as long as he covered up his sin it was totally absent. There was no joy in Davidville that day. No joy, no strength, no energy, just tormenting guilt and sadness.

The solution for David was to quit covering up. It was to admit what he had done, to acknowledge how awful it was and to ask for forgiveness. When he finally did that life returned to him. Psalm 32:1-2 says, “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them.” David was talking about himself. I have no doubt that he was deeply ashamed and filled with regret and remorse over what he had done. But he could not fix it. He knew what he deserved, and likely beat himself up with considerable self-loathing. He could only have disgust for anyone who did what he had done. But to his unending relief, God forgave it. That forgiveness was a healing salve to his tortured soul.

When God forgives he doesn't say, “Well, I'm not going to punish you this time. We'll let it go, but...” and then periodically play the guilt card. Yeah, remember what you did with Bathsheba. I don't want you to ever forget that. You call yourself a man after God's own heart? How do you suppose Uriah feels about that, David? God didn't do that. When he forgave David, though there would be consequences, one of those consequences would not be constant use of guilt and the threat of loss of God's love. In Psalm 103:12 David wrote, “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” How far is the east from the west? In David's worldview it was as far as it is possible to go. You could not put sins and guilt farther away than that. I am pretty sure David felt the relief of that forgiveness every day of his life after this episode.

Why is confession important? A few years ago Laurie and I were in a furniture store looking at sofas, and Laurie began committing what I deemed to be an obvious TMI infraction. She began explaining the history of our hand me down living room furniture, how it looked and what it would take to improve it, at some considerable length. It seemed obvious to me that the sales person we were talking

to had no need to know any of that and not much interest in it either, as evidenced by her eyes glazing over. Now the reality is that Laurie is a whiz at people skills and connects with people extremely well, way better than her husband. For me to give her relationship instruction would be a bit like me taking it upon myself to give Tom Brady instructions on how to play quarterback. Guess who had the temerity to do just that. Deciding I had to save her from herself I cut Laurie off mid-sentence and said, "Laurie, she doesn't either need or want to know all of that." Would it surprise you to learn that this turned out to be a less than winning move on my part? I instantly began feeling this vibe from her that was something less than warm and fuzzy. When we were done in the store and got into our car we had a little discussion. She informed me calmly that she did not appreciate how I interrupted her, and furthermore that she had felt belittled by the way I spoke to her. I had really hurt her feelings. I tried to explain my actions, by which I mean I defended myself. My first tactic was to help her see that I was only seeking to save her from her own folly, but this proved quite counterproductive. It just added fuel to the fire. I tried to explain why I had done the right thing, but even in the middle of my explanation I realized I wasn't convincing myself, much less her. I suddenly saw that I had basically been rude and insensitive. There was no way around it. I stopped and said, "You're right. I shouldn't have done that. It was arrogant and unkind. It certainly was not loving, and I am sorry. Can you forgive me?" When I said this there was an instant shift in the weather. There was a clear warming trend, and the distance that had come between us instantly disappeared. The key to restoring love and unity in the relationship was admitting my wrong and turning from it. This is also key to having a relationship with God in which there is openness, unity and in which we feel God's love.

There are, however, some misconceptions about confession that we need to avoid. One of those misconceptions is that confession is some sort of religious ritual. There is the idea that you have to see a religious professional and confess your sins to him. The very act of confessing becomes a sort of rite you have to perform. Do you think David did that? No, he simply admitted his sin to God and turned from it, asking forgiveness. There was no ritual aspect to his confession whatsoever. Similarly in the New Testament there is no evidence for some sort of rite of confession. The religious approach is to take what is essentially a relationship matter and turn it into a ritual.

But there is another form of misconception about confession that I personally had to work through. I remember people quoting 1 John 1:9 to me and saying this is the process of having a relationship with God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." So

the idea is you have to confess all your sins to God to experience his forgiveness. If you don't confess your sins you will lose access to the power of the Holy Spirit and the sense of God's presence and his love.

There is some truth in there, but at least for me it resulted in a rather curious habit that was not at all helpful in experiencing God's presence and power. For a period of time in my younger days I would find myself wanting to make sure there was no unconfessed sin in my life, so at the end of a day I would try to dredge up all the sins I might have committed. During the course of a normal day I typically did not have occasion to commit some spectacular, obvious, egregious sin. So that meant I had to sort through all my thoughts, actions and interactions, to see if in some way I had a sinful thought, or was impatient or unkind to someone, or had failed to do something I knew God commanded me to do.

That never produced any real peace, love, joy or sense of God's presence. It actually felt kind of burdensome and mechanical. Somehow it did not release the power of the Spirit in my life. What it tended to do was focus my thoughts on trivial matters. That's typically what religion tends to do.

David didn't need to dredge through his activities of the day to know that he was hiding some glaring sins. When I insensitively was rude to Laurie in a store I didn't need to have a time of self-examination to find some unconfessed wrong between us. It was glaringly obvious. The only question was whether I would admit my wrong and turn from it, and that was the only question with David as well. My point here is that when we become aware that there is something that we are withholding from God or are not willing to admit or turn away from, that's when we need to confess. This is not about having fishing expeditions, or treasure hunts where X marks the spot of some miniature sin previously hidden from us. *National Treasure* and *Fool's Gold* are both movies that are about sorting through clues to try to find some treasure that has long been hidden. Both involved some clever and painstaking efforts to locate the treasure. That is not what admitting our sin is to be like.

But doesn't 1 John 1:9 and say we can only be forgiven of a sin if we confess it? That is a failure to understand the context of that verse. John was addressing people who claimed that they had no sin in their lives. Obviously if you have no sin you don't need anyone to save you from the punishment of your sin. You don't need a savior. Verse 8 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." The day you admit that you are in need of a Savior, that you acknowledge that you fall far short of the glory of God and throw yourself on

the forgiveness of Jesus, you have done what 1 John 1:9 says we need to do. You have admitted that you are a fallen person in whom sin is very real.

A basic principle of relationship is when I have sinned against another person and that becomes apparent to me, I need to admit my wrong. So it is true with God.

One problem with the whole treasure hunt approach to confession is that it fails to acknowledge the much larger reality. The thing that separates me from God and requires Christ to die on the cross is not that I occasionally sin. The problem is that there is something distorted inside me that taints every single thing I do, even the “good” things. It is always there. It is so pervasive and deep that the only solution is for Christ to die on a cross for me and begin a radical transformation from the heart out that will not be complete until I am done on this planet or he comes back.

### TRUE CONFESSION CREATES GENTLE PEOPLE

Think for a moment of that day when David was openly confronted and admitted his terrible wrong. What do you suppose he felt at that time? Humiliation, disgrace, shame, terrible remorse and regret. Think of the most disgraceful thing you have ever done. How would you feel if you were publicly confronted with it and had to admit it?

In his book, *Jesus, Hero Of Thy Soul*, Jim McGuigan tells a story that at least gives us a bit of a glimpse of what we’d feel. He boarded a plane that was going from Atlanta to Dallas. When he got to his seat there was a man already sitting in it with the guy’s wife sitting next to him. Politely Jim said, “Excuse me, sir, but I believe you are in my seat.” The guy just nodded to the window seat in front of him and said, “Why don’t you just take that one. It’s empty.” McGuigan said, “Yes, it is now, but there is a large crowd of people just now starting to come onto the plane.” The man’s wife chimed in and said, “Oh, just take that empty seat.” He patiently explained that if he did that someone would soon come and insist that he leave because he was in their seat, and then everybody would have to move anyway. Now a bystander jumped in and said, “Look, there are lots of empty seats. Just take that one.” McGuigan said, “Mister, I’m having enough trouble here, please don’t make it harder.” He turned to the guy in the seat and pleaded, “Come on, please let me have my seat.” At this the man became very angry and disgusted, gathered his belongings and climbed over his wife into the aisle. Jim was totally embarrassed, but he climbed past the man’s wife, sat in his seat and stuffed his case under the seat in front of him. He wanted to just be done with it, but the wife would have none of it. She went on and on telling people around them how much trouble he had caused everyone by being so stubborn. Then she pushed him over the edge



when she said, “And besides, this is my husband’s seat to begin with.” McGuigan could take it no longer. He took out his boarding pass with 15A on it, showed it to her and said, “No, lady, this is my seat. See? 15A!” She responded, “This isn’t 15A.” Horrified he looked up to see that sure enough, he was sitting in 16A. The seat he had been refusing to sit in was his, and the one he made such a fuss about having belonged to the other man. He was mortified. All he could do was say, “Lady, I am so terribly sorry.”

David’s mortification was galactically deeper than that. In Psalm 51:17 he wrote, “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” The Hebrew word translated “contrite” means “crushed.” David’s heart was crushed by his own awful failure.

What will the result be when our hearts are crushed, broken because of our own sin? It is going to create people who are as far from demanding of God as they could possibly be. It is easy for us to sort of think we deserve something. God sort of owes it to us to be nice to us and give us things we think we need. When we, like David, have confessed our sin and our hearts are crushed, we are not going to expect anything from God. The fact that he forgives us and continues to love us will overwhelm us. We will be flooded with gratitude to him even if our lives are full of disappointment, because we know what we deserve, and God has not given it to us. He has not judged us, but loves us.

Furthermore we are not going to be demanding and judgmental of other people. How do you think Jim McGuigan would relate to someone who made a mistake about the seat they were assigned on an airplane after his incident? “Man, I know how you feel. That’s so embarrassing. Let me tell you what I did.” He would sympathize with them, not say, “How could you be such a dolt?” They may disappoint us, we may see their failures, but if our hearts are crushed by our own wrong we are going to be very patient and gentle with them. Whatever is true of them, we have been given grace, kindness and love that we absolutely do not deserve.

## GOD MAKES GOOD COME FROM BAD

I suspect that thing that most Christians struggle with more than anything else is believing that God really loves them and truly, completely, eternally forgives them for every single bit of their shortcomings, failures and sin. Here’s the thing you need to grasp. You have almost certainly never done anything as shameful and as awful as what David did. And yet David knew he was forgiven, God put his sin as far from him as the east is from the west, and God actually chose to use his and

Bathsheba's relationship to establish the line that would someday accomplish God's greatest victory, the coming of the Messiah to rescue the world.

Why Bathsheba? David had other wives, some of them noble and godly women like Abigail. Why didn't God choose a son from them to be the next king, the one through whom Messiah would come? He deliberately chose Bathsheba. That was neither a coincidence nor a mistake. It was a message. It was God saying he could take the worst that we can do and still somehow bring his good plan and his grace out of it.

Yes, there would be some consequences. But God continued to love, continued to pour out his grace, and used even the initially sinful liaison of David and Bathsheba to accomplish his glorious victory. We need to understand that nothing we do is beyond God's grace. Nothing we do can derail his love and his forgiveness. He is not withholding it, he is not saying if you don't confess this you won't be forgiven.

God's forgiveness is beyond anything we have ever experienced or imagined. It is not like human forgiveness, it is deeper, greater, full and eternal. With all your flaws and sins, God loves you, not because you are trying hard or doing it right, but because you are in Christ. You are forgiven because of what he has done, and as a result nothing can ever divert or block his love for you.

God's forgiveness is more like following Google maps than going on treasure hunts to discover hidden sin. While we were in the Seattle area for the funeral for Laurie's mom we were driving places that we totally unfamiliar to us so we relied heavily on Google maps. We repeatedly followed the directions Google gave us when we had no idea where we were or where we were going. However on a couple of occasions I just looked at the Google map and headed off to our intended destination thinking I knew where I was going. Somehow I misread the map and was going in the exact wrong direction. Fortunately Laurie had fired up Google maps on her phone and it began talking to me. I found it interesting that the Google map lady didn't say, "What is wrong with you? You're an idiot. You're going in the wrong direction. Either turn around right this instant or I'm done talking to you. If you don't fix this right now, we're finished." Instead she gave me directions. Turn right in 400 feet. She directed me basically back to my starting point and then headed me in the right direction. She didn't say, "Turn right in 800 feet. Do you think you can handle that? Do you know right from left? Or is that too hard for you to manage?" She just instructed me the way to go, and all I needed to do was listen and follow.. That's kind of how God works with us. Confession is

admitting that I'm going in the wrong direction. It means listening to God's voice, acknowledging my error and turning around. It means accepting that God will take me where I need to go and following his directions.

When God confronts me with the deep bitterness toward that awful person, that horror whose name I can hardly bear to utter, I speak of Dean Spanos, it means not excusing it saying it is righteous indignation, but turning from it.

God is our Heavenly Father. When a child is disobeying and the corrects him or her, what do you think the dad wants? Does he want the child to trudge around after that weighed down by guilt, to feel like no matter what they do it will never be good enough and to want to avoid Dad because he is so condemning? No, the dad only wants the child to experience the best in life. He wants the child to obey because it is what will bring about good in that kid's life. When Carissa was a toddler we had a problem with her wanting to stand right in front of the television and put her hands on the screen. We had to teach her not to do that. One day she did that and I said, "Carissa, you know that you are not allowed to put your hand on the TV." She stopped, looked at me for a moment, then deliberately put her hand on the side of the TV and looked at me to see what I would do. It was all I could do to keep from laughing out loud. It was clear defiance, testing to see how much she could get away with. I let her know that she could not get away with that either. But here's the thing, that did not affect even the tiniest fraction of an iota how much I loved her.

When we admit our wrong and turn to following God's directions, he loves us just as much as he ever has or ever could. And then he does the most amazing thing. He can even bring good out of our worst days, just as he did in David's case. What David did was inexcusable, but not unforgiveable. And God used that terrible choice to somehow bring about his rescue of the human race. Nothing and no one is beyond God's ability to redeem.