

A Prayer of Repentance

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[0 : 0 0] The story goes that there was a rich man and a poor man, and they lived in a village. The rich man had lots of sheep, lots of flocks of sheep, and the poor man had one little sheep, one little ewe, and he loved this little sheep.

He would share his food with this little sheep, and he would cuddle this little sheep. This little lamb was like a daughter to him. A traveler came into the village, and as was a protocol back in the days, he had to put on a bit of a banquet for this traveler.

And so the rich man was unwilling to take one of his own sheep, so he took the poor man's lamb, and he killed it, and he cooked it. So this was a story that Nathan the prophet told King David in 2 Samuel 12.

And, of course, David, hearing the story, was completely outraged. And he said, this guy, the guy that did this, the rich man that did this, he's going to die. He's going to die.

And Nathan said, you are this man. Now, you know the background story here, right? David was at the peak of his power, King David, in the Old Testament. A particular time in his life where his soldiers were off fighting wars, and he's lounging around the castle, and he sees this woman that he likes, and he's overtaken by lust.

[1 : 1 1] And before you are too hard on David, whoever's here don't know that failure. And David takes her, and she gets pregnant. And this is a very big problem.

She's married to a guy called Uriah. So David sees to it that the husband is killed in battle. He sponsors an assassination, basically.

Amazingly, David's actually pretty cool with this whole scenario. He just wants to get away with it and tie up the loose ends like the husband, etc. So he can kind of shack up with Bathsheba and raise his kid. So Nathan confronts him with this story and says, you are this man.

And the words are like daggers in his heart. And how does David respond to this? When he's confronted by his sin? Well, Psalm 51 is his response.

Let me begin with a question, though. How do you respond to guilt? I'm going to assume that there are things in your life that shame you, perhaps things from years ago.

[2 : 1 3] And it can feel like a weight. In Psalm 51, you know, David talks about, he says it's like his bones were broken. We live in a time where it's kind of like a bit of a your best life now kind of world, you know.

We want to be self-actualized and get the most out of our life. And if you go to a bookstore and go to the self-help section, you can find books which will help you live better, which will help you be more useful as a person, probably, perhaps think better, perhaps help you work through pathologies that you might have.

But there is nothing that can take away our guilt. To do that, you have to deal with God. You have to really deal with God. You see, it's not enough just to feel really bad about what you may have done in the past, what you're currently doing.

Because guilt are like these skeletons that, you know the saying, skeleton in the closet, right? They're like skeletons, but they don't stay in the closet. They're like just one step ahead of you.

As you're walking through life and so you're constantly tripping over these things. Time doesn't heal guilt. When I said, perhaps there's some things in your life which shame you, I guarantee that some of you thought back decades.

[3 : 36] Thought back to when you were a little kid. Time doesn't heal guilt. What do we do with our guilt? Try and bury it? It doesn't go away. Try and ignore it?

It doesn't go away. We must deal with God. David knows this. David knows this very well. He makes it pretty clear in verse 4.

In verse 4 he says, Against you, only you, have I sinned. We can get hung up on that line, right? Because it sounds like David doesn't think he sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah.

I mean, David is very aware that he sinned against them. He knows he ruined them. He ruined them. So David frames it like sin against God though, because true to Old Testament standards, all sin against God are insults to the God who created them.

All sins against people are insults to the God who created them. He knows he must deal with God. So David here is not trying to get out of his responsibility. He's not trying to take the edge off his sin by going, Well, it's not really about them.

[4 : 42] It's about God, you know. No, by framing it as sin against God, he's actually heightening the badness of it.

He's not taking the edge off at all. He's making it worse. Think about it like this. A kid pushes over another kid in a playground. It's not ideal. It's not like great.

It's naughty, right? That same kid assaults the principal of the school. That's really bad. And that's why David frames it like this.

He knows that's what he's done. And the psalm talks about this in another way. If you look at verse 5, and this is going to be really helpful to have your Bibles open, all right? Verse 5.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth and the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Okay.

[5 : 41] David here is not saying that sex is bad, and he's always not saying his particular conception was bad, the conception that conceived him. No, he is affirming that from birth, our hearts seek their own way.

And the Christian technical word for that is sin. Clearly, this is not your typical infant baptism passage, right?

But it's not irrelevant to what we did in the service. In fact, it's very relevant. You could say that infant baptism is quite an impolite thing to do, really.

Because you're saying all of us, from the elderly to the infants, wherever they've gone, have a predicament that needs to be dealt with.

And the predicament is the tendency to resist God. You will not, if you have children, you know you will not have to teach Nora how to be naughty.

[6 : 51] She will know how to do that. Anyone with kids, you know this, right? There is something in our hearts which veer away from God. It comes very naturally to us. It's in here.

We all need forgiveness, from infants to the elderly. We all need to deal with this predicament with God. Really deal with God.

And that dealing with God is called repentance. Here's the great thing about this passage, Psalm 51, right?

When we think about repentance, we might think about it that it's about this big. Repentance. This is a specific measurement. It's about this big, right? It's like, oh, forgive me. Sweet.

Repentance is about this big. I hope you see that as we go through it. Okay, so Psalm 51 is a wonderful model for us on repentance, how we deal with our guilt, how we deal with our shame.

[7 : 54] I want you to see how David begins. His first words, have mercy on me. Isn't that great? Have mercy on me. Oh, have mercy on me.

There's no excuses. He didn't begin by saying, okay, God, God, seriously, seriously, seriously, seriously. She was so hot. I'm not joking.

I would never have gone there except she was so beautiful. And I was really stressed out. I'm the king. You don't know what that's like. You know, there was no excuses.

He didn't try to like, kind of like slime his way out of it and go, so I kind of figure I've done a kind of a bad thing here. I guess, you know. No, it's this like, it's this exhaling.

Have mercy on me. And this is the mark of a true Christian, I think. A true Christian is someone who knows that they are a sinner. It can take a while for this to get through to us, I think.

[8 : 56] And David was very blind to it for a long time. But he's not blind to it in Psalm 51. Do you see how many personal pronouns he uses? Have mercy on me. Blot out my transgressions.

This is just verses 1 to 9. Wash me. Cleanse me from my sins. My transgressions. My sin is ever before me. I sinned. I brought forth an iniquity. Wash me. He knows.

He knows. Folks, to be a Christian is to know that you are a sinner. But repentance is not just knowing that we are sinners. Do you notice in the prayer 51, there's not a prayer of remorse.

It's not, oh God, I'm really sorry. Verse 2. Yeah, I'm totally sorry. It's like, oh, I just was awful. Verse 3. Yeah. Did I mention I'm sorry? Because I feel terrible. It's not that.

Because repentance is not feeling bad about something. That's the kind of this view of repentance, right? Repentance looks beyond that, and it looks to God. Let me say this another way.

[9 : 57] Repentance is an act recognizing what we are before God and what God is for us. Now, both those parts of the equation can be tough, right?

The first part, recognizing what we are before God, right, bumps up against one of the most commonly held humanistic convictions, which is this. If there is a God, I'm probably good enough for him.

Folks, that's not true. That's not. But if we manage to get past that and realize, no, we're actually quite simple. We get to the second part, and that can be a problem.

What if I come to God with all my skeletons? I round them all up and bring them to God. Will he have anything to do with me? Excuse me. Will he accept me?

Will he love me? Will he forgive me? That's really hard. Well, the answer is in verse 1.

[10 : 55] Will God accept us? Verse 51. Have mercy on me, O God. God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy. Blot out my transgressions.

The basis of God accepting us is not like, I know God will forgive me because I feel terrible. No, it's, I know God will forgive me because of his steadfast love.

That's a Hebrew word. It's hesed. It means, it's a covenant word. For all of David's unworthiness, he knows he belongs to God.

He knows God is loyal to him. He knows God is loyal to the promises he made. Way back to Abraham. And God has bound himself to these promises.

But why would God do this? Because of his abundant mercy, also in verse 1. This is a language of heart emotion. God has a passion for his children.

[11 : 56] Like, you know, like any parent, right? You yearn to be with your kids. I can't wait to get home to see my kids. This is what God is like. Will God accept David?

Will God forgive him? Will God want anything to do with me when I've wronged him? Yes. Yes, he will.

Because we, like God, can stand on the fact that God loves us and is loyal to us and wants to be with us. David knew this, and he only had a few books of the Bible to go on.

We have it all, and we have the witness of the work, the witness and work of Christ on the cross. God loved us so much. He was so loyal to us that he would rather die than be without us.

But repentance doesn't end there. It's getting bigger. We're getting a better view of it. So it's not, God forgive me. I know you will.

[13 : 02] Because repentance is not just about forgiveness. The first nine verses of Psalm 51 are about forgiveness. But the second half are not. Verses kind of 10 to 19 are about renewal.

And you can see the transition. Verse 9. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. This is another request for forgiveness using a repeated word, which matches a word in verse 1.

Basically, it's a sandwich, right? So David is kind of like sandwiching that first little section. He goes, this is a little section. It's about something in particular. It's about forgiveness. The promise that I'll forgive you.

And David changes gears in verse 10. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

What's this verse telling us about repentance? We pray, God forgive us.

[14 : 04] It's wonderful. But it shouldn't finish there. It shouldn't be, God forgive me. Great. Now I'm off to the shops to buy some sausages for dinner or something.

We might even carry on the prayer, actually. We might go, God forgive us. And I need a girlfriend. And I need a job.

And, or my boss is lame. I'm stressed out. Great. You should pray all those things. Those are wonderful things to pray. But this passage, Psalm 51, do you notice it?

I don't think it says change my situation because my situation is bad. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Change me. I'm the problem.

Father, forgive me. But also change the dynamics of my heart that cause me to do stupid things.

[15 : 07] Change my heart, Father, so I won't do this again. Actually, change is the wrong word. It says create. And that create word, you know that word, right, from Genesis? That's a God-making word.

That's a God-making-out-of-nothing word. That's important. In the beginning, God created. Same word. God brings into existence something that wasn't there before.

So the repentance prayer looks like this. We don't just need forgiveness. We need renewing. And that renewing can be miraculous.

A miraculous work of the Spirit of God. So ask God for it. God, deal with the core issues in my life. That's not the only thing David asks for.

I'm starting now. This is the beginning of the end here. David asks for joy. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, in verse 12, and uphold a willing spirit. See, he's not lost his salvation, he realizes.

[16 : 06] He's just lost the joy of it. And it is true. And what a wise prayer it is. Shame, guilt. Does that not rob us of joy?

You know this, right? It's very ironic today, I think, that people think that joy will be found in doing whatever you want. And the Bible says it's the opposite.

Joy comes from submitting your life to God. Now listen to this amazingly prophetic verse in verse 13. Then I will teach transgressions your ways and sinners will return to you.

How God has answered that prayer. How many thousands, millions of people have read David's betrayal and incredible fall from grace.

And been comforted by and guided by Psalm 51. And then another request in verse 15, a remarkable request. Oh Lord, open my lips and a mouth will declare your praise.

[17 : 10] You probably recognize this from the liturgy, right? So David doesn't just ask, teach others about what I did and let it help them. He says, I want to praise God rightly.

Because shame doesn't just rob you of joy. It has a way of silencing us. Guilt silences you. Like, oh, I've done this stupid thing.

I can't even, I don't want to even, I can't sing at church. I can't. I'm a hypocrite. Of course you're a hypocrite. It's no surprise to anybody.

You know, like, yes. That's why we pray. That's why the liturgy says, oh Lord, open our lips and our mouths will declare your praise. It's, that's reminding us that yes, you're a hypocrite. You've sinned. You've done terrible things. And it's silencing you.

It's oppressing you. So God, change that. Help me to praise you. Shame silences us. And the enemy loves that. The enemy loves silence. The enemy loves when there is no witness to the goodness of God.

[18 : 11] So what a vital prayer. God, help me to praise you. Now do you see where the psalm goes? Do you see the transitions it's making from shame to forgiveness, from sin to righteousness, from silence to praise?

That's the transition that the psalms make. And let me point out something really interesting to you. The word for sin comes six times in the first half of the psalm, but only twice in the second half.

The word God appears once in one to nine and six times in the second half. The structure of the whole psalm. Sin gives away to God. The poem literally empties itself of sin and is filled with grace.

Isn't that wonderful? Let me conclude here. Folks, when we don't deal with our past failures, it is really hard to have intimacy with God.

We're like Lady Macbeth, haunted by bloodstains. We can't remove by ourselves. But on the other side of guilt. If you come to God, really dealing with God and fully repenting, there is forgiveness.

[19 : 22] But not just forgiveness. There is renewal. There is a promise of a miraculous word, work in your heart. There is even joy. And there is even praise.

No matter how terrible you think you've sinned. And there is all of these things because God is very loyal to you. God loves his children.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.