

# Psalm 51, a Psalm of Confession

Today we are in Psalm 51 which is this very famous Psalm about David's confession after his sin with Bathsheba. It's an amazing story of sin, repentance and forgiveness in the life of David

David was a rather amazing character in the Bible. We can demonstrate this by asking, "Was David a success or failure?" Or ask it another way, "Do you respect David?"

If you say, Yes, I respect him. How can you respect a

- lying polygamist with a temper whose such a
- rotten father that his own son tries to kill him, who
- commits adultery with the wife of one of his most trusted generals and then in
- pure cowardice has him murdered?

I doubt many of us can throw an Ace on top of that mess. That's not very respectable.

If you say, Yeah, that's right. I don't respect him. How can you not respect a man who

- killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands and a Philistine with a sling?
- How can you not respect a man who God hand chose to be the King of Israel,
- who waited so patiently to be King in God's time, who

- refused to lay a hand against the Lord's anointed,
- who wrote a giant portion of the the OT,
- whose songs are used by millions of American's today in their worship service, and
- who God himself says, is a man after my own heart.

Does God say that about you? Have you written any parts of the Bible? Again, where's your ace?

David was a failure, but the reason David's failures did not cripple him and maim him and render him useless is because he channeled the power of the gospel through repentance. And listen, this is encouraging. Your failures, whatever they may be, can be washed as white as snow, whatever they are. Your affair, your hatred, your murder, your pornographic addiction, your chemical addictions, your anger issues, your materialism, your lust for approval, your insecurity, your unforgiving spirit.

There is hope in this Psalm. If there's hope for David, there is hope for you. Often time the thought of facing our sin is too much.

- You just want to bury it.
- Every time you bring it to the surface, your so disgusted at what you see, you just want sweep it under the rug and forget about it.
- If there's not a quick fix, then I'd just assume let it rot. All those sins want to sideline you.

Satan would love to sideline you for the rest of your life. Are you kidding me, how could God use you? What kind of absolute failure do you think you are? God doesn't use idiot hypocrites like you.

You know what Psalm 51 says? Yes he does. Yes he does. You need Psalm 51 because David needed it.

It is encouraging that God uses losers. God didn't bless Israel because of David, but in spite of him. I'm sure David was tempted to let that sin crush him and sideline him and destroy him. I'm sure David was in deep depression and I'm sure there were times when he felt like he was in a pit from which he could not escape.

But praise be to God we have this record, Psalm 51, an account of how he got out. He did get out. He didn't just get out; he triumphed. He became a greater leader. He became a greater man of God. He became a greater person. He comes out triumphing. How is that possible? Because he repented. The power of the gospel was released through his repentance.

So today we are going to look at how to get out of the pit. But first let's remind ourselves how he got into it.

## **How He Got in the Pit.**

The story begins with those infamous lines, In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war.... David is at the absolute

peak of his success. He's conquered, triumphed. He's been a remarkable leader. He's trusted God. Next week we will look at a Psalm 20 David writes during this period of his life when he is completely leaning on God with all his might.

So here David is standing at the pinnacle of success. You almost picture him posing on the porch of his palace with his cape flapping in the wind. This guy is amazing; he's invincible.

And yet he doesn't realize it. He is totally exposed. His pride is making him a target. Could he even imagine that in a month he'd be murdering Uriah. Uriah! Uriah the Hittite was one of David's truest and best friends. Uriah was one of the 37 men who went out into the wilderness when Saul was trying to kill David. They risked everything to go out with David and protect him. They risked their lives. He would certainly have been killed without them. He owed those men and Uriah his life.

Uriah, this great soldier who learned integrity and loyalty from David himself, was out with the army, fighting against the Ammonites. David was in Jerusalem, and he saw Uriah's wife Bathsheba, and he fell for her. He had an affair with her. She got pregnant. This was a problem, of course, because her husband was away on a campaign. So David began first to try to cover it up. He called Uriah back from the front, under the guise of wanting to learn how the battle was going. He listened to the story, and he made sure he asked enough

questions so Uriah was there till late in the day.

He finally said, “Fine, thank you for the report. Uriah, look. It’s late. You need to stay overnight before you go back to the front. So go home, have a great meal, take a bath, and have sex with your wife.” Uriah said, “Far be it from me, when my men are sleeping on the hard, cold ground, in danger, without any of these comforts. Far be it from me at a time like this to do that which they are forbidden to do. Therefore, I will sleep in my front yard. I will not go in. I will show my solidarity with these men.”

Do you see the earnestness, the integrity, of this guy? I'm sure he learned this from David himself. So he doesn't go in. What David is finally forced to do? He sends a message via the very hand of Uriah to his general, Joab, this is what they decide to do. They send Uriah and a small group of men out on a very dangerous mission. Then they arrange to withdraw their support. So they're killed. Then, as soon as Uriah is killed, Bathsheba goes into mourning. After the time of mourning is over, David marries her.

David thinks everything is fine. But 2 Samuel 11 ends with these ominous words, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Then Nathan the prophet comes. Nathan gives one of the great sermons in the history of the world. Nathan says, “David, let me tell you an account of something that

happened in your kingdom. And David we need a ruling this on this. I hate to troubled you with this, but our lower courts couldn't handle it and so we sending it to you. There was a rich man with lots of flocks and a poor man with no flocks. He just had one little lamb. She was like a daughter to him. She ate from his dish. She slept in his arms. Well there was a traveler who came and the rich man wasn't willing to take one of his own sheep so he stole that poor man's lamb and slew the lamb and served it to his guests. What should be done?"

David arose in wrath, and he said, "Is this man without pity? This is a heartless man! As the Lord lives, this man should die. Does he think there's no justice in my kingdom? Let him stand before me. Who is this man?" Nathan said, "You are the man," the most devastating sermon application in the history of the world. "You are the man."

What a condemnation and what a friend. Do you have friends like this? I have several one of them. My wife is one. My kids sometimes do this to me. I even have one whose name happens to be Nathan. And I have several more. Even as recently as this week I can think of two times where I've been called out on my sin and God has used them to speak into my life. Who can point that bony finger into your face and say, "You are the man."

Now you can imagine for David, the horror. You can imagine how naked and exposed he felt. The blood rushing to the face. The shame. The cycle of horror, denial, lashing out,

anger, evasion, blame-shifting, shame, sorrow, depression, self-loathing. He's down deep. You can imagine it can't you. Your whole world comes crashing down. He's in the pit. How does he get out?

Well let's read his getting out prayer. And I am sure this prayer didn't come 15 seconds after the finger. This prayer was the result of gut wrenching hours of introspection, prayer and thinking. And here is what he says:

Now we are going to look at here are 4 evidences of the truly repentant. I was going to do something like 4 steps or 5 things every repentant person does. But it's not that easy. Repentance is one of those things that if done right has certain qualities about it but it's hard to reduce to a formula.

It's the difference between saying, here's the four things you must do to love your wife on valentines day. Vs, here's four evidences of true love.

So here's evidence #1

## 1. The Repentant are Broken in Spirit

In verse 17 David says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

There is a brokenness to a truly repentant man. Clearly that is

part of the equation. But let's be very clear about what he is broken over.

David is broken not over the pain that sinned caused him, but the sin itself. One of the most common mistakes we make is confusing being upset about our sin for repenting. As God has promised us all along, sin causes a lot of problems. And it's easy to get worked up and angry because our world starts falling apart when the consequences of it come home to roost. I can imagine David was really bummed when Nathan called him out on his sin. His world shattered like giant pane of glass. He thought he had it all covered up. He thought he had this great secret plan. And then it blows into a billion pieces. And it hurts. Look how upset I am. That proves how sincere I am, right. Only sincere people are going to be this upset, right? But he's mistaking his wounded pride for repentance. It's so easy to think we're repenting because we are so upset.

And sure we stop for a while, and the next thing you know, we're back doing it again. We never change. Why? Because you still love the sin. You just don't love being caught in the sin.

Now, I'm quite sure David is upset about being caught. But that's never even mentioned here. He upset because of the way his sin has ruined and destroyed his relationship with God.



You see David was able to hate his sin because he saw it as an enemy to knowing God. Do you know that you can't increase hate without increasing the corresponding love? We hate those things that prevent us from acquiring our love. So what's the only way to hate sin? The only way to hate sin is to love God so much and to see with absolute clarity that to cling to this sin is to prohibit me from getting the one thing I really want, which is God himself.

Do you feel distant from God? Well, perhaps there is sin in the way!

- Do you have an unforgiving spirit. That is preventing you from knowing God.
- Do you have a spirit of jealousy?
- Are you holding onto bitterness or anger?
- Are you lost in materialism and love of money?
- Are you addicted to pornography or lusting after another person or having an emotional affair?

The only way to hate those things is to realize that they are enemies and absolute obstacles to getting close to God. One of the hardest lessons to learn about walking with God is you can't have both. You can never feel close with God and be walking in sin. This is how all relationships work. How can a man feel close to his wife while simultaneously give his heart to another woman?

Here's a test. If you could do whatever sin you love and guarantee you never get caught, would you? Do you believe

what God says? Do you believe that sin is a poison? Or do you somehow truly believe the lie that you are immune to it. Even though you wouldn't recommend it for anyone else, even though you can see the carcasses of million men and women strung along the road from doing exactly what you are doing, it's okay for you, you can handle it, you've got it under control.

The prayer of the broken and contrite is this. I am absolutely crushed that my sin has destroyed the relationship. Help me not because I'm so sorry I got caught, but help me because the one thing I want is you and I can never get to you while this sin is between us. It is a poison. It is an enemy. It prevents me from getting the one thing I want, which is you. I'm helpless, hopeless, completely stuck in the pit.

Do you see how this connects to our theme this year of treasuring Christ? This is how you treasure Christ in repentance.

So the first evidence of the truly repentant is that they are broken in Spirit, secondly they are honest.

1. The Repentant are Broken in Spirit.
2. The Repentant Honest.

One of the essential parts of getting out of the pit is to go deeper into it. Whatever has been exposed to you is just the tip of the iceberg. You haven't even begun to expose what's

really there. There's always an event, there is always something that causes you to stop and evaluate yourself at some level. Something is exposed. Something is discovered. Maybe you were hiding and hiding and hiding and then bam, something happens and it's discovered or brought to light in some way. What do you do? David's answer was go deep.

You can't chop the green off your dandelion and say, "Well, I've chopped off everything I can see. You're just seeing the surface. The life of the thing is underground, invisible. If you want to kill it you have to dig beneath the surface and unearth the actual creature itself, the part of the plant that contains the life.

And that's just like sin. You can't just deal with symptoms. You can't just try to modify behavior only. You can't just say, "Well this little expression of sin is causing me problems so I'm going to be very gentle and snip it off." No what caused you to want to do that in the first place? This is what David does - he goes for the root. He digs down and tries to get to the source. This is where the truth of God's Word is like a knife that cuts deeply right between bone and marrow.

This is the part that hurts. This is the part nobody likes. True repentance admits what's really there.

"Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart" (Psalm 51:6).

I don't want to have falsehood in the inward being. Yes, take that knife and go deep into the flesh and get all of it. Show me what's really there. Look at what David says here,

"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" (Psalm 51:4).

He wants to see it as God sees it. Not as his mother or father sees it. Not how his friends see it and especially not how he sees it. He wants to see it how God sees it.

God is looking way beyond mere symptoms. There are no secrets with him." Repentance then is going to trying to see it and feel it in that same way, to see our behavior and motivations from God's point of view.

And let's be reasonable for a moment. Isn't that what matters anyway? What God sees is the reality. Everything else is just an illusion a fabrication. Whatever faults other people see in you, those are just symptomatic, a small part of the boiling inferno inside that you couldn't keep under the lid. So confession is digging down to the reality. Who cares what people see. What I care about is what God sees. What I care about is what's really there. Even if nobody sees, I want to expose it before God.

Charles Spurgeon famously has said,

"If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be." - Spurgeon

"If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks you to be." - Spurgeon

Our normal reaction is to be defensive, to deny, blame-shift, to avert, to justify. But why? The reality is - it's there. As humans we are so concerned about having our life be seen at just the right angle.

On a physical level you can probably relate with this. Maybe you are self-conscious of your nose or your body shape or some oddity about you. And if you take a picture of yourself at just the right angle you look great. That nose flattens, the unsightly thing disappears, and you look fantastic. And that's what you want to believe is true. But that's so silly. That's not true.

That's so often how we deal with sin. If I can get the world to look at me at this one particular angle and if everyone believes that that's who I really am then I'm good. I don't care who I really am. I just care what people believe I am through the image I project.

What are we doing? We all do this and this is an indicator that we are finding our identity and security in our outward appearance.

1. My worth comes from having a perfect appearance
2. I don't have perfect appearance and can't change it.
3. Therefore I can't have any worth.
4. That is unbearable so I won't admit what I really am so that I can have some worth.

It's so sad. God of course wants us to find our identity elsewhere.

But do you realize that this is a metaphor for something even more identity crushing than physical appearance. Where does your worth come from in the eyes of God, in the only eyes that matter?

1. Your worth comes from having not physical perfection, but moral perfection.
2. You don't have moral perfection, not even close, and you definitely can't change that.
3. Therefore you have no worth.
4. And that is unbearable so we won't admit it so that we can have some worth.

Do you see why so few people can be honest? This is such a horrible place to be. That is so uncomfortable. When we are staring down the cold steel barrel of this truth we get wild-eyed. We'll do anything to stop the sweating and panic. We're grasping for threads. It's so terrible we'll take the most irrational escape routes.

- For example, we are familiar with the idea that misery loves

company. Imagine if David in that moment finds some counselor who says, you know David I've committed adultery too. Oh, the flood of relief that comes in. I'm not as bad as I think, because see other people do it too. This pit isn't that bad.

- This is why people try to work their way out of the pit through self-loathing. See how miserable I am. That proves that I'm better than the average guy whose not as sorry. Get me out of the pit. How many bulls do I need to sacrifice in order to get this thing over with. I'm so sorry. What do I have to say to get out of the pit? How many rams do you want sacrificed? What do I have to do to get out of the pit? It's a way of trying to be less ugly. I am creating worth in myself through my religious effort or moral deeds.
- When we are in the pit, rather than admit it, we will say or do anything to justify the sin to make it sound less bad. Do you remember what happens when Joab sends word to David that Uriah has been killed. Don't worry Joab, the Ammonite sword is a devouring thing. It kills some and others get swallowed. I didn't kill him, the Ammonite sword did.

And yet the truth is this: our worth comes from being like Jesus Christ, and we are not like Jesus Christ and therefore we have no worth. You know what repentance is? It's agreeing with that statement. Do you know that this is the definition of confession. Saying the same thing as God.

Let me explain a little cryptic part of this verse. "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" (Psalm 51:4).

God is a judge. And a judge, judges sin. The judge, says, this act was a worthless act and is deserving of punishment. Now you can agree with that or you can disagree with that. There are people who are punished all the time who don't agree that they should be punished.

Confession is agreeing with the judge, saying the same thing as the judge. Part of being honest is agreeing with the perfect judge. What's in my heart is worthless and deserving of judgment. We like to somehow separate the sin and the sinner; that's a pretty modern concept. I sinned and my sin is worthless but I still have worth. The person is worthless to the degree that that the person's sin is worthless. You don't say I love the garbage but hate the stink of the garbage. If it didn't stink it wouldn't be garbage. The stink is what makes it garbage. You can't really separate it.

To confess is to agree that I, the person who did these deeds, who used my free will to make these decisions, am worthless.

It's going deep beyond what people can see, beyond what people know, going to that place that only God knows. Giving God the keys to those secret locked chambers of the heart and say, "Okay God, I've got nothing to hide. Go in and turn the lights on and look around. It's not pretty." Nobody likes examining the pit they are in. Nobody likes looking and



saying, "Man, I was only able to admit I was this bad, but actually I'm worse."

You see what's in here. Go ahead and judge it.

This is a painful place to be but good. This is the equivalent of having your chest cavity opened up on the operating table. But now we are finally there. God can finally reach in and pull out that worthless part and replace it with His righteousness. To actually do the needed repairs. Nobody wants to do that, but it's necessary if you ever want to be healed. Being honest with the horror of what's inside us, and what that horrible thing deserves, man that is a painful place to be. It's hard to go there.

1. The Repentant are Broken in Spirit.
2. The Repentant Honest.
3. The Repentant are Unashamed of their Helplessness

So now that we've finally admitted it, there's nothing to be ashamed of. The pride is gone. We are at the bottom. The only place we can go is up. Now that we've finally confessed, said the same thing as God does, we can be rescued, we can be given forgiveness and be given worth, a worth that is not our own.

As soon as we raise our hand and say, "God I have no worth, I have no value, would you help me?" He reaches down and pulls you out of the pit. What I want to point to in this Psalm

is the massive initiating, causal work of God in repentance and restoration of his children when we finally ask for it!

1. Look at verse 2. Wash me and cleanse me. You are going to have to be the one who washes and cleanses me. I can't wash myself. Think about that. How helpless and disabled do you have to be to have another grown person wash you. How humiliating is that to have another person have to undress you and soap you up and wash you in your personal spaces. You have to be so helpless. That's the picture. Look at verse 7. Cleanse me with hyssop. Hyssop is a really gnarly plant that was used for scrubbing. Cleanse me with sagebrush. Cleanse me with a brillo pad. Get down deep into the cracks. Don't just do a surface treatment. Get it all.

What I we are going to do now is experience this truth through the taking of communion. So can I have the ushers and musicians come forward.

Cleaning is removing the worthlessness. Only God can do that. Only something outside of us can do that. We are going to sing an old hymn that I recently sung and was just shocked at how great the words and particularly as it relates to this point here. And so what we are going to do is sing a verse, and we will pause between verses as I lead us through a few more thoughts and then we will sing some more.

[Verse 1]

Listen to the initiating work of God. The repentant are unashamed of their helplessness. Look at what David says God does.

2. Look at verse 9 blot out my iniquity.

[verse 2]

3. Create in me a clean heart. That's a creative work of God. That's an ex-nihilo act. Out of nothing, I will do a creative work and make something good and beautiful and pure and clean.

[verse 3]

4. In verse 12 God is the one restoring. God is granting the willing spirit to obey. God is the one who is granting sustaining grace. David is admitting dependence at the level not just of cleansing from past sin but for future obedience, for future grace to even have the desire to obey, the ability to even have a willing spirit.

[verse 4]

5. In verse 14 God is the one delivering. God is the savior.  
6. In verse 15 God is the one who opens his lips. God is the one who is going to have to create a heart that overflows with Praise.

[take bread] Jesus paid it all. [pass cup]

Do you hear the level of dependence? The absolute absence of pride? His pride isn't wounded. It's gone.

What Christ does is offer us complete forgiveness. Stop trying to find your worth in how you appear. There will always be flaws. And the flaws are always increasing. Stop trying to find your worth in what you can do. There is always someone better and you are never perfect. And for goodness sake, stop trying to find your worth in how righteous you are.

You have worth because of the received righteousness of Jesus Christ. David was washed whiter than snow. And so can you. What have you done that you are absolutely ashamed of. Do you think you are somehow unique. Let me welcome you into the assembly of the bankrupt. Every one of us here is broken, destroyed by sin. Welcome to the assembly of the beggars. There is hope for you if you reach up to Christ and let him wash your dirty body. Let him undress you and cleanse you in your personal spaces. Those parts of your body you are ashamed to reveal.

Let him cleanse you with a scouring pad and get it all off. And you will be clean. You will be acceptable. You will have his worth. You will be free of it. You will have worth, God's worth given to you. Don't you want that?

- Take the cup.

There is one final evidence of the truly repentant.

1. The Repentant are Broken in Spirit.
2. The Repentant Honest.
3. The Repentant are Unashamed of their Helplessness
4. The Repentant are Joyful

In verse 16 David says "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering" (Psalm 51:16).

So David is saying, listen you don't want burnt offerings. But then he ends the Psalm by saying, " Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar" (Psalm 51:18-19)

What's the difference between the two? The second offering of bulls is an offering of praise. A truly acceptable sacrifice, a truly repentant heart acknowledges the point of bulls. God is delighting in replacing the worthless acts of mankind with his righteousness.

Do you know what this results in for both the giver of the righteousness and the receiver of it? Joy!

Listen to how Many times David talks about rejoicing. ONE of the truest, probably the most indicative element of true repentance is that you rejoice over the bones that God has broken!

Can you see it as wonderful? Can you see it as amazing? Or do you feel like you have to now prove your repentance before joy is yours? You have to prove your worthiness.

Listen to David!

- Let me hear joy and gladness vs 8
- Restore to me the joy of salvation
- My tongue will sing of your righteousness. - crazy. righteousness.
- vs 15 open my lips and I will declare your praise.

This is why we sing. This is why we shout for praise.