

# Psalm 51 - Confessions, Part III: The God of Forgiveness

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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.

Turn with me this morning to Psalm 51. Psalm 51, page 474 of the Bible in the pew in front of you. I've got to admit to you that when our elders suggested to me preaching on Easter Sunday from Psalm 51, David's confession after his adultery with Bathsheba, I thought it was a terrible idea. And you may still in a few minutes agree that it was a terrible idea. But, I'm actually really excited about it. Now, having studied and having God working among us in the last few weeks, I'm excited about what God is going to show us here together this morning.

It's our final look for this series at this great Psalm, where God teaches us through King David so much about what true repentance looks like.

[ 1 : 14 ] Two weeks ago, we learned about the nature of sin, that it involves both our attitudes and our actions. God created us to enjoy this wonderful relationship with Him, but our hearts are bent away from Him naturally.

And by our deeds, we walk away from God and distance ourselves from that relationship that He's created us for. We look for our fulfillment somewhere else other than Him.

Last week, we saw that the heart of repentance is one that is sorrowful, that is broken, heartbroken over the damage we've done to our relationship with God, and then turns back to Him, not merely to new behavior or new deeds that we want to do, but back to that relationship with God that we long to see restored, that we would find our hearts joyful in Him again.

David models these realities about sin and repentance for us in Psalm 51, but he actually begins somewhere else. He starts the psalm with his focus on something that is both really vital and really helpful and hopeful to us as we consider, especially on Easter, who our God is, and that is David begins by considering the God of forgiveness.

Listen to how he begins his confession. Psalm 51, beginning at verse 1, we'll read the first 10 verses. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.

[ 3 : 00 ] According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. This is God's holy word.

[ 4 : 04 ] In a world of people you can't trust or count on, something absolutely reliable. In a world of things that come and go, something eternally permanent.

Let's pray and ask God's blessing on His word in our hearts. Pray with me. Father, for Your word, we are so thankful. We need it.

We need You to speak this morning, Father. Father, You know how quickly we can create a God in our own image, of our own making, who works the way we think He should, and the way we would like Him to.

Father, by Your word, by Your Spirit, in our hearts, give us a clear and a right picture of You.  
Forgive us, Father.

Forgive, first of all, the one who preaches, who needs it most today. Bring Your forgiveness, not just to me, but to all of us, that we might know You and know You more.

[ 5 : 15 ] Know the one true and living God, whom to know is life eternal. Might we meet You here and know You more, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. I still remember how intimidating my nine-year-old basketball coach was. He was a very no-nonsense, stern guy, didn't put up with anything.

In fact, he even gave homework to his nine-year-old basketball players. You know, plays that we were supposed to study and things we were to memorize and every practice we had to come and bring that homework back.

I still remember I always did my homework. I wanted to be the good kid and always do what I was supposed to, plus I was so afraid of him. And I had seen what happened to some of the other guys who forgot their homework and how he made them run and run and run for failing to do their homework.

So the first time I forgot to do my homework, I lied to him. I made up a story about how I had done it and where I had left it and just that I would bring it at the end or at the next practice.

[ 6 : 35 ] I didn't want to be embarrassed as a failure in front of the other guys. And I certainly didn't want to face the consequences of my mistake. I had no desire for extra running that day.

Problem was, my parents knew better and I can still feel, thanks to them, the dread of having to go back to the coach and confess to not doing my homework and lying to him about it.

As I got older, I remember trying to avoid confessing to high school football coaches. In football, if you forget any of your pads, you're disqualified from practice for the day.

Absolutely not. Even one missing knee pad, you're out. You can't practice. However, what you could do, at least on my team, was you could leave the rest of your pads on and go out into the 100 degree heat and just run or do up-downs until you puked.

That's what you could do for all of practice. You couldn't be part of the team, but you sure could do that. I can remember trying hard to hide the fact that I was missing a knee pad. How can I get through practice without them noticing that I'm missing something?

[ 7 : 48 ] I didn't want to confess what was really going on. I didn't want to face the response I knew was coming. So the character of someone we've offended, the response we know to anticipate or expect from them has a huge impact on our willingness to apologize or confess our failure, doesn't it?

Perhaps you've been in the spot where you've offended or betrayed or failed someone and it's someone you desperately want to avoid confessing to because you know how they're going to respond.

You've watched them and you don't want to find yourself in that spot. I've experienced the joy of the opposite dynamic in a relationship.

By the time I started dating Christy in college I had begun to believe that you could find relationships where you could fail and still be loved.

Where you could fall on your face and be helped up. And I watched her being patient with others and when I risked sharing some of my personal struggles with her instead of continuing to hide them as was much more natural to me she was understanding and forgiving even willing to help.

[ 9 : 14 ] She didn't berate me she didn't run away from me she didn't even make me run laps she actually was patient. Her character knowing I could expect a patient and merciful response to my failures encouraged me to confess sin to her more.

It was a huge part of my wanting to marry someone who would love me like that. Kind patient forgiving perhaps you've known someone like that too.

Someone where you did feel safe sharing your struggles admitting your sin your failure to them because you knew what they were like and how they received failures.

My wife is regularly merciful patient and forgiving but not always. How much more merciful patient and forgiving is my heavenly father?

is our heavenly father. The Bible tells us that it's that kindness of God his loving kindness that is meant to lead us to repentance.

[ 10 : 32 ] It's the thing that invites people like us who fail and make mistakes to come to him. It makes us willing even eager to confess our sins because we know what he's like we know what response to anticipate.

we have come to know his forgiving character. When we consider confession and repentance it is important to see our sin for what it is.

It's important to understand what repentance really is. But the most important reality of the entire process the thing on which it all hinges it won't start confession won't begin without it is to understand and know the character of our God who is a God of forgiveness.

This is where David starts his confession isn't it? Look at verse 1 Have mercy on me O God according to your steadfast love according to your abundant mercy David's about to get to his sins they're coming he's going to talk about them a lot but what makes him even willing to start going there it's mercy steadfast love abundant mercy the character of his God that he delights in forgiveness now David of all the people in the Bible is called a man after God's own heart what does that mean that David never sinned that David knowing God's heart so much always loved the things that God loves always did the things that God's heart would have had for him to do no obviously not this psalm reminds us of that but part of what it means is that David had gotten to know

God's heart and what is it that David had learned what David had learned and knew about God's heart was that even when David failed and failed big God's heart was one of mercy and forgiveness and so in a moment of deep sin David knew where to run didn't he David needed a God of forgiveness just like I do just like you do it's not good enough apparently to be one of the greatest leaders of God's people ever it's not good enough to come to church occasionally or even regularly one of the contexts of this sermon series on Psalm 51 that we've been in the last three weeks is our session the elders chosen to lead this particular church confessing our corporate sin from several years ago during a difficult season of church conflict here at

[ 13 : 37 ] Southwood we failed to love and to lead as God has called us to we brought dishonor to the name of Christ and we hurt many people whom we dearly love because of our sin if you want to hear more detail about what God has taught us in this respect please feel free to go online and listen to sermons from the last two weeks but my point this morning is to say to you the session needs forgiveness the pastor needs forgiveness he got to pick one person in the whole world to love as his wife and he fails to love her often times as Christ has loved his church every single one of us stands in desperate need forgiveness just like David and David here in his sin points us where we need to be pointed to the

God of forgiveness he says steadfast love abundant overflowing mercy those are words that describe a heart of compassion a caring character a tender nature God's steadfast love his loving kindness it's sometimes translated is that faithful love in relationship with us that never quits it's God's love in relationship with us that never fails those who fail him in the relationship even when they're failures yet he does not Sally Lloyd Jones calls it God's never stopping never giving up unbreaking always and forever love that's the love David runs to it's that love that pursues the people that he made for relationship with him who so often run the other way and God in that steadfast love runs faster after them at the core of who the God of the Bible is that's what you find abundance mercy steadfast love when he's introducing himself to Moses and his people Israel in the Old Testament all the way back to Exodus chapter 34 that's where he starts listen to what he says he comes to him and the Lord passes before Moses and proclaims Yahweh Yahweh this is my name Yahweh we translate the Lord a God what merciful and gracious slow slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin that's who God is when he introduces himself he leads with his mercy gracious merciful this description of his character from Exodus 34 is repeated over and over again throughout the Bible as who God is the Bible gives other descriptions of God it says he delights in showing mercy casting our sins into the depths of the sea Micah 7 that he's rich in mercy Ephesians 2 his grace grows even faster than our sin Romans 6 so that there is always more grace in God than there is sin in us no matter how much we think we've accumulated his grace has grown faster there's no one more forgiving than our God this is the biblical picture of God of who he is yet I've often got a different picture in my heart I often when I think of God I'm picturing this coach with his arms crossed disappointed shaking his head I've forgotten my homework again I've lost a knee pad again

and he just wants me away from him go you can't be here with the team today just go run go away till you get it together had that picture of

God in your mind before I've pictured God on a more positive side as a judge who hands out awards to those who are doing well I mean you know no one is perfect but he loves to award the most deserving of all the people out there if I can do better than some of them God will meet me halfway you know and he'll want to give me an award for that y'all to this point I've lived nearly half my life in what could be described as a cosmic awards day just hoping that I'll outdo the other kids enough to get another ribbon or certificate because God loves those who try hard enough to outdo just a little bit of the others I've pictured God as someone who's so different and distant from me that he couldn't possibly care about me especially on my worst days and at my lowest points what about you what picture of God is in your mind when you think about him this morning what's he like what characterizes him what picture comes to your mind could you pick the true God out of a lineup do you know what he's like see the

[ 19 : 25 ] Bible says he's very different from those pictures I've had in my head at times the Bible gives us a lot of great pictures of God God is truly pictured it says as the father of the prodigal son waiting on the porch eagerly anticipating the return of his lost son so he can welcome him home running to forgive the least deserving to throw a party for the most miserable the one who has offended him greatest and he wants to celebrate with him God is truly pictured as the merciful king in the parable who forgives a debt that could never be repaid God is truly pictured in Hosea as the loving husband who pursues and buys back his unfaithful disgraced wife time after time after time he forgives and even pays to have her back as his own when you get to the heart of

God that's what you find grace mercy forgiveness it thrills his heart he delights to forgive you know I delight in international travel vacations with my family I love doing that but they're expensive you may delight in diamond jewelry sports cars space shuttles something like that but but they're expensive aren't they so you may not have a lot of them even though you delight in them they're so expensive you can't own a bunch of them often you can't have a lot of it y'all forgiveness is very very expensive for those of us who have rebelled who have committed treason against the creator of the universe our God and King the cost of that treason as you would expect is death we have accumulated an incalculable debt against a holy and just and righteous God and David recognizes in this psalm the same thing you may know about

God his heart is merciful it's also just he must punish sin the debt must be paid it's who he is it's part of his character according to the passage in Exodus that we read earlier he's not only forgiving but he also can't leave sin unpunished even if he has to go to the third or fourth generation to get that debt repaid he will and must do so so forgiveness is very very expensive it's not enough to delight in forgiveness forgiveness for God to love forgiving he actually has to put some action behind it and we finally get to Easter you were wondering I mean come on I started in Psalm 51 give me a few minutes but but we're at

Easter now what is it that God has done God has purchased forgiveness in fact all the forgiveness that all of us will ever need in the person of Jesus he endured the death we deserved to pay our debt for us Jesus takes what sin deserves because God must punish sin and on the cross he dies bearing our sins in his body on the tree 1st Peter 2 Jesus dies for sins it's what sin deserved right death but was it enough did Jesus dying pay that debt in full how do we know Easter says yes yes it did Jesus walks out of the tomb on Easter morning and Easter says the sin bearer gets death no more the one who has sin placed upon him sin that deserves death walks out of the tomb alive someone with sin marking him receives life and death no more which means what sin no more needs death to be paid for if Jesus has paid it our sin that he has paid for in full will never receive that debt our debt that we owe to a holy

God hasn't just been partially paid but our debt has been paid in full it is finished Jesus is alive and so the sin that he carried with him no longer no longer must face death Easter says God has dealt with our sin and its rightful consequence eternal death he has done that the sting of death is sin but God gives us what victory through Jesus Christ our Lord 1 Corinthians 15 Easter says God moved to deal with our sin before we even committed it that's how good at forgiving God is that's how much of it he has that he has paid the price already for all our sins the ones you've committed the ones you haven't gotten to yet he's paid for them in full so no one who trusts in the payment made by [ 25 : 29 ] Jesus and the life earned by Jesus will ever have to pay that debt amen ever ever pay your own debt that you deserve to pay Jesus resurrection shows us there is nothing else to be paid

there are no more laps to run there is no more judge for you to impress there's a God delighting to forgive who has purchased forgiveness full and free to give to you and he's not disinterested he sees the heartache of this life and the struggle and the mess that you're in and he comes running towards you this morning with forgiveness to give to you and he delights in sharing it with you listen to how capable he is of forgiving you completely verse 7 purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean wash me and I shall be whiter than snow let me hear joy and gladness let the bones that you have broken rejoice hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities create in me a clean heart oh God and renew a right spirit within me completely clean clean enough to stand in the presence of a holy holy holy

God as David puts it even whiter than snow we read earlier about an angel coming from heaven white as snow David says whiter whiter than snow is the way God makes us if God cleanses you you'll be that clean white and whiter than snow only God can remove the stain of our sinful nature and our sinful actions that stain that's so deep it's hard to get out we scrub and scrub but we still see it if God washes you you will be fully and forever clean let the bones you have broken rejoice only God could take bones that have been crushed ground to dust is the image in the Hebrew word and put them back together together so that they have energy and joy and life again and then he says create in me a clean heart notice not give me a second chance

God I'll make it up to you not just wipe away the dirty spots so I don't look as bad as I did create a new heart create the same word used in Genesis chapter 1 when God creates the heavens and the earth from nothing God you're the only one who can do this David is saying you're the one who creates and I need to be wholly new I need you to recreate me all over from the heart work in me life where previously there was only death only God can forgive the way David's talking about as fully and finally and completely as David's describing do you see how all your sin requires nothing short of God's forgiveness even my little lie to a coach at nine years old can only be forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus none of us stands clean on our own before a just and holy God every single one of us stands in need of forgiveness but do you also see how none of your sin requires anything beyond

God's forgiveness even my worst failures to love my wife or to love the church or the darkest secrets the deepest sins of your heart or my heart are completely forgiven through the death and resurrection of Jesus he washes whiter than snow and blots them out forever from our record sometimes the stain of shame from our past can linger like a stain in clothing that's hard to get out sometimes it hangs over us sometimes we feel like that's all God would see if he looks at me as this thing that I've done the thing I've thought the thing I failed to do if that's you God says to you this morning that he wants you to know the freedom and the joy of his full forgiveness which washes you thoroughly makes you completely clean it's the joy of being able to be completely honest about yourself to live in relationship with someone where you can come at your lowest point be totally transparent and yet find yourself even in your failure loved and accepted

David comes to God utterly broken and dirty and says have mercy on me oh God let all your overflowing mercy fall on me and wash over me till I am completely clean you can come to that same God with that same request that's the God of forgiveness I hope every one of us will know in a fresh way this Easter there's at least one more biblical picture of this God of forgiveness that I didn't mention earlier when I talked about the pictures of God as the father of the prodigal son as the forgiving king as the faithful forgiving husband it's the picture of Jesus himself hanging on a cross blood dripping from him struggling to breathe in deep agony where his heart has never felt this before and in the midst of it he cries out what father forgive them father forgive them do you see the heart of God there do you see the God of forgiveness the heart of God is so full of forgiveness that even as he is purchasing that very forgiveness at the cost of his own life even as he is enduring the pain and the agony that the sin he's forgiving has caused him he cries out that forgiveness be extended to those whose debt he's paying in the midst of it he cries out father forgive forgive can you imagine such selfless love what a merciful savior what a

[ 33 : 06 ] God of forgiveness to forgive even and especially then if you have questions if you want to know more about this forgiving God if you just want to come talk and pray about something that you've been struggling with for the first time maybe you've prayed for forgiveness a lot and you just want to come pray again some of our elders are going to be down front at the end of this service we love to talk with you they're going to come down front I'm going to be at the back which means front or back you've got someone who needs the forgiveness of God as desperately as you do who

would be delighted to talk to you about the God of forgiveness and the forgiveness that we found in Jesus let's pray father we confess that we bring nothing that deserves your forgiveness this morning but we rejoice that there is nothing needed because we have a savior whose blood paid it all our full debt who walked triumphantly out of the grave having the pronouncement of full forgiveness and full payment of the debt been pronounced upon him and in him we stand forgiven and we rejoice father this

Easter would that joy be something that drives us to honesty to freedom in living to being willing to confess to you and to others and to find a forgiveness that we only hoped might be possible to find someone who knows us fully and who loves us completely show us more of that forgiveness that we might run to you for it in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](http://southwood.org) to