

Recovering From Christmas:

Trusting in the 3 R's:

Recovery, Restoration, Reconciliation

Adventure Series: Trust

Advent Week 5 - Dec 26th, 2021

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Deuteronomy 4:27-31

Psalm 56

Jeremiah 29:10b-13

Matthew 5: 21-30

1 Peter 5:2-11

Throughout the Bible, a lot of promises are made for God to preserve His people. For some there is consolation in that, that they are not abandoned, for other's the freedom comes in understanding that they can never mess up too much, but will always have another shot at it. In the Bible, there are just a few commandments that God laid out for His people, and then hundreds of pages of instructions on how to get the best out of your life, your body, and how to stay in integrity by making it easy to not betray those few commandments. The laws were not extraneous, they were support to help keep the ten commandments and preserve our soul.

In Matthew 5, Yeshua tells it like it is. People thought that outwardly following the law was hard, but restraint was holding their righteousness. We've all seen those Christians who make backhanded comments about how 'I would *never* do that.' Passing condescending judgement on those who falter. There are a few times that he spoke about how what causes a man to sin is his heart and that God judges the heart. That passage in Matthew clears up any doubt that action is not the only thing you are accountable to. Let's be honest, over the holidays a lot of people falter when it comes to holding their righteousness, judgement, and temper.

Now, this is where it gets really complicated. Not only do you have to not actively murder someone, which hopefully is not that hard to refrain from, for most of us, but if you curse a person (a.k.a. Wish ill on someone) or fantasize about harming them or harm coming to them, or even just get angry - that is blocking your pathway to God. You have to repair that relationship before you have a clean heart to make it right with God. It's easy enough to not murder, but to not get angry or send some not-so-positive vibes someone else's way is much easier said than done... especially when we are talking about inside the mind and heart and not just what passes the lips.

Adultery is another similar example, not only do you need to not actively commit adultery, we must remember that the commandment is actually to not covet. This means lusting after something that isn't yours, especially if it belongs to another. Thus jealousy is a condemning sin, as is lust. It's ok to be overwhelmed with desire for your own partner, but technically not before they are yours. In these days it's unlikely they will become yours if you don't have that experience before the wedding day, but that does explain why the Hebrews often didn't meet their spouses until the wedding.

Man, is it good that God's the one who has to judge. I wouldn't want that job. Most of us can't even sort out which side of the line we are on personally, we definitely don't have any chance of judging if another person is right with God as we don't know their heart, or intention, or thoughts, or reconciliation status.

In a traditional holiday setting, there are opportunities to commit so many of these subtle sins. We covet as we consider what we wish we will get, we are jealous of what someone else gets, gluttony through overindulgence, our fuses get shorter with family the longer the exposure, and in coronavirus times we have all sorts of feelings about not being able to travel or gather how we normally would have. Now, talk about a thorny crown (which is literally what a corona virus is).

So how are we meant to navigate this confusing, intricate world that seems to be setting us up for failure? Well, not only is the world full of tempting morsels and the holidays particularly so, God also set out several pathways to reconciliation. There are three stages to this journey of recovery, but four steps to be taken to make your way 'right with God'.

Trust is an act of faith and hope in the love that someone has for you to be graceful in the way that you make peace with them and find joy in that reconnection. There is a lot of trust involved in being a person of faith. We trust that God has our backs and that He will take care of us. That our love for Him, and His Love for us, is enough to bring us back home, welcomed and reconciled. We don't want to be the prodigal son, who goes off and squanders our opportunities through impatience, ignorance, and indulgence, but sometimes we do mess up and we know that it can be made right.

Oddly enough it's actually easier to see how we can be reconciled from bigger things, but the small little seeds of sin in our hearts, that's where it constantly feels like we are in battle for our souls. It's one thing to be built to hold people accountable, it's another thing entirely to be righteous in the Lord and to do that without personal judgement being the motivator. We have no right to judge anyone, including ourselves. That passage about anger, and making things right with other's before making our offerings to God is a really tricky one. What if they don't forgive you?

If the attempts to make things right are denied, does that still count if the attempt is genuine? Well, now let's bring it home to the centre of what matters... it's not about whether you are forgiven by someone else, it's about if you are right with God, free of guilt and shame. So what allows you to recover your way and get back on track with God is whether you can forgive yourself for all the little ways you mess up, while staying in integrity and not being arrogant or belligerent. It is a delicate balance between being an emotional self martyr and absolving yourself of any responsibility. We humans like to go all in, whatever we are doing.

Recovery is the first stage. When we overindulge, whether in food, vices, or emotions, we must first take the time to rest and rebalance. We cannot stumble down the path to God still overloaded by the weight and repercussions of our choices. So, first we must recover - physically, emotionally, mentally - so that we can get back on track spiritually. Now, that may sound backwards so many try to pray the pain away, and in the support of that prayer, and with the help of some unseen allies, work towards feeling better. But the instructions Yeshua left us are to make reparations first, then come to give the offering.

That is why so many people keep taking back something they've already laid down to God. It's simply because you didn't make it right first. When you just lean on God to make

it right you'll inevitably keep taking it up, keep taking it up, no matter how many times you surrender.

Only God can make you perfect, but the hinge point in being restored to your pathway and set back on the right track is how willing we are to make those changes. Now, this may seem like a better sermon for March or February when we are dealing with the shame of having failed in 'faithfulness' to our New Years resolutions, but before we get excited about how we are going to be different moving forward, we must first face how to be reset through recovery, restoration, and reconciliation.

We learn to be gentle with ourselves, forgive ourselves, and sometimes excuse ourselves altogether from the responsibilities of maintaining integrity to the instructions of righteousness. The holidays innately set us up for 'failure' with way too many opportunities for the subtle sins, so at this point in human evolution, we are dealing more with recovery methods than with the ideal of maintaining that composure and pure mind and heart... so much of the Bible tells us that is too much to realistically expect of any human mind. It's more about what you do next.

Recovery is the artform of shedding what no longer serves you to reset and rebalance to a good starting(over) point, making yourself qualified to be in that space. Restoration is the grace of God making reparations and doing upgrades and maintenance on you to bring you back towards that pure design and intention He had for you, setting you back on that path. Reconciliation is when that intent becomes your truth. When you and your God embrace in that sweet surrender, where you accept God's design and plan for you. When you become the embodiment of that prayer that God holds for you. When you are made right with God, accepted as you are, and appreciate for exactly who that is.

First, you accept and forgive yourself. Secondly, you make right with others for all the unconscious hurt that you have contributed to, and the intentional. Lastly, you step into God's awaiting embrace. For He had been waiting, praying, and helping all the while for you to make your way back to Him like a Father just happy to receive His child back home in His arms.

Just as we are all happy to see family at Christmas, you can only imagine how excited He is every time you turn your attention to Him, or your attention to who He designed you to be. God delights when we are reconciled to that design, when we step into that embodiment, and we become what He intended.

Soli Deo Gloria,
Rev. Rynn Parraw