

# \* The Heights Baptist Church \* Series: The Psalms \*

## \* Topic: Confession \* Psalm 51 \* 9/21/25 \*

### MAIN POINT

Failure to confess our sins and repent as Christians interferes with our relationship with God. Even though we have been forgiven in Christ as Christians and are now justified before God, we need to confess our sins and allow Christ to continually cleanse us to maintain our communion with God.

### INTRODUCTION

#### **What are some consequences of allowing sin in our lives as Christians?**

As Christians, we are justified in Christ, and sins we commit do not remove the fact that we are forgiven in Christ. And yet, sin does war against our souls. It damages us, damages others, and blocks our fellowship with God. Today we will be looking at Psalm 51, which is David's heartfelt confession to God of sin in his life. Through this Psalm we will see the importance of confessing our sins to God in order to maintain a right relationship with Him.

### UNDERSTANDING

### BACKGROUND

*Note to study leader:* The goal of reading these verses in 2 Samuel are simply meant to remind us of the setting in which Psalm 51 was written. Ensure you don't spend too much time discussing these verses, in order to allow adequate time to study Psalm 51.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 SAMUEL 11:1-13

#### **What issues tempted David in verses 1-14? How could he have acted in the face of each temptation?**

David was tempted by three issues in this passage: 1) It sounds like he had too much free time on his hands (People don't seem to do well with too much comfort or free time). 2) He saw Bathsheba, who wasn't clothed at the time. 3) He had a desire to keep his sin with her a secret. We, like David, face many temptations, and like him we always have the choice to resist and flee the temptation, or to give in to it.

#### **Who was affected by David's sin?**

God, David, Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab, and all of Israel who heard of David's sin.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 2 SAMUEL 12:1-14

#### **God is already fully aware of our sin. Why do we still have trouble honestly confessing it?**

#### **Why do you think Nathan used a parable to confront David?**

The parable was intended to help David process what he had done. The goal was to move him toward confession and forgiveness. According to verses 5-6 and 13, it worked. David confessed his sin to God and was moved to repentance after Nathan brought him face to face with his sins and their consequences.

*In failing to confess, Lord, I would only hide You from myself, not myself from you. Augustine*

*It does not spoil your happiness to confess your sin. The unhappiness is in not making the confession. Charles Spurgeon*

**The New King James Version translates a portion of 2 Samuel 12:14 as follows; “by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme...” How is this the case, and how does it relate to the importance of Christians living a life that is “above reproach”?**

Many non-Christians are not routinely confronted with Christ in their daily lives. We as the body of Christ are to reflect His light on others. And if our life reflects badly on Christ, we may be hindering them from coming to Him.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 51:1-6

**What is the main thing David is asking for? How would you describe his attitude?**

The Bible assures us God is willing to forgive us and to cleanse us from every sin (1 John 1:9). Sometimes people avoid asking God’s forgiveness because of their pride. They do not want to admit they have a deep spiritual need only God can meet. Each one of us has sinned and fallen short of God’s design for us (Rom. 3:23). We need to take responsibility for our sins and confess them to God. When we do, we’ll find Him ready to forgive us.

**To what attributes of God does David stake his request for forgiveness?**

**What does David mean in stating that it was only against God he had sinned, when others were clearly hurt (v. 4)?**

David felt the weight of his sin and did the only thing that could get him out of this dilemma: He appealed to God to show His mercy and love, and to forgive him. David was a king and did not have to beg anyone for anything until he realized the gravity of his sin. David longed to be right with God again and did not hide his sins. Hiding sins seems illogical from the outside because God knows everything, but we still try to pretend that we are not sinners even when we talk with God.

**Was David’s repentance focused more on his actions or his heart? Why is this important?**

David’s repentance started with his heart and his inward being. Merely correcting actions is legalism and does not solve the problem. The only way to deal with sin is to go to its beginning and, through the transformation of the heart, one can find the transformation of choices and actions. In the end, David no longer saw people as a way to get what he wanted. Instead, he longed to share God’s ways with others. It’s more important to correct the cause than the effect. As Jesus said, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean (Matthew 15:11). He also tells us that out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 51:7-13

**What changes when we acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness?**

Sin ruins people’s lives every day. David knew this all too well as he pondered the depths of his moral failure. Yet David clung to the hope of God’s forgiveness and cleansing. We need to claim the same vital truth—God’s grace can cover the worst of sins.

**In verses 10-12, what two requests does David make of God in these verses concerning his spirit? What stands out to you about his requests?**

He asks God for a steadfast, or right spirit, and a willing spirit. You would think David would have just promised to do better. David realized he wouldn’t succeed if he used the flesh to try to conquer the flesh. He is asking God to give him a spirit that desires to walk in obedience to God, and a spirit that desires to be steadfast in being obedient to Christ. We need God to do this.

**What is our role in restoring our relationship with God after we have sinned? What is God's role?**

**What stands out to you about David's request for God to restore the joy of his salvation?**

The joy of fellowship with God is one of God's greatest gifts. For David, God's salvation meant deliverance and freedom from the inner consequences of sin. Sin had bound and burdened him. When God restored the joy of his salvation, it meant that God had restored David's relationship with Him.

**In verse 13, how does David describe how God's forgiveness changed how he saw other people?**

Often, we trivialize our sin as "just not that bad." We may try to hide our sin just as David did. For the Christian, repentance is more than just a single act; it's a lifestyle. And we choose this lifestyle because we are confident in the grace and forgiveness that God promises us.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 51:13-19

**What promises does David make to God in these verses? How are they connected to God's grace and mercy? Are these things part of your relationship with God?**

**What sacrifices does the Lord desire in verses 16-19? What do these sacrifices look like in your life?**

God desires to restore sinners completely. Indeed, He will restore us when we turn to Him in genuine repentance and confession. He loves to see the "broken and humble heart" (Ps. 51:17) and will bring His grace quickly. The sacrifice that God desires is the sacrifice of our selfish wills and self-importance. Humble acceptance of God-given renewal and re-creation is necessary. God accepts and forgives those who come to Him openly and humbly in dependence on His grace.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 32:1-5

**How is the tone of this psalm different than the other one?**

Psalm 51 describes the huge burden of unconfessed sin. When we try to suppress this, hoping it will go away, we are left with the burden of guilt. But God delights in forgiving and restoring us.

Psalm 32 describes God's character as including grace and love. In light of His desire and willingness to forgive and restore, we should be quick to confess whenever we find ourselves in sin.

APPLICATION

**Is there any area in your life where you are holding out on God? Let us confess our sins to God and allow Him to cleanse us.**

**Is there any area in your life where sin is getting the best of you? Pray that God would grant us willing hearts, to sustain us, and steadfast spirits, to walk with Him in obedience.**

PRAYER

God, we confess that we are sinful and that we repeatedly sin against You. We praise you and thank you for your great mercy, unfailing love, and great compassion made available to us through the work of Christ on the cross. Thank You for blotting out all our sins. We thank you that your Holy Spirit will not depart from us. Help us to accept your forgiveness and the joy our relationship with you brings. Create in us pure hearts and renew steadfast spirits within us. Grant us willing spirits, to sustain us. Help us to teach transgressors your ways so that others may find salvation. Help us to sing of your righteousness and declare your praises.

## COMMENTARY

### Psalm 51

Introduction: This psalm provides us with a clear historical setting, which was David's confession of his sins after being confronted by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 11–12). David had just seen Bathsheba bathing on her roof, committed adultery with her, and murdered her husband Uriah to cover up his sin. Even though we see his sin on full display, David is described by God as a man after His own heart. It is a great encouragement to believers to know that when God forgives our sin, we are truly forgotten and our intimate relationship with Him is restored!

Verses 1-2: David's plea is one of forgiveness. He relied completely on God's mercy, which is evident in the terms gracious ... faithful love, and abundant compassion. After owning up to his sin, David appealed first to the mercy of God, even before he mentions his sin. No matter the monstrosity of sin, God has infinite amounts of mercy to lavish upon those with repentant hearts. He asks God to blot out his transgressions - this word in the original language is a judicial word. David realizes that he is guilty. He asks that his sin be wiped away and no record would appear against him, which is only possible through the mercy and grace of God. David was deeply sorrowful for his sin and committed to turn from it.

Verses 3-5: Confessing our sins does not mean a shallow reciting of misdeeds. It means owning up to wrongdoing and bringing our lives into line with God's goodness and commands. God can forgive and cleanse us from terrible transgressions. The statement "Against You... alone" does not mean that others were not involved in the effects of the sin, but that the ultimate affront was against God Himself.

Verse 6-7: David knew God wanted to change him from within, not merely externally. When David's heart was right, righteous actions would follow (Matt. 12:34). David also affirmed that the Lord wanted to teach David wisdom deep within. Biblical wisdom is God's gift (Prov. 2:6), and David's turning to God in reverent fear was the beginning of a life change for him (Prov. 9:10). David asked God to purify him thoroughly. Clean signifies both ceremonial and moral cleanness. God would have to do a lot of cleaning to make David whiter than snow; yet David longed for exactly that.

Hyssop is a small, bushy plant used for sprinkling in the Bible, signifying cleansing. Hyssop was used on the first Passover to paint blood on the doorframes during the plague of death of the firstborn in Egypt. It also was the last interaction Jesus had with this world when dying on the cross (John 19:28-30). Hyssop directly relates to the sprinkling of Jesus' blood to cleanse us in Hebrews 12:24.

Verse 8: David longed to hear joy and gladness again in his heart, but his sinful condition prevented it. Only God's cleansing could bring it again. Nathan the prophet's indictment had pierced David's soul, and the ache of David's sin had caused him much pain. He felt really beaten down, helpless under sin's load; and God was his only hope.

Verse 9: Turn your face away (v. 9) literally means "hide your face." God often had warned His people He would turn or hide His face from them when He judged them (Isa. 54:8; Mic. 3:4). Here, David asked the Lord to look at his sins no longer. Forgiveness includes the idea that God no longer would hold David's sin against him (Ps. 32:1).

Verse 10: David asked for a willing spirit—one that would help him follow God closely again. He knew that without such inner conviction, he quickly could return to a life of sin. The renewal of one's heart and spirit are common images representing not only forgiveness (vv. 1-2,7-9) but also a change that enables a person to live in obedience to Yahweh's commands.

Verse 11: David knew his sin merited the worst sort of punishment. David did not want God to set him aside and no longer use him as He had done with Saul, Israel's first king (1 Sam. 16:14). He asked God not to take His Holy Spirit away, as He had done with Saul.

Verse 12: David was filled with remorse and guilt. He needed the Lord to restore the joy of David's salvation to him. He needed God to remove his sin to make room for joy again.

Verses 13-5: David's words sound astounding; he actually believed God still could use him effectively in His service. He would teach others about God's perfect ways, and they could be restored just as God had restored David. David's sins were great and the consequences staggering; yet David trusted in the forgiving, cleansing, renewing grace of God. Publicly praising God and teaching others about Him was part of the response of God's deliverance in a person's life.

Verses 16-17: David recognizes that he cannot pay back God for his sin; and he realizes that even though men despise broken people, this is required in our pathway back to God. David knows that God alone can renew his spirit and redeem him through the forgiveness of his sin. God desires a broken spirit (or heart) rather than acts of religious ritual.

Verse 18: Build the walls (v. 18) refers to strengthening Zion, which is where Yahweh dwelt among His people (65:1).

Verse 19: "Righteous sacrifices" refers to those offered with the proper motives. Outward actions don't matter if the inward heart attitude isn't right.