

August 27, 2017

Rev. Becca Wieringa

“After God’s Own Heart”

---

I grew up in a small Pentecostal church in eastern Oregon and the people we went to church with became very much like my extended family. We spent a lot of time with our church family. We went to church three times a week, sometimes four, Sunday mornings & evenings, Wednesday night youth group and bible study and occasional Saturday prayer meetings. Plus they were the people we went to lunch with on Sunday afternoons, had over for dinner and board games Friday nights.

We had a lot of church friends, but my favorite was a man named Bill. He was older than my parents and for some reason, he and I always had a special bond. I couldn’t wait to get to church each week to give him a hug.

Every year the older people in the church would adopt one of us young people, and Bill always adopted me. He’d take me to lunch, send me cards, give me candy even if I wasn’t supposed to have it, and always asked me about my week when we saw each other at church.

When I was in the hospital after my first kidney surgery, my family was in the process of moving to a new house. Bill was the one who packed up my bedroom and made sure none of my special things were left behind, and he made sure to tell me, “I didn’t let them throw out one single thing of yours!”

Bill only had one leg. I have no idea how he lost his leg. Sometimes he wore a prosthetic and sometimes he used a wheel chair. But I remember one time we did a labor auction in our Sunday school to raise money for church camp. Of course, Bill made sure I was the one he hired to come over and help him out.

His wife Marjorie had died a few years before and there were some things that only having leg made difficult doing on his own. I helped him sweep and carry things out to the garage and do other odd jobs, and then we sat on the porch and drank chocolate milk while we waited for my parents to come pick me up.

One time I asked Bill why he was always so nice to me. He said, “well we’re friends, aren’t we?” I said, “yes but why?” and he said, “well kid, I guess you’re just a girl after my own heart.”

There was only one person in scripture who was said to be a man after God’s own heart. The apostle Luke wrote in Acts 13:22, “After removing Saul, God made David their king. God testified concerning him: I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.”

David started his life as a shepherd, but when he was still a boy, Samuel the king told his father Jesse that he would one day be the king of Israel. He was the youngest of several brothers, the

least likely to become king. But God looked into David's heart and saw more than just a simple shepherd boy.

Not only was David shepherd and king, but he was also a poet, musician, mighty warrior, son, husband, father, and beloved friend. He slew the giant Goliath with faith as his weapon. He won the heart of his people.

But David also led a complicated life. He committed adultery, and then tried to cover up the affair by having the woman's husband killed. He lied when he felt that needed to and ran from his problems more than once.

In other words, David was a good man, and a great king, but he was also deeply flawed and his life was marked by bad choices and brokenness. So what exactly made David a man after God's own heart? And more than that, what can we learn from David's life about our own relationship with our Creator?

I think the answer, though not necessarily a simple one, can be found in the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm. David wrote this song after the prophet Nathan confronted him about his affair with Bathsheba. I'm going to read this from the Message translation. Though it's a paraphrase, I love the beauty of the language that will help us understand why God so loved David.

Generous in love—God, give grace!  
Huge in mercy—wipe out my bad record.  
Scrub away my guilt,  
soak out my sins in your laundry.  
I know how bad I've been;  
my sins are staring me down.  
4-6 You're the One I've violated, and you've seen  
it all, seen the full extent of my evil.  
You have all the facts before you;  
whatever you decide about me is fair.  
I've been out of step with you for a long time,  
in the wrong since before I was born.  
What you're after is truth from the inside out.  
Enter me, then; conceive a new, true life.  
7-15 Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,  
scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.  
Tune me in to foot-tapping songs,  
set these once-broken bones to dancing.  
Don't look too close for blemishes,  
give me a clean bill of health.  
God, make a fresh start in me,  
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.  
Don't throw me out with the trash,

or fail to breathe holiness in me.  
Bring me back from gray exile,  
put a fresh wind in my sails!  
Give me a job teaching rebels your ways  
so the lost can find their way home.  
Commute my death sentence, God, my salvation God,  
and I'll sing anthems to your life-giving ways.  
Unbutton my lips, dear God;  
I'll let loose with your praise.  
16-17 Going through the motions doesn't please you,  
a flawless performance is nothing to you.  
I learned God-worship  
when my pride was shattered.  
Heart-shattered lives ready for love  
don't for a moment escape God's notice.

There is a Hebrew word we translate as repentance but don't always use it the right way. We think of repentance as being sorry for something, apologizing, asking for our guilt to be erased or our transgression to be forgotten. But repentance means much more than simply saying I'm sorry or asking forgiveness.

In a sense, both of those actions are about us. We apologize so that we can mitigate our own guilt. We ask for forgiveness so that we can feel better about the situation.

Repentance isn't about us, it's about the wronged party, about fixing the broken relationship, about healing. The Hebrew word that is translated as repent shows up in the Old Testament 1050 times and means to turn or to return. In other words, when we repent of something we are literally turning our back on our sin, returning to a state of grace, leaving the old behind and facing the new.

It's not just apologizing, but it's promising to change, and then following through on the promise. Repentance is about bringing healing into a broken relationship by leaving behind what left it broken to begin with.

David understood repentance. He knew that the harm he had done with his deception and abuse of power could not be wiped away with an "I'm sorry." He'd created a ripple effect of dire consequences by his actions and had offended God with his sin.

But David also understood grace. He realized that God's mercy and grace were greater than any human's ability to forgive. David knew that God had been with him since the beginning of time, and that although David's brokenness was deeper than just surface mistakes, God's love for him was deeper still.

David repented of his sin—turned his back on the evil he had done—and vowed to make it right with the people he had hurt.

Although the legacy of brokenness in his life went all the way back to Adam, David knew that holiness came from God. It was God's spirit in him that allowed him to return to truth and justice, to start again with a clean slate, and begin the hard, hard work of healing broken relationships.

In Psalm 51, verse David sings, God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life. David wanted the chance to make amends and to save the relationship, both with God and the people he had wronged, and he knew that was only possible through the grace and love of his Creator.

David wasn't a man after God's own heart because he was perfect. No human being is perfect, and David's sins were great on a human scale—adultery, murder, dishonesty, cheating... you could say he did more than his share of wretchedness. So no, it wasn't being perfect that made God love David so much.

It was David's willingness to be in relationship with God no matter what. No matter what. David's relationship with God was his priority. He did his best to seek God's will for his life. He put all of his hope and trust and faith in God's leading and direction. When he screwed up, which happened often, he sought forgiveness and rededicated his life to doing right, serving God's people, and being God's voice of love and hope to the world.

I think back to my relationship with Bill, a man 7 or so times older than me. We had a special bond because we each saw in the other a friend, and we did our own part to contribute to the relationship and to care for the other person, according to our own strengths and gifts.

It was the same with David and God. They were friends. They were connected. David trusted God and David was God's beloved. David knew his life was in God's hands, and though he was broken and human, he loved God and was committed to building God's kingdom here on earth.

God wants each of us to be men and women after God's own heart. God wants us to be people who put our trust in God and who are willing to be in relationship with God no matter what.

And we learn from David how to do this: We must recognize our own flaws and brokenness, be willing to repent from our transgressions against God and others, and turn around so that we can recommit ourselves to God's purpose for our lives.

We also must realize and embrace that we are strongest when we live in loving relationships with each other, and as a result, offer ourselves as agents of peace, bearers of hope, and conveyers of love that heals all brokenness and covers a multitude of sins.

In short, the heart of God is love. To be men and women after God's own heart are to be human beings marked by God's love, encouraged by that love to love ourselves, flaws and all, and emboldened by that love to love others without condition or expectation.

Life's most wonderful, deep, important, mysterious truth is this: God **loves** us. God loves us just the way we are, flaws and all. And God loves us enough to not allow us to wallow in our brokenness. And God loves others as much as God loves us. God wishes for us healing and wholeness not just in our own hearts, but in our relationships with God and with others.

The purpose of relationship with God is reconciliation, so that we can turn around and offer reconciliation to others as well.

Somehow, we human beings struggle to make loving relationships our priority. Oh, we use people for our own gain—to alleviate our loneliness, to accomplish some tasks, to take out our frustrations, to garner advice... but we have in a sense insisted on playing God—judging one another, trying to determine one another's value and worth, trying to figure out who is more important than who, all the while trying to hide our own pain and brokenness and sin from others out of shame or pride or any number of a hundred other reasons. But we weren't created for any of that.

We were simply created to love and be loved. All of life was supposed to be worked out within loving relationship with God and each other, a cosmic conversation between friends. We are meant to share our brokenness and flaws with one another, forgive the blemishes we see in each other, and together figure out this world we live in as we journey through it, together.

Think back to the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm. David is convinced, and I am too, that "Heart-shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice. This is what God wants. Broken hearts ready for love; not guarded hearts unwilling or afraid to love.

Friends, if we could figure out this one thing, if we could somehow truly make loving, selfless relationships with God and others our life's focus, if we could come to a place where we really grasp that this whole life is all about relationship, wow, how amazingly advanced we could become.

I believe that we would unlock the secrets of the universe if only love became the sole purpose of everything we do. Then, we would be men and women after God's own heart, entirely and eternally.

David was the greatest king to ever live, according to the Judeo-Christian tradition at least. He was compassionate and kind, mighty and brave, humble and contrite. He was also deeply flawed and prone to rash decisions and selfishness and bad choices.

Yet he understood that forgiveness requires repentance. He knew that God's mercy and grace were powerful enough to smooth out even the deepest flaws. He knew and honored God's

laws, the greatest of which is love, and made them the foundation of his life. And he made relationship his life's priority. In doing so, David was a man after God's own heart. May it be the same for us, today, and always. Amen.