

For the Love of God

The Confession of Man and the Compassion of God

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THE CONFESSION OF MAN AND THE COMPASSION OF GOD

Psalm 51

If you have a Bible, turn to Psalm 51. Today begins week 2 of our immersion in the psalms as a church, and the first week in which there will be a different sermon, often by a different preacher, in each of our worship gatherings. And we will do this, Lord willing, today and for the next five weeks. My prayer (our prayer) is that the Lord will teach us much across our faith family—even in different ways—about what it means to worship him in spirit and in truth.

In this particular gathering, we come to one of the most well-known, humbling, convicting, and encouraging psalms in all of Holy Scripture. And to preach on it is challenging, to say the least. Charles Spurgeon said of this psalm, "*Such a psalm may be wept over, absorbed into the soul, and exhaled again in devotion; but, commented on—ah! where is he who having attempted it can do other than blush at his defeat?*" So in commenting on it today—in preaching this text—I just want to walk us through it humbly and simply, pondering its meaning along the way and allowing its truth to penetrate our hearts.

In order to understand what this psalm is saying and how it applies to our lives, we need to start by reading the introduction to it. Before you even get to verse 1, it says, "To the choirmaster. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Much like Psalm 56, which we studied last week, there's a clear historical background to this psalm . . . a background that is instrumental for understanding what's going on here. So, again, like we did last week, hold your place here in Psalm 51 and turn with me back to 2 Samuel 11. What I want to do is read the story of what happened to bring this psalm about, because apart from this story, we won't feel the weight of what's written here.

Now many of you may be familiar with this story, and some of you may not, but even if you have heard it, try to imagine it like it's the first time you've ever heard it. One of the reasons I want us to read the whole thing is because, along with the story of the Israelites at the edge of the Promised Land in Numbers 14 that was also a part of our Bible reading this week, this is one of the most tragic stories in all of the Old Testament. This is one reason why I thought we needed to study this psalm today, because whether it's Israel's sin at the edge of the Promised Land, or David's sin here with Bathsheba, we have so much to learn in each of our lives (and in the church) by looking not just at the triumphs, but at the failures of those who have gone before us. So let's read 2 Samuel 11 and the first part of chapter 12 together, both to set up the context of Psalm 51, and to serve as a warning to us in this room.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman

bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing." Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. And he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'"

So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, "The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." David said to the messenger, "Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him."

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought

her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die." Then Nathan went to his house.

And the LORD afflicted the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and he became sick. (2 Samuel 11-12:15)

And so, in light of this story, this is what David prays . . .

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
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.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
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, O God, you will not despise.*

*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)*

Okay, let's walk humbly and simply through this psalm, pondering its meaning and allowing its truth to penetrate our hearts. Obviously, you don't have blanks to fill in on your Worship Guide—just an empty page to write down whatever sticks out to you along the way as we listen to God. I'll try to emphasize various things along the way, but on a whole, I want us to see (and hear) four simple truths here—simple, yet significant truths.

Sin is serious.

First, sin is serious. Notice how David repeats over and over again three different words to describe his sin. You might circle or underline them. Verse 1, "Blot out my *transgressions*." Verse 2, "Wash me thoroughly from my *iniquity*, and cleanse me from my *sin*!" Verse 3, "I know my *transgressions*, and my *sin* is ever before me." Verse 4, "Against you, you only have I *sinned*, and done what is *evil* in your sight." Verse 5, "I was brought forth in *iniquity*, and in *sin* did my mother conceive me." Verse 9, "Hide your face from my *sins*, and blot out all my *iniquities*."

It is offensive.

Sin, iniquity, transgression, evil . . . all different words that combine together to show the seriousness of what David did. Think about sin in this passage. It is offensive. David uses the word “transgression,” and the word means to rebel against divine law. We see the nature of sin here in two ways.

First, sin defies God. Verse 4 says, “*Against you, you only, have I sinned.*” Now obviously, David sinned against Bathsheba. And obviously, David sinned against Uriah. We may think that in our sin, the most serious consequence is the harm that we bring to someone else—a spouse, children, parents, friends, others. In our narcissistic age, we may even be tempted to think that the worst consequence of our sin is on ourselves. When you hurt yourself, that’s said to be the worst of all.

But that’s not biblical. The worst consequence of sin is the fact that you have defied the infinitely holy God of the universe. Your offense to him is the primary problem of sin. Just think about the transition that has come about in David at this point. He has gone from asking, “How do I cover up my sin?” to “How could I do this to God?” This is the place we all need to come to . . . to see our sin for what it is—outright defiance of God himself. When you sin, you defy God. When I sin, I defy God. Now that’s obviously not all that it’s involved in sin.

Yes, sin defies God, but also—sin destroys man. The effect of David’s sin carried beyond David to the murder of a man, a wife losing her husband, and a child dying. Never underestimate the power of sin in your life to cause pain in others’ lives.

It is comprehensive.

Not only is sin offensive, but it is comprehensive. David doesn’t say, “Oh, I messed up a few times.” No, he has a much more comprehensive understanding of sin. He knows sin goes back to the moment he was born. Verse 5 says, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*” That’s not a reference to an immoral relationship David’s mother had, or the specific circumstances surrounding his birth. It’s a reference to the reality that affects every single one of us in this world from the moment we are born.

We are born into sin. We are born with hearts that are prone to defy God and destroy others. I see in my sixteen-month-old a nature that is as sweet and cute and cuddly as can be at one moment . . . and then as defiant and uncontrollable as can be in the next moment. And it’s all of us: we don’t just occasionally sin . . . we are comprehensive sinners, possessing a nature that is prone to disobey.

Sin is pervasive.

Our sin is not just offensive and comprehensive. It is pervasive. David says in verse 3, “*I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*” It’s with me all the time...and it’s not just David here, it’s me. Even in my best deeds on my best days, when I am doing what would seem to be the most noble things, I am still prone to do those things for selfish reasons. Even in my clearest displays of Christ-like actions on the outside, I can harbor some of the most evil thoughts on the inside. I am a sinner, through and through.

Oh, see how pervasive sin was in David’s life! Sin appears so subtly. It all started with a walk outside . . . and a glance across the roof. It all started with a glance. He looked! This is why Jesus says later in Matthew 5:29-30, “*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into*

hell" (Matthew 5:29-30). Now that sounds extreme, but it makes sense, doesn't it? If David only knew the disastrous effects that would spring from this glance that would wreck the rest of his life . . . if only he had the chance to do it all over again . . . he would rather have gouged his eye out. That's the point of what Jesus is saying—take radical measures to guard yourself against pervasive sin that appears so subtly.

Sin appears so subtly and sin harms so deeply. A lustful look leads to adultery . . . adultery to lying . . . lying to murder . . . murder to the death of a child. And beyond this, realize how deep the harm as David's oldest son, Amnon, repeats the same sin David did, only he rapes his half-sister. Sin harms so deeply.

Sin controls so quickly. We're not reading the rest of the story in 2 Samuel, but David's sin just permeated his household. Within two years, his son Absalom was murdering his brother Amnon and rebelling against his father. Sin spirals.

Sin devastates so painfully. David's reign as king eventually ends with strife between the men of Judah in the south and the men of Israel in the north, strife that will one day lead to a divided kingdom. This whole picture started with one look on one day. David . . . and others . . . devastated by sin. That's why he says in Psalm 51, "My bones are crushed . . . my joy is gone . . . I'm guilty of shedding blood." Sin is serious! Oh, see it in your own life! Your sin is serious! You may think it's small . . . it's not small! It's serious.

What we perceive to be the slightest sin is infinitely serious before God. It's a defiance of God, and it brings destruction to you and others. That may sound like an overstatement, but think about it. In Genesis 3 it was one sin. A piece of fruit was eaten, and condemnation came to all men. All people born into sin in the world, save one. And all the effects of sin in the world—murders and rapes and holocaust and world wars and trafficking of girls in Nepal and kidnapping of girls in Nigeria—goes back to that one sin!

Think about what we read in our church's Bible reading plan this week. In Numbers 14 the people of God sin at the edge of the Promised Land, and God says that none of them (except Joshua and Caleb) will see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. None of those who despised me shall see it. Then in Numbers 15,

"While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. And the Lord said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the Lord commanded Moses." (Numbers 15:32-36)

Stoned for picking up sticks. Then in Numbers 16, Korah and others rebel against Moses and ultimately against God, and they're standing with their wives and their kids in front of their tents, and all of the sudden,

"The ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly." (Numbers 16:31-33)

Oh, these things are written down for a reason . . . we are reading these things for a reason . . . God is saying to us over and over again, "Sin is serious. It's serious. It's serious." To a world and a culture and a church that is prone to treat sin lightly, as if it's no big deal . . . a glance here, a thought there, a word here, an action there, lying, lusting, anger, gossip, selfishness, unbelief . . . God is saying, "Any and all sin defies me, and destroys you, and others . . . sin is serious."

God is gracious.

Then there's the second truth. Oh, I am so glad Psalm 51 has a second truth . . . and a third and a fourth for that matter. Thank God Psalm 51 doesn't leave us with the seriousness of sin. The second simple, significant truth is that God is gracious. Just as David uses different words to describe his sin, he uses different words to describe God's grace. You might circle these as well. In verse 1 he says, "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*" Mercy . . . abundant mercy . . . steadfast love. Then he prays, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" Literally, what David is asking is that God would "un-sin" him . . . that God would remove his iniquity from him.

Talk about a bold request . . . to ask the holy God whom you have defied . . . to act as if you have not defied him . . . and David knows there is no basis in *himself* for this. What basis does David have to come before God?

None. David knows that he has committed two sins for which the law of Moses provided no forgiveness: adultery and murder (Murdoch Campbell, quoted in Boice). The penalty for these sins according to God's law was death. David had nothing else to appeal to, so from the start of this psalm, his first words are a cry for mercy. Not according to what I have done or can do to make myself clean, David says, but according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. David is appealing to the grace of God, grace that God revealed about himself in the history of his people. In Exodus 34:6 he says that he is "*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*" who (according to Exodus 33:19) says he will be "*gracious to whom I will be gracious*" and that he will "*show mercy on whom I will show mercy.*"

His cleansing is costly.

Now David knows that such grace, such mercy comes at a cost. David knows that his cleansing is costly. It involves sacrifice. Which leads to what James Boice called the four "most important" yet "least understood" words in Psalm 51:7—"*Purge me with hyssop.*"

I was actually meeting with a small group of guys Thursday morning and we were studying this passage, and the first question was, "What is hyssop?" And the answer to that question is huge. The language David uses all throughout this psalm deals with purification and cleansing, which was the responsibility of the priest among God's people. Someone who was unclean, which we've read about in Leviticus and Numbers, would come to the priest for cleansing. And hyssop was a small plant that, because of the way it was shaped and formed, could be used as a small brush. And so the priests would use hyssop to brush, or sprinkle, blood over a sacrifice or offering. In Exodus 12, when the people of God were given prescriptions for the Passover sacrifice, God says, "*Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it into the blood in the basin that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin*" (Exodus 12:22). Then later Leviticus and Numbers both describe how hyssop was used to sprinkle blood on people or sacrifices in cleansing

ceremonies. So when we hear David pray, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean," David is referring to the process of sacrifice, and specifically the sprinkling of blood.

David knows that the penalty for his sin is death. And if he expects his sin to be removed from him, then the penalty for sin must be paid by something (or someone) besides him. God can't just overlook sin as if it didn't happen. There's a penalty for sin that must be paid, and David knows that, which is why he uses the language of sacrifice here. And this is where we just can't leave Psalm 51 in the Old Testament, for we know this picture of sacrifice is pointing to something (someone) much greater. The author of Hebrews tells us,

"For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." (Hebrews 9:19-22)

So that's what would happen in the OT. But then the author of Hebrews goes on to tell us about how this is fulfilled in the New Testament by our great high priest: "[Christ] has appeared once for all . . . to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26). Later, the author of Hebrews says,

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22).

His forgiveness is free.

In our sin, we can only approach God through the sacrifice of another in the place of our sin. And it is only because of God's costly sacrifice that his forgiveness is free. To you and me. This is the wonder of God's grace. We stand before God guilty in our sin. He is justified in his judgment of us. But in his mercy—in his abundant mercy—he makes a way for you and me to be cleansed of all our sin. Despite all our sin, God makes a way for you and me to be washed whiter than snow.

Confession is the connection.

Which leads to the third truth: sin is serious, God is gracious, and confession is the connection. Sin is serious, God is gracious, and confession is the connection between our sin and God's grace. How can you and I be clean before God? How can your sins—in all of their comprehensive pervasiveness—be wiped completely away? Confession is the connection. That's what this whole psalm is about. It's acknowledgement of sin alongside pleading for forgiveness. "Purge me with hyssop" and "wash me," verse 7. "Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities," verse 9.

Confession involves honesty.

Now this kind of confession involves honesty. David is completely transparent before God here. He's not trying to cover over his sin himself . . . he knows he can't do that. He's not trying to blame other people or his circumstances for his sin, though we so often do that. Well, I was tired . . . or this person had done this to me . . . or I was put in that situation. We're prone to do exactly what our sinful forefathers did in the very beginning. God confronts Adam in his sin, and he says, "It was her fault." God confronts Eve, and she says, "It was the serpent's fault." Ultimately, both of them even blame God—"You gave this woman to me . . . you put us in this garden . . ." Listen to what David says in verses 16-17 here: *"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, O God, you will not despise."*

Now David is not demeaning the sacrificial system—we've already talked about that. David knows sacrifice is important. But he also knows that sacrifice is an outward ritual that must reflect an inward reality.

David knows that in light of his sin, he can't just offer a burnt offering on the outside, as if that would take care of everything. David knows something must happen on the inside . . . in his heart. And this is huge. If we are not careful, religion can become one of the biggest cover-ups for sin in your life and my life.

You and I can live in sin, particularly secret sin . . . sin that nobody else knows about, and gather together in a setting like this and convince ourselves that we're okay. Participating in outward rituals while covering up in the inward reality of sin in our lives. Don't do that. God, help us not to do that. God, help us not to sing songs and listen to a sermon while bypassing brokenness over sin that remains in us. The path to the grace of God is paved with honesty before God.

Confession involves humility.

Confession involves honesty, and confession involves humility. Confession involves exactly what we're seeing in David here . . . you and I coming to God and saying, simply, "I have sinned against you. I have defied you. My sin is ever before me . . . I can't escape it. And I need you to take it away. O God, I need you to take it away. There's nothing I can do; this is something only you can do." Oh, this is the key, and it's one of the realities that sets Christianity apart from other religions in the world.

Non-Christian, we invite you to notice the difference here. There is no prescription for what must be done to make cleansing and forgiveness possible. Pray this many times. Read this many holy passages. Recite this mantra this many times. Spin this many prayer wheels. Fast, take this trip, go to this building, perform this ritual . . . none of that. It's honest, humble, "I can't do it . . . I need you to make me clean, O God."

And when we come before him like this – oh, non-Christian and Christian alike, when we come before him, either for the first time in our lives or on a daily basis in our lives, and we say, "I need you to cleanse me and forgive me," then we find that God is gracious. First John 1:9 says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all righteousness."* Oh, what good news . . . the greatest news in all the world. You can be made right with God! And it's not by doing a list of good works to try to cover up the evil and uncleanness in your heart. It's by trusting in divine grace . . . by casting yourself before him in confession of your need for him.

Oh, I invite you to do that today, if you have never done that. Non-Christian friend, confess not just specific sins, but comprehensive sinfulness to God . . . your defiance of him. Put

your trust in the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf, and through your confession, today, through your confession of need for his grace and trust in his love for you, he will wipe all your sins away. Oh, we invite you to do that today. And then, once you put your trust in Christ, and for all who have put their trust in Christ, live in this! Don't try to hide your sin before God, and don't grow casual in your sin before God. Confess your sin before him . . . daily . . . and receive his mercy as the gift it is, and it is new every single morning.

Restoration is the result.

Which all leads to the last truth here: sin is serious, God is gracious, confession is the connection between the two, and restoration is the result. Oh, notice that David doesn't just want a clean slate; he wants a clean heart. He wants a new start. And he knows he can't make this happen on his own, so he prays, verse 10, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*" Oh, see the emphasis on inner transformation here. David knows his heart is sinful, and he knows he needs God to create a change at the core of his being. He doesn't need to try harder next time, which is how we often deal with sin. "Oh, I messed up . . . well, I'll try to do better next time." No, David knows he doesn't need to try harder; he knows he needs a new heart. A radically new start. And this is exactly what God gives.

God re-creates our heart.

In response to our confession, God doesn't just wipe the slate clean, washing our sins away. No, it gets even better: God re-creates our heart. The word in verse 10 for "create" is the same word that's used in Genesis 1 to describe how God creates the world. Just as God creates a sun and a moon, light and darkness, the earth and the seas, God has the power to create a new heart in you and me. And this is exactly what God does for us in Christ. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 – "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*"

God re-establishes our joy.

God re-creates our heart and God re-establishes our joy. "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation,*" verse 12. Notice, again, that only God can do this. It's God's salvation, not David's, and when God re-creates our heart, he re-establishes our joy. He brings shattered bones to rejoice (verse 8). Oh, see the way this works.

When we sin, when we defy God, we hinder fellowship with God, and the result, as we've seen, is offense against him and the devastating effects of sin in our lives . . . all of which steals our joy away. But in confession, when we come honestly and humbly before God in our sin, he restores our relationship with him, and in the process he re-establishes our joy before him. Oh, don't miss this! Concealment of sin is the pathway to misery. But confession of sin is the pathway to joy. David had tried to conceal his sin, and that didn't work. And mark it down, ladies and gentlemen, it will never work. Concealment of sin always leads to misery. But confession of sin always leads to joy . . . to joy in God.

Now obviously, I want to be careful here to note that this doesn't mean all the consequences of sin go away. Keep in mind what we mentioned earlier, that David's sin had disastrous effects not just in his life, but in the life of his family and really all of Israel for generations to come. And when we sin—when you and I sin—there will be consequences that we face in our lives in this world, and consequences that others will feel the effects of. Sometimes people think, "Well, I've confessed my sin, so why is God still making me pay for it years later?" And the reality is that the effects of sin don't just go away. Praise God that

the ultimate effect of sin (death) has been paid for by Christ, and we're looking forward to the day in the future when Christ returns and all sin and its effects will be removed from the world, and we will dwell with him in a new heaven and a new earth. But until that day, past sin can cause present pain. But even amidst the pain, you can know that in Christ, because of his sacrifice, you have been restored to God. You can know that when God looks at your life, he does not see your sin. Instead, he sees the righteousness of Christ.

I mentioned last week being asked on a radio interview what are some of my biggest regrets in life, and so many things came to my mind . . . things I wish I never would have done . . . or thought . . . or desired. And when I think about those things, I can feel so dirty, so unclean . . . with so much regret. I'm guessing I'm not alone in this, and some of you can so easily beat yourselves up over past sin. So what do you do with that? Here's what you do. At that moment, you go running to the reality that when the God of the universe looks at you . . . that when the only one whose opinion ultimately matters looks at you . . . he sees none of those things.

O God, I thank you that you don't see any of those things. That according to your abundant mercy and steadfast love, you have wiped those things away. And I find . . . you can find . . . deep, abiding, eternal joy in that reality. You are restored to God. You have been reconciled to God. You are in relationship with God, and there is joy in him that supersedes anything and everything else this world offers put together. "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit*" (Psalm 51:12).

We walk with Him.

And so, David says, when God re-creates our heart and re-establishes our joy, by his enabling, we walk with him. By his grace, despite our sinful tendencies, we are able to walk with him willingly. See how David goes here from cleansing from God to communion with God. His sins are not just washed away; he is now willing to follow God wherever and however God leads, according to his Spirit that he has put in us. Oh, this verse (Psalm 51:10) is on the wall in my bathroom so that every morning, Heather and I see this and say, "This is what we need. This is what we most need in the world . . . a clean heart before God, and a steadfast spirit to walk with him today."

We witness to Him.

This is restoration: we now walk with God and we witness to God. Verse 13 – "*I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*" David is compelled by God's grace to proclaim God's grace. If this is true, if God will make anyone who comes to him clean through confession and faith, then this is the greatest news in the world. To people all across Birmingham in a church-saturated city where we cover up sin with cultural religiosity, tell people, "Christ alone can make you clean." And we don't stop here—we go to Muslims here in the United States and around the world—to the Hui and the Arundo and Middle Eastern peoples—we give our lives to go to them and say, "Only Christ can make you clean." We tell Tibetan Buddhist people in Nepal the same message, and hundreds of millions of Hindu worshipers in India the same message, "Only Christ can make you clean." And he will make you clean . . . if you will trust in him.

We worship Him.

This is the result of confession: we walk with him, we witness to him, and we worship him. Verses 14-15: "*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.*" When you realize that you have sinned against God, and that in his grace, he has wiped away all your sins through the sacrifice of his Son on a cross, then worship overflows. We sing . . . loud. We declare praise. And not just in each of our lives

individually, but the psalm closes in verses 18-19 with a corporate cry for all the people of God. David wants the grace he has found in God to be applied across the entire community of Israel . . . that all of God's people might worship him rightly, honestly, humbly, truly, as they rejoice in the good pleasure of God.

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