

Psalm 51 - Confessions, Part II: The Heart of Repentance

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank y'all so much. I love the words of that song. What a great confession of the desperation of sin that cries out for Jesus to rescue.

Hosanna! Oh, save us! That's really the whole story that we're talking about for these three weeks in terms of confessions. The nature of sin, the heart of repentance, and finding then a God of forgiveness.

We're learning together from David's confession in Psalm 51 what true repentance looks like.

Because that's to be a regular part of all of our lives.

Seeing our sin and turning to God. Sin deserves death. And we see it and realize what we deserve.

[1 : 05] And then we turn to Jesus who has beaten death at death's own game. And we praise Him and rejoice in that. If you weren't here with us last week, part of the context of this series is the session of Southwood making corporate confession of our sin.

Particularly in light of a season of church conflict here several years ago. We were telling you that God has shown us several things.

Shown us our failure to love well. Shown us how our offense is against His glory. And also shown us at least some of the hurt that our sin has caused to many others.

For more of that context and the particulars of that confession, you can go back and listen to last week's sermon and the comments made by some elders afterwards.

And that's all online. So as branches, our magazine which addresses that further. But I'm thankful for people who have already reached out to talk with me and other elders even this week.

[2 : 17] Let me say again that you or someone you know may have questions or concerns or hurts that need healing. Please, please let us know that.

We would love to talk with you. That's our heart. That's our great desire in this. The elders will be down front again at the end of the service this morning to make them a little bit easier for you to find if you're looking for them.

But as we talk more about what God teaches all of us about repentance, let's look back to Psalm 51 and read a couple more verses. This morning, verses 16 and 17.

And then we'll pray. This is God's holy word. For you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it.

You will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart. Oh God, you will not despise. Pray with me.

[3 : 22] Father, we ask this morning that you would open our eyes. That we might behold wonderful things in your word. All of us are sinners.

The one who speaks is a great sinner. We all have a greater Savior. Show him to us.

We pray in your word, by your spirit. For your glory and for our good. We ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Last week, as we discussed the nature of sin, we saw that sin involves both our hearts and our actions.

That God created us for relationship with himself. To be in this wonderful relationship where we trust him. Where we rest in him.

Where we find our enjoyment and our fulfillment in him and in this relationship. That's God's design. But by nature, we are bent away from God.

[4 : 34] And by our actions, we walk away from God towards sin. We look for our own methods of fulfillment.

We spurn the relationship with God that he created us for. And we turn our backs to him and walk away. That's what sin is. Kids, this is the picture that you should draw this morning if you're working on one of those bulletins.

And you want to draw a picture of what it means for us to sin. It's for us to walk away from a relationship with God and look for what we're supposed to find in him somewhere else.

Chasing after maybe we'll find trust or rest or joy in another place. David says that to God, right? Against you and you only have I sinned.

You're the one over here and I've walked away from you. Walked away from my relationship with you to pursue my own agenda. Our hearts wander in search of fulfillment in someone else or something else.

[5 : 39] And that's sin. We see it pictured here in David's adultery with Bathsheba. The context of this particular psalm. The prophet Hosea uses that same picture of God's relationship with his people.

That they go looking for things they need in another lover and leave God behind. Distancing themselves from the beautiful intimate relationship with God that he created them for.

We can also see it certainly in terms of a human marriage. Where one spouse walks away from relationship looking for fulfillment elsewhere.

And sin like that devastates relationship, right? It distances us from the God we were meant to be in close fellowship with.

Finding deep satisfaction and delight in. So this morning we're talking about repentance. In other words, how does God recommend addressing this problem?

[6 : 45] What is he looking for when we find ourselves time and again, even as his people wandering away, distancing ourselves from him and going after sin?

Our own desires, wandering away from God. And David says, you will not delight in sacrifice, in burnt offering.

That's not what God's looking for. But instead, what? Verse 17. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

The heart of repentance is an issue of the heart. What's going on here? A repentant heart. We'll see this morning as one that is both sorrowful and joyful.

But first sorrowful. A broken and contrite heart, God says. That's where it begins. Repentance begins with our hearts breaking.

[7 : 52] The sorrow of the repentant heart is mourning relational distance. That's what's breaking our hearts.

In other words, godly sorrow over our sin grieves the damage that is done to our relationship with God. The broken and contrite heart is one that is heartbroken over walking away from rather than toward God.

It's easy to be saddened by the consequences of sin, right? By getting caught by the ways this is going to impact me and the difficulty this is going to bring into my life that I've been caught in sin. It can be painful. It can be inconvenient. Godly sorrow, the sorrow in a repentant heart is focused not on the consequences but rather on the relationship.

Puritan Thomas Watson calls this sorrow a holy agony. It's a deep sense of the wrongness of my actions, the wrongness of the attitudes of my heart, before the righteousness of God.

[9 : 13] How wrong I am. It sounds like our hearts crying out, look how I've defaced the image of God. Look how I've mocked the law of God.

Look how I've neglected the things that God loves. How I've longed for other things more than I've longed for God. And what an affront that is to my Father who loves me.

It is to be something we feel deeply. And David even describes earlier in this psalm his bones being crushed and broken in his sin.

Have you felt that holy agony? How could I have done this to my God? To the one who loves me? To the holy and perfect one?

How could I have treated him who wanted that relationship with me? How could I have run away from that? Typically to feel that requires meaningful contemplation of our sin on our part, right?

[10:20] We're not really good at that, most of us. We've been willing to slow down and take the time to consider my own sin and contemplate the offense against God.

I've needed recently to sit and listen to others tell me how my sin impacted them. Those are not easy conversations.

Those are often difficult things to hear. But an important part of true repentance is hearing and understanding the ways I've offended someone.

So that I can grieve that with them. I can confess my sin against you much more thoughtfully and much more meaningfully if I've actually genuinely tried to understand how I hurt you.

That's part, y'all, of why our session is inviting those difficult conversations, particularly right now.

Genuine sorrow over our sin and over how we've harmed the image of God and others is a significant part of genuine repentance, particularly when we're thinking of our relationship with God.

[11:34] Our hearts must mourn the relational distance. Because we said repentance is a heart issue. And here's the heart of true repentance.

What's at the essence of it? It's seeking that relationship. From the heart. From everything I am. All that we are. Let's go back to the example in the human relationship first.

I think it will help us understand this in our relationship with God. Imagine again that husband who walks away from his wife and seeks fulfillment and joy and rest in the arms of another.

Then imagine he comes to his senses. Caught in his sin, he offers his wife this proposal. I'll stop being with her. And I'll wash the dishes for the next 100 days.

I'll do the next 100 loads of laundry. I'll buy you some really nice jewelry. I'm going to quit doing the bad things and do some really good things.

[12:47] I'll start sacrificing more around here. I'll do my part. Now those are nice things, right? But what would you say may be missing in that?

Where has he missed the point? He seems to have forgotten what? The heart. The damaged relationship. The broken trust and the joy that's been lost between the two that was promised to be there.

And that needs to be restored with his wife, doesn't it? If you're the wife, you're thinking, if there's ever any hope for us here, don't just turn from bad deeds to good deeds.

You need to turn from her back to me in our relationship, right? Right? That's absolutely essential. Listen, jewelry and laundry are nice things, right?

Those are great ideas. Don't get me wrong. The changed actions, the sacrifices that he would make could come and likely should come.

[13:56] But they are the fruit of repentance. Not the root. Repentance is to have fruit. We're to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. But at the root of repentance, at the heart of what it is, is the relationship.

It's the relationship that's the heart of repentance that we're turning back to God. So listen, this is where it really matters. Where does that make a big difference for us?

In much the same way, God says to us, I'm not primarily seeking the things you can do. Remember, he says, I'm not just seeking the sacrifices that you might make, but rather a broken and contrite heart that mourns the distant sin has created in our relationship and wants to turn back to me.

Wants restoration there. This is the way the Bible pictures repentance. It's turning back to God. Just one example, Acts chapter 26. Paul's talking about repentance, that they should repent and turn where?

To God. Performing deeds in keeping with repentance. The relationship priority first, and then the deeds follow.

[15:11] Our catechism says the same thing about repentance. Question 87, what is repentance unto life? Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ doth with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it where?

Unto God. With full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience. The deeds still there, but the relationship priority first.

When we turn from our sin in repentance, we turn back to God himself. Not from bad will over here, to good will over here, but rather to our gracious God, who forgives will, and then remakes will in his image.

And that may seem like a small distinction to you. Really? Yeah, you're just splitting hairs. What's the whole point of that? It's actually the essence of Christianity. We are so used to penance in

practice, which is very different from true biblical repentance.

Penance and repentance sound a little bit the same. I'll say them a few times so you hear the difference. They're very different things for some very important reasons. Penance says we turn from bad deeds to good deeds.

[16:42] We often live this way. This is often what Christianity looks like, as though it's stopping bad things and doing more good things. You've thought it before.

God, if you just get me out of this jam that I'm in, I'll always, what? Go to church. I'll never go there again or click on that again.

Just keep me from getting caught in this. Get me out of this just this one time. Those things we promise God in the face of our sin, when we're afraid we might get caught and we wanna escape that happening or maybe just we're facing some other difficulty in life, we promise God things we will do or not do, right?

And what does that show us about what we think God values? What do we think he's looking for? We think he values what we do or don't do most.

I'll sacrifice this or that, God, if you'll come through for me. That's penance. We've messed up, right?

[17:55] So we pile our arms full of sacrifices and march back over to take them to God and say, see all the things I've done to make up for it? See what I'm willing to do?

I'll do better. I'll be different. I won't let you down again. That's penance. I've sinned, but I'll make it up to you.

And God says, you're missing the point. I want your heart broken and contrite. I love you. I want relationship with you, not performance from you.

That's what I value, you. Penance, coming to God with your arms full of sacrifices is what most Presbyterians do naturally, isn't it?

But you must hear me. That way of relating to God fits Islam. It fits Mormonism. It does not fit biblical Christianity because it leaves out two absolutely essential things.

[19:04] The relationship with God and the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. They're not at issue in that model. Christianity is nothing in my hands I bring.

Simply to thy cross I cling. As we sang earlier, that's true repentance. I don't need a second chance to see if I can perform better for God this time.

I need a substitute to perform better for me. That's Christianity. If sin is walking away from God against you and you only have I sinned, then true repentance is turning back where?

To God. To God Himself. It's not from bad deeds to good deeds. It's from my back is turned to God. I am moving in the other direction, turning back to my face is towards God.

In humility, in worship, in desire for restoration. When we turn in repentance, you know repentance has turning involved.

[20:10] It's God Himself that we're turning back to. Because I've begun to mourn the relational distance in my heart, my desire is to seek the person Himself and the healing of our relationship.

And hopefully you begin to see where the joy in repentance comes from.

I said earlier, a repentant heart is both sorrowful and joyful. How's that possible? That seems a little bit odd. Sorrow maybe fits with repentance in your mind, but where would joy show up?

And is that even appropriate? Well, if we're mourning the relational distance and we're seeking that relationship to be restored to the trust and rest and joy that it was designed for, our joy comes in celebrating relational nearness and being close to God, you could say.

We don't rejoice primarily in our reformed behavior, although that will come. We don't rejoice primarily even in the forgiveness of sin, as big a deal as that is, and that's something certainly to be celebrated, but it's not primarily where our joy comes from.

[21:32] We rejoice in the God we trust and the fulfillment that we find in Him, in God Himself. As we repent of our sin and turn brokenhearted back toward God, we find in Him, how does God respond?

He doesn't kick us while we're down, does He? He doesn't turn up His nose at our sorrowful state and just say, stay there, cry a bit longer, you deserve it.

Pathetic. You've turned away from me. What happens when we turn broken and brokenhearted to God? Verse 17.

A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. You will never despise it. In fact, in context, You will delight in it.

I love the picture of the prodigal son's father, don't you? What's He like? He doesn't despise the lowly condition of His unclean, pig-feeding son who's come running back to Him and doesn't deserve anything from Him.

[22 : 44] What does He do? He runs to Him and throws His arms around Him and celebrates the relational restoration that has happened, that His Son is home.

That's the joy of the Father, isn't it? It may feel odd to you to seek joy as a part of repentance. You may feel you don't deserve to be joyful after what you've done.

I'm just going to stay in the sorrowful part. That's all I ever deserve. Look at how clear David is about this part of repentance as he confesses to God.

Verse 12, one you may be familiar with. Restore to me what the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. Make me joyful again in your salvation.

What is the joy of His salvation in this context? Look back up one verse to verse 11. What's the joy of His salvation? Cast me not away from your presence.

[23 : 45] Parallel there, not being cast away from God's presence is having joy in His salvation in the relationship with Him. Restore me to joy near you, relationship with you.

It means that the sorrowful heart of repentance is actually the pathway to the joy of our salvation, isn't it? David prays again in verse 8.

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Charles Spurgeon says this verse right here is a preposterous prayer.

What a great word, preposterous. It's a preposterous prayer that a sinner should request joy.

Spurgeon says it's preposterous except that the Father of Heaven is throwing a party.

Spurgeon writes this, if when prodigals return the Father is glad and the neighbors and friends rejoice and are merry with music and dancing, what need can there be that the restored one himself should be wretched?

[24 : 57] Do you hear what Spurgeon's saying? Who is it that gets to define this relationship? It's the Father, isn't it? He's the one who could have said get away, don't come back and the Father says I tell you what this relationship is, you're not an outcast, you're not a slave to me, you're my son.

Come into the party and rejoice in our relationship. The Father defines the relationship and what does he not delight in? He does not delight in your sacrifices.

He's not looking to see how full your arms are of all the things you can do and how hard you promise to work to pay off the debt that you've incurred. No, listen.

Listen to what he did to define your relationship with him because every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

[26 : 11] Y'all, that's why God's looking for empty-handed sinners. Not the ones with all their sacrifices with them because he has made the one all-sufficient sacrifice for you and he wants those who come empty-handed clinging only to the cross of Christ.

That's how you turn back to God in repentance. He has made the one sacrifice that already makes you perfect. Hebrews 10, 14.

I love that. Don't you love that? Those who are still struggling, those who are not yet sanctified already made perfect. How? By their arms full of sacrifices? By the ones the priests did over and over and over for generations?

No. By one sacrifice. By the one sacrifice of his son, those still struggling are made perfect in their relationship restored to the Father.

That only happens through the cross of Jesus. The sacrifice of the son in our place. Let me tell you one thing this means for us both corporately and individually as we prepare to come to this table where we're going to celebrate that sacrifice made for us.

[27 : 30] First, corporately. Southwood, we've talked in the last couple of weeks about a particular chapter in our story.

It's a significant chapter marked by our sin and our failures and in many respects well deserving of sorrowful hearts.

That's very appropriate. But it is not and cannot be the defining chapter of our story. This morning we're also talking about another chapter in our story where our Savior came and lived and died for us.

Where he pursued relationship with us at the cost of his own life. Where he called us, Southwood, to be his people, a part of his universal church.

One where our sin and the gates of hell themselves cannot prevail against her, his church.

[28 : 44] And our Heavenly Father says this morning, I get to tell you which chapter defines your story in our relationship. It's that one. Do it often, he says.

And remember with great joy my love for you in the midst of your sin. I hope we always learn from our past.

I hope we always take time to listen to and to pursue healing with people impacted by our sin. but I'll be honest with you, you're not likely to hear a lot of corporate public talk about that difficult chapter beyond next week because it's not the one that defines us.

Next week, we will celebrate our risen Savior who lives and reigns and calls Southwood his beloved bride and says, you're perfect because of my love for you.

We will rejoice in that relationship and in that great God and I promise you, you can expect to hear a lot about that chapter of our story that has a cross and an empty tomb every week from here forever.

[30 : 00] You'll hear about that one. That's the one that defines who we are. God gets to make that choice. Now, personally, personally, for each of us as sinners, you need to know that same reality is true.

God gets to define the terms of the relationship. Many of us, if you're anything like me, you've felt or feel today broken in your sin for whatever it is for you.

Perhaps there's a chapter in your story that's marked by sin so strongly that the shame you feel from that many days defines your relationship with God.

You're not even willing to go towards Him for fear and shame of how He must feel about you.

Perhaps you've come back so many times in repentance that you're beginning to feel God must be tired of you.

You're tired of you failing and having to go back again. You just feel broken in your sin. Listen to me.

[31 : 12] If you're broken in your sin, God does not despise that condition. He delights in it, right? In the broken and contrite heart.

He wants to restore the joy of your salvation. In fact, when you here in your sin, look back to Him and I know how you're wondering how He feels.

What's He gonna think? How's He gonna respond to me? I want you to know, you need to know that the Father runs off the front porch where He was out looking for you, throws His arms around you, and throws a party in His great joy that His Son has come home.

He calls you His beloved Son. He celebrates the restored relationship that you have with Him. This is that party, that feast that He throws for you this morning.

He spread it before you at the cost of His body and blood and God says, He defines the relationship. This is the defining chapter in your story, in your relationship with Him.

[32 : 25] You're His child. Always seated at His table because He has made you clean. Oh, listen, come, come weeping over your sin.

That's appropriate. But come weeping over your sin. Run back in repentance to the forgiving arms of your Father and find that those tears that were full of sorrow for you become in His arms tears of joy because you're near to your God again.

May that be the joy of your salvation and the joy of your heart this morning as you come to this table. Remember what Paul tells us about how Jesus instituted this supper for us.

He says I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes friends this is not the table of Southwood or of the Presbyterian church this is the Lord's table he he's the one who sets it and he's the one who invites all of those who truly are willing to turn from

their sin and to trust Jesus alone who have made that profession and joined themselves to a church that preaches that gospel he invites all those to come we would love to celebrate with you this morning if you know this morning that you're not willing to turn from your sin if you're not willing to let go of it the fulfillment that you're seeking there it's too appealing or perhaps if you feel some sorrow over your sin but you're still at a place where you feel like you have to balance the scales with

God and come back arms full of your own deeds if that's where your heart is don't come to this table this morning that way this is a table where we come empty handed we don't want to say outwardly something that's not true of us inwardly if you're willing to let go of the sin and self that you would find hope in and come back empty handed to cling with both hands to the cross of Jesus and his sacrifice on your behalf then come running you're going to find a father who's running to meet you and delighted to have you as his child back at his table let's pray and then we'll do that together father for your love and grace on display before us this morning we are most grateful we confess we're those who don't deserve it we deserve the death that your son has taken for us we deserve no chance at being welcomed back into relationship with you and you've insisted on it and so we come at your invitation to rejoice in your love to us in

[35 : 54] Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org