

Freeway Series / Sermon 4: Ownership

May 1, 2016

“You can’t help a liar.” You buy that? You can’t help a liar. Here’s the deal: You can help almost anyone who is struggling with almost anything ... as long as they are telling the truth. But you can’t help a liar, because they won’t admit what needs fixing. I even think there’s a Bible verse that comes close to making the same point. King Solomon, the smartest guy in the world at that time, said: “People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy.” (Proverbs 28.13) So it seems to me, if you are lying about the junk you’re struggling with, I can’t help you. If you lie to yourself, you can’t help you. If you lie to God, he won’t help you. People who conceal their sins will not prosper; but if we are honest about our sins, and turn from them ... there can be freedom, right?

But instead we play games with people, and we play games with God. Sometimes when we get caught, we kind of confess, but as little as possible. You buy that? You are caught in a sin, so you confess some of your sin, the part they know, the part they probably will find out, but you keep hidden as much as you can. Ever been there, done that? Isn’t that still “concealing sin?” We’re talking about way more than an “I’m sorry because I got caught.” We’re talking about the willingness to confess sins that are safely hidden because we want his healing.

Now, what makes this a huge problem for us is that lying has lost its status as a sin in our culture. People lie, we lie, with little or no remorse at all. We even expect our politicians to lie to us – they call it “spin.” I think God calls it “lying.” Last week I suspect every NFL team in the league was doing some lying, trying to hide what they were going to do in the draft Thursday night. It’s part of the game, right? People lie to get ahead; they lie to get out of trouble, they lie to help other people get out of trouble; we lie to hide those parts of us we don’t want others to see – we call those lies “masks.” Sometimes we get so practiced at lying that it doesn’t even tweak our conscience, any more. But the Bible says, people who conceal their sins will not prosper, right.

Which is why -- here’s another verse for you – King David tells us, “What you’re after (what God is after) is truth from the inside out.” (Psalm 51.6)

Be transparent, be honest. You see, guys, God doesn't want us tell the truth to make our life more difficult. He wants us to tell the truth because "you can't help a liar." He wants us to tell the truth because "people who conceal their sins will not prosper." He wants us to tell the truth because he wants us to experience life to the fullest: what we are calling the "Free-way."

We're tight in the middle of a series we are calling the Freeway – the path to the abundant life God wants for us. Remember? Step 1 was "Awareness." "God, show me those things inside me that are offensive to you, things I might think are perfectly okay, but they dishonor you." Make me aware. Step 2: "Discovery." "God, help me learn to trust you. Help me to trust you when I understand you, and when I don't; help me to trust you when I agree with you, and when I don't. Because I believe that you are smarter than me, and that your way will be better for me than my way." Discovery is about trust. Step 3 (this week) is about "Ownership." We're going to talk about being ruthlessly honest about our sin. This is going to be really hard, but it can change your life. Remember: "People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if we confess and turn from them, we will receive mercy." And we're going to need a boatload of mercy for this Free-way.

Now I want to expose some lies this morning, lies that are killing us spiritually. These lies will corrupt the abundant life that Jesus came to give us, so they need some exposing. Here's lie #1: "It's not my fault!" Here's the deal guys, you can't blame your way to freedom. We try ... hard, but people who conceal their sins will not prosper, God says. And saying "it's not my fault, and blaming someone else, is usually concealing my sin, and it's usually lying. Taking ownership means that I stop blaming God, and I stop blaming others for messes I have created.

Now here's the problem: blame comes naturally. It's almost like it's hard-wired into our DNA. I found some cartoons that are kind of funny, and pretty much dead on.

- How many of you guys remember the Family Circus? Do you remember "Not me"? "Who is kicking the table?" And there are Not Me, and Nobody, and Ida Know under the table, banging on it.
- This one is pretty good: "He did it." You parents ever seen that one in real life?

- Or here is a kid in therapy. Therapist says, “What do you say we blame your parents and knock off early?”
- Two more. Here are the cats: “Say nothing, they’ll blame the dog!”
- And here are the dogs (they are not as good at lying as cats are): “Did you see what the cat did?”

This goes back to the very beginning. In Genesis 3 we read about the fall, the first sins of Adam and Eve. Maybe you know the story. God placed Adam and Eve in a garden, and they were told they could eat from any tree in the garden except one. Guess which one they obsessed over. We’re kind of like that: God tells us we can do all these wonderful things, but we’d rather obsess over what he tells us not to do. Go figure. Anyway, they eat the forbidden fruit, and in their shame they hide from God ... We do that too, don’t we?

We’ll pick up the story at verse 11. God says, “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?” And how they answered God is just classic – this is where it all got started. Adam said, “It’s not my fault!” “It was the woman (the woman) you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” (v 12) Isn’t that great? He blames God: “It was the woman ‘you’ gave me ... You put her here, God.” And then he blames the woman: “She gave me the fruit; I just ate it.” “It’s not my fault: it’s her fault; and it’s kind of your fault, God!” So God asks Eve, “What have you done?” Well, she’s not going to take the blame. She says, “The serpent deceived me, that’s why I ate it.” (v 13) “It’s not my fault; it’s that blasted snake! Why did you put that snake there, God?”

Now it’s kind of fascinating that it took the serpent, the fallen angel Lucifer, the personification of evil to deceive the woman; and all it took to deceive the man was a naked woman! But just listen to them: “It’s not my fault! I’m the victim of this naked woman.” “Well it’s not my fault! I’m the victim of this blasted serpent.” “In fact God, it’s kind of your fault! You put us here!” You see, it’s in our spiritual DNA: It’s not my fault; it’s his fault, her fault; I’m just a victim. You ever play that game? Be honest! You ever slip into those lies? We all do. You see, our spiritual nature is to minimize our guilt and blame others.

Now, don’t miss this: Technically, Adam and Eve are both telling the truth. When Adam says, “Eve gave it to me,” she did. When Eve said, “The

serpent deceived me,” he did. But both of them are telling half-truths as a way of evading personal responsibility. They are making excuses. As long as Adam could blame Eve, he could feel better about himself; same with Eve.

We have a word for what Adam and Eve did. And it is something we are really, really good at. It's called: Victimization. You play the victim; you blame someone else for mess you made. We have these code phrases when we want to play the victim: “I was treated unfairly,” “I got the short end of the stick,” “I was dealt a lousy hand,” “Life's not fair.” That's what Jordan was talking about a few minutes ago.

- Some of you guys blame your parents: “They got a divorce, so I don't know how to have healthy relationships.”
- Some of you blame your husband: “He doesn't know how to communicate so we always end up in this spot.”
- Some of you blame your wife: “She blows everything out of proportion and so we end up in these big fights.”
- Some of you blame the church: “It's the pastor's fault I'm not growing spiritually. He's too shallow, he's too deep.”
- We blame the schools: “It's the teachers' fault that my kids aren't smarter than they are.”
- We blame politicians. That's why everything is going wrong; “It's those daggone Republicans.” Or, “those irresponsible Democrats.”
- We blame our heritage: “Of course I have a temper, I'm Irish.”
- We blame our past: “I spend too much because we didn't have anything when I was growing up as a child.”
- If you lose your job, it's not your fault, it's your boss: he's unreasonable, he doesn't understand you. He's had it out for you.
- It's not your fault you lost the book; your roommate borrowed the book and never gave it back.
- If you get angry, it's not your fault; they provoked you.
- If a relationship ends, it's not your fault: you're normal, you're healthy; the other person -- they've got issues.
- The college student who killed 32 people and wounded 17 others at Virginia Tech left a note: “You caused me to do this.”

Been there? Done that? Well, this is us. This is me, this is you, this is every human being since Adam and Eve. This is our story. We learn early on how to play the victim: “It's not my fault!”

Well, there's a verse we need to chew on. It's from the little letter we call 1 John (1.8). If we refuse to admit that we are sinners (if we refuse to own up to our sin), then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us." (Phillips) Let's read it together ... Listen guys, the biggest roadblock on this Free-way, this path to freedom, for me is ... me; for you is ... you. We have to stop blaming God, and we have to stop blaming others, we have to challenge the lie – "It's not my fault" – because you can't help a liar; because people who conceal their sins will not prosper. You can't blame your way to freedom.

Here's lie #2: "I made a mistake (a mistake)." 8 years ago a Senator from North Carolina was running against Barak Obama and Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Presidential nomination. The news broke that he'd had an affair. Here's what he said to the press. He said, "Two years ago I made a very serious mistake, a mistake that I am responsible for and no one else. (He said,) In 2006 I told Elizabeth about the mistake, asked her forgiveness, and asked God for His forgiveness. And we have kept this in our family until this time." Now, at first his admission seems humble and contrite. After all, he had made a mistake. Right? Well, a mistake implies an error in judgment—something I do unintentionally.

- I turn the wrong way down a one-way street. Done that: that's a mistake.
- I thought it was sugar; it wasn't, it was salt. Big mistake.
- I mistyped the name of a website, and I ended up where I shouldn't have been. Done it; embarrassing mistake.

I don't know what happened, but she ended up naked in my bed! Mistake? No; that's called sin. You know what is right, and you do what is wrong – that's called sin. The New Testament was written in Greek, and there are several Greek words that we translate as "sin." They all communicate something different about what sin is, what sin does. Here are just a few of them:

- The most common word is, hamartia. It originally meant, "To miss the mark." God wants you here, and you end up over there. It's basically whatever you do that violates the will of God – that's sin, and we are good at it.
- Then there is the word, parabasis. It means to disobey, to break the law, to step across the line. That's when we deliberately step across

the line that separates right from wrong. Not the lines we draw, but the lines set there by God. He gets to draw the lines.

- Then there is the word *opheilema*. It carries the idea of a debt. You don't pay what you owe, so you incur a debt. Forgive us our "debts," we ask God.
- Then there is the word *anomia*, which literally means "lawlessness." That's when we tell God, "I don't play by your rules, I make my own." "I don't care what you want; I don't care what you say; I'll do what I want to do and you can't stop me." A rather stupidly arrogant attitude, don't you think?

But instead of calling our sins, "Sin," we talk about our mistakes, our failures, our baggage, our issues, errors, indiscretions, shortcomings, hang-ups, problems, challenges, struggles, our junk ... Just about any word other than ... "sin." And here's the deal, guys, when we whitewash our sins, when we language it to soften it, we are liars. And you can't help a liar; because people who conceal their sins will not prosper.

Remember that verse in 1 John: "If we refuse to admit that we are sinners, then we live in a world of illusion and truth becomes a stranger to us." (v 1.8) Well here's the very next verse. It says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (v 1.9) If we "confess our sins." Do you know what "confess" means literally, in Greek? It means, "to say the same thing as." It means we call sin what God calls it. We agree with God. We say the same thing about our sin that God says about our sin. Because you can't help a liar; and you can't find freedom if you're lying about your sin. So we stop "whitewashing" our sins with euphemisms, and we replace the euphemisms with 3 simple words: "I have sinned." "God, I have sinned." "God, I need help, because I have sinned." That is a life changing conversation you can have with God.

No blaming, no whitewashing. There's one more way we mess up when it comes to dealing with sin in our life: We own it, even when it's not our fault. This is about ownership. We own it when it is our fault – we've already dealt with that, and ... we take responsibility, even when it's not our fault. Because here's the deal, guys: Sometimes it's not your fault. Sometimes bad things happen to every one of us. I've been hurt, I've been betrayed, I've been deceived, I've been maligned, I've been

disparaged, people have said things about me that are not true. You've had all that happen to you too. It hurts. But in the end it really doesn't matter how you got where you are; all that really matters now is, "What are you going to do about it?" It's how I respond; how I move forward from those injustices. And that is my responsibility. It may not be my fault; but I take responsibility. I own it.

But here's a really big problem. Sometimes we would rather be right than be free. We would rather play the victim card than accept the responsibility card. Listen, let's say you get in a serious accident when you are going home. You are badly hurt. Do you want them to call the ambulance, or the police? Think about it: What do you want? Do you want to be healed, or do you want to assign blame? You are going to have to make a choice. You think you can do both. Guys, you are going to have to choose.

We studied a Jesus story a few months ago. It's in John 5. It says, "Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there was a pool, in Hebrew called Bethesda, with five alcoves. Hundreds of sick people—blind, crippled, paralyzed—were in these alcoves. One man had been an invalid there for thirty-eight years." (vv 2-5) So this guy is lying there paralyzed. That's his whole life, that's his identity. It's not a great life, but it's all he knows. It says, "When Jesus saw him stretched out by the pool and knew how long he had been there, he said, "Do you want to get well?" Really?! That sounds like a stupid question, doesn't it? Are you serious? This guy is a crippled beggar, he has been for 38 years. Of course he wants to get well, right?

But ... I've been a pastor here at Capital City for over 20 years now, a professor teaching messed up kids before that. And I have learned that it is a great question. You see, if Jesus heals this guy, a whole lot of things are going to have to change. He won't be able to beg any more: and that's his identity, that's his job, that's his income. Are you willing to pay the price of being healed?

So let me ask you guys that question: Do you really want to be healed? I know, you've been hurt a lot. You've been betrayed, deceived, maligned, disparaged, people have said things about you that are not true. Do you want to hang on to your right to get even, or do you want to be healed?

Do you want the police, or an ambulance? I'm telling you guys, if you want freedom, there's a price you'll have to pay. And part of that price is that you'll have to give up your job as an injustice collector, you'll have to turn in your victim card.

- If you want to be well you're going to have to give up endlessly repeating and rehearsing how badly you've been hurt, how badly you have been mistreated.
- If you want to be well you'll have to give up your grudges and forgive some people. And to be honest, that will be really hard for some of us. Some folks wouldn't know what to do without their grudges; it's their identity. We're going to talk more about that next week.
- If you want to be well you're going to have to allow people to get close to you again, you'll have to risk trusting people rather than keeping them at arm's length.

You see, when we hang on to the victim card, we buy into the lie that life will never be great until the world becomes fair, until all those who hurt me make it right or get theirs. And you can't help a liar, right?

Now, this stuff is hard to listen to. I know this stuff is challenging, to all of us. In fact I suspect that some of you don't like me very much right now. You think I've been a little harsh. You are thinking, "That preacher doesn't really understand what I've been through." And you are right. But I don't think what I have been teaching is from me; I think it's from him. And he is even more right than you are. Do you want to taste the life he came to give you? This Free-way? Do you want to be well? Well, guys, here is a truth: The first part comes right out of the Bible. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8.32) That's God's truth. But here's the part life adds on: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free...*but it will sting at first.*

Guys, there are some hard words we have to be able to say—not just with our lips but from our hearts.

- The first is: *I was wrong*. Will you say it with me? ____ That's hard for some of us, isn't it? That may be the first time in weeks, or months, or years that you have said those 3 words. Is there someone you need to say it to? Some person? God?

- The second is, *I have sinned*. Will you say it with me? _____
Sometimes we are more than just wrong, it's more than just a mistake, it's flat out sin. Is there someone you need to confess your sin to? Some person? God?
- The third is: *It's on me, now*. Will you say it with me? _____ Do you know what that means? It means, "He may have hurt me, but it's my choice whether I let that hurt define me." "She may have hurt me, but it's on me to move forward, with God's help." Because ... I want to be well.

I am going to ask you to pray a prayer with me. But listen: God won't be listening to your words, he'll be listening to your heart. Can you pray this from your heart? Let's read this together, as a prayer to God ...

Our Father,

We confess to you and to one another, that we have sinned against you by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not fully loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not always had in us the mind of Christ. You alone know how often we have grieved you by wasting your gifts, by wandering from your ways. Forgive us, we pray you, and free us from our sin. Renew in us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son our Savior. Amen.

Leader:

Almighty Father; we enter your presence confessing the things we try to conceal from you and the things we try to conceal from others. We confess the heartbreak, worry, and sorrow we have caused, that make it difficult for others to forgive us. We confess the times we have made it easy for others to do wrong. We confess the harm we have done that makes it hard for us to forgive ourselves. We confess the anger and the bitterness we won't let go of, that steal the joy you want to give us. Lord have mercy and forgive us through Christ.

Song: Lord, I Need You ...