

Psalm 51 “When You Need to Pray the Sinner’s Prayer”^{**1}

Series: “Learning from the Psalms: How to Put God at the Center of Life”

Main Idea: What should we as children of God say to God after we’ve sinned? In Psalm 51 we find the record of David’s prayer after he committed adultery and murder. David expressed six heartfelt things to God in his sinner’s prayer, and we can learn from him.

- I. Ask for forgiveness (1-2).
 - A. David knows he doesn’t deserve it.
 - B. David appeals to the character of God.
 1. God’s love is unfailing.
 2. God’s mercies are great.
- II. Admit your guilt (3-6).
 - A. David confesses that he has sinned (3).
 1. He is guilty of transgression.
 2. He is guilty of sin.
 3. He is guilty of iniquity.
 4. He is guilty of evil.
 5. He is guilty of bloodguilt.
 - B. David confesses that he has offended God (4).
 1. The real problem with sin isn’t that it messes up my life.
 2. The real problem is that I have rebelled against the Owner of the universe.
 - C. David confesses that he is a sinner (5).
 1. We are not inherently good people.
 2. We begin life with a sin nature.
 - D. David confesses that he lacks what God desires (6).
 1. God wants more than the absence of sin.
 2. God wants hearts that are loyal to Him.
- III. Ask for cleansing (7-9).
 - A. God doesn’t just overlook sin.
 - B. God washes sin away by means of a cleansing agent.
 1. The result is snow white purity.
 2. The result is joy.
- IV. Ask for restoration (10-12).
 - A. David admitted what his sin did to him.
 1. Sin corrupts our heart.
 2. Sin makes us spiritually weak.
 3. Sin short-circuits our relationship with God.
 4. Sin makes God-pleasing service impossible.
 5. Sin takes away our joy.
 6. Sin takes away our appetite for the things of God.
 - B. David asked God to do what God alone can do.
- V. Anticipate a God-centered life (13-17).
 - A. David said he would use what he learned to help other sinners (13).
 - B. David said he would use his lips to praise God (14-15).
 1. Sin makes us become self-focused.
 2. The evidence of true repentance is a God-focus.
 - C. David said he would give God what He wants most, *brokenness* (16-17).
- VI. Ask God to bless the rest of His people (18-19).
 - A. David’s sin affected more than David.
 - B. David’s restoration also affected more than David.
 1. God gave David another son.
 2. God gave the world a Savior.

Make It Personal: Is there any unconfessed sin in your life?

1. We can’t undo the past.
2. We can experience forgiveness through Christ.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see WBC 8/12/07.

The sinner's prayer. We often think of the sinner's prayer as a conversation that an unsaved person needs to have with God. And certainly the unsaved person needs to pray the sinner's prayer, to call upon God, confess his hell-deserving sin, and accept God's provision for that sin in the person of Jesus Christ.

But saved people need to pray the sinner's prayer too, for saved people continue to sin at times. If we say we don't, we're deceiving ourselves. We may be quarantined but we still sin. We speak cutting words to those we say we love. We look at things we shouldn't. We fail to do things we should. We sin. We, people saved by the grace of God, sin.

So what should we say to God after we sin? That's today's message. *When You Need to Pray the Sinner's Prayer.*

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:8-2:2

There's a chapter in the Bible that I wish wasn't there, and my heart gets heavy every time I read it. It's 2 Samuel 11. Don't get me wrong. 2 Samuel 11 is a good gift to us from God and we, especially men in our midlife years, desperately need to read it often. It's here that we read about David's wicked choice to lust after Bathsheba, engage in God-defying adultery with her, and then concoct a wicked cover-up that resulted in the murder of her husband.

One of the reasons God gave us 150 psalms is to show us how to make Him *the gravitational center of our lives*. Sin is when we *don't* do that, when instead of making God the gravitational center of our lives, we pursue something else.

For David, it was illicit sex. For us it may be something else, but regardless, if we make anything other than the Lord God Himself the center of our lives, the results are always disastrous. If only David hadn't coasted in his midlife years, if only he hadn't lived to gratify the cravings of his sinful heart. If only, *if only*.

Perhaps those words are haunting you. *If only* I hadn't made that foolish decision. But we did. So the question before us now is, how do we make God the gravitational center of our lives *after* we've sinned?

Thankfully, our gracious God has provided us with the answer. He gave us Psalm 51, which records the words David prayed *after* he committed adultery and murder.

What do you say to your Maker and Judge after you've violated His holy law? Our tendency is to say nothing. Instead we run from Him. We fill our lives with distractions to drown out the pounding of our guilt-stricken conscience. Or, instead of speaking to God, we tell ourselves lies like, "Well, she brought it on, it wasn't my fault," or "I only did it *once*. I'm not nearly as bad as a lot of people."

That's what David did too, at first. He tried to hide the truth for months, perhaps a year, until God graciously sent a man into his life to expose his sinful secret. And then he confessed it all, to God, and to everyone affected by his sin. He actually put his prayer in writing so we would all know about it, and benefit from it when we need to pray our own sinner's prayer.

Notice the heading of the psalm. *A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*²

What do you say to God after you've sinned? What *can* you say? What *must* you say? David shows us. In Psalm 51, David expresses six heartfelt thoughts to God, we

² It's worth noting that this isn't the only penitential psalm in the Psalter. There are at least six other psalms that flowed from a penitent heart: Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, and 143. The penitential psalms show us that God wants His wayward children to come back, and He kindly shows them the way, no where more vividly than in Psalm 51.

must every sinner who wants to leave the darkness and enjoy walking again with God in the light.

I. Ask for forgiveness (1-2).

David is going to ask God for forgiveness in various ways at least nine times in this psalm. Notice how he begins in verses 1-2, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

David was Israel’s shepherd, but one day instead of protecting God’s sheep, he defiled one and eventually murdered another. To make things worse, the man he killed was one of his most loyal soldiers, Uriah, and the woman was Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. This isn’t just adultery. This is abuse of power.

David had committed two sins for which the Mosaic law provided no forgiveness. In the cases of deliberate adultery and murder, no sacrifices were to be offered. The penalty was death.

What do you do if you’ve committed sins worthy of death? There’s *nothing* you can do, nothing that would make things right, and David knows it. So instead of doing something David begins by *asking* God for something.

Notice the first words out of David’s mouth. “Have *mercy* on me.” Why would David bring that petition to God first? He tells. He asks for mercy because he knows two things, indeed, he clings to these two realities.

A. David knows he doesn’t deserve it. He knows what he deserves. He knows there is nothing he could give God or do for God that would undo the crimes he’s committed and the penalty he must pay. *Have mercy on me, O God* is his only plea.

So if David knows he doesn’t deserve forgiveness, on what basis does he ask for it?

B. David appeals to the character of God. “Have mercy on me, O God, *according to your unfailing love.*” There’s what prompts David to ask for what he doesn’t deserve.

1. *God’s love is unfailing.* David appeals to the *chesed* of God, one of the most important Hebrew words in the Old Testament, a term that speaks of God’s covenantal loyalty to His chosen people. He’s faithful even when they’re not. It’s His nature to demonstrate pity and kindness. That gave David hope. And so did this.

2. *God’s mercies are great.* “Have mercy on me...according to *your great compassion.*” The word is actually plural, hence the KJV’s, ‘tender mercies.’ David’s not the first person in history to blow it. He knows about Adam and Eve’s blunder, Noah’s drunkenness, Abraham’s lie, Jacob’s deception, Samson’s immorality, and on and on the list goes. And he knows that in each of these sinner’s lives God’s mercy was greater than their sin. Year’s later Frederick Faber said it well in his hymn...

*There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.*

*There is welcome for the sinner,
And more graces for the good;
There is mercy with the Savior;
There is healing in His blood.*

*For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of our mind;*

*And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.*³

Beloved, this is why we can ask God for forgiveness today, not because we deserve it, but because He is merciful and loving. David knows that. And so in verses 1-2 he proceeds to ask God to *blot out*, *wash away*, and *cleanse* him from his sin. The imagery speaks of doing laundry, as one commentator puts it, “as if David is comparing himself to a foul garment needing to be washed and washed.”⁴

That’s me, says David. I’ve soiled my life by my sinful choices. But I want to be clean. Wash me, O God, scrub this foul sinner clean!

What do you say to God after you’ve sinned? You *ask for forgiveness*. Is that all? No. Forgiveness is free but it’s not cheap. Something else is necessary.

II. Admit your guilt (3-6).

“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.”

David confesses four very specific matters in this portion of his prayer. First...

A. David confesses that he has sinned (3). Not in vague generalities, either. He uses five different synonyms for sin in this psalm, admitting his guilt in five ways.

1. *He is guilty of transgression.* “I know my *transgressions* (3).” The Hebrew word *pasha* refers to crossing a forbidden boundary, doing so an act of rebellion and disloyalty. That’s what I’ve done, says David. I went where I shouldn’t have gone, and in so doing I rebelled against You, the King of kings.

2. *He is guilty of sin.* “My sin is always before me (3).” The Hebrew *chatath* speaks of falling short or missing the mark of God’s revealed will, like an arrow that misses the target. Sex is a good gift from God when enjoyed within marriage, but to engage in sex outside of marriage misses the mark. That’s what I did, cries David.

3. *He is guilty of iniquity.* Back in verse 2, “Wash me of all my *iniquity*.” The Hebrew *aown* speaks of a crooked or wrong act, often associated with a conscious and intentional decision to do wrong.⁵ That’s me, O God, I’ve done wrong!

4. *He is guilty of evil.* Verse 4—“And done what is *evil* in your sight.” The Hebrew *ra* speaks of that which is not morally right, pure, or good. Goliath was an evil man, he blasphemed God on the battlefield. I have done evil in Your sight too, says David. I’m as guilty as Goliath.

5. *He is guilty of bloodguilt.* That’s the word he uses in verse 14 when he cries out, “Save me from *bloodguilt*, O God.” He utters the Hebrew word for blood, *damim*, and acknowledges, “I’ve got blood on my hands!”

Do you see how specific David’s confession is? There are no vague generalities here, and certainly no blame-shifting. *I’m guilty*, he says to God, guilty of transgression, sin, iniquity, evil, and bloodguilt. In short...

B. David confesses that he has offended God (4). Verse 4—“Against you, you only, have I sinned.” David isn’t saying that he hadn’t sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah,

³ Frederick Faber, *There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*

⁴ Derek Kidner, p. 190.

⁵ See Willem VanGemeren, p. 271.

his own family, and a whole lot of other people, for he had. But there's always something fundamental about our sin that we tend to miss, yet David didn't.

1. *The real problem with sin isn't that it messes up my life. Or others' lives.*

2. *The real problem is that I have rebelled against the Owner of the universe.* At its root all sin is against God, "since it is only by God's law that sin is defined as sin."⁶

In reality, at its core every sin is an act of *treason*. To illustrate, suppose I received an invitation from a generous king to come and spend six weeks with him in his beautiful palace. He generously offers me everything I could dream of, personal time together, exquisite meals, free evening entertainment, the works, at no cost to me. And so I went, and for five weeks I enjoyed the kindness of this generous king.

Then one day I was walking down the main road near the king's palace and saw a flower growing in the front flower bed. I walked over and picked that flower and smashed the petals into the ground with my foot.

Now suppose you saw me crushing the flower and asked, "Why'd you do that?!" And I shrugged my shoulders and said, "I don't like that kind of flower." And you could rightly say to me, "Listen, the flower's not the issue. What you did to that flower is an insult to the generous king who planted that garden in the first place."

That's what we do every time we sin. When David went to bed with Bathsheba, he took a flower from God's garden and smashed it under his feet.

"We never see sin aright until we see it as against God," writes Jerry Bridges in *The Pursuit of Holiness*. "All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught...Pharaoh and Balaam, Saul and Judas each said, 'I have sinned;' but...David said, 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned.'"⁷

As must we when pray the sinner's prayer. But there's more. Not only does David confess that he sinned, and that he offended God with his sin, thirdly...

C. David confesses that he is a sinner (5). Verse 5—"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."⁸ This is difficult to admit, but vital.

1. *We are not inherently good people.*⁹ We enter life with a universal problem.

2. *We begin life with a sin nature.* According to David, what he did with Bathsheba wasn't just some slip up. He acknowledges that his sinful actions were the overflow of his sinful heart, the expression of something that had been there since conception and had now come out.

Charles Spurgeon explains, "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 as well as its streams. My birth-tendencies are out of the square of equity; I naturally lean to forbidden things."¹⁰

That's David's problem, not merely that he sinned, but that he entered life with a sin nature. And that's our problem, too. If you don't know Christ, you are enslaved to your sin nature and cannot please God. But even if you do know Christ and are bound for

⁶ As James Boice puts it, p. 427.

⁷ W.S. Plumer quoted in: J. Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, p. 20. cf. Gen 39:9

⁸ David isn't saying his mother was a wicked person. Apparently David had a mother and father who feared the Lord.

⁹ There have only been three "good people" on this planet. Adam and Eve, who were created by God, declared by Him to be "very good" (Gen. 1:31), who later sinned against God and ceased being very good. And the sinless Jesus Christ. In fact, God made this statement to Noah about man's condition in Genesis 8:21, "Every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."

¹⁰ Charles Spurgeon, p. 408.

heaven, you still battle with sin. Even God’s people (including a man after God’s own heart like David) are sinners, forgiven sinners, yes, but still sinners nonetheless. To use Spurgeon’s metaphor, the fountain of our lives is polluted, and if we fail to guard our hearts that rank residue of remaining sin will spill out of our hearts and into our lives.

Again, please don’t miss how specific David is when he acknowledges his guilt. This is no generic, “Father forgive me for I’ve sinned” recitation. From his heart he confesses that he has sinned, that he has offended God, that he is a sinner, and one more thing...

D. David confesses that he lacks what God desires (6). Verse 6—“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.” David now admits to God something we tend to overlook.

1. *God wants more than the absence of sin.*

2. *God wants hearts that are loyal to Him.* Sure, God wants us to stop sinning, but that’s because sin keeps us from what He wants most for us, for our hearts to be enthralled with Him. And David confesses he lacks that. As do we when we sin.

Is there hope? Yes, but the solution isn’t found within us, but in Him. David acknowledges that God makes possible what God requires. “You teach me wisdom in the inmost place,” he says to God. *You teach me. You make it possible.*

This is the sinner’s prayer. This is the kind of prayer we need to pray after we’ve sinned, which means we ought to be praying this way a lot. But there’s more to be said. David’s not ready to get off his knees. Ask for forgiveness. Admit your guilt.

III. Ask for cleansing (7-9).

“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.”

Do David’s words sound familiar? He’s actually repeating the requests he brought to God in verses 1-2: *cleanse me*, which comes from the Hebrew word for sin *chattah* and literally means “de-sin” me;¹¹ *wash* me, that is, make me pure again; and *blot out* my iniquity—in Bible times since paper was very expensive, quite often instead of throwing away a used document a person would rub out the old writing and turn the papyrus sheet sideways and write new words on it.¹²

That’s what David wanted God to do with him. He knew that a sinful man cannot wash away his own sin. That’s what Pilate tried to do, but putting your hands in a basin of water doesn’t cancel out the wicked deed those hands have committed.¹³

What’s needed is what David did. He simply asked for cleansing. He knows that what we cannot do for ourselves, God will do for us...if we but *ask*.

This doesn’t mean that the cleansing occurs without cost, however. Perhaps the most important words in the psalm are the first words of verse 7. *Cleanse me with hyssop.* David understood two truths regarding the removal of sin.

A. God doesn’t just overlook sin. To do so would be to violate His justice.

B. God washes sin away by means of a cleansing agent. The *hyssop* was a small plant in David’s day, probably from the mint family. “Because of its shape and

¹¹ Observation by James Boice, p. 428.

¹² Boice, p. 428.

¹³ Michael Travers, *Encountering God in the Psalms*, p. 259. Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth tried the same, to wash her guilt away by rubbing her hands together. Act 5, Scene 1

structure,” writes James Boice, “it was used as a small brush. In the ceremonies of the temple it was used to sprinkle blood.”¹⁴

The first time we see hyssop in the Bible is in Exodus when the Jews dipped the hyssop plant in blood and sprinkled it on their doorframes. When the death angel saw the blood, he passed over that house and the inhabitants did not die (Ex. 12:22).

Later when God established His covenant with Israel, hyssop was again used. Hebrews 9:19-22 explains, “When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and **branches of hyssop**, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep.’ In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Don’t miss those final words. In order for there to be *forgiveness*, there must be *the shedding of blood*. David knows that. He knows that God washes away sin by means of a cleansing agent, *by the shed blood of a substitute*.

This, my friend, is why Jesus died on the cross. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).” Christ is the cleansing agent. When we pray the sinner’s prayer trusting in Him alone, God makes us clean.

How clean? How clean does God make a sinner after applying the cleansing agent? Listen again to David, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be *whiter than snow*.”

1. *The result is snow white purity.* You may be thinking, “But you don’t know what I did. My sin is so great.” And that’s true. But I know what Christ did and what God says about it in Ephesians 1:7, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” When God makes the sinner clean, He makes the sinner snow-white-clean! And this produces a second result.

2. *The result is joy.* David prays in verse 8, “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.” God had been crushing David’s bones—that’s what He does with His children when they sin. He makes them feel miserable. Those guilt feelings are His good gift to them, His wake-up call. And if they’ll answer that call and pray with David the sinner’s prayer, He will restore to them what they’ve lost, His joy.

It’s so simple. To receive it, you must ask for it. Ask God for cleansing.

Sadly, do you know what many choose to do instead? Instead of dealing with the cause of their guilt, they just try to eliminate the *feelings* of guilt, through alcohol, through binge-eating, through indulgent living, through anti-depressants, and so on.

A friend of mine left his wife. I pled with him to repent and return to his wife, but he refused. Later I heard he’d become an emotional wreck and believed he needed help for his “depression.” In reality, his depressed feelings were working just the way His Maker intended them to work. He didn’t need an anti-depressant. Like David, he needed to ask for forgiveness, admit his sin, and ask God for cleansing. Then, and not until then, would he experience the joy he so desired.

But the sinner’s prayer isn’t over yet. Something else is needed. Verses 10-12, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

¹⁴ James Boice, p. 429.

IV. Ask for restoration (10-12).

James Boice says this section may be the most important part of the prayer. “It indicates that his confession of sin is part one was genuine, because it shows that he could not be content merely with forgiveness. His sin and its effects were so terrible to him that David did not want to fall into sin again.”¹⁵

When repentance is genuine, there will be a disdain not just for the consequences of the sin but for the sin itself. In asking for restoration David expresses two things to God.

A. David admitted what his sin did to him. Sin isn’t passive. It’s an aggressive viper and David tells us it attacks us in six destructive ways.

1. *Sin corrupts our heart.* “Create in me a *pure* heart,” David says. That request implies that sin had a contaminating effect on his heart. David’s sin wasn’t merely the eyes that looked upon Bathsheba, nor the hands that caressed her. No, David’s root sin was a heart that wanted to do those wicked things. “The heart is the rudder of the soul,” said Spurgeon, “and till the Lord take it in hand we steer in a false and foul way.”¹⁶

2. *Sin makes us spiritually weak.* “Renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Again, that request implies something, doesn’t it? The request for renewal implies that David’s sin caused him to lose his steadfast spirit which he now asks God to restore. Sin deflates us. It takes away our inner zest for God and the things of God. It creates an internal instability.

3. *Sin short-circuits our relationship with God.* “Do not cast me from your presence,” David says. That’s what happened to King Saul, and David witnessed it firsthand (1 Sam. 28:15). Saul ignored God and God’s commands, so God ignored Saul. “Don’t do that to me,” David pleads. “Don’t let me go through life without Your abiding presence any longer!”

4. *Sin makes God-pleasing service impossible.* “Do not...take your Holy Spirit from me,” David pleads. Some use a verse like this to support the notion that a person can lose his salvation by sinning. But in the Old Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon people signified that God was enabling them for service.¹⁷ David knew that persistent, unrepentant sin makes God-pleasing service impossible. It did with King Saul and David doesn’t want it to happen to him.

5. *Sin takes away our joy.* Please realize that even after committing adultery and murder David was still a saved man. “Restore to me the *joy* of your salvation,” he prays in verse 12. David didn’t lose his salvation. He did lose the *joy* of it.

If God has saved you, dear friend, that means you are His eternally. That also means that if you sin, as David did, the following will happen. First, He will chasten you, starting with pricking your conscience, followed by more severe measures if necessary. Consequently, He will remove your joy (Gal. 5:22 indicates that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, but that fruit will be gone if you live in sin). The fact that God removes your joy is an expression of His love for you designed to get your attention. At that point you will either repent of your sin, or He will continue to bring the painful consequences of your

¹⁵ James Boice, p. 432.

¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, p. 405.

¹⁷ For instance, in 1 Samuel 16:13, when Samuel announced that David would be Israel’s next king and proceeded to anoint him with oil, the text says, “From that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.” David was a believer in Yahweh prior to that moment. The visible manifestation of the Spirit that day had to do with service, not salvation.

sin into your life, and if you still refuse to repent the result may well be a premature death (e.g.—Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5; see also 1 Cor. 11:30).

I should also say this. If a person claims to be a Christian and lives in persistent sin with no evidence of remorse and no evidence of God’s chastisement, it may well indicate the person professed salvation but never truly possessed it. God disciplines His children, that’s a guarantee (Heb. 12:6). The absence of discipline indicates the person isn’t truly a child of God. It’s not that he lost his salvation. It’s that he never had it to begin with.

6. *Sin takes away our appetite for the things of God.* Verse 12—“Grant me a willing spirit,” David prays. That implies he didn’t have a willing spirit.

Moms, what happens when your five year old, against your instructions, eats two candy bars and drinks a can of pop right before supper? He’s not going to be hungry for the good food you’ve prepared for him, is he? So it is when we have unrepentant sin in our lives. We lose our appetite for the things of God. We don’t want to read His Word, go to church, and so forth. We lack a *willing spirit*.

This is what sin does to us. It corrupts our heart, makes us spiritually weak, short-circuits our relationship with God, makes God-pleasing service impossible, takes away our joy, and takes away our appetite for the things of God.

Am I describing your life right now? If so, do what David did. *Admit it.* Admit what your sin is doing to you. Then you’ll be prepared to do something else David did.

Notice the various requests he makes in verses 10-12: *Create* in me a pure heart...*renew* my spirit...*restore* the joy. In other words...

B. David asked God to do what God alone can do. The first request, “create” in verse 10, is so significant. It’s the Hebrew word *bara* which appears in Genesis 1, “In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth.” This word speaks of what God and only God can do, create something *ex nihilo*, ‘out of nothing.’ We say that some people are ‘creative’ but even the most creative person creates out of existing materials. Only God creates something out of nothing.¹⁸

That’s what He did at the beginning. Out of nothing He brought something into existence, the heavens, the earth, plant life, birds, fish, animals, and finally man. And that’s what David is asking God to do in his heart.¹⁹

Let this sink in. David is asking God to bring into being something that is not there to begin with, something that man cannot accomplish, the creation of a *clean heart*. So often we say things like, “Well, ole Sam slipped up again but give him some slack. He’s got a good heart.” That’s not what God’s Word says about ole Sam’s heart, nor yours or mine.²⁰

David knows he needs a new heart, a *clean heart*. But not only can he not create a clean heart, there are no preexisting materials within him that God might use to create a clean heart. “It would have to be a creation from nothing,” writes James Boice, “since if any of it came from David himself, that little bit would contaminate everything, like deadly germs in drinking water.”²¹

And here’s the good news. Creating clean hearts is just what God does! He gave the prophet Ezekiel this promise in Ezekiel 36:25-27, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I

¹⁸ I’m indebted to a helpful explanation by James Boice; p. 432.

¹⁹ As Derek Kidner puts it, “With the word *create* he asks for nothing less than a miracle.”

²⁰ Paul wouldn’t sell too many books on the positive thinking market, but he understood David’s point and made it his own, confessing in Romans 7:18, “Nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh.”

²¹ James Boice, p. 432.

will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

This is the sinner’s prayer. You’ve admitted your guilt and asked God for cleansing. That’s good. But you need more than forgiveness. You need restoration. And God graciously allows you to ask Him for it. So ask! And then pray about something else.

V. Anticipate a God-centered life (13-17).

Note the first word of verse 13, “*Then* I will...” Don’t miss this for David grasped something we’re prone to miss. The intent of seeking forgiveness from God isn’t so I can get rid of guilt feelings and get on with my life. The intent isn’t about *me*. It’s about *God* and *God’s agenda* in the world. When I am living in unrepentant sin, sure it’s bad for me but the real problem is that it’s bad for God for the glory He should be receiving both *in* my life and *through* my life isn’t happening.

As a forgiven man David anticipated doing three God-centered things with his life.

A. David said he would use what he learned to help other sinners (13). “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.” David knows there are others in the world who are just like him, other *transgressors*, other *sinners*. He can’t wait to get involved in their lives, to get in their faces if need be, and with the tears of experience flowing down his cheeks *turn them back to God*.

When you’ve experienced God’s amazing forgiveness you want others to experience it, too. Good counselees often make the best counselors.

Did God grant David his request? Did He use him to turn sinners from their sin back to God? Indeed He did, and He’s still doing it, through *this* psalm as Derek Kidner points out, “The psalm itself is the richest answer to the prayer, since it has shown generations of sinners the way home, long after they had thought themselves beyond recall.”²²

Churches are filled with people that have amazing stories, stories of how God delivered them from sin and gave them new lives in Christ. That means that churches are filled with potential rescue workers, with people who could be on the front lines of the battle pulling fallen soldiers from the enemy’s grasp. But where are they? Sadly many are wasting something God wants to use.

Some of us have a story to tell that we’re not telling. The reason is our pride. We worry about what people would think of us if they knew the truth about what we’ve done in our lives. My friend, think about what David did. He committed adultery, murder, deception, and more. Do you think he was ashamed of what he did? Absolutely. But he chose to tell his story, the story of his sin and God’s undeserved forgiveness (read Psalm 32 for more), and he told it because he wanted to help other sinners to the glory of God.

There’s a second God-centered activity he anticipated...

B. David said he would use his lips to praise God (14-15). “Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.”

I get the sense from this that while David was hiding his sin he didn’t sing much, not songs of God-exalting praise, for sure. How can you sing heartily to God if you know God isn’t pleased with your life?

No, people hiding sin don’t sing well. But forgiven sinners do. 1 John 1:9 tells us why, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” My friend, if you have experienced *that*, if you know that

²² D. Kidner, p. 193.

God, instead of punishing you for your transgression has chosen to pardon you because His own Son took your punishment in your place, if you know *that*, if you've been forgiven by *that* God, you will then gladly praise that God! Spurgeon said it well, "A great sinner pardoned makes a great singer."²³

Think of it this way...

1. *Sin makes us become self-focused.* When I come to church thinking about me, about my problems and concerns, then I won't sing very heartily in the worship service. That's because self-focused people are *self-focused*.

2. *The evidence of true repentance is a God-focus.* I love being around new believers for this very reason. There's no pretense, just a "I can't believe how good God's been to me" perspective that flows from a grateful heart.

But there's something else David intended to do. Thirdly...

C. David said he would give God what He wants most, *brokenness* (16-17). "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

David isn't downplaying the necessity of sacrifices and offerings. He knows that God commanded His people to bring them to Him. But he also knows how easy it is to start going through the motions, especially when you have hidden sin in your life, and so you begin to pacify your soul with meaningless religious activity.²⁴ "I know now that's not what You want," David says to God. "I know now what you want most is my broken heart."

Why does God want a broken heart? Have you ever loved someone, maybe a boyfriend or girlfriend, perhaps a spouse, or a child, only to have that person reject you? How did you feel? We have a phrase in English that we use at such a time. We say, "I feel like my heart is broken," and by saying that we mean that we can't stand the thought of life without that person.

Do you think of God that way? Do you appreciate merely the things He does for you (like give you eternal life), or do you appreciate *Him* (for knowing Him *is* eternal life)? The evidence of a broken heart is that can't stand the thought of life without *Him*.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus actually indicated that this brokenness is the key to true blessing, saying in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." I love how Eric Lane puts it, "When God's rebuke breaks the heart, that broken heart can be offered to him."²⁵

David continues his outward focus as he ends his sinner's prayer, and so must we.

VI. Ask God to bless the rest of His people (18-19).

"In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar."²⁶

²³ C. Spurgeon, p. 406.

²⁴ See Psalm 50:7-15; Isa. 1:10-17.

²⁵ Eric Lane, p. 235.

²⁶ Some feel that these final two verses were written at a later date, not by David, but by Israel's director of music at a time when Israel's walls were literally lying in piles on the ground (perhaps in Nehemiah's day). If that's the case, David's prayer provided a wonderful model for the exiles as they wrestled with the painful question, "What do we do now that we've blown it?"

David's tone has changed, hasn't it? He's no longer on his face, but now is looking into the future. And he's no longer thinking about his sin, but about his people. "Bless your people, O God. Bless Jerusalem so sacrifices will continue there!"

There are two important realities we learn from Psalm 51. One...

A. David's sin affected more than David. Have you ever thought this thought, "Oh, it's not that bad of a sin as long as it doesn't hurt anybody else"? That's not true. All sin affects not only us but those around us. Think of Achan. Think of Abraham's choice to sleep with Hagar. And think again of David.

His baby died (2 Sam. 12). Several of his sons became womanizers, including Amnon who raped his half-sister, Tamar (2 Sam. 13), and Absalom who pitched a tent on the roof of the palace and slept with his father's concubines for all to see (2 Sam. 16:22). And as Nathan the prophet predicted, the sword never left his house (2 Sam. 12:10). David's close friend, Ahithophel (Bathsheba's grandfather) turned against him. And so did his son, Absalom, who took the throne by deception and brought civil war on the nation. And worst of all, David's sin caused the Lord's reputation to fall under the contempt of the Lord's enemies (2 Sam. 12:14).

Our sin always affects more than just us. That's especially true when a leader sins, whether that leader is the head of a nation (as in David's case), or a church, or a school, or a business, or a family. Yes, David experienced forgiveness, but that didn't eliminate all the consequences of his sin. David's sin affected more than David. Thankfully, because of grace...

B. David's restoration also affected more than David. I'll mention two ways. Because David got right with God...

1. *God gave David another son.* As you know David's first child with Bathsheba died. It was a painful loss. But then a second child was born. His name? The couple called him "Solomon," but God gave him another name through the prophet Nathan. Call him Jedidiah, which means "loved by the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:25).

Can anything good come out of a sin story? Praise God, yes! God gave David another son. But this was no ordinary son. Indeed, through this son...

2. *God gave the world a Savior.* When David was a young man God gave him a promise, that one of his descendants would save and rule the world. Now after David's mid-life crisis, God reveals which son it will be. The son of this very woman, Bathsheba.

And you know the rest of the story. Solomon, the one loved by the Lord, became the link that takes us ten centuries later to Jesus, who provided salvation for sinners just like David. How? He died on a cross, and on that cross paid the penalty of sin for every sinner who would follow David in praying the sinner's prayer.

And of course He didn't stay dead. Three days later God raised David's son, His own Son, from the dead. Forty days later His Son returned to heaven to prepare an eternal home for those redeemed sinners. And one day soon the Son of David is coming again for His people, His *forgiven* people, and they will be with Him forever!

This is the good news, my friend. Sinners can be forgiven. Just ask David.

Make It Personal: Is there any unconfessed sin in your life?

There are two things for sure...

1. *We can't undo the past.* However...
2. *We can experience forgiveness through Christ.*

I'd like to close with a story told by a former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, H. A. Ironside:

I once heard the late Dr. F.E. Marsh tell that on one occasion he was preaching... and urging upon his hearers the importance of confession of sin and wherever possible of restitution for wrong done to others.

At the close a young man, a member of the church, came up to him with a troubled countenance. "Pastor," he explained, "you have put me in a sad fix. I have wronged another and I am ashamed to confess it or to try to put it right. You see, I am a boat builder and the man I work for is an infidel. I have talked to him often about his need of Christ and urged him to come and hear you preach, but he scoffs and ridicules it all. Now, I have been guilty of something that, if I should acknowledge it to him, will ruin my testimony forever."

He then went on to say that sometime ago he started to build a boat for himself in his own yard. In this work copper nails are used because they do not rust in the water. These nails are quite expensive and the young man had been carrying home quantities of them to use on the job. He knew it was stealing, but he tried to salve his conscience by telling himself that the master had so many he would never miss them and besides he was not being paid all that he thought he deserved. But this sermon had brought him to face the fact that he was just a common thief, for whose dishonest actions there was no excuse.

"But," said he, "I cannot go to my boss and tell him what I have done or offer to pay for those I have used and return the rest. If I do he will think I am just a hypocrite. And yet those copper nails are digging into my conscience and I know I shall never have peace until I put this matter right." For weeks the struggle went on. Then one night he came to Dr. Marsh and exclaimed, "Pastor, I've settled for the copper nails and my conscience is relieved at last."

"What happened when you confessed to your employer what you had done?" asked the pastor.

"Oh," he answered, "he looked queerly at me, then exclaimed, 'George, I always did think you were just a hypocrite, but now I begin to feel there's something in this Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a dishonest workman come back and confess that he had been stealing copper nails and offer to settle for them, must be worth having.'"

Dr. Marsh asked if he might use the story, and was granted permission.

Sometime afterwards, he told it in another city. The next day a lady came up and said, "Doctor, I have had 'copper nails' on my conscience too." "Why, surely, you are not a boat builder!" "No, but I am a book-lover and I have stolen a number of books from a friend of mine who gets far more than I could ever afford. I decided last night I must get rid of the 'copper nails,' so I took them all back to her today and confessed my sin. I can't tell you how relieved I am. She forgave me, and God has forgiven me. I am so thankful the 'copper nails' are not digging into my conscience any more."

I have told this story many times and almost invariably people have come to me afterwards telling of "copper nails" in one form or another that they had to get rid of. On one occasion, I told it at a High School chapel service. The next day the principal saw me and said, "As a result of that 'copper nails' story, ever so many stolen fountain pens and other things have been returned to their rightful owners."²⁷

Have you been hiding any copper nails in your pocket, my friend? It's time to be honest with yourself and with God. It's time to join David in praying *the sinner's prayer*.

²⁷ H.A. Ironside, *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, 1945, Moody Press, pp. 104-106.