

Forgiveness: Naming The Hurt
March 19, 2023 Montavilla United Methodist
Rev. Heather Riggs

Content Warning: This Sunday we will be exploring the story of David and Bathsheba. We will be discussing the topic of sexual assault. Take care of yourself in anyway you need to.

"The only way to stop the pain is to accept it. The only way to accept it is to name it and, by naming it, to feel it fully. In doing so, you discover that your pain is part of the great, eternal tapestry of human loss and heartbreak. You realize you are not alone in your suffering, that others have experienced and survived what you have experienced, and that you too can survive and know joy and happiness again. When you embrace your feelings, you embrace yourself and allow others to embrace you too." (p104 The Book of Forgiving)

2 Samuel 12:1-10

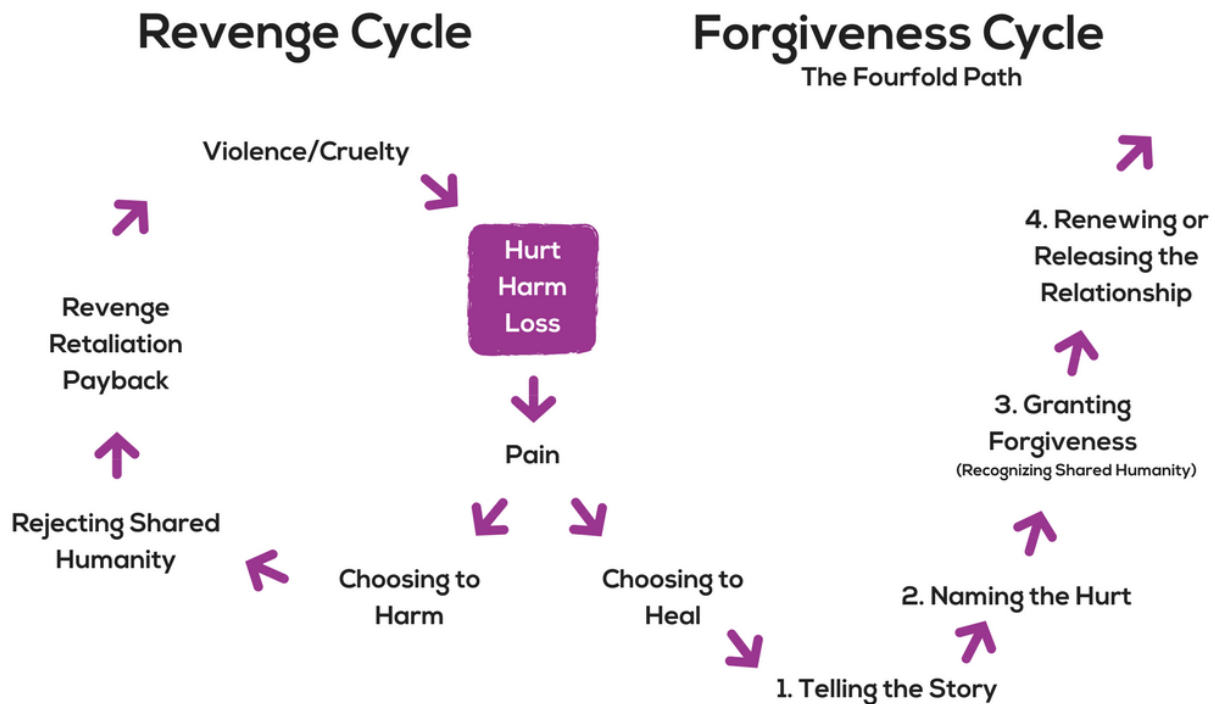
12 So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When Nathan arrived he said, "There were two men in the same city, one rich, one poor. **2** The rich man had a lot of sheep and cattle, **3** but the poor man had nothing—just one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised that lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup—even sleep in his arms! It was like a daughter to him.

4 "Now a traveler came to visit the rich man, but he wasn't willing to take anything from his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had arrived. Instead, he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the visitor."

5 David got very angry at the man, and he said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the one who did this is demonic! **6** He must restore the ewe lamb seven times over because he did this and because he had no compassion."

7 "You are that man!" Nathan told David. "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul's power. **8** I gave your master's house[c] to you, and gave his wives into your embrace. I gave you the house[d] of Israel and Judah. If that was too little, I would have given even more. **9** Why have you despised the LORD's word by doing what is evil in his eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife as your own. You used the Ammonites to kill him. **10** Because of that, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own, the sword will never leave your own house.

Revenge Cycle & Forgiveness Cycle



This Lent, we are exploring the fourfold path of forgiveness from Tutu and Tutu's book, *The Book of Forgiving*. Drew is leading a book study on Wednesday evenings on zoom. On Sunday mornings I am using Bible stories to illustrate the steps of the fourfold path.

For step one, Telling the Story, we explored how Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve from the book of Genesis, how their lives might have been different if Cain had told the story of how he was hurt as honestly as possible. How could Cain's life have been different if he had been honest with himself? How could our lives be different if we were honest with ourselves?

Today we will move forward to step 2 on the fourfold path: Naming the Hurt.

Naming the Hurt can often feel like the most confusing step of the fourfold path. People often wonder, didn't I already share how I was hurt when I told my story?

Not quite. The difference is:

Telling the story is about identifying the facts of what happened.

Naming the Hurt is about identifying our feelings about what happened.

This can be hard for those of us who grew up being told that sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.

Scientifically, however, our brains cannot tell the difference between physical pain and emotional pain. This is part of the neuroscience about addiction. Many people suffering from unhealed emotional pain will self-medicate with alcohol, drugs and other addictions in an attempt to numb their feelings so that they can pretend that the injuries to our hearts don't hurt.

Naming how our feelings are hurt is the next step in healing, so that ourselves, our families, and our communities can stop the cycle of harm.

In our scripture today, the Prophet Nathan performs an intervention for King David.

Nathan uses the story of the ewe lamb to help David tell the story of what David did to Bathsheba and Uriah, with honesty. This is a beautiful example of what can happen if someone who has done harm can hear the true story of the harm they have caused. David was finally able to recognize Uriah's and Bathsheba's humanity and David eventually made restitution to Bathsheba by making Bathsheba's son, Solomon, David's heir.

They dealt with the truth of what happened, but given how much family drama continued to happen for generations to come, I wonder if they ever did the work of naming the hurt?

Bathsheba is the person in this story who was harmed and lived to feel the harm, but because Bathsheba both lived in very sexist times and many of the editors, interpretations, and commentators on the Bible have also lived in sexist cultures, Bathsheba's voice is mostly missing from the story.

In many bible commentaries, Bathsheba is victim blamed, in the same way that survivors of sexual assault are blamed and shamed today.

Bible scholars ask what Bathsheba was doing bathing on her roof in the same way that people ask what women were doing or what they were wearing when they were assaulted. The truth is that bathing on your roof was normal. Since most buildings were short, the roof would have been a very private and safe place, if David hadn't been stalking Bathsheba from his tall Palace. My friend who was raped, was wearing an

oversized, yellow, church camp T-shirt and long men's athletic shorts when the man who was stalking her decided to assault her.

Sexist Bible scholars also ask why Bathsheba didn't say no, in the same way that people today ask why assault victims didn't fight or fight harder. The truth is that as king, David had all the power, and as the wife of a Hittite serving in the military, Bathsheba was basically married to a man whose immigration status depended on staying in favor with the King. A modern equivalent might be if Bathsheba's husband was in the US on a work visa and the official in charge of his visa demanded that Bathsheba have sex with him in order to keep her husband's visa. Abuse of power is an old and not uncommon story in cases of sexual assault.

Bathsheba was put into a position where she could not say no to a powerful man who was stalking her while she was privately bathing. A man who coerced her into having sex and got her pregnant. A man who had her husband killed and then coerced her into living with him.

That's the honest truth of Bathsheba's story.

We don't know what Bathsheba felt, because no one cared enough to write her story.

But we do know what many other women with similar stories have felt.

Women tell us that after assault they feel:

- Shame because our culture judges women on our sexual activity, even when we are assaulted.
- Anxiety and an inability to feel safe
- Fear that she will be assaulted again
- Powerlessness and loss of agency because her life feels out of her control.
- Bathsheba would also have felt grief at the loss of her husband, Uriah, and the life she thought she was going to have.
- Bathsheba probably also felt loneliness, since her move to the palace harem would have separated her from her family and friends.

I wonder if the other women in the harem encouraged Bathsheba to share her story? I'm sure many of them were traded to King David for favors as if they were livestock...as if they were the young ewe of Nathan's story.

I wonder if they helped her name her hurts. If they hugged her when she cried for her murdered husband and her lost baby. If they acknowledged her pain as real and valid?

I wonder if she found healing and peace, even as she claimed the restitution that was owed her, by reminding King David that he had promised to make her son, Solomon, David's heir. This is important, because forgiveness does not mean that we give up on justice. Forgiveness and healing means that our healing becomes a source of power that we use to seek justice and reparations, rather than to cause hurt and harm through revenge.

Naming our hurt - naming our feelings helps us to not get stuck in repeating our story, over and over again as if we hope that this time, our story will change.

Naming our hurt feelings allows us to accept the fundamental vulnerability of being human. To accept our pain, instead of trying to avoid it with harmful coping mechanisms like addiction and revenge.

I think Tutu and Tutu explain this well on page 104.

"The only way to stop the pain is to accept it. The only way to accept it is to name it and, by naming it, to feel it fully. In doing so, you discover that your pain is part of the great, eternal tapestry of human loss and heartbreak. You realize you are not alone in your suffering, that others have experienced and survived what you have experienced, and that you too can survive and know joy and happiness again. When you embrace your feelings, you embrace yourself and allow others to embrace you too." (p104 Book of Forgiving)

Clenching the Stone

Today's stone ritual is Clenching the stone. This practice also works well without a stone.

1. Hold your stone (or not) in your open hand
2. Name a hurt - a feeling and clench your fist.
3. Open your hand and release the hurt to God.
4. Repeat as needed.