

A Look in the Mirror

Me:

Over the summer, Abi and I dropped all three kids at my parent's house for a week. It was unbelievable. I love my kids more than I can tell you, but that time with Abi was priceless. Date night every night! Turns out she still likes me for some reason. Our kids got to spend time with Gaga and PopPop, which makes me happy on so many levels. After dropping the kids off, we stopped to get gas and snacks for the road on our way back home. We had stopped at this exit before and took the long way around on the way out. So having learned from our mistake, we were confident it was going to be a smooth stop. As we pulled out, we even spent time talking about how we both pride ourselves on the ability to learn from other people's mistakes. I don't need to learn the hard way. Some people have to figure it out on their own. I would rather learn from your mistakes than my own. So we're in the middle of executing the perfect pit stop and having this conversation about learning from other people's mistakes when it hits me that we should have been back on the interstate already. So I asked Abi to pull out the GPS to see how long it would be until we hit I-95. We were running parallel to it, so we could have driven for hours and not found it. Not only were we driving parallel to the interstate, but we were also driving south, and we needed to be going north. We had only gone a mile, so it wasn't that big of a deal, but once again, I learned that pride goes before the fall. We were so busy talking about how we don't understand why people can't learn from other's mistakes that I missed the big sign that would have told me how to get to the interstate. But let's be real: It wasn't my fault. They should have marked it more clearly.

We:

That's the game we play. It's not our fault. We can always find someone or something to blame. Robert Bloch said this, "The man who can smile when things go wrong has found someone else he can blame it on." We laugh, but only to keep ourselves from shifting nervously in our seats. We do this all the time. We do it at work. I would have gotten that report to you, but the internet was down, and the printer was out of paper, and my dog ate the copy I printed out last week. There was really nothing I could do. We do it at home. I was going to cut the grass, but the mower is out of gas, and it's hot right now, and it's probably going to rain later. We definitely do it in relationships. How many times have we caused the conflict? We might say, "It's not you. It's me." But we don't mean that. We mean, "It's not me, it's you." It's your crazy, your dysfunction, and your insecurities that blew this up. We are always looking for someone to blame because the problem cannot possibly be us. Can it?

God:

This isn't anything new. We've been doing this from the beginning, and I do mean the beginning. In Genesis chapter three, right after Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God comes to talk with them. Here's how that went:

'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."' - Genesis 3:8-13

Right from the start we were trying to shift the blame. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. It was here that sin entered the world, and mankind's relationship with God was shattered. The blame-shifting didn't work then, and it doesn't work now. They were both banished from the garden, given punishments, and were sentenced to physical death. Up until this point, death wasn't a part of the world. It all started right here. Even though they tried to blame someone else, they were held responsible for their own sin.

We've been choosing sin ever since that day. We can try to pass the blame if we want, but that won't get us where we need to go. Sin breaks our relationship with God, but He hasn't abandoned us to our fate. Let's circle back to 1 John chapter 4.

'This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ' - 1 John 4:9-10

"But I'm a good person," we protest. "It's really not my fault, I didn't have a choice." Here's the thing: We all choose sin. It broke our relationship with God, and it is also what breaks our relationships with others. Sin is prevalent in our lives, and you are not the exception. How do I know? Romans 3 tells us,

'But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the

glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ' - Romans 3:21-24

This is a good news/bad news situation. The bad news is everyone sins and is therefore imperfect and separated from God. The good news is everyone has the opportunity to receive forgiveness and restoration. Because Jesus gave His life for us on the cross, forgiveness is ready and available to everyone. If you have any questions about how to receive that, I would love to talk with you about that today. There is another layer to this, though. Even after we've been forgiven, we still sin every day. Forgiveness is available for us, but we still fall short. Jesus' sacrifice covers all sin, but the reality is we still struggle with it. A word you've probably never heard outside of the church is sanctification. To say that someone has been sanctified means that they've been declared holy. In the book of Hebrews, the author is talking about the old sacrificial system and how animal sacrifices were never going to be good enough. They couldn't bring sanctification. They couldn't remove sins. This is why Christ came. But the author gives us some interesting insight. Take a look at what they had to say:

'And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. ' - Hebrews 10:11-14

Those who are being sanctified. That's you, and that's me. What does that mean? It means we have forgiveness and are being made holy, but we aren't there yet. This is why we still have sin in our lives, and it's why that sin is blowing up our relationships to this day.

You:

You amplify the problems of others while minimizing or denying your own. This produces pride in your life and erects barriers between you and others. I'm not asking you to beat yourself up or live a life filled with constant guilt. You are justified and being sanctified, but you're still imperfect. When you can acknowledge this in your own life, it will relieve some pressure from your relationships. Why? Because acknowledging my own imperfection is a direct shot at my pride, and [pride is the poison that kills relationships](#). When I acknowledge the issues in my own life, it allows me to extend a little more grace to others as well. If you're out there looking for your perfect match, you're wasting your time. You are imperfect, and so are they. That doesn't mean you can't be together. I believe we're

imperfect, and we're for each other. But before you get out there and start looking at others to pursue in a relationship, you've got to take a look in the mirror and make sure your heart and your attitude are right. As followers of Jesus, we pattern our lives after His. This means that our attitude should be a reflection of Christ. Listen to what Paul had to say in Philippians 2:3-11:

'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ' - Philippians 2:3-11

Godly relationships are about sacrificing for each other, showing kindness, having integrity, forgiving one another, and all kinds of other tough stuff like that. You're going to need Jesus to pull that off. I don't care if you're talking about a romantic relationship, friendship, or even relationship with your family. This stuff doesn't come naturally. If you're going to do all of that, you are going to have to set your pride aside and have the same attitude as Jesus. You're going to have to work on the person in the mirror before you start trying to work on someone else. You are going to have to stop shifting the blame. You'll have to understand that you are at least partially to blame in almost all conflict, which we'll talk about in a couple of weeks.

I know that it's hard, but you need to come to be able to say this: *I'm not perfect, but I'm in process. I'm justified, but I'm being sanctified. None of this has anything to do with what I've done. It's all because of Jesus.* When you can say that and understand what it means, you begin to see yourself and others in a new light. You do have to put in some effort here. Chasing after Jesus isn't easy, and it isn't automatic either. It's a daily decision. So chase after Him with everything you've got and look for people to partner with you along the way.

We:

We may be imperfect, but we're in process. And we were made to do life together. We don't complete each other. Two imperfect people cannot complete one another. We can help each other along the way. We can model for the world what the power of Jesus has done in our lives. We can show them what grace, mercy, forgiveness, and humility can do. When we do these things, it's absolutely beautiful. So let's push each other. Let's encourage one another to go deeper in our relationships with Jesus. I'm not looking for potential, what you might be if you tried. I'm looking for patterns in your life. Not perfection, progress. We're not perfect, and we won't be this side of heaven. We are in process. So let's encourage one another in the process because Jesus is making us all new.