

How to Repair the Wrong You've Done

Rich Nathan
September 26 & 27, 2020
That They May be One
Luke 19:1-10

We all screw up. There is no one on earth that doesn't do something that hurts someone else! Sometimes our screw-ups are small and sometimes they're really huge. The question that I want to deal with today is: how do you repair the wrong you've done against another person? Most of us are really bad at relational repair.

Here are some really common situations. Bill and Molly are a married couple and Molly's phone bill was past due. She had a busy day of working in her photography business and she said, "Bill, I really need you to pay this phone bill today. It's past due and they said they are going to turn off my phone if it's not paid today. I'm putting the bill on the counter. All you need to do is call in and pay it. Will you do that?" Bill said, "Sure. Absolutely! I'll do it."

Well, Molly got home after a busy day photographing a wedding and she discovered that Bill had completely forgotten to pay. He laughed it off and said, "Oh, Molly, I'll take care of it tomorrow. There was a great football game on. You know how much I love football. You can use my phone. After all, we are one." But Molly was furious. Bill said she was making a big deal out of nothing, just like she always did.

Then there's the situation with Emily. Emily was really angry with her boss because he loaded her up with work that her co-worker had neglected. Emily found out that the boss was having problems in his marriage so she spread a rumor around the office that the boss was about to get a divorce. When the boss got wind of these rumors, he traced the rumor back to Emily and confronted her. Emily didn't apologize and she didn't let him know that she was upset with being assigned her co-worker's work. Emily's relationship with her boss soured and a couple of months later she quit.

We all do things that are wrong and hurt other people. As I said, most of us don't have the tools or aren't willing to use the tools to repair our broken relationships with people that we've hurt. We do lots of things other than really address the wrong we've done. You have your techniques of avoiding addressing the problem. I have my techniques. I'm sure that at some point, you've avoided people that you know you've hurt. Maybe you pretend that there's nothing wrong. Or you tell a joke to make it seem like nothing. Or instead of addressing the issue, you try to be extra nice. Or you buy your spouse a gift or come in with coffee for your co-workers. Maybe you blame it all on your parents who never resolved anything in their marriage either. But you don't apologize.

The result of failing to repair our wrongs can be really serious. It can ruin a friendship. It can destroy a marriage. It can wreck our small groups. We're living at a time where there's so much relational disrepair in our country. Along with all the personal hurts and wrongs we commonly do to one another, we have added multiple layers of problems of racial divisions, political divisions, church divisions and social media attacks.

A few weeks ago, Julia began a series on unity titled, "That They May Be One". In Ephesians 4:3 we read:

Slide Ephesians 4:3

³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

If you are a follower of Jesus and you take the Bible seriously, how would you grade yourself in terms of your obedience to this biblical command to "make every effort" to have healthy relationships with other Christian believers? I'm so challenged by this phrase: "make every effort". It's almost as if the Apostle Paul was saying, "Spare no expense. Go absolutely overboard! Don't just settle for OK in your relationships. Do what you can to make things right."

The reason for this is because Christian community is not something that we human beings create. Christian community is a beautiful gift to us from God that God simply asks us to maintain. As Julia said, Christian community is a divine invitation to join in the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. But we settle for such a low standard of unity in the church and in our own family relationships. We're satisfied with a certain level of disunity. Let me illustrate.

If someone said, "Nobody can keep all the Ten Commandments. That's a lot! I'm going to keep eight of the Ten Commandments! What about that one about not stealing? I steal stuff from my job all the time. I waste tons of time now that I'm working at home and no one's checking up on me. Stealing is so hard to define anyway. And forget about the commandment about not lying! I exaggerate constantly. I lie to customers. I cheat on exams. Besides, everybody lies. It's no big deal. But I'm pretty good at keeping eight of the big 10. 80% is at least a B or B-.

And, friends, that's how we are in our relationships. That's the way we are in the Christian church today. I know that I'm at odds with this or that person. So I'll just avoid them. Maybe I'll just leave the church. I'll quit my small group. I'll pretend that everything is ok. I don't try to work things out. I just move on! After all, there are plenty of other people in the world and I'm really too busy to worry about this one person. Does any of this sounds familiar? Do you resonate with any of the excuses why you tolerate burned out bridges with family members, with former friends, with people in the church or in your workplace? Paul says, "Make every effort." Don't ever settle for a certain amount of relational disharmony.

Today, I want us to look at the story of one little guy in the gospels who made every effort to repair the wrong that he had done. I called my message, "How to Repair the Wrong You've Done." Let's pray.

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Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷ All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

This is a favorite story for children in Sunday School. Sunday School children sing songs about Zacchaeus. They act out the story. Children identify with Zacchaeus because he's so small. He's a little guy behind tall adults in a crowd and like children, he's jumping up and down trying to see the parade going by. He's missing the show. Short people like me resonate with the story of Zacchaeus.

Of course, nobody in the crowd liked Zacchaeus because as the story tells us, he was a tax collector! The way tax collection worked back then was that Rome, who ruled the Mediterranean world in the first century, demanded taxes from the nations they ruled. But there were no civil servants working for Rome to collect taxes. Instead, the Roman government would sell the right to collect taxes to people called "publicani". Some English Bibles translate this as "publicans". These "publicani" would pay the taxes for their particular region up front so that the Roman government got their money right away. Then the "publicani" would go after the people in the region. Of course, they would want to get a profit on what they paid the government up front so they would charge extra to the local citizens and if the local citizens couldn't pay, they would take out loans from the tax collectors. So the tax collectors also functioned as loan sharks collecting a huge amount of interest from these loans to pay the taxes.

These "publicani" were hated because everyone hates tax collectors. They were hated for their loan sharking activities. But they were especially hated because they were fellow Jews who were collaborating with the Roman government.

So, Zacchaeus is a little guy who has done a lot of wrong to a lot of people. How do you repair the wrong you've done to people?

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Step One: Listen fully to the hurt you've caused

Before admitting our wrong, we need to first really listen to the hurt we've caused. Sometimes, if our admission is not voluntary, if it's the result of a confrontation, a premature admission or confession can be a way to avoid feeling the full weight of the wrong that we've done. Have you ever tried to talk with someone about how they've hurt you and they cut you off prematurely and say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me" before they've heard what they've done or how deeply they've hurt you? There's nothing more frustrating than having a Christian short circuit the painful process of true healing and true reconciliation through a premature confession. "But you haven't even heard what I'm upset about yet." "I don't care, please forgive me anyway!" "But you don't really understand what you've done. You haven't really listened to what your sin produced in my life or in our family." No relational repair can take place until we've shut up and really listened, not just with our ears, but with our hearts.

So, before you admit you're wrong, make sure you have first listened long enough to hear the extent of the hurt you've caused. Because if we're going to repair the wrong we've done, we then have to admit that we're in the wrong. And it's at this second step that most of us fail.

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Step Two: Admit the wrong you've done

We have a million excuses regarding why what we did was NOT really wrong, why compared to what this other person did – to be really honest, she drove you to this – yes, maybe what you said was kind of a low blow, but given the circumstances you were more than justified in responding with a personal attack. They're way more to blame than you are. Besides, given the way that you were parented, the extraordinary pressure put on you from your mother's overly demanding toilet training, no wonder you ripped his head off.

I love reading excuses kids give for why they didn't turn in their homework. Once in a while there will be an article in the newspaper where teachers share their favorite homework excuses. Here are some of my favorites:

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- We had our electricity cut off in our house and I had to light my homework on fire to get enough light to see the fuse box.

- My father went through a nervous breakdown and used the pages of my homework to make paper boats.
- I was carrying my homework to school when the wind came and blew it away. I tried to chase after it, but I couldn't catch my homework.
- I was not able to write my homework because my finger hurt and I couldn't hold the pencil.

Step two in repairing wrong is simply admitting it. Here's what I did that was wrong. No excuses, no blame shifting, no minimizing. And here is step three:

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Step Three: Renounce the wrong you've done

By renounce it, I mean very simply to STOP doing the wrong thing. Often, the truth is that we don't really want to give up the wrong that we're doing. I like gossiping or not responding to emails or always being late for an appointment. Being late is what makes us the fun, quirky free spirits that we are. So what if someone has to sit around waiting for us for half an hour. So what if we don't think about changing or really ever intend to change. So what if someone has to write to me three or four times before I get around to answering a simple question. So what if I frustrate the heck out of others by being so disorganized or non-responsive. To repair our wrong, Jesus says that we have to vigorously renounce our wrongdoings!

Let's listen to the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount:

Slide Matthew 5:29-30

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Don't excuse it! Don't minimize it! Talk about radical words by Jesus! Cut it off! Gouge it out! Friend, regarding your wrong, are you ever this radical? Ask God for the grace to change and then get radical with yourself! Don't say this is just the way I am! Renounce it!

Even if we listen and admit the wrong, renounce it and turn from it doesn't mean that everything is repaired. Zacchaeus proved his repentance by making amends.

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Step Four: Make restitution for the wrong you've done

Look at this

Slide Luke 19:8

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Had Zacchaeus been guilty of taking more money from local tax payers than was owed? He was guilty. Had his overcharging hurt lots of people? Again, guilty as charged. In the presence of everyone, in public, he declares that he is going to give back everything that he unlawfully took. Not only that, but he’s going to add something to it. According to the Old Testament law, if you stole something not only were you required to give back what you stole, but you had to pay back double.

Slide Exodus 22:4

⁴ If the stolen animal is found alive in their possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—they must pay back double.

But Zacchaeus decided to go beyond what the law required. Not only is he going to pay back double, he’s decides he’s going to pay four times over. And he’s also going to give away half his possessions to the poor.

I heard a story about a business owner who was interested in God and he employed several Christians at his company. He said that he watched those Christians like a hawk. He said, “You know what made me cross the line and become a Christian myself? One day, an employee of mine who was a fresh convert to Christianity came to me and asked to see me after work. I agreed to meet with him, but during the day I began to wonder if this new convert wanted to get together with me to try to convert me. I thought he may try to lay some religious trip on me.”

At the end of the day, the boss was stunned when this employee came into his office, hanging his head down and he said, “Sir, I’m just going to take a few minutes of your time. I’m here to ask your forgiveness. Over the years that I’ve worked for you, I’ve taken company supplies for my private use. I’ve cheated on my time clock. A few months ago I became a Christian. Jesus Christ has changed my life. Out of obedience and love for him, I’m here to make amends with you. I wondered if we could figure out a way to repair what I’ve done. If you need to fire me, I sure understand that and I totally deserve it. If you want to dock my pay, come up with a number that you think is appropriate or if you want to give me extra work on my own time, that’s ok too. I just want to make things right with you and God.”

To make a long story short, the business owner and the new convert worked things out. But the business owner said, “This young man so impressed me that I knew what he had was real. It wasn’t smoke and mirrors. He hadn’t just gotten a little religion, and I wanted to have what he had.”

Have you ever thought about going back to someone who you damaged financially, and tried to make things right by repaying what you took? I know that sounds radical since it almost always involves a risk! But people who love Jesus do that!

We live in a time when the subject of reparations is coming up quite a bit in the protests regarding race. The idea of making reparations to blacks in our country because of slavery and Jim Crow is not a recent idea that came out of the Black Lives Matter movement. The notion of reparations goes all the way back to the Bible. I haven't the time to make a prolonged argument regarding reparations – which involves tons of practical and political considerations.

I want to make a simple point today and that is that reparations are biblical. In the Bible, descendants of people who wronged a group centuries before, pay reparations to people whose ancestors were wronged. The people who paid were not the perpetrators. And the people who received the payment were not the victims. Yet God said this is what I want done, to right the wrong of this grave sin.

We're going to post in the chat an article by a very conservative Christian that you can read in your spare time if you're interested. It's titled "Reparations are Biblical".

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/reparations-are-biblical/>

The steps to repair a wrong are these: listen; admit it; renounce it; and finally repair it.

We can't read the story of Zacchaeus without considering how Jesus repairs our wrongs.

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A story how Jesus repairs our wrongs

Jesus is not just interested in correcting wrongs. He's interested in restoring people to relationship with each other and with God!

Slide Luke 19:10

¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

I want to finish today with a story that maybe a few of you have heard. I suspect that most of you have not heard this story. This story's about a young man named Derek Black. Derek was raised in the home of a radical white supremacist. David Duke, a Holocaust denier and Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, was Derek's godfather.

At age 11, Derek designed a kids page for what has been called the first major internet hate site. Derek's father still leads and edits this hate site. Derek went off to college. He kept his white supremacist views hidden from many of his classmates, but he was outed by an upper classmen. Everyone in his dorm hated Derek. He was cursed

everywhere he went. Signs were posted on his dorm door, trying to get him kicked out. Everyone in the dorm despised Derek except for one student.

The kid who lived a floor above Derek was an Orthodox Jew named Matthew Stevenson. Matt hosted Shabbat dinners in his dorm room. Matt invited Derek, this anti-Semite and white supremacist, to Shabbat dinner with Matt and some of Matt's Jewish friends. Derek decided to take him up on it. Derek came to Shabbat dinner for more than two years with Matt. Derek was super well trained in his white supremacy philosophy. He had crime statistics and white supremacy statements from the founding fathers of the United States. He had lots of ways to abuse social science data to show why whites were superior. He was a great debater and arguing wouldn't work with him. But over a period of time, Derek was converted out from his white supremacy.

Derek said two things converted him. The first was being confronted again and again by fellow students who told him how hurtful and destructive his beliefs and behavior were. The second and equally important thing was Matt's invitation to friendship and dinner. Face-to-face relationship with a real Jewish person. Over time, these confrontations and Matt's friendship created an internal crisis for Derek. He realized that his whole belief system required him to hate the people who were kind to him and who were telling him the truth. Over a course of a couple of years, Derek realized that his entire life was built on a terrible lie.

Finally, he wrote a public letter to the Southern Poverty Law Center that investigates hate groups. Like Zacchaeus, Derek publicly renounced his beliefs as immoral and destructive. And he is, in a sense, paying reparations. Derek now spends his time helping other people get out from these destructive white supremacist philosophies and hate groups. He's getting his doctorate at the University of Chicago, exposing the roots of racist ideologies.

Can you imagine if we Christians at Vineyard Columbus imitated the example of Jesus, the example of this Orthodox Jewish young man, Matthew Stevenson? Yes, confront evil. Yes, challenge lies. But as Christians, what if we went beyond confrontation? What if, like Jesus, we prayed to be agents of restoration and reconciliation? We may hate what someone else is saying. We may hate the hurt someone else is causing. But what if we as followers of Jesus simply refused to hate other people? What if we said: God, would you use me to heal the divides that are tearing my family apart right now? Lord, would you use me to reach across the divide that's tearing my small group or the church apart right now? What if you said: Lord, use me to reach across the divides that are tearing this country or my community apart right now?

Friends, only the Holy Spirit can enable us to have the courage to repair the wrong we've done. And only God's Spirit can enable us to seek to restore people who have hurt others through their wrongdoing. Let's pray.

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- II. Step Two: Admit the wrong you've done
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