

“THE ART OF CONFRONTATION”
by Rom A. Pegram (7/19/20)

Good morning, everyone ... and welcome to Trinity! Today, we’re continuing in our summer worship series called “The Power of Words.” Last week, we learned words are powerful ... and can be used to either tear others down or build others up. We want to be about the latter, don’t we? As we begin today, I want to tell you something that happened to me a few years ago...

I have an incredibly good friend from SW Wisconsin who I met around 1995 during the time of my first appointment at Belmont & Whig UMCs. I was inquiring about a sound system in the church at Whig; this guy named ‘Mike’ from a sound company meets me there to talk about the possibilities. Little did I know that one meeting was going to lead to a lifetime of friendship...

Fast forward several years down the road and we were on one of our mini-vacations/trips together—down to Chicago—to go to an international guitar show. I thought we had a great time. We saw several vintage guitars, many that were drool-worthy, and generally enjoyed the day together. Mike was too tired, after the day, to drive home so I was driving from Chicago back to SW Wisconsin where we lived.

Suddenly, in the middle of the trip home, Mike decides it’s time for a *confrontation*. And what he tells me totally takes me by surprise—totally blindsided by his comments. Now, we’d been friends for some years by this point, but he’d never had a pastor for a close friend before, and didn’t realize the extent of the realities of my life, my schedule, or my commitments to many, many people—which I take seriously. But what he told me on this day was ... “You’re not a very good friend!”

I had just taken a weekend out of my year (which means vacation time, since I don’t have weekends), and went to a mutually interesting event with him—a guitar show. What part of ‘friend’ didn’t he understand? To be honest, I was at first a bit in shock ... and then I was just mad. How dare him tell me I wasn’t a good friend!

After the trip was over, I had to take some time to think & pray about what Mike had told me; I eventually decided it was God who was in charge of this one. As Mike explained to me during the trip, yes, I would do things like spend a weekend together ... enjoying mutual interests, etc., but what about the rest of the year? Why couldn’t I pick up the phone and call him once in a while? (He had told me that he had tried to call me on numerous occasions, but I hadn’t picked up or returned his call.) Well, I was probably busy, but that wasn’t a good excuse when it came to *friendship*...

Folks, what I’d experienced on that day was ... *the art of confrontation*. Mike probably wouldn’t have called it *that*, but he was enough of a friend to be honest with me—to help me *be* a better friend, a better Christian, a better human being. Proverbs 27:6 9 (NLT) gives some insight into *the art of confrontation*: “Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.” Even though it was a bit of a shock ... and hurt, *many times this is God’s way of repairing relationships*—a restoration of putting God back in the center. Here’s my definition of ‘confrontation’: ***A meeting between two friends for the purpose of restoring godliness.***

The truth is, you can’t confront someone who’s *not* your friend; it must be two people who are friends, like Mike & I, or Nathan & David in today’s Bible story. And

notice it's for a particular purpose—*restoring godliness*. In other words, some sin has occurred. Something happened that damaged the relationship. It was sin in the eyes of God ... and God's called someone to confront; it's time. Again, it's one friend to another; that's *biblical confrontation*. And the purpose is to put God back in the center of the relationship.

Now, just a note: I realize today's message has potential for abuse. So, I approach this message with great respect to God's ways. The danger is ... we'll have about 250 confrontations going on in our community after this message. But what I've discovered over the years is that ... about 80% of the time, when someone thinks they should confront, *they shouldn't!* So, I need you to listen pretty close today...

The story's found in the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel, the first few verses. It's a conversation between Nathan & David. Nathan was the main prophet in David's kingdom—one who speaks for God. And David, of course, was the king. So, here's Nathan—a key spiritual leader of his day, with one of the greatest kings the world's ever known ... in one of the greatest dramas of scripture. ... *King David had just committed a major sin*. There was adultery. From the palace, he saw Bathsheba bathing at her place and proceeded to have an affair with her. The long-term affair eventually led to David taking her husband, Uriah—a soldier in David's army, and sending him to the battle front where he'd certainly be killed (i.e. to cover up the affair, Bathsheba's pregnancy, etc.). And the story just gets really bad from there. Well, it's shortly after the affair that we find this confrontation—Nathan called by God to confront the king, the purpose, of course, to restore godliness in David's life. Listen (2 Samuel 12:1-14, NLT):

So the LORD sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: "There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. ² The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. ³ The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. ⁴ One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest."

⁵ David was furious. "As surely as the LORD lives," he vowed, "any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! ⁶ He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity."

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man! The LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. ⁸ I gave you your master's house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. ⁹ Why, then, have you despised the word of the LORD and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. ¹⁰ From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own.

¹¹ "This is what the LORD says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view. ¹² You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel."

¹³ Then David confessed to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “Yes, but the LORD has forgiven you, and you won’t die for this sin. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because you have shown utter contempt for the LORD by doing this, your child will die.”

So, someone has slipped just a bit, hasn’t been treating others the way they know they should—in a godly way. When that happens, *confrontation* needs to take place. How does that work? From Nathan’s perspective, what did he do? First...

FOLLOW GOD’S LEADERSHIP CAREFULLY. Once again, about 80% of confrontations ... shouldn’t happen anyway! A sure sign you aren’t following God’s leadership in confronting a friend is ... you’re enjoying it way too much! By the way, if you are ever confronted by someone and they’re all excited about confronting you, you better end the meeting really fast... ☐

When it comes to biblical confrontation, you shouldn’t be excited about it. There should be no sense of joy in what you have to do. There was no joy in Nathan’s having to confront his king (& friend). He knew what David had done was wrong. He didn’t endorse David’s sin. He didn’t try and cover up David’s deed. He could have told David flat out ... ‘YOUR SIN IS WRONG!’ But he didn’t confront David just out of his own desire to set things right; he confronted David because he was clearly sent by God...

Look at the first verse again (2 Sam. 12:1a): “So the LORD sent Nathan....” It’s so important to know that God’s directing our ways. But, how do we know in the case of confrontation? Here are a few questions to ask when considering biblical confrontation:

- *Is the sin dishonoring God?* Does what they’ve done reflect poorly on God or Christ or the Church? ‘Could be a sign...
- *Is it damaging to your relationship?* Has the offense caused a divide in your friendship? This could be a sign...
- *Is it hurting others?* Are others being negatively affected by a certain action? With David, it wasn’t just about him; it was about Bathsheba, Uriah, their child, and the whole nation of Israel. This could be a sign...
- *Is it hurting the offender?* Is it hurting—especially in an eternal sense—the one who’s committed the sin? All these need to be considered...

The truth is ... we all need a Nathan, don’t we? *Who might be a Nathan in your life?* I’ve got a couple of ‘em ... and wouldn’t trade ‘em for the world! David wouldn’t have been David ... without Nathan; we all need a Nathan in our lives. Here’s something else Nathan did...

REQUEST A PRIVATE MEETING. Confrontation (biblically speaking) has to be done one-on-one...

Today’s story, again, is one of the great dramas of scripture. Nathan’s not coming to talk to someone like you or like me; he’s going to confront the highest ruler of his day. It’s

like the Chief Spiritual Officer is going to talk to the CEO. It's like the Vice President confronting the President, or something like that. He does this in private. And we need to learn that ... *confrontation has to be done one-on-one*...

When my friend had this confrontation with me, I was really happy that no one else was there. I felt a bit embarrassed. I felt ashamed. And I wouldn't have been as vulnerable if others had been there watching. But I knew Mike was a close friend. I knew he would keep the confidence of the meeting, and I could be myself even in my initial response. Do you understand? It was really important this meeting was *private*...

(For more information from God's word on how to handle a confrontation, look to Jesus' words from **Matthew 18:15-20**. Here Jesus expands on a lot of the concepts we're talking about today). For now, remember that a private meeting for confrontation is always best! Next, Nathan did this...

PREPARE TO TACTFULLY SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS. The first part of preparation for anything difficult is ... *self-preparation*. You have to check your own heart first; Jesus said (Matt. 7:5), "Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."

Next, there is *written preparation*—writing down exactly what you need to be said prior to a confrontation; this is what Nathan did, as he told David the story of the rich man and the poor man/shepherd (2 Sam. 12:1-4)...

Folks, *confrontation is serious business*. We can't take chances on what we're going to say, even anticipating a friend's reaction to *what* we have to say. Nathan was careful. He didn't take a direct approach, did he? He took an indirect approach, but one he (and God) knew would tug at David's heartstrings more than anything else could. Why? Because David was once a poor shepherd too ... and he hadn't forgotten. So, when he realized he was the offender in this story, it hit him hard ... and he repented hard...

Sometimes you need to write it down so you know for sure if you need to confront or not; sometimes (about 80%) you don't need to confront, you just need to forgive. There's a place for both. But, if God's calling you to confront, prepare what you're going to say ... tactfully. Then...

STATE THE TRUTH COMPASSIONATELY AND TRUST THE SPIRIT. So, Nathan's moving in. He's about ready to deliver the soft—tactful—truth to David. He delivers it, then he trusts God's Spirit to do his work... You see, the ultimate work of restoring godliness is not *my* work, or *your* work, but *God's* work. But God uses us, many times, as his instrument. That's what he did with Nathan. Let's pick up with Verse 5, where we find David furious: "... 'As surely as the LORD lives,' he vowed, 'any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! ⁶ He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.'" Do you see what David thought? He thought Nathan was telling him a true story. He thought it was something that'd happened in his kingdom. As king, he was going to be the judge on this one!

And this is when Nathan turns around and basically says, "Look, the story is just a story, but this story is about ... YOU!" Then, in Verse 7, we hear this: "Then Nathan

said to David, ‘You are that man! The LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. ⁸ I gave you your master’s house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. ⁹ Why, then, have you despised the word of the LORD and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. ¹⁰ From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah’s wife to be your own. ¹¹ This is what the LORD says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view. ¹² You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel.’”

The much-needed confrontation was finished. Nathan stated his case as compassionately as he could, then waited for God’s Spirit to move—which he did! David was sucked right in ... and he got the point, which brought him to his knees in repentance—where God wants us all. And finally, Nathan did this...

OFFER GRACE & SUPPORT. In 2 Samuel 12:13-14, we see what Nathan did once David confessed; he offered GRACE & SUPPORT... In Paul’s letter to the Romans (12:15) we see a good example of what Nathan did here; Paul instructed the Church at Rome: “Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.” That’s what a true friend does—what Nathan did for David...

Were the consequences all taken away once David confessed? No, but this was a turning point in David’s life with God ... for the rest of his life ... so the confrontation was exactly what was needed ... and David ended up being referred to as ‘a man after God’s own heart’...

As I close today, I want you to make two very courageous/godly decisions *with me*:

- 1 – Under God’s leadership, I will compassionately confront a friend if necessary.
- 2 – I will also receive confrontation from a friend if necessary.

I’m making those decisions right along with you today. God’s preferred way of restoring godliness in our lives is one-on-one, you and God. But if need be, God will send a friend to get your attention. He’ll use a ‘Nathan’ in your life—to bring you back, to restore your relationship with him and with others. Never doubt, folks, God does this because he loves us. THE POWER OF WORDS. They can be used to build up or tear down. Let’s work with God to do the ‘building up,’ shall we? And sometimes we do that through ... *the art of confrontation...*