

Hosea 5:15-6:3. Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me.” “Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. ³ Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

Acknowledge the LORD who cares for you.

- 1. Confess that you have offended Him.**
- 2. Seek his loving face and serve Him.**

It seemed that he was well practiced and well coached. His mom walked into the room and he knew exactly what his mom wanted to hear. “I’m sorry mom for not listening.” “I promise never to do it again.” But as he said the words you could tell the wheels were turning. You could see that he knew that this was his key out of trouble. Say the words, give the hugs, make the promise, and then I can be free from this timeout chair and I can be on my way. His words were well rehearsed, too rehearsed, and his eyes were purposefully averted from his mother’s gaze. It was obvious his concern was not for the confession but the impending release. And so mom reluctantly did what she had to do. She told her boy that he needed some more time to think about what he had done and she left him in the chair and walked out of the room. Shaking her head she looked at her husband and said, “What are we going to do with that kid?”

Anyone who has ever had children or been around kids or anyone who even remember what it was like to be a child can relate to such a scenario. It is one that is played out often. It is part of learning and growing as a child. The confession, the apology, and the way the child moves on are to be sincere; it is not about just knowing the right words to say in order to obtain a clean release, but it is about growing as a child under a parents care.

The words of our lesson for today seem like the right words. The Lord God had asked for a confession. His children had disobeyed Him not just once, but repeatedly. They had tinkered with the gods of their neighbors and thus they had become ensnared in idolatry and the many sins that came with it. They had also been challenged by their enemies and in their trouble they neglected God and turned to earthly enemies for help and support and unwise alliances. They had

abandoned God and now the LORD had seen it fit to take his protecting presence away from them.

The children of Israel finally saw that this was not a good thing so they did their best to fix the situation. ***“Come, let us return to the LORD.”*** They said to each other. ***“He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. ²After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. ³Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”*** For years God had sent his prophets to speak to them, to call them to repentance and so they knew what to do, they knew what to say, and so they said what they thought God wanted to hear. They had been well practiced and well coached, but their plea even though eloquent (and poetic even) was more than a bit empty. Their eyes were averted from their offense and the face of God and they seemed to be more focused on their impending release. ***“He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.”*** The children of Israel were confident that their loving Father would soon release them and restore them because that’s what he was known for.

But what was missing? What was absent from their confession that God had specifically asked from them? There was no admission of guilt, was there? Therefore there was no real sincerity either? They were sorry, but it seemed like they were sorry that they had been caught. They were sorry that they were suffering in their discipline. They talked about how bad it felt to be chastised by God in this way. God had torn them to pieces. He had allowed their enemies to strike and removed his protecting arm from around them. God had disciplined them and had left them to sit on their own – think of a parent leaving a child in his room to think about what he had done, but worse. And still there was no real confession because there was no admission of guilt or wrong doing by the children of Israel, even though they were certain that God would forgive them. Say the words, cry the tears, make the promise, and then we can be free. That was the formula that had worked before, so let’s do it again so that we can feel better. They treated the true God like one of the pagan idols they had become so fond of - bringing him empty sacrifices hoping that such gifts would restore their fortunes. This was not a humble confession exposing their guilt and looking to God for forgiveness. It was a self-serving confession that fell short and left God shaking his head and saying as he does in the very next verse, ***“What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah?”***

We might smile as we think about that child in the time out chair trying to work the system. We might even shake our heads and chuckle as we think about those children of Israel who seemed so surprisingly insincere time and again. But

then it is suddenly not quite so funny when we look at our own lives and see the same pattern of disobedience.

Well coached and well practiced it seems that we know the right words to say and we too make it into an empty formula. We fool ourselves into thinking that we can manipulate the system. We can say we are sorry, we promise we won't do it again, we may even sing a lovely song of praise or two and then he will forgive us; because, well, that's what he does. We rattle through the confession of sins with our eyes averted from our offenses and we focus on the impending release - if we even give that any attention. We just know that God will forgive us, because that's just how it works. Just like we know that the spring rains will come and the sun will rise, we know that God will forgive us.

We say the words, we cry the tears, and we make the promise to not do it again so that we can feel better. That's the problem many times isn't it? Our confessions are slow in coming because of our pride. And then when our confessions do come, that sinful ego somehow finds a way to make the confession about ourselves. We fail to truly acknowledge how we have offended God, but instead we bemoan how this sin has adversely affected our lives and then we do our best to deal with the problem so that we can just move on, avoid further pain, or just feel better. We sin and then we eventually we confess, but then even the confessions that we make are sinful and selfish and we have offended God once again. God looks at our confessions that are so often so self-serving and he shakes his head and says, "What am I going to do with this child of mine?"

Despite our sinfulness our Lord cares for us. Despite our insincere apologies, despite our failure to acknowledge the Lord in our life and how we have offended him, God still cares for us and He wants us to grow as his child under his care. And in order for us to grow and mature and serve him as the upstanding children that he has called and created us to be he desires from us sincere repentance. He does not desire that we know the formula, the code, the right sequence of words and prayers and actions to access his forgiveness, but instead he wants our hearts. It is not about coming to church the prescribed amount and then going through the motions in order to appease our God. But instead God, as our heavenly Father, cares for us and he wants us to have a quality relationship with Him that results in a healthy spiritual life. Human nature wants to ignore the pain and refuses to look at the One we have abused, but we have to face squarely what we have done. We have to acknowledge the One that we have sinned against. We are to come in humility before the Lord our Maker and seek his face of mercy because he is also the One who takes away our sins.

The Lord doesn't want empty and well rehearsed confessions, instead he tells his children of Israel and his children of today exactly what he wants with these

words from Hosea 6:6. ***For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering.*** God is your Father and he wants your love. He wants your heart. He wants you to confess your sins to him and know his love and forgiveness. He wants you to see seek his face and plead for his mercy. Our Father in heaven wants us to know him, both his justice and his mercy. The holy God wants us to respect and honor him and acknowledge him in our lives. He wants you to be honest with him and to trust that he cares for you and wants the best for you. And so while this confession by the children of Israel is insincere and empty it is not be entirely dismissed because there are still quite a few words that are worth holding on to such as, ***“Come, let us acknowledge the Lord.”*** When sincerely given, these words are certainly beneficial.

Let us acknowledge the Lord. Let us know and make known who the Lord is. He is a God of mercy and patience, abounding in love and faithfulness; but he wants our hearts to be faithful to him. He desires that we his children serve him and follow his ways and obey his commands. And when we sin we should therefore acknowledge that we have sinned against God. We have not just broken some rule, we have not just made some mistake, when we sin we are to acknowledge that we have hurt and offended God our Father. And then we are to seek his face, we are to lower ourselves before an almighty God and merciful Father. We are to admit our guilt and plead for his underserved mercy. When his people, when his children, come to him in honesty and faith his forgiveness will shower down on us like the refreshing spring rains and his goodness will rise over us and warm our hearts as surely as the rising sun. That is who he is, that is who our God is, and we have the privilege of knowing such a loving relationship with our heavenly Father through faith in Jesus.

It is not fear, nor is it selfish manipulation that defines our relationship with God, but rather it is love. He is our Father, who loves and cares for us. Because of his undeserved love in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation for us his children. There is forgiveness. There is release. But God’s love and mercy is not to be abused. Instead of looking to selfishly manipulate God’s forgiveness we are to joyfully serve him as he served us. We are to live joyfully under his care because we know how much he loves us. He loves us so much that he laid down his life as a ransom for us all.

So dear friends, dear children of God, acknowledge the LORD who cares for you. Confess that you have offended your heavenly Father. Seek his loving face and serve Him with an honest and joyful heart, because he is the One who takes away all your sins and covers all your offenses and removes your guilt forever through your Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.