

The Path of Renewal

Psalm 51

8/11/2019

PD Mayfield

At this time, children ages 4 to 1st grade may attend children's church for age appropriate Bible lesson, songs, and crafts. Please feel free to escort your child to the lobby where a volunteer will greet them. And of course, children are always welcome to remain with us as well.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 51. This summer, we've been going through various Psalms looking at different types of Psalms. Last week, Pastor Randy introduced what is sometimes called a Psalm of confession or a penitential Psalm. Today, we'll look specifically at Psalm 51 as an example of a confessional Psalm. Here, we see how David demonstrates honesty, authenticity, self-awareness, and a genuine longing for God's mercy. So, let's read this Psalm and hear God's word so that we might seek the same renewal that David sought from the Lord.

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

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 blood guiltiness, 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. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, help us to be confessors like David. A lot of times, we are acutely aware of our sin, but we don't know what to do with it. Help us to walk in this path of renewal that David models of depending on your grace and crying out for your mercy. Help us to understand these things. Help us to practice these things. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

On any given day, and more and more in our lives every day, our 24-hour news cycle shows stories of betrayal, murder, assault, and all kinds of forms of violence. It can be quite overwhelming, can it not?

We generally hear these stories on the front end. A man betrays his wife and loses his job because of his present addictions. A woman who arranges her husband's death so she can receive his life insurance. The boss who gets arrested for laundering money from the company. We don't often, however, hear what happens next. After getting help, does that man and wife rebuild their marriage? Does he start over in a new career? What happens to the relationship between that mother and her children now that their father is dead, and she is in jail? Is renewal possible? Can relationships be restored?

What of less severe situations, right? Because no one here has likely ever murdered someone. Maybe at least not physically, but maybe in our mind and in our heart. But less severe situations like your sibling taking your toy again without asking, or saying you would finish that project on Friday, and you failed to deliver again. Our lives are full of these stories, certainly what we can see on the screen. But they're present in our lives where we experience and we also act in ways that offend, that harm. We're often left hurt and full of disappointment and pain. These experiences impact our work and our relationships.

So, how can we experience renewal? Well, today's Psalm shows us that path. This song of confession sung by David who the Bible calls a man after God's own heart, but also says of David that his hands are so defiled with bloodshed that he cannot build the very temple for God that he so longed to do. This man was a poet and a warrior, a shepherd and a king, a sinner in need of mercy and a son established in God's grace, a man who was hardened and blind by his sin but was softened and awakened by the Spirit.

So, let us follow this path of renewal that's offered here in Psalm 51. Let us not neglect the way nor be tripped up by our own steps. Rather, let us walk firmly and confidently in the path of renewal which this path begins and continues in God's mercy.

If you are note takers, here is what we will be discussing today as we unpack Psalm 51. Since this path of renewal begins and continues with God's mercy, we confront our sin with truth, we repent from our sin with humility, we respond with renewed worship. So, we confront our sin with truth, verses 1-6, we repent from our sin with humility, verses 7-12, and we respond with renewed worship, verses 13-19.

If you look at verses 1-2, these opening verses show us that King David is the author of this Psalm. And we learn that he is seeking God. What is he seeking? He calls out for mercy. He desires cleansing, but why? Verse 3, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." So, what has David done? What is his offense? In general, we can understand our sin to be either actively against God's law, or imperfectly falling short of the law's ideal. So, we're either transgressing the law, or we're failing to obey and fulfill the law, having it match the condition of our heart.

So, as we look at verse 1, I want you to look at the section right above it. It says, "To the choirmaster, a Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Some English translations provide titles to Psalms, which these are not part of the original manuscript. However, the instruction here to the choirmaster is actually in the original text. This is verse 1 in the Hebrew Bible even though it probably isn't listed as verse 1 for you in your translation.

Here is the context. Now, not all of David's songs that he writes give any specific context or particular occasion for the Psalm. Now, some of them, they do. There are around 13 that he does. And this one is one of them. And we learn more about the specific context of looking at David's transgressions in 2 Samuel chapter 11 to chapter 12. Chapter 11 is the account of David's actions. The whole matter was disgraceful and shameful and should not be whitewashed. But to briefly summarize, here are some notes to make sense of this context.

David was loafing as king when he should have been working. David lusted after another man's wife. David disregarded several things regarding Bathsheba's integrity and honor. Now, the Bible certainly uses euphemisms here to describe what occurs between them.

But can we talk for a second? David and Bathsheba's relationship didn't start out as a passionate love affair. The text tells us that David sent for her. He took her, and he lay with her. After learning Bathsheba was pregnant, David sought to cover up the whole thing. This is how he did it. First, David brought Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, home from battle to spend several days resting and enjoying the comforts of home. However, Uriah, demonstrating his greater integrity and honor, did not take part in such comforts while his men were engaged in battle.

Seeing that his plans for this cover up wouldn't pan out, David carried out another scheme. He sent Uriah back to the battle with secret instructions to the commander Joab to place Uriah at the heaviest point of fighting and to withdraw in order to allow him to be killed. Let this sink in to you about what's happening here.

It's important to also note that Bathsheba was not the guilty party. She wasn't the seductress. She wasn't the temptress. And in the whispers of the subtext, Bathsheba screams "me too." David coveted her. David committed adultery. David abused his power. David engaged in deceit to Uriah's face and then certainly as he orchestrated his death. And the whole thing reeks. Chapter 11 ends at verse 27 saying, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

The story continues in chapter 12 where Nathan confronts David with the truth of his actions. He tells David a story, a parable. This story involves coveting and theft. It's a story of injustice. And David rightly gets angry. He's roused for justice. He wants to bring to account what has been done and execute the right payment and punishment for what the crime called for. And Nathan then revealed to David, "You are that man." And this rebuke cuts David to his heart. David becomes honestly and acutely aware of his sin before a holy and righteous God.

So, it's in that context that we see Psalm 51. This song of confession, David also acknowledges his sin extends far deeper than just the guilt of his actions. He's honestly reflecting upon the mystery of his condition, his very core, how he understands not only the guilt of his actions but also of his nature. You see, David is not a sinner because he sinned. He has sinned because he's a sinner.

Look at verse 5. "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." David acknowledges that he was brought forth in such a condition. And this verse, though, does not mean that his mother had sinned in conceiving him. Rather, it means that David is aware of his own nature as a fellow human made in the image of God fallen, corrupted, and polluted by sin.

This is where Paul is getting into those dynamics that he's painting in Romans 7. We have this war within us of in-dwelling sin. Even when we are redeemed and washed and forgiven in Christ, there is this nature that abides in us. So, David cries out to God, to the one who can pardon his guilt and cleanse his pollution.

John Calvin writes this about this Psalm, "We have no adequate idea of the dominion of sin unless we conceive of it as extending to every part of the soul and acknowledge that both the mind and heart of man have become utterly corrupt. Who, indeed, can save us?"

So, understanding the scope of these events in David's life actually helps shed light on the extent of David's song. This song of repentance and renewal and this restoration of joy because nothing about the context is fun or exciting or worth going on about, rather, in shame and sadness and lament. And yet, there is this source of joy that can only come about through this path of renewal. The depth of our sin is met with God's steadfast love and abundant mercy, amen? The depth of our sin. If it goes to the depth of our actions, that's one thing. We can all agree, yeah, I did something wrong.

Brene Brown, a researcher of vulnerability and shame, I think she has been doing great things. She's very popular inside the church and outside the church. When it comes to dynamics of the heart and dynamics in relationships, she is doing great things. I don't know if I can come up with a better saying of clarifying the difference between guilt and shame. Sometimes we use those words interchangeably. I feel guilty, when really what we're experiencing is the shame of what we've done, or the shame of what we

haven't done but we should have. And she pithily says, "Guilt is, 'I made a mistake.' Shame is, 'I am a mistake.'"

Shame does that. It lies and distorts the reality by actually saying, I am this mistake. If I'm doing these things, then I am such a horrible person. On one hand, by what we're looking at here, but David acknowledging his core nature, there is some truth to that. But we're not so utterly corrupted that we are outside the reach of God's grace.

And so, this path of renewal hinges on that distinction between guilt and shame because if we are focused upon, "I am a mistake," which are the lies, the distortions, maybe people are even saying that in a way to shame us. But it actually takes us off the path because the path takes us through the acknowledgment of what mistakes we've made. It's actually owning up to them, taking responsibility, and confronting our sins with the truth. And when we confront sin with the truth, we are met with God's grace. Let me say it again. The depth of our sin is met with God's steadfast love and abundant mercy.

When we think we've gone lower, He is there with us to meet us. When we think we've done something that there is no way we can return from this, He is already there to comfort us, to call us back, to welcome us, and to show His tenderness and kindness. He is there again and again. So, when we confront sin with truth, we are met with God's grace.

Secondly, because of God's mercy, we repent from our sin with humility as we look at verses 7-12. Notice the language David uses. He uses words clearly that are asking specifically for the Lord to work. So, let's kind of run through them. Verse 7, "Purge me with hyssop," this image comes from a cleansing ceremony in Leviticus 14 upon which a person is being healed from a skin condition. David, of course, is not believing that the sprinkling of the hyssop actually takes away his guilt, but he does recognize that in this covenant of God through Moses that he recognizes that such ceremonies were God's grace to His people in that time to highlight the inner condition to which such ceremonies point. They're symbols. They point to what God is doing. It's representing the cleansing that God is doing by His grace.

Likewise, in verse 7, "wash me," this word is so powerful. It's not taking a bath. It's not washing the surface. This is washing your laundry in the old tub scrubber, the washboard. This is washing clothes in a trough that you're treading. You're treading the dirt out. The cleansing agent is getting to the very fibers of that garment. It's not just cleaning the surface. It's cleaning and penetrating from deep inside.

Verse 8, "Let me hear joy and gladness," David wishes to not dwell upon his guilt, but rather rejoice again in God's grace. Verse 9, "Hide your face from my sins," David longs for the Lord to look upon him with favor and delight. When he asks to blot out my transgressions, he is asking them to be wiped away. Now, I use a fountain pen. I don't know what you use anymore with digital technologies. But to blot something out, once it's penetrated the paper, it's not really coming out. And so, this work of the Lord to blot out, to wipe, to clean is only a divine action of the Lord for them to be remembered no more.

Verse 10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit," David knows it is not just about remorse and then putting on a good performance. No. This renewal is from the inside out and is completely of God so that he or others can only boast in the Lord and cannot boast in our own self-willed goodness. We're either faking it to the point where we're crushed with our despair because we can't fake it but for very long, or we're prideful and we're puffed up because we think we're doing it. But when we are measured up against the holiness of this righteous God, it's like walking into Home Depot when your spouse has said, go pick up some white paint. And you walk up to the wall of swatches, and you realize there's not just one color of white paint. If you put white paint next to white paint, there's always going to be a shade that is clearer and crisper and cleaner and whiter.

Verse 11, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me." Now, this verse raises some interesting questions. Some scholars think that this verse particularly focuses on David's kingly role, his unique role in the nation of Israel, and that he is asking the Lord to not take away his favor as king. Now, this certainly fits the backdrop because David would have been very much aware

of what happened to Saul because he is now king because of the Lord removing His favor from Saul. So, now, thinking about the depth of his sin and the ripple effects of those consequences of his sin, there is a good sense of shame. There is a mirror to the face of acknowledging what has happened, what your choices have done. But in that gap, what is the Lord going to do? I've sinned. What is the Lord going to do? I've broken His law. What is the Lord going to do? And in his role as king, it certainly makes sense for David to be fearful in wondering about his fate.

However, other scholars focus on the fact that this is a Psalm that is meant for the people of Israel and that there is something that is kind of removed away from the particularity of David to recognizing this question that we may all ask in that gap from confession to what is the Lord going to do? Would we experience the same fate?

I personally think it's helpful to know this background to consider the psychological and emotional experience that David might be having in the midst of his confession. It's also important to remember that because this is a Psalm to be sung and to be embraced by Christians corporately and certainly in your own confession personally, this is not evidence or this is not a proof-text, if you will, of the possibility that the Lord takes His Holy Spirit away from you. That is not the implication here. But rather, in our sense of guilt, we wonder, right? But in that rhetorical gap, we are met with the grace and mercy of God in His abundance and steadfast love. And that question is quickly and certifiably quelled. Of course the Lord's grace would return His face to us and not cast us away from Him.

This is where the rubber meets the road. This is where Peter, for example, when he's hearing Jesus teach about forgiveness, Peter asked the question, "Should I forgive my brother seven times?" He's hearing Jesus. He's connecting the dots, and he's making the connection of the implication. If I am to forgive, there is no limit to that forgiveness. There is no time when it runs out. There is no sixth time, we're good; seventh time, we're not. It's again and again, the Lord shows Himself good and kind and gracious.

Verse 12, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit." Here, again, is capturing what he mentioned already in verse 7, this joy and gladness, this rejoicing, the joy of salvation that this is the outcome of the Lord's washing. Renewal through repentance is not about feeling regret only, the regret due to our poor decisions, or wishing to avoid negative consequences. Rather, it is acknowledging that we have gone against or we've failed to live up to the holy God.

For example, this certainly plays out in life in other ways, but it's very poignantly observed in our children. It's like when a child cries after hitting his brother because it hurts that he got caught versus that child who may cry because he knows he was wrong, and the hitting of his brother hurt his brother. That's the brokenness of the heart. It is not crushed in spirit because you are waiting and anticipating the punishment. It's longing and anticipating the grace so that there may be restoration. There might be healing between the offended parties.

We must rightly understand any sorrows associated with our sins certainly might involve consequences. And you can read what plays out in David's life. It's heart wrenching. This is not punishment for sin as if there is some penalty to be paid, and certainly now as we move into the new covenant of Christ, this is not something that we add to the work of Christ on the cross. We don't come to Him with confession as a penance that somehow makes satisfaction for His grace or added to His grace. Rather, we come to Christ running because He pours out His grace. And our confession is merely trusting with full assurance and hope that He will do it.

Here in this time of repentance, though, it's an acknowledging also of our patterns and our rituals, our strategies for how we evade this grace, how we evade this work of God in our lives. How do you evade God's mercy? How do you say, I've sinned, I've got to make it up, I'll do this double next time? We deny our need for His grace and mercy perhaps because we whitewash our sin to be nothing. But more often than that, we create this sense that our infractions actually don't matter, and we deny that we're actually guilty of sin. And John speaks to that in his letter.

We also deny His mercy's power. Perhaps we say, thank you, but I certainly owe you something. This desire to pay for God's mercy can show up on the front end, as we've already talked about, such as I must do something to receive His mercy. But it also can show up on the backend like, I must do something now in return for His mercy. Both of those are a form of payment.

Rather, this Psalm and the beauty of the gospel of Jesus shows that it is a gift that cannot be earned, and it's not a gift that can be paid back. It is certainly and only a work of Christ. When we repent of our sin with humility in these ways, we truly experience God's pardon. There's nothing left to be wondered about that. When we confess our sin and repent with humility, we have God's pardon in Christ.

As we move away from repentance, it doesn't stop there. Because God is merciful, we now respond with renewed worship looking at verses 13-19. Verse 13, he says, "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." In the Psalms, transgressors and sinners are often the people of Israel. They're not people outside Israel. They're people as members of the covenant. So, what he's saying here, as he moves from repentance to renewal and restoration, there is a sense that we want to contribute to the bringing back of other people who are also straying from the path of this renewal.

John Calvin says this,

"Those who have been mercifully recovered from their falls will feel inflamed by the common law of charity to extend a helping hand to their brethren. And in general, such as are partakers of the grace of God are constrained by religious principle and regard for the divine glory to desire that others should be brought into the participation of it."

Just as people participate in bringing us back, confronting us with our sin, walking alongside us to encourage us to repent and find this renewal in Christ, likewise, we then go out in a renewed sense of encouraging others.

And it goes further into our worship. Verse 14, "my tongue will sing aloud." Verse 15, "my mouth will declare your praise." Verse 17, "sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." Now, this is where we understand the Psalm in connection to what it means as followers of Christ. We recognize the validity of the sacrifices that were set up in the Old Testament. David is not disparaging them as insignificant or ineffective. But what we're recognizing in the story of God's redemption is that it is finished. There is no more sacrifice to be had except our response of worship to God, our reasonable sacrifice, our "living sacrifice" as Paul says in Romans 12. That we would respond to the mercies of God trusting in Christ by faith.

So, as we do this in our personal lives, as we do this as a community, may we be such a community that we are marked by confession and repentance, confession and renewal. This involves trust. It certainly involves trust with the Lord that He does this. But it involves trust with one another. Each person must cultivate the trust in his or her own heart for God's word. God's word is trustworthy to recount all that is necessary for salvation and although God employed men to write His words, it is holy inspired. It's infallible and free from error in all that it teaches. The word is likewise sufficient. It's necessary for salvation, and it's sufficient that we would grow in our faith and practice.

This trust is important because as we lean out, it's scary. How many of you just had a thought that you would never want anyone else to know about? That sense of trust with the Lord and with the brothers and sisters in Christ is sacred and significant. It's challenging to cultivate, but it's something that we must cultivate as the people of God, nonetheless.

In addition to trust, we must practice. As we remind ourselves of God's grace and depend upon Him for mercy, let's walk in this truth. Let's encourage one another. And at times, this experience will be intimate and close, and we'll experience richness and depth in our relationships. But at other times, it's

going to be awkward. It's going to be clunky. But it's worth it. Keep going. Keep doing it. Keep trying. Keep starting. Continue to repair breached trust and cultivate renewed trust. Keep doing it.

At other times, we may experience the messiness of building such a community. We may sin against each other. At our worst, we can even do it on purpose. But certainly, we very often just do it accidentally through miscommunication and misunderstandings. This path of renewal that we walk with God is the same path of renewal we must walk with one another so that our broken relationships can be repaired, that our neglected relationships can be renewed.

This is the encouragement of this song, that we would take these words and we would embrace them in our heart for our confession, trusting in the Lord who pardons, the Lord who renews. And that we would experience life in Him and that we might likewise find our joy in Him and in our relationships because when we respond with renewed worship, we experience God's renewal.

I'm going to close with a quote from my favorite dead guy, Herman Bavinck. He says this, "The idea that a prolonged state of misery has to precede a state of grace reached numerous pious circles," he's talking about the second great awakening in the 1800s, "into this day. One encounters in the church a great many Christians who year after year complain about their sins, but almost never enjoy the heartfelt joy in God through Christ, nor ever arrive a peaceful and quiet life of gratitude."

Let me say that again more slowly. He's speaking about a form of piety that wants to emphasize and exist and wallow in that struggle of our sin recognizing its stench, recognizing its wretchedness. And we feel like we have to feel that really good before we can move on and really warrant God's forgiveness.

"The idea that a prolonged state of misery has to precede a state of grace reached numerous pious circles into this day. One encounters in the church a great many Christians who year after year complain about their sins, but almost never enjoy the heartfelt joy in God through Christ, nor ever arrive a peaceful and quiet life of gratitude."

That is the hope of the gospel, to be restored and reconciled and redeemed back to God, to experience heartfelt joy, to have peace, to have full and true and lasting gratitude.

Psalms 51 is this wonderful example for the church to sing, for us to sing and to notice that the notes that David sings here, he does not emphasize upon the substance of his sin. But rather, notice where the cymbals are crashing. Notice where the horns are blasting. Notice where the chins are lifted, when the arms are raised, that upon the supply of God's mercy, it's not wallowing in our sin, but rejoicing in God's mercy.

One final quote. Reggie Kidd writes on worship in his book *With One Voice*, he says, "With a musical instrument in his hands and a song on his lips, this man," referring to David, "admits the worst about who he is and what he has done, and in so doing finds greater tenderness and confidence in his relationship with God. David opens the floodgates of the human heart." And I would add that he walks the path of renewal. May the Lord do this in your life. May the Lord do this in our community. Let's pray.

Father, we pray to you. We rejoice in the gift of salvation. And we ask that you would return our joy of that salvation. Would you comfort those here whose consciences are seared; whose hearts are hardened with sin that are so entangled that they don't know what to do? They try, and they seem to always fall flat. We are tired. We are fatigued. We are apathetic. Warm our hearts, O God. Move us to repentance and faith in ways that we would find forgiveness and joy as we are restored in you. We beg of you, have mercy on us according to your mercy. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.