

Psalm 51

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[0 : 0 0] Father God, we thank you for the opportunity this morning to gather and to sit under your word, and we ask that you would speak to us in such a way that we are different as a result. Please change our hearts, as David prayed, that we may love you as you deserve. Amen.

What do you do when you know that you've done the wrong thing? What's your first reaction? I'm going to be a little bit self-indulgent right now, and I want to stick a photo of the cutest young man in the world up on the screen. I don't get to show him off in the morning very often, so I thought this was a good opportunity, because over the last 18 months, my son has taught me a lot about how to react when you do the wrong thing.

He is 18 months old, but it is amazing how many wrong things he can do already. I say, don't touch this, and he touches it. I say, stop eating possum poo that you find in the backyard, and he continues to try and eat possum poo that he finds in the backyard. I say, share that toy, and he pushes the other child away and holds onto it. He has multiple options at his discretion when he knows he's been caught out doing the wrong thing. His favourite is to act casual. I say, don't touch the dishwasher, and he stands next to the dishwasher, leaning on it. He's not using his hands, just, I'm not doing anything wrong, and then he's just waiting for you to turn away so he can continue pressing buttons. He occasionally goes for the sheepish, where he knows he's in trouble and kind of comes over and sucks up and looks for a hug or something like that. And every now and then, he goes for the classic devastated, where he just breaks down in tears and can't believe that he's done the wrong thing and just wants a hug and so on. And funnily enough, as I've been watching him, I've realised that I actually do really similar things. Not exactly the same, but an 18-month-old and a 30-year-old process guilt in really similar fashion. Not so long ago, a little while ago now, but I remember being caught for speeding. And I don't mean at the point where I was pulled over by the police and they were filling out a ticket. I'm in the point where I'm driving along at a speed slightly in excess of the limit, and I see the police car coming the other way. The processes that my brain go through in that split second are pull over and, you know, face the consequences, turn down the next street as quick as I can and try and hide, or accelerate and see if I can outrun them. I won't tell you what I did. But the point is, in that moment where you've done the wrong thing, you do actually need to make a decision. What do I do now? Do I face the consequences? Do I try and cover it up?

Do I just go blank and cop what's coming? I wonder when it comes to God, what you do when you know you've let him down. When you know that you've sinned against God, when you know that in his eyes, what you have done, what you have thought, what you have said is wrong, how do you react?

What's the right response in that moment? Because the Bible is full of examples of good people that we're supposed to imitate. There's lots of great instructions of what we should do and shouldn't do, but what about the moment when you fail? There's instructions to how we should speak, to how we should use our money, all that sort of stuff. There's examples of people to imitate.

[3 : 13] But today I want to show you a story from Scripture of one of Israel's greatest kings stuffing up spectacularly. Ken pointed us to it just a second ago as he introduced the reading.

David is pretty much the pinnacle of kingship when it comes to Israel. He's as good as it gets. He's a key figure when it comes to the promises that God has made to his people, but he falls spectacularly.

Now, in the interest of time, I'm going to give you the Sam Lowe paraphrased version of 2 Samuel 11 and 12. So stick with me. Basically, David has been king for a little while and he's been doing what God asked him to do. He's been fighting battles and he's been winning battles left, right and center.

And it gets to the point where he has won the big battles and there's just a few little skirmishes on around the place. So he decides this spring, instead of going off to battle, he's going to sit back in his palace and take a well-earned rest. Sends the army out, does his own thing and as he is wandering around on the roof of his palace, probably feeling pretty happy with how his life is going, he spots something off in the distance, something that's appealing to his eye. Spots an attractive female taking a bath. Now, rather than maybe appropriately looking the other way, he looks, he's impressed, he desires and he sends one of his aides to go and find out about this woman. His aid returns with the sad news that this is Bathsheba. She's the wife of Uriah. Now you would think, end of story, he looked, he can move on and get on with his life. Unfortunately, his solution is, Uriah's off in battle, go get her anyway. He's the king, how's she going to say no? He gets Bathsheba, he brings her to his bed, he sleeps with her, he sends her back to her house, end of story. He's the king. The people who know about this can keep secrets, he figures it will be fine. But unfortunately, Bathsheba sends a message to David explaining that she's now pregnant. Problem. Bathsheba's husband is not in town, how did she get pregnant? Now, this could be the moment of truth where David concedes, confesses, faces the consequences, but instead he comes up with a plan. He invites Uriah back from the front line, invites Uriah to the palace, under the ruse that he wants to hear how the battle's going, and then he sends Uriah home, hoping that he would sleep with his wife. I mean, he's been away, he's been at battle, he hasn't seen her, surely. You know, it's almost inevitable, and then he can just pretend that was the night she got pregnant. Uriah has more honour than David does, and refuses to go into his own home while the rest of his fellow soldiers are still in battle. So instead, he sleeps on the side of the road at the entrance to the city, and heads back out to battle. So again, moment of truth. Does David concede now? He's tried to cover it up, it hasn't worked? No, he doesn't. Instead,

David sends instructions out to Uriah's commanders to put him where the fighting is the fiercest, and then just when it gets really intense, to instruct the soldiers around Uriah to step backwards so that he's killed. And sure enough, that's what happens. David's solution? Uriah's dead now, so I guess Bathsheba is available, and she becomes his wife. So did you get that? God's anointed king commits adultery, then tries to trick her husband into sleeping with her so that he'll think it's his baby. When that doesn't work, he kills him. It's just so that he won't get found out for committing adultery in the first place. See how it begins to escalate. David goes to these massive lengths so that his first mistake isn't found out. But unfortunately, he's digging himself deeper and deeper. Now it seems like it works on one level. Uriah is dead. Bathsheba is now living with David, and they will have a child. It looks like they're a family. And all the people who know what's going on are smart enough to know that you don't tell the king he's done the wrong thing.

[7 : 25] Otherwise, you end up like Uriah did. So it seems like David's secret is safe. But the problem is, two people still know what happened. And that problem is the same problem for you and me.

When you sin, and when I sin, we can try and cover it up. We can pretend it didn't happen. We can pretend that we will deal with it in some way. But it did happen, and there are two people who will always know that it happened. David still knows what he did. Verse 3 of Psalm 51, I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. No matter how elaborate the cover-up is, no matter how convincing it is for everyone else, you will always know what you have done.

You will always be aware of the decisions you've made and the consequences that went with it. No amount of lying will actually trick yourself into thinking, I shouldn't feel guilty. I haven't done the wrong thing. I mean, you can see what guilt drove David to do.

When you dishonor God with your actions, it doesn't matter how many other people know about it. Even the secret sins carry guilt with them, and you know that to be true in your own life.

There are things that you've done that no one else knows about, but you know, and you still carry that burden, maybe even that fear of what if somebody does find out?

[8 : 56] There's no point trying to ignore it or pretend it didn't happen, because that'll just make you trapped by guilt and fear. Plus, even if you're really good at keeping your secret, even if you can actually hide it from every other person you know for your whole life, you will still know, and God will still know. Verse 4 of Psalm 51, against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

The Bible tells us that God knits us together in our mother's womb, that God numbers the hairs on our head. God knows us more intimately than we even know ourselves. And to somehow think that we can trick him into thinking that we're better than we are, to somehow think that we can keep a secret from him, is not only foolish, it just doesn't work. He knows what we do before we even do it.

He knows our thoughts and our words before they come out. To try and hide our mistakes will not work. And the end of 2 Samuel chapter 11, which I encourage you to have a look at maybe when you go home, tells us that the thing that David had done displeased the Lord. I'm fairly confident that that's the sanitized version of what God was feeling at that particular point. His chosen king, instead of doing what his chosen king should have done, has just cheated and committed murder to cover it up. I imagine God was more than displeased. God was angry and rightly angry. God would have been straight up ticked off with David. And yet you and I do exactly the same thing. God wouldn't have just been annoyed that David had gone and slept with this woman. God wouldn't have even just been annoyed that he had then killed her husband. The issue is, as well as doing them, he has the arrogance to presume that he can hide it from God. He has the ignorance to think that God won't know if he just keeps it quiet amongst his advisors. And yet you and I do exactly the same thing. Every day we make decisions that dishonor God. Every day we make choices that mean our needs are more important than what God wants for us. The way we treat people, the way we talk about people, the way we use our money.

Those are choices that say to God, you're actually not in control. I'm the one who makes decisions here. And then when the guilt sets in, we do anything but admit that we've done the wrong thing.

That doesn't even enter our minds. We go for the play casual and just pretend we weren't doing the wrong thing. We flat out deny it. Or if we're really feeling guilty, we try and cover it up by doing lots of good things to balance it out. But God knows. You know.

[12 : 00] In our story, David doesn't get away with it. God sends Nathan, a prophet, to confront him. Nathan tells an elaborate story. And sure enough, David realizes just how disgusting his sin is before God.

He realizes how he cannot hide it from God anymore and he has to face up to God. And from that point, when David realizes that he can't run. When God gets the sin and puts it right in front of David's face and says, there's nothing you can do to get away from this, from that point, he writes this psalm to God.

He pours out his heart. And this psalm is a gift to us because I think it shows us what God wants from us when it comes to making mistakes, when it comes to our sin.

Make sure you've got Psalm 51 in front of you. And I want to show you four steps that you need to go through when God confronts you with parts of your life that don't honor him.

The first step is you need to face your guilt. You need to acknowledge that you have sinned. You need to recognize that you have done what is wrong.

[13 : 06] Because no matter what else is going on around you, no matter how great people tell you you are, no matter how great you tell yourself that you are, before God, you have failed.

Against God, you have sinned, just like David said. Verse 4, against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. So God is right in his verdict and he is justified when he judges.

Even if you're struggling with a personal sin. Even if your issue is in your mind and nobody else hears about it. If your issue is that you look at somebody as annoying and frustrating and not worth the effort and not important and not valuable, God still knows.

And we need to have the humility to say, God, I am doing what is wrong. To say, God, I have sinned. I know I have sinned. And I carry the guilt of that.

You will never escape guilt by pretending that you're better than you are. One John in the New Testament reminds us, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.

[14 : 12] And we just perpetuate the cycle, like David. We say, God's, you know, he does it no best, I know best, and I've got no sin. We make God out to be a liar by pretending that we are good, when in reality, we are wicked.

So the first step, you must admit your guilt, just like David did, eventually, when he was confronted by Nathan. David fell before God and he poured out his guilty heart in confession.

Here's the challenge, though, for you. You may not have a Nathan come and tell you. God may not provide a prophet to point to the things in your life that are inadequate, that are rebellious, that are wicked, but he has provided his word.

When you open it and the Bible points to something in you that is not where it needs to be, how do you respond? Do you try and play it casual? Or do you acknowledge your guilt and your sin before God?

Second thing David does, he acknowledges God. Look at verse 1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion.

[15 : 25] Blot out my transgressions, wash away all my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgression, and my sin is always before me against you, and you only have I sinned.

He appeals to God. Now, his sin affected people. His sin affected Bathsheba because he pulled her out of a marriage. His sin affected Uriah because he ended his life.

His sin affected the people that he dragged into his sordid web to go and fetch this woman for him. To the people that he insisted had to carry his lie. But his main port of call when he confesses is God.

His emphasis is God. Against you and you only have I sinned. He knows that it's God's laws that he's broken. Now, it's not that he hasn't hurt these people. It's not that that's not an issue.

But it's that God is the main issue. To break relationship with his creator. To sin against the one to whom he is accountable. And he knows that it is God alone who he has rejected that can forgive him.

[16 : 36] God is the only one who can deal with what he has done. When we sin, it's much, much easier to try and address the effects of sin in our life. If I was to start gossiping about somebody.

Start spreading rumors about that person and eventually it came out. It's easier for me to go to that person and try and fix the issue that everyone can see. But you've got to understand that by undermining that person, by devaluing that person, what I've done is I've dishonored God.

It's God's law that I've broken. It doesn't mean that this relationship doesn't matter. But so often we deal with sin only at the level of its effects. But sin fundamentally is a break in my relationship with God.

Sin is an issue between creator and creation. And the effects of it are real and painful. But what sin does is break the relationship with God.

And so the only one who can fix that is God. You must come before him confessing your sin and acknowledging his right to judge you.

[17 : 48] Confession shouldn't sound like, Dear God, I've done something wrong, but you have to forgive me because that's what you're like. That's not David's prayer. He does request forgiveness.

He does desire mercy. But he says, God, please have mercy because you are so loving. Even though I don't deserve it, please have mercy. When you sin and reject God, he's the one you need to acknowledge.

He's the one you need to seek for forgiveness because his desire is to give you good things. And it's him alone who can forgive you. If I was to step forward and punch Chris in the face, It's not much good for me to then wander across and ask Wendy to forgive me.

Sin is between you and God. The effects will be broader. But the only person who can forgive you for breaking God's law is God. Your first port of call when you are confronted with sin in your life must be to go to the one who can forgive you.

To the one who you are accountable to. The third thing David does is he repents. Verse 7. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

[18 : 58] Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. And key couple of verses here. Create in me a pure heart, O God.

Renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. And grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

David doesn't come back to God at this point and go, look, I'm really sorry. And you know, reality is it's probably going to happen again. There's a lot of beautiful women who bathe around my palace. And I like to walk around up there.

But if you can forgive me, that would be helpful so I'm not feeling bad. And then we'll deal with the next one when it comes up. It's not his prayer. His prayer is, God, I'm sorry.

Please take away the bits in me that make me do these things. Take away the desire in me that leads me into these situations where I choose things that are less than what you've designed for me.

[19 : 55] He wants to be changed. Repentance is so much more than just sorry. He says, Father, fix me. Don't let me end up in this same situation. Don't let me fall into this same sin.

Fix me. It's not just a matter of admitting that you've done the wrong thing and feeling sorry for yourself. It's about admitting it and then turning away from the things in your life that led you down that path in the first place.

Sin is you wandering away from God and his will. Repentance is saying sorry, begging for forgiveness, and then running back to the God whose strength will sustain you, who will give you the strength to make better choices, to resist temptation.

It's there in the end of verse 12. Grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. God, give me the strength to actually fulfill my desires, to actually obey you, to follow you as you deserve.

He confesses his sin. He acknowledges God. He repents. And lastly, verse 13, he trusts in God's forgiveness. Then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you.

[21 : 10] So confident in his forgiveness is David that he says, when it happens, I'm just going to start telling people. Because I'm ready for it. I'm going to be an example of your incredible love.

God's design for you isn't that you spend your life feeling guilty. You will spend your life making mistakes. Until Jesus comes back, that is the sad reality for all who try and follow Jesus.

But God's desire is not that you walk around with this weight of guilt on your shoulders. He does not, when we come to him with something to be forgiven, go, thank you, you're forgiven, and then I'm going to remind you about it next time you come back.

You said you weren't going to do this anymore, but remember? The Bible promises that as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us.

When you go to him and confess your sin, Scripture promises us in 1 John 1 again, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[22 : 08] God sent Jesus to die on a cross so that we could be forgiven. And if we confess, his death and his resurrection are sufficient for us to be completely clean.

No matter what you've done, no matter how bad you think it is, the blood of Jesus is more than enough to deal with your guilt. More than enough to wash the stains in your life and the power of his resurrection is more than enough to free you and redeem you, to take you from being one under the judgment of God to being a precious, treasured possession.

And today God is saying to you, no matter what you've done, if you would just admit it, if you would acknowledge God, if you would repent and commit your life to him, he will forgive you.

I love this psalm because David goes from at the beginning being in a place of incredible darkness, begging for God's mercy, to finishing up praying for the strength to stay pure and finally rejoicing in the forgiveness that he knows God will give him.

So confident is he in God's power and mercy and he doesn't even know about Jesus and the cross yet. So confident is he in the merciful character of his God that he can pray and leave this guilt with God knowing that it is dealt with and he doesn't even know about Jesus yet.

[23 : 42] Jesus is the incredible answer to this prayer in Psalm 51. David prays for forgiveness and cleansing and in the blood of Jesus he gets both.

David prays for a willing spirit to sustain him and in the sending of the Holy Spirit he receives the power to follow and obey his God. Today Greg and Clarice did something really significant up the front and I don't know if you've realised this but baptism is amazingly similar to Psalm 51.

Baptism is not primarily about what Greg and Clarice had to say. That's a big part of it. They expressed a desire to be washed.

They expressed a desire to follow God. But the answer to Psalm 51 and the answer to the prayers and words that were said here is Jesus. Their desire to be forgiven, their desire to turn to Christ is only possible because of the blood of Jesus.

Their ability to stand true till their life's end is only possible because of the power of Jesus' Holy Spirit in them as a result of the forgiveness that has been won on the cross and in Jesus' death and resurrection.

[25 : 01] David prayed this prayer confidently and Greg and Clarice, you can speak these words today confident because God has answered in Jesus' death and resurrection.

And for those of us sitting in this room who maybe aren't at a point where we have made a commitment like what Greg and Clarice did today, God's word is this. Stop carrying your guilt.

Confess your sin and find joy and forgiveness in Jesus. Amen.