

When I was really young, about 6 years old, I went with my family on a shopping trip to Hastings, NE. At that time, I hated, I mean, hated shopping for clothes, but my parents wanted to do that all the time. My sister, seven years older than me, went off to shop in the mall. I wanted to go with her, but my parents said, “No, you need to stay with us. We are going to shop for clothes for you.” What did I do? I pouted. I was frustrated that I couldn’t go with my sister, so I took every opportunity to show that off. I sat down by one of the clothes racks and leaned against it while they picked out different options. Before I knew it, a whole row of clothing racks tumbled, one after another. I was feeling sheepish when the domino effect was done. Needless to say, I got a stern punishment.

I may not have been the model citizen in that example, but King David did far worse. He failed to do his kingly obligations and stayed home when most kings went with their warriors to battle. Then he looked out and lusted over a woman, Bathsheba, and forced her to lie with him. She was a married woman, and David got her pregnant. He didn’t repent; he decided to “resolve” the situation by killing her husband, Uriah. David thinks everything is fine and dandy until the prophet Nathan tells him the story of a man who has many sheep but steals the sheep from a man who only had one. David is outraged at this hypothetical story until Nathan shows him that he is the transgressor. His confidant breaks past the ignorance of his crimes, and he sees his sins. The depth of his offenses hit him. David has sinned so deeply, bordering evil, and now he senses how absolutely dirty he is.

It really hits you like a truck of bricks when you have wronged others. I felt pretty bad after I played dominos with clothing racks, and I imagine the people in that store weren’t pleased either. Probably none of us will be in David’s situation, but we’ve all had that horrible feeling. It’s not that you’ve been found out; that’s not really being sorry. It’s

that you recognize that you have hurt others so deeply you care about, and you feel absolutely filthy. You have broken relationship, and you have hurt person in their vulnerability. It could be a spouse, it could be a friend, it could just be another person that you have wronged, and it burns to see the hurt in the others' eyes. Often you would do anything to take that feeling away, for the way they have been injured comes back and injures your heart at the same time. It was from this kind of inward hurt that tradition says David wrote Psalm 51. The entire psalm speaks of pain and This is one of seven Penitential Psalms in the Christian tradition. This one is almost formulaic of the path to forgiveness. It begins with a confession of the sin, followed by a prayer for healing, a prayer for restoring relationship with God, praising God's mercy, and thinking about what God desires of sinners, according to the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary. We see in this passage what it means to be truly repentant and to seek forgiveness.

We need forgiveness to be whole. The first thing you might think when you see that painful look in another's eyes is to heal that wound as quickly as possible, for everyone's sake. We wrench with guilt when there is something that just eats at the heart. We need to get our wrongdoings off our chests, or we get literally sick with frustration and pain. We cannot escape the fact that our sinful nature breaks relationship with those around us, those we depend upon, those we love, those we trust. We will hurt others, unfortunately. But it's not just about the community around us. When we have hurt our neighbor, we have also sinned against God. The two are inseparable. "Against you...alone I have sinned," says the psalm, when David had neglected his duties, killed a man, and committed adultery. It need not be that deep. If I were to say an insensitive word to my fiancée, that would be a sin against God who loves us both and seeks our mutual goodness. Even if I were to curse

at another driver on I-25 cutting me off, that, too, is sin! The first commandment calls us to love God; the second calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. God calls us to faithful, life-giving relationship among all three. The penitential psalms, like Psalm 51, are telling us that we will break relationship; we will hurt other people, but we must name our wrongdoings and sins as we come before God for forgiveness. We are called to restore relationship on all levels. The faithful response will always be confession and repentance, turning away from the sinful action and seeking not to go down that road again. When we offer ourselves in our vulnerability and pain and name how we have done wrong, it goes a long way toward reconciliation with others, and, indeed, with God, who knows and sees all.

We now walk into the season of Lent together. Traditionally, that has meant that you give something up. That is possibly the case, but I think the season means more than that. I believe the point is name and seek to remove obstacles between you and your relationship with God and each other. Just as this psalm seeks to name our inequities and heal relationship, the season calls us to better understand what we can do to foster relationship. In doing, you can also add something to your schedule. Perhaps more prayer time is necessary. Perhaps you want to do more volunteer service. Maybe more bible reading. Maybe we need to focus on the positives in naming the blessings daily that we take for granted. It's up to you and what you need to grow closer to our Creator. God is willing to forgive if we name our sins clearly, seek to repent, turn away from them, and seek God's loving forgiveness. It's important for our own well being as well as the well being of our relationships. Let us go into this time, moving toward the cross, as a time of fully restoring relationship. Love and honor God. Love and honor your neighbor. Love and honor yourself. Let us walk this Lenten journey together. Amen and Amen.