

Love Means Saying You're Sorry

(II Chronicles 34:14-19, 29-33; II Peter 3:9; Luke 15:1-10)

In the Eric Segal book Love Story, newlyweds Jennifer and Oliver have their first serious fight. She had tried to bring about a reconciliation between Oliver and his father, and in anger, Oliver tells her to get out of his life. Terribly hurt, Jennifer runs away, and Oliver frantically begins to search for her. When he finds her, he starts to tell her how sorry he is for having hurt her. But she stops him and says that line for which the book and the movie are so well known. She says, "Love means never having to say you're sorry."

It's no wonder this line became so popular. Who likes to apologize? It's really difficult for us to admit that we've done something wrong and say we're sorry. It's humbling to ask for someone's forgiveness.

"Love means never having to say you're sorry"? Prideful creatures that we are, we want this to be true. But it's not. In fact, love means having to say you're sorry. When we have wronged or hurt someone, if we love that person, we will want to humble ourselves, say we're sorry, and do whatever we can to restore the loving relationship.

What a wonderful model of this we find in King Josiah. Now, according to the person who wrote Chronicles, a person known as the Chronicler, even as a child, Josiah was interested in the worship of the Lord and in the temple. As soon as he turned 20 and assumed full authority as king, in 638 BC, Josiah therefore began doing what he could to reform the way his people were living and worshiping. Previous rulers had let the temple fall to ruins. So, King Josiah ordered that the temple be repaired. And while the money was being collected to begin the repairs, a book was found in the temple. It was a book of the law, believed to be an early copy of what we now call Deuteronomy, the law God had given Moses. This book, more accurately a scroll, had been lost and forgotten for many years, but now it was found. It was dusted off and taken to the king.

According to the Interpretation Bible Commentary, "Josiah has (had) demonstrated his faithfulness to God since his youth by earnestly seeking God in worship, by cleansing all Israel of illicit shrines and reestablishing the

centrality of Jerusalem, and by undertaking repairs and renovations of the temple complex. Now, God rewards (rewarded) Josiah by revealing to him God's word....However, finding God can be a disturbing experience!" (Tuell, Steven S., Interpretation Bible Commentary, First and Second Chronicles, p. 237)

Upon reading the word of God, King Josiah was indeed disturbed. Maybe the king was deeply touched by the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Or, maybe the king was horrified by the long list of curses in Deuteronomy 28 that would fall on those who broke the covenant with God by not obeying his words (28:15-68). Or, perhaps King Josiah was distressed to read how far removed he and his people were from God's plan of government welfare for the poor, for God has said through Moses, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). Maybe the king was disturbed by all these passages and more. In any event, King Josiah suddenly saw even much more clearly the God he had loved from his youth. And seeing God so clearly was a disturbing experience for King Josiah, as it was for others in scripture.

When the Prophet Isaiah had his vision of God, he was immediately horrified by his own unworthiness (Isaiah 6:5). He exclaimed, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" When Simon Peter glimpsed Jesus as he truly was, "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'" (Luke 5:8). And similarly, when King Josiah read God's word saw the holy God more clearly than he'd ever seen him, he was overwhelmed with the unholiness of himself and his people. The Chronicler wrote that King Josiah "tore his clothes" (34:19).

The tearing or rending of clothes was an outward sign of inner grief and distress. It could be a sign of deep sorrow and mourning over someone who had died. But here, in King Josiah's case, it was an expression of guilt and the sorrow the king felt about the way he and his people had treated God. Tearing his clothes was Josiah's way of saying, "I now see how terribly my people and I have treated you, God, and I'm so very sorry." King Josiah knew that because he loved God, he had to say he was sorry. Love meant saying he was sorry.

And love also meant repenting. Because King Josiah loved God, he had to tell God he was sorry, and he had to show God he was sorry by doing what he could to change the behavior for which he apologized. In other words, the king repented. He began to go a different way--the right way.

King Josiah called all the elders of Judah to Jerusalem. And then the king, the elders, the priests, the Levites, and a large multitude of the people, both great and small, went up to the house of the Lord--went to the temple. And Josiah read in their hearing all the words of the book of the law, the scroll of the covenant, that had been found in the house of the Lord.

But the king didn't even stop there. He did a truly amazing thing, amazing especially for a political leader. He probably had advisors telling him not to do it. Nonetheless, in front of the nation, the king showed his weakness, his imperfection. In front of the nation, the king humbled himself and confessed his sin. King Josiah declared, "I have sinned. We all have sinned. We must begin now to do better, to love God better, to follow his commandments better, to live in covenant with God." For, in the presence of all his people, King Josiah "made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. Then he made all who were present...pledge themselves to it.....(And the king held up his end of the bargain or covenant.) Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel, and made all who were in Israel worship the Lord their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the Lord the God of their ancestors" (II Chronicles 31-34).

How rare it is for a political leader to admit his mistake. Even the Pope will not repent of his part in the current scandal of the Catholic Church. The greatness of King Josiah was not due to his military might or his wealth. The greatness of King Josiah was due to his humility and repentance. His humility and repentance were his way of saying to the God he loved, "I'm sorry, and from this time on, I'm going to be better to you, God. And I'm going to do everything I can to help those around me do better at loving you too."

In scripture, King Josiah is presented as *the* righteous reformer, the only king, including David, to escape any condemnation. According to Kings, Josiah is the only person in scripture who "turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might" (II Kings 23:25).

When King Josiah told God he was sorry and repented and brought himself and his people back into covenant with God, he was re-connecting with God, re-establishing a close relationship with God. Apologizing and repenting begins the process of repairing a broken relationship--with God and with one another.

God knows that we are not perfect. He understands the mistakes we make. But he knows that our carelessness with him and with others, our mistakes, result in broken relationships. So he wants us to learn from our mistakes, to accept responsibility for them, to apologize for them, and to repent--to stop making the same mistakes and causing the same hurt and damage to our relationships--our relationships with him and with one another

And as our epistle lesson for today tells us, "He...is patient with (us), not wanting any to perish, but wanting all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). In fact, scripture tells us that when we do this, when we "get" it and begin making better choices, choices that involve obeying God and living the way he wants us to live, then all of heaven rejoices. Jesus said, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7).

Repentance is actually one of the loveliest words in our language. It pays us human beings a huge compliment, for it says that we can do something about the course we have taken. We may not be able to change what we've already done, and we may not be able to fully escape the consequences of our past choices. But we don't have to continue in the same destructive path. We can tell God we're sorry, repent, and renew our covenant with God. And the same thing is true in human relationships. We can tell the one we have wronged that we're sorry, repent, and renew our covenant with him or her.

Let us be careful that we do not live our lives according to Eric Segal's words. For when we break our promise to God or to anyone else, as we are

prone to do from time to time, the relationship remains broken until we accept responsibility, express our sorrow, and repent. Besides, if we really love the one we have been in relationship with, the love we feel for the other will necessitate that we accept responsibility, that we tell him how sorry we are, and that we work at doing better. Let us therefore follow the example of King Josiah, for love means, from time to time, saying we're sorry. Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; May 2, 2010