

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus
Swift Creek Baptist Church (SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, August 1, 2021

Psalm 51:1-17 “Confession, Repentance and Forgiveness”

Intro. The superscription at the top of Psalm 51 gives the background of this Psalm. You can read about it in 2 Samuel 11-12. King David had committed some terrible sins. He had broken at least 2 of the 10 commandments. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then he was responsible for the death of her husband, Uriah. David added to his sin by trying to cover up his sin for about a year, partly by marrying his widow almost immediately. He refused to confess his sin before God or man. I’m sure he had tried to rationalize away what he had done. After all, he must have reasoned, what he did was common practice for other kings. People today still rationalize away their sin by saying, “Everybody else is doing it.”

But is it wise to hide your sin, or rationalize your sin? King David’s wise son Solomon said in Proverbs 28:13, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” As someone has said, “Secret sin on earth is open scandal in heaven.”

We all sin, but once you do, you have a choice to make. You can either confess your sin, or you can conceal your sin. If you conceal your sin, you will experience some of the same problems David did. You see, unconfessed sin and unresolved guilt will negatively affect you in several ways. It will affect you *emotionally*. David became a miserable man. He lost his joy, as vv. 8 & 12 indicate. Sin will rob you of peace. In the last of v.3 David said, “my sin is always before me.” He felt dirty all over. He experienced a persistent sense of guilt. A year had passed, but the accusing finger of conscience was still pointing at him. Sin continually oppressed and haunted his spirit. Indeed, someone said that “A guilty conscience is the most terrible companion in the world.” Then, unresolved guilt will affect you *physically*. You may get ulcers and develop other problems. David’s physical problems were so bad, that it felt like his bones were being crushed under the load of guilt, as v.8 indicates. Over in Psa. 32 David says this: “... day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer” (v.4). Finally, unconfessed sin certainly will affect you *spiritually*. David speaks of this in vv.10-11. He knew he wasn’t close to God any longer and felt he was in danger of being banished from God. The Holy Spirit no longer filled his life with power and joy. David no longer enjoyed going to the temple to worship. This is implied in the first part of v.8. The reason some people don’t go to church is because they have unconfessed sin in their lives. When they do go, they feel bad while in church, so they stay away. As v.13 indicates, sin was affecting his testimony before unbelievers. So the most costly thing on earth is human sin and the guilt that results from it! Remember, as the song says, “sin will take you farther than you want to go....” The person that breaks the laws of God also breaks himself in the process. There is no misery like the misery when a person is away from God.

Haven’t you experienced these problems at some time in your life? You may be experiencing them right now. Well, I want to give you God’s prescription for the healing of your spirit, your emotions, and your body. Let me show you from Psalm 51 how you can be forgiven, cleansed, and healed from the problem of unconfessed and unforsaken sin. First:

I. CONFESS YOUR SINS TO GOD

That is the starting place. In v.3 David says, “For I acknowledge my transgressions....” The word translated “acknowledge” is literally the word for “know.” Here it means, to “recognize, to make known, acknowledge, confess.” You do not confess for God’s sake. He already knows your sin. You do it for *your* sake. So don’t just reluctantly *admit* your sins, but confess them to God. Confession in the New Testament (1 John 1:9) literally means “to say the same thing.” It is to agree with God that what you did or said was wrong, and as David says in the last of v.4, God would be right and just to judge you for it. If we say the same thing about our sins that God says about them, and we truly mean it, then we are confessing sin. Beware of “cheap confession.” Merely praying with the lips, “Lord, I have sinned, please forgive me!” is not confession. Be specific.

Then v.6 says, “Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts....” You should be truthful and honest with God about your sin. Usually, man is not very honest with God and others about sin. We tend to excuse our sin. We come up with euphemisms for sin. Instead of lust we call it a love affair. We are constantly trying to minimize and nullify what the Bible says about sin.

Now there are several aspects of confession that I want to bring out from our text:

A. Acknowledge Personal Responsibility – Notice in vv.3-4a how often the personal pronoun is used (read). David’s eyes are not on someone else; his eyes are on himself and on his Lord. When David finally confessed, he did not blame Bathsheba or anyone else, but he put the spotlight on himself, revealing personal sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they blamed others. Adam blamed Eve and even God Himself, and Eve blamed the serpent. Today our society shifts blame all the time. We blame our circumstances, or blame our environment, or blame other people for our problems and faults. But *you* are morally responsible, not only for how you act, but also for how you react. We should follow David’s example and accept personal responsibility when we sin.

B. Acknowledge Your Sin by Name – In v.3 David sees the plurality and immense number of his sins, and makes open declaration of them. He says, “For I acknowledge my transgressions....” Yet there he does not yet get specific. But notice v.14, “Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God....” The bloodshed that David refers to is the murder of Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba. In an attempt to cover his sin, David had Uriah put on the front lines of battle, so that he would likely be killed, which was exactly what happened. He had been the means of the death of that good and faithful soldier, and he now confesses that fact. He puts himself down as one worthy to die (cf. v.4b).

So the next time you realize that you have sinned, go ahead and confess to God the specific sins you have committed. Be honest about it. Agree with God it was wrong. Then, you must take the next step:

II. REPENT OF SIN

True confession of sin involves repentance, a sincere change of mind. Now before you will repent, you must experience at least two realities:

A. Recognize the Seriousness of Sin - In v.4 David expresses one reason why sin is so serious. He said, "Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight...." He sinned against man, but he understood it was mainly against God. The returning prodigal in Luke 15 rightly said to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and against you." Notice that he first acknowledged that his sin was against God. This is what makes sin so serious. It is against God! Sin is first and foremost a violation of the law of God, not just the law of man. Sin is spitting in the face of a loving and holy God.

Though sin is primarily against God, others are certainly affected by sin. David's one night of sinful passion led to the destruction of a marriage, and the death of a good man. Lives can be ruined by our sin. That has happened all too often.

Another reason sin is so serious is because of the true nature of sin. As you look at the Psalm you find that David used four specific words to describe his sin. Sin is serious: 1) Because it is a Transgression (v.1b), for sin is crossing a forbidden line. God has put up certain boundaries in this life. Just as He has certain physical laws, even so He has certain moral laws. For example, God has drawn a line around another person's spouse, and said, "You shall not commit adultery." You are not to cross that line by becoming sexually intimate with them. But David crossed that line with Bathsheba. He was guilty of willful rebellion. Sin is an act of defiance. 2) Because it is Iniquity (v.2a). This refers to something that is twisted, perverted or distorted. It is when people call what is wrong right, and what is bad good. When we call immorality "love" we have committed iniquity. We have twisted and distorted something beautiful, into something sinful. Morally, it is something that is altogether wrong. You can't excuse it; you can't in any way condone it. How society has become so twisted and perverted today, especially in terms of sexuality. 3) Because it is Sin (v.2b). This is to miss the mark. The picture is of an archer who draws back his arrow and aims at a distant target but his aim is off and the arrow falls short. Doing God's will should be our aim in life, but when we sin, we miss the mark. Sin is deviating from God's plan and purpose for our life. 4) Because it is Evil (v.4). When was the last time you called something *you* had done, "Evil"? That also means what is bad and injurious. How many times have you agreed with God that what you have done was downright evil? Not often, for we make tend to make light of sin. It's no big deal, we say. It was just a little white lie. So you see, it is not until you recognize sin for the evil that it is that you will turn from it.

Illustration: Do you remember how I said that sin is like missing the mark? In April of 2003, 23-year-old professional knife thrower Jayde Hanson attempted to repeat the pace of his world record effort of 120 knives thrown in two minutes. He made his attempt before over one million British television viewers. But they were shocked as they watched him "nick" the head of his female assistant. Afterwards, he told a local newspaper, "In 11 years of performing, I've only hit my assistant on five occasions."¹ Even a professional will miss the mark and people can get hurt. Even so, other people are sure to get hurt when we miss the mark of God's will for our lives.

Recognizing the seriousness of sin is one aspect of both confession and repentance. You must agree with God that what you did wrong was wrong, a willful transgression, a sin, something that is downright evil. Only then will you repent, or change your mind about doing that sin in the future.

So once we understand the seriousness of sin, then that should lead us to the next step:

¹ "Knife Thrower Slices Assistant on Live TV," (4-10-03); submitted by Jerry De Luca, Montreal West, Quebec.

B. Experience Godly Sorrow - V.17 says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.” David uses two similar images of what should happen when we confess our actions as truly sinful. We will become heart-broken over our sin. Then the word “contrite” literally means “crushed.” We make light of sin, but true repentance does not take place until we see the heaviness of sin. 2 Cor. 7:10 says, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted....” David must have finally experienced deep, godly sorrow over what he had done.

Have you ever wept before the Lord after you realized that you have sinned against a loving God? Revival comes when God’s people stop making light of sin, and instead experience the load of sin crushing and breaking their spirit to the point that they turn from sin and to the Lord. And that leads to my next point. Not only should you confess your sins, and repent of your sins, but also:

III. TURN TO GOD AND TRUST IN HIM

This is where David actually begins in this Psalm. He first turns to God. The answer to your sin problem is God. In v.1 David says, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies...” When you do wrong, you can’t make up for it by good works or religious rituals. As we see here, your hope for forgiveness rests wholly upon the grace and mercy of God. Pardon of sin must ever be an act of pure mercy and therefore to that attribute of God the awakened sinner must flee. Titus 3:5 says, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us....”

So as you turn to God in your time of confession and repentance, do this. First:

A. Trust in God’s Provision of a Sacrificial Atonement – In v.7 David says, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean....” Why does David make a reference to hyssop here, when talking about forgiveness and cleansing of sin? Well, he knew his Old Testament well. Hyssop was an aromatic desert shrub under three feet tall with clusters of yellow flowers.² It was used for 3 similar purposes. First, it was used at the Passover to apply the blood of the sacrificial lamb to the doorposts (Ex. 12:22). The lamb died that the firstborn might be saved. Second, it was used in the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14:2-7). Once again, hyssop and sacrificial blood were both used in the cleansing ritual. Third, hyssop was used in the purification of sin involving the sacrifice of a red heifer (Num. 19:2-6). What was common to all three was the fact that it was used in association with blood sacrifice.

The point is that David understood that forgiveness of sin could only come through sacrifice, for hyssop was always associated with sacrifice. And the sacrifices of the Old Testament were all pointing to the cross of Jesus Christ. Speaking of Jesus, Paul wrote, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). And every time you find forgiveness in the New Testament, the blood of Christ is close by. God never forgives sin apart from the shed blood of Christ. Never. Never! The hymn declares the truth, “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!” We must apply the blood of Jesus to our lives by faith in Jesus. God does not forgive sin just because He is loving. The only reason He can forgive sin is because His Son paid the penalty of sin. The exercise of His love must satisfy His attribute of justice. As the prophet predicted, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...” (Isa. 53:5). And now with

² Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary.

open arms He can say to you, “I can extend mercy to you because my Son died for you.” Oh, the high cost of sin, and the high cost of providing forgiveness! Forgiveness is free to the sinner, but it is not cheap; it cost Jesus Christ His life’s blood. We receive forgiveness primarily because of what He has done, not because of our prayers or tears. The next time you are tempted to sin, think about what it cost Jesus! The high cost of cleansing sin ought to make us hate sin and want to turn from it.

Now based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you can take the next step:

B. Trust in God’s Offer of Forgiveness – In the last of v.1, David prayed, “...Blot out my transgressions.” Likewise, in the last of v.9 he said, “...blot out all my iniquities.” The Hebrew word “blot out” is found in Num. 5:23, where God said, “And the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water.” Isa. 44:22 says, “I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions....”³ If you have ever been caught and convicted of breaking the law, that goes on your record, or at least it used to! Even so, over in Rev. 20:12 the Bible says, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. ...And the dead were judged according to their works.” Our sins are recorded in heaven, but David is saying, “My sins are all recorded against me; but, Lord, erase my sins from your book.” Even so, Peter said in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out⁴....” [Illustrate with a slide erasing sins?]. Isn’t forgiveness a wonderful thing?

What is one of the big problems that people have in asking for forgiveness? One problem is this. We are concerned that we will turn around and just repeat the same sin. Habitual sin is hard to break free from. In v.5 David acknowledged his sin nature. He said, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” It is as if he said, not only have I sinned this once, but I am in my very nature a sinner. The fountain of my life is polluted, and therefore the streams that flow from that fountain will also be polluted. I naturally lean to forbidden things. The one sin against Bathsheba was but one falling stone from a whole mountain of iniquity. So can we receive more than just forgiveness? Can we avoid repeating the same sin that we have just received forgiveness for? Indeed so, and that leads to another important step:

C. Trust in God’s Provision for Victory over Sin - The sin nature is like that old wire grass or nut grass in many yards. You can pull up the grass, even some below the surface. But before you know it, it will be back. Why? Because the roots are still very much alive. God has to deal with the root of the sin problem, or you will not have much victory over sin in your life. So this is what we need to do:

1. Trust in God’s Cleansing – David prays in v.2, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”⁵ Then in v.7 he said, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” It is not enough to blot out the sin from God’s legal record. David understands that he needs to be cleansed and purified. David is not just interested in avoiding the punishment his sins deserve, but he wants God to cleanse him of sin. He is sick of sin. He would have God Himself cleanse him, for none but He could do it

³ It is used in Ex. 32:32, where Moses asks God to blot out his name from the book of life if He does not forgive the sin of Israel (cf. Deut. 9:14; Ps. 69:28). In 2 Kings 21:13 God said, “...I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish....”

⁴ The word used in the LXX of Psa. 51:1 is *εξαλειψον*. The word used in Acts 3:19 is *εξαλειψον*! That word actually refers to washing the ink off the parchment. It is not blotted over but washed away!

⁵ That is an example of Hebrew poetic parallelism. The second phrase simply explains further the first.

effectually. The hypocrite is content if his garments are washed; but the true petitioner cries to God, “wash me.” The careless soul is content with a nominal cleansing, but the truly-awakened conscience desires a real and practical washing, and that of a most complete and efficient kind. “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.” It is viewed as one great pollution, polluting the entire nature. He desires to be rid of the whole mass of his filthiness.

2. By Creating Within Us a Clean Heart – He pleads in v.10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God....” He was not asking for renovation or reformation. Instead, he said, “Create.” What! Has sin so destroyed us, that the Creator must be called in to do His creative work yet again? (It is the same word used in Gen. 1:1). Indeed so, for sin has ruined God’s original creative work. “Create in me.” I, in outward fabric, still exist; but I am empty, desert, void. Lord, you made a man in the world at first; Lord, make a new man in me! None but God can create a new heart. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” When you become a Christian God gives you a new heart, and with the power of that new life within He can enable you to live right. Oh, dear friend, don’t just ask for forgiveness over and over again. Ask God to give you a new heart. We should not only seek forgiveness, but purity of heart so that we may not repeat the same sin.

3. By Renewing a Steadfast Spirit – He prayed in the last of v.10, “renew a steadfast spirit within me.” The word translated “steadfast” means “settled, firm, established.” David *had* been strong in his faithfulness to keep the commandments of God. But now, conscious of his own weakness, he seeks to be kept on his feet by a power superior to his own. That royal Spirit is able to make us walk in all the uprightness of holiness. Such influences will not enslave but emancipate us; for holiness is liberty, and the Holy Spirit is a free Spirit. The heart is the rudder of the soul, and until the Lord take it in hand, we steer in a false and foul way.

Friend, you can’t live the Christian life on your own. You must be born again (John 3:3). You must be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. You must rely upon God, and not just your own strength. Have you been born again?

Now once you have confessed your sin, repented of sin, and placed your faith in God, then, and only then, can you reach the last step:

IV. CLAIM THE BLESSINGS OF FORGIVENESS

I have already shared with you the problems you will experience if you cover and hide your sin. Now I want to motivate you by the blessings you will receive if you confess and forsake sin. In Ps. 32:1 David said, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven....” He wrote those words after Psalm 51 was prayed, and he had received forgiveness from God. What are some of the blessings of forgiveness?

A. God Will Restore Joy and Gladness - This joy follows pardon and purity. In v.8 we see that David expected to “hear joy and gladness” once again after receiving forgiveness and cleansing. That is why he prayed in v.12, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.” Don’t settle for cheap thrills and temporary sinful pleasures. Don’t accept the devil’s substitute for the joy of the Lord, such as drugs and alcohol. Follow the steps of Psalm 51, and you can have lasting joy! So confess and repent of your sins, and get your joy back.

There is another blessing I see here:

B. God Will Restore Your Witness and Usefulness – In v.13 David said, “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.” He knew that God can only use clean vessels.

Conclusion: Wouldn't you like to end the guilt, and enjoy the peace of forgiveness? Wouldn't you like to have your sins wiped off your record? Wouldn't you like to have the joy of the Lord? Wouldn't you like to be used by God to bring blessing to others? Then confess your sins to God. Repent of it. Turn away from it. Trust in Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. His suffering and shed blood is more than enough to wash away your sins. So will you do business with God this morning? May our observance of the Lord's Supper be a special time of making things right with God.

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2021; J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 402-407 only; Ken Trivette (notes from his sermon on this text entitled, “How to Look at Sin”); Jerry Vines, notes from Pastor's Conf. Message & *Fire in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977), 13-26; Warren Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1993). Morgan read, but not used.

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