

How many of you remember the game show “Truth or Consequences?” For those of you born after 1980, it was a show where contestants were “selected” from a studio audience. They were asked a trivia question and they could either answer it correctly be forced to “pay the consequences” – perform some type of stunt. On occasion, the show would include a reunion with a long-lost relative or the return of an enlisted military person from overseas, usually Vietnam. No one minded these consequences.

Today, we hear from the Old Testament the 3rd or 4th episode of that soap opera we call the story of King David (or as I call it – Canaan Place). The prophet Nathan has a ‘come to Yahweh’ meeting with David over his sexual indiscretions. The wily king may have thought all was smoothed over when he brought Bathsheba to live with him and make her his wife. Nathan and Yahweh have other ideas.

Don’t you just love how Nathan uses a metaphor to trap David in his own game? Can’t you just imagine David buckling at the knees and going pale when Nathan declares “You are the man!” I can hear the soap opera organ playing “Dun Dun Duuuuuuun” in the background before the screen fades to black.

You'd think that we're just going to commercial the way this lesson ends. Next Sunday, we skip all the way to David losing his son Absalom. We need a little bridge here. The bridge reads thus:

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said to David, "Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die." Then Nathan went to his house.

There are consequences to David's actions. Forgiveness has been granted, but there are consequences. Many, many consequences.

Not only does the child born to Bathsheba die, but it's the beginning of horrible losses for David to endure. Before we get to next week's episode, David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar. She becomes an early #metoo candidate when David refuses to do anything about it. After two years, Absalom, infuriated by the ruin of his sister, has Amnon killed. David forgives Absalom. Absalom tries to overthrow David. And, standing on the sidelines is Joab, the faithful soldier, shaking his head.

There is much ado about forgiveness in cultural theology today. There's wisdom behind it, too. Forgiveness is necessary for the one who needs to forgive much more than the one who needs forgiveness. It is how we kick the one who has wronged us out of the living room of our psyche. The person needing forgiveness may accept the offer and receive some sense of pardon. What both the forgiver and the forgiven often fail to realize is that the consequences of the wrongdoing may continue for a very long time and catch innocent people up in the chaos.

One would think that the consequences of sinful actions require more contemplation than the forgiveness of those actions. How many people have faced a judge who have not once thought about what the fall-out of their decisions and actions may be?

But, let's not sit in smug righteousness. There are actions we take daily that have consequences that affect other people. You may have heard about them or read about them – they're known as the seven deadly sins.

According to Wikipedia, this grouping is a list of behaviors or habits that directly give birth to other immoralities. We know them as pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.

Each one corrupts not only the sinner but also the sinned upon and everyone around them. Don't believe it? Let's take just one as an example: gluttony. Gluttony isn't only about eating too much. It's not only about consuming too much. It's also about wasting or withholding too much. Gluttony committed by one individual not only creates an unhealthy individual, but it also causes creates unhealthy communities. When a few live maximally, many end up living less than optimally.

Think about our consumption of fossil fuels. How many wars have been fought over oil? How much plastic, made from oil, is now floating in our oceans? How much loss of life and/or livelihood has occurred because of our energy requirements? It boggles the mind.

God can and does forgive our sins. God cannot erase the consequences of our sins. What God can do is redeem them those consequences. We know this from the stories of leaders before David.

- The consequences of Joseph's brothers' decision to sell him into slavery were redeemed by Joseph's service to Pharaoh. That redemption came at the cost Jacob's grief and the brothers' humiliation.
- The redemption of Saul/Paul brought about the beginning of the Christian faith. It didn't erase the wrongdoings prior to the event on the road to Damascus, including the murder of Stephen at the hands of the crowd.

What we can take from the story of David and other similar stories of forgiveness, judgment, and redemption, is that the cycle of human behavior hasn't really changed much since the beginnings of creation. The examination of our wrongdoings must go hand-in-hand with our own tendencies to judge others and our inability to control the consequences of our actions.

We need to be aware of the intricacies of free-will and our behavior.

It may be impossible to take into account every action or decision that we make in our fast-paced society. However, it certainly behooves us, when making significant decisions about ourselves, our families, our communities, our country, the long-term consequences are considered along with the short-term affects. God can redeem us from ourselves, but oh how long we may have to wait and oh how much damage may be done before that redemption is played out.

Truth or Consequences. It's not a game show. It's life.