

“Spread the Good News: Your Life Matters”
Ephesians 2:10, 4:25-5:2

As we affirm the goodness of God’s creation, one of the issues that often comes up is what to do with our human mistakes and habits of wrongness. Even with the best of intentions, we often fall for the fallacies of self-justification when it comes to human conflict and challenges. We would like to think that we would never participate in heinous acts like genocide, but the big decisions about doing something wrong don’t come to us in isolation. They usually build up over time. Take for example the antisemitism that has plagued Europe for centuries. We are appalled to read accounts like this massacre on Valentine’s Day in 1349 from Frank Snowden in his book *Epidemics and Society*,

The citizens of Strasbourg (France) rounded up the community of [2000] Jews, brought them to the Jewish cemetery, and said that it was their religion that was leading them to poison the wells where Christians drank –and that was the source of the bubonic plague. They had either to renounce their religion or be killed on the spot. Half of the Jews held to their religion, and they were burned alive.

But if we dig deeply behind such incidents, we know that the hate of Jews was building up for centuries before that. Desmond and Mpho Tutu write about these habits of wrongness this way, “The path from goodness to evil was laid carefully. In order to permit ourselves to inflict wanton harm, our actions must be accompanied by a host of rationalizations and justifications...In the Bible, depravity does not enter creation in a tidal wave of wrongness. It comes in as a slow, silent leak, drip by quiet drip, until the earth is flooded...We do not veer off the rails in an explosion of error. We make a succession of uncorrected missteps, and then when we check, the good we would do seems far out of reach...Choosing wrong is learned through a series of small decisions. Little failures become ingrained through repetition.”

We lose our way because it is often hard to see the little steps and ego-justifications that lead us away from our core goodness. We have to stay vigilant and close to our core goodness each and every day to find our way back to goodness when we fall short and before the habits of wrongness become ingrained and unchecked realities in our lives.

According to biblical scholars, the letter to the Ephesians was written by an anonymous writer who was addressing it to several churches. The main concern of the letter is for the followers of Jesus to be imitators of Christ in their everyday life and not just in their worship life. They were called to continue the mission of Christ and their lifestyle was supposed to show their faith. Their faith commitments were to be made public. Their public life was at the center of their faith in Christ. Prayer and worship were to move them away from lying, cheating, anger, hatred, gossip, malice, divisions, and holding grudges. They were called to tell the truth, practice self-control, work honestly, share with the poor, build up others, be kind to others and forgive others. These were the faith values which were in direct opposition to many of the values of popular culture in their time. Gossip, greed, violence, hate, oppression of the poor, and lack of compassion

were part of the cultural practices in the Roman Empire where people valued success, power, and personal gratification. The author of this letter was spelling out to the churches what it really meant for them to be imitators of God by living in God's love, which was shown through the example of Christ. The author was calling them back to the goodness of God's creation in them, despite the entrenched habits of wrongness that were among and around them.

Let's listen to Ephesians 4:25-5:2

²⁵ What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

²⁶⁻²⁷ Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

²⁸ Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can't work.

²⁹ Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

³⁰ Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.

³¹⁻³² Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

5 ¹⁻² Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

At first this may seem like a dream, a pie in the sky, but the author was grounded in God's grace which was expressed earlier in the letter in chapter 2 verse 10:

¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Every day we have new choices and opportunities for good because we are made for goodness. Desmond and Mpho Tutu recommend a daily examine of conscience where one looks at their daily actions and interactions by asking, "Where was God in this?"

They also identify another way of doing this by asking two simple questions, “Was it nice? Was it necessary?”

Mistakes are part of our everyday life, but they do not have to lead us down the path of habits of wrongness through ego-justification. They also do not need to lead us to feel ashamed of ourselves. We can make a daily commitment to ask God to help us to live by God’s vision for goodness and to seek humility and resilience when we fall short.

One thing that I learned recently in terms of my self-awareness is sensory types. According to Donna Eden in her work on energy medicine, this is our way of relating to the world around us, especially when we are under stress. The four sensory modes are: Visual, tonal, kinesthetic, and digital. Here is Donna’s description of each these styles:

Stress Style	Reaction	Eye Movement	Motto	Orientation
Visual	“sees” what you do wrong	Looks you straight in the eye. Need eye contact for trust.	You’re wrong	Toward the future
Tonal	Hurt more by your tone of voice than by your actual words	Looks down and to the side, giving you an ear while trying to think without getting hit too much by your energy.	I’m angry at you for making me feel wrong	Toward the past
Kinesthetic	Has over-compassion for others but lacks self-compassion	Looks straight down -not as an evasion, but in an effort to cut down sensory input and come home to self.	I don’t want you to suffer or feel wrong.	Toward the present
Digital	Logical, rational, reasonable, detached, unaware there is a problem.	Looks up and to the side, as if looking into their own mind	I am right	Moves freely among past, present, and future without fully experiencing any

From the cover of *The Energies of Love* by Donna Eden and David Feinstein:

Visuals are extremely passionate and inspire others to care about the things they care about, but in moments of conflict, their take on the situation can overshadow what is actually occurring.

Tonals have a gift for understanding others and their dilemmas, but during moments of conflict, their ability to read between the lines can morph into hearing what was never said, felt, or thought.

Kinesthetics are generous, compassionate, and accepting of other people, but their caring nature pulls them in too many directions. They try to meet others' needs at the expense of their own, which can cause mounting resentment.

Digitals are rational and principled and have a gift for quickly understanding complex situations, but they can become closed to others' perspectives and feelings.

Let's spend some time sharing with one another about this. How does this connect with your experience?

There are many self-awareness tools in the world which makes our time to be very good for our ability to see the world wholistically. We all are unique expressions of God's love in the world, but we must be intentional about cultivating the gifts that have been given to each of us. We are not doomed to be stuck in habits of wrongness. God's grace is with us each day when we ask for help to see the path forward in love and to repent when we fall short.

We will end with a prayer of listening to God's voice speaking to us about the habits of wrongness. This is from Desmond and Mpho Tutu:

I hear your call as you are falling.
You stumble over your own wrongdoing and topple into
the bottomless pit of guilt and shame.
But there is no abyss. It is an illusion.
There is no depth to which you can fall that is beyond my reach.
I have lived with you from the age of the ages.
The dream of you has delighted me, the fact of you pleases me.
There is a choice in every moment.
In every moment there is a chance to flourish and not to fail.
Every instant is rich with possibility.
I have not carved out the path that you must follow,
We form the way together, you and I.
I have destined you for good and a field of goodness lies before you.
Listen to me, and though the way may not be easy,
Every step and stone will lead to joy.
Turn aside to heed the voice of the tempter and faltering will mark your journey.
I trust you, my child.
Even when you have fallen the road does not end.
You can rise up from the ground and turn around.
You can repent and head for home in me.
Seek me out.
You will find me.
I have been here from eternity.
Until eternity this is where I will be.
I am waiting and you will find me. Amen.