

**Text: I John 1:8-10**

**Title: “Confessing and Forgiving”**

**ILLUSTRATION** – When we lived in New Mexico our children were little and we lived in a home that we liked a lot with one exception. We could never get rid of the mice. No matter how many traps I set I could never conquer the little rascals. One evening we had some guests over to our house and as we sat in the den a mouse ran over the foot of one of our guests, stopped and looked around at us and kept on running. You can imagine that this made things quite interesting with a wife and two daughters. One day I was playing golf with some buddies and I happened to be on a tee box next to the parking lot when I noticed Nan’s car drive up. Nan jumped out of the car and said, “I’ve had enough of the mice. They’re running around like they own the place. I’m taking the kids to Vera’s house (Vera and Sonny were like grandparents to our kids), and we’ll come home when you get rid of the mice.”

I was reminded that day that it’s the little things that create the tension in homes and marriages ... little things that, if they accumulate enough, can become a big thing in a marriage. We need to learn how to work through the low-grade irritations that happen as well as the relational catastrophes that sometimes happen. And, believe it or not, the solution is found in the Gospel (the Good News) of Jesus Christ.

In this series we’ve learned that we are living out our marriages in a broken world that has been infected with sin. So no relationship will be perfect because we are all sinners. The Good News is that God’s solution for our sin problem is also the solution to every other problem that we have, including in our families. Last week we learned that FIRST LOVE leads to SECOND LOVE. When we first love God with every fiber of our being, then will we be able to love others with the sacrificial love God wants them to have. So marriages, and all relationships, for that matter, have to be fixed *vertically* before they can be fixed *horizontally*. Remember that Jesus taught us to pray:

**Matthew 6:12 - Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

So we have to *experience* forgiveness from God before we can *express* forgiveness to others, most importantly our mates, kids and parents. Open your Bibles to I John 1:8. This passage contains one of the greatest practical explanations for how we experience forgiveness from God when we sin. And we’re going to see that it is also the pattern for our experiencing and expressing forgiveness in our relationships with our mates. **Read I John 1:8-10.**

The Good News is that God has made it possible for us to have our sins forgiven and to be purified or cleansed from all of our unrighteousness. God deals with the *chains* of sin and the *stains* of sin. We experience this when we first come to Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life. When we are saved every sin we’ve ever committed and ever will commit will never be held against us. We are forgiven and right with God. But the fact is that even after we are saved we still sin. I John is written to believers. On into Chapter 2 John says, “I’m writing to you so that you may not sin. *But* if anybody does sin we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ, who continues to plead our case before the Father. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

So in a *judicial* sense, if we are saved, our sins are all already covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God will never hold them against us again. But in a *relational* sense, sinning still affects our relationship with God. God is still grieved when we sin, and our fellowship with Him has to be maintained by confessing and receiving His forgiveness.

For this to be real in our lives we need to be self-aware enough to know when we have sinned against God. Remember John said in v.8 that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We still battle the sin disease that infects this human body and will continue to do so as long as we live in these bodies. He said in v.10 if we say we have not sinned we make God out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives. We commit “sins” because we have the disease of “sin.” But v.9 tells us that if we confess our sins God is faithful to forgive and to cleanse. So forgiveness is possible. And that’s how we experience forgiveness in the *vertical* sense. Then we are able to experience and express forgiveness in the *horizontal* sense, in our relationships with our mates. What we are called to do is to live out our relationships with our mates and children in the shadow of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Note: If you’re single one of the things you can do as you look toward the day when you will marry someone is to learn now how to live out every relationship in the shadow of the Cross, then you’ll be ready to do that in marriage.

Living with our mates in the shadow of the Cross requires a lifestyle of:

## 1. CONFESSION

### 1 John 1:9a - If we confess our sins...

The word for “confess” means to openly admit or acknowledge something. And it’s a verb that means we do it continuously. So it’s a lifestyle. And often we are so self-focused that it never even occurs to us that we are offending our mate in a way that requires forgiveness. So if our marriage means what it ought to mean to us, we can’t let things pile up before we deal with them. In light of the Gospel here’s how confession can happen:

- **Have the courage to confront.**

If we don’t learn the importance of confession in our relationships we are destined to be stuck in a cycle of hurting one another over and over. So we have to be courageous enough to confront our own sin and the sin in our loved one’s life.

Note: Confession is required when one of you does something to the other that the Bible calls sin. We’re talking about being dishonest, unkind, hateful, selfish, unfaithful, or abusive. That’s sin and requires that we confess it to God and to the one we have sinned against. However, forgetting to pick up the laundry from the cleaners or breaking a piece of china or failing to put your dirty dishes in the sink falls in the category of a weakness. It’s certainly good to say you’re sorry, but you don’t need to ask for forgiveness.

But we do have to be courageous enough to confront our own sin or the sin of our mate. It's isn't love when we keep silent about it; it is love when we see that God has a better way for us and our mates to live. Again, the Good News shows us this. God loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us as we are. So He confronts our sin. And we confront our own sin and confess because we want to be right in our relationship with God.

- Approach with honesty.

**1 Corinthians 13:6 - Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.**

One of the ways that God sanctifies us is that He puts us into families where we have to experience being sinned against, and where we sin against them. We come to know those things that are sinful by the loving honesty of our mates. We overcome those sinful actions or habits by honestly confessing. Remember I John 1:8 says that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We need to be honest.

- Approach with humility.

Reconciliation only happens when I turn away from being self-focused and become focused on the needs of my mate. The greatest problem we face in life is not the sin of our mates; it's *our* sin. When we are self-focused we become self-righteous, thinking that we are right and all the problems are in our mate. If I'm not open to the possibility that I am wrong, then the only other option is that the problem is my mate's fault, not mine. So we start collecting evidence and building our case against them. We will certainly not be open to loving criticism from our mates when we're convinced that they're the main reason things are a mess. So we need to approach it all with humility.

- Keep short accounts.

**1 Corinthians 13:5 - It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.**

Remember when you were first dating? Nothing bothered you. In dating we are focused on winning the other person. We work hard at being kind, patient, and selfless. There's nothing we wouldn't do for them to make them happy. But after the wedding usually things immediately change. We begin to say and do things that we would never think of saying or doing when we were dating. You take each other for granted. And what happens is that there is a list of offenses that begins to build up.

Offenses are going to happen. Remember you're a sinner living with a sinner. Confession helps us keep the list short. It's hard work, but it is worth it. Parenting and jobs and church all take time, but you have to make time to deal with it, even if it means staying awake until you get it resolved.

**Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,**

- Refuse to excuse.

One thing that blocks our experience of forgiveness with God is excuse-making. When He brings conviction by His Holy Spirit we can easily say, “Well I’m not as bad as \_\_\_\_\_. Surely what I did is not that bad.” In our own sinfulness we have this built in defense lawyer who steps up when we are accused or indicted, rather than honestly admitting we are guilty.

And the same thing can happen in marriages. When our mate confronts us about sin we have to resist the temptation to take the focus off of ourselves. Hear them out. Listen to what they have to say. Be open to the fact that God may be confronting you through your mate ... they may be right and you may be wrong. But if you’re thinking only about how you’re going to defend yourself then you won’t hear what God wants you to hear.

But what if we knew that on the other side of our confession forgiveness was waiting for us? That changes everything. So living with our mates in the shadow of the Cross requires a lifestyle of confession. But it also requires a lifestyle of...

## **2. FORGIVING**

**1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

We can live in a lifestyle of experiencing and expressing forgiveness in our marriage. In light of the Gospel here’s how forgiveness can happen:

- **Give the offense to the Lord.**

When you read the Gospels you learn how Jesus responded to people who sinned against Him. His first response was to give the offense to His heavenly Father. He prayed from the Cross where He was being crucified. What an example. Before you talk to your mate about their sin, talk to God about it. Make sure you see it the way He sees it. When you first commit the offense to the Lord it will clear your heart of any condemnation.

- **Persevere when you are wronged.**

**1 Corinthians 13:7 - It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

God is long-suffering toward us, and we should be toward our mates. After we have lovingly confronted our mate with the offense, we have to leave room for God to work. Repentance and change takes time. Hopefully when we confront our mate with sin they will respond quickly. But if that doesn’t happen, we must never give in to bitterness. In God’s strength we pray and believe for their right response.

- **Respond with compassion.**

**Romans 2:4 - God’s kindness leads you toward repentance...**

God's grace opens our eyes and makes our hearts tender. It shows us our need for forgiveness. It makes us want to run to Him for help. And when we respond with gracious compassion when our mate confesses, it makes the experience sweet. When we know that there's nothing so bad that it goes beyond the grace of God, that allows us to drag everything into the light and to not be afraid. We can quit hiding and quit making excuses and quit blaming others. We can say, "You're right. I need you to forgive me." And the same thing is true when we know we will be met with grace when we confess to our mates.

- **Greet confession with encouragement.**

If we're not careful we will keep the foot on the neck of our mate when they come to us in confession. Sometimes we want them to hurt as much as we have hurt, so we're slow to forgive. But just think how much easier it would be if you've developed a lifestyle pattern of greeting confession with grace and encouragement.

- **Remember the grace shown to you.**

It's easy for us to forget our own sin and weakness. It's easy to forget how gracious God has been to us. When we grieve over our own sin and are filled with gratitude for the forgiveness God has shown us it will be a joy for us to forgive our mates.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is that there's no sin that goes beyond the grace of God. And when we experience that grace and forgiveness from God we have to express that forgiveness to others. And when that happens, God can do amazing things when two broken people come together.

VIDEO – "Broken Together"