

David Carter / General Adult

Psalms in the Key of Life / Psalm 51

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I have had this toothache for the last few weeks and it's not a constant pain, but if I drink something cold or eat something on that side, I feel this shooting pain. And I've tried to ignore it and hope it goes away, but it doesn't seem to be going away.

But every time I feel that pain it's telling me something, isn't it? It's telling me something is wrong and I need to do something about it.

Pain is a warning sign, it serves a purpose. I mean, imagine if you could touch fire without feeling pain, we would have a bunch of crispy people walking around. Pain tells you something's wrong, something's dangerous, something's not safe, get help, get it looked at.

God uses the pain of our sin in much the same way. There's a pain that we feel inside, a brokenness. It's the pain of regret, shame, guilt. God uses that pain just like any kind of pain, it's the Holy Spirit in our hearts telling us, something's wrong, something's off, something's dangerous. That pain is the Holy Spirit convicting us and telling us, it's time to do something about it.

Maybe you're here this morning and you are crippled with the pain of regret and failure, maybe you're overwhelmed today with guilt because of past, maybe present sin.

What do we do with that? Where do we go? Like, if I get a pain in my tooth, I go to the dentist, if I've get a pain in my gut, I go to the doctor, but what do I do when I am weighed down with the pain of my sin?

David, King David answers that question for us in [Psalm 51](#). David, overwhelmed with the pain of his sin, writes this Psalm of confession and repentance and he brings his sin to the Lord.

His words give expression for our own sorrow over our sin.

What do we do when we are weighed down by our sin?

Look with me at [Psalm 51](#) this morning.

For this Summer we're turning our attention to Psalms that deal with everyday life issues. And like it or not, our battle against sin is an everyday issue.

I think of John's words that he writes in [1 John 1:8](#).

**1 John 1:8 ESV**

***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

David is a great example of this reality.

Most of your bibles will have a heading just above verse 1 that communicates to us the circumstances that inspired the writing of this Psalm.

The heading, the inscription says, ***"To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba."***

In case we need clarity around what that means, the NIV translates it, ***"When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba."***

2 Samuel chapter 11 and 12 tell us the details of this event but let me just share with you a summary so that we can understand the circumstances that moved David to write this Psalm.

One day while David should have been off at war, he decided to stay home and as he was walking on the roof of his palace, a certain woman caught his eye while she was bathing. And when David sent for someone to find out about who this woman was and what her situation was, he found out that her name was

Bathsheba and she was married to a man named Uriah, one of David's most faithful soldiers.

We would hope, at that point, that David, a man after God's own heart, would have been wise enough to leave it alone. However, we find out that he sends for Bathsheba. The ESV says that he took her and when she came to him, he slept with her and then sends her back to her house.

As if our hearts aren't broken enough over David's actions, when he finds out that Bathsheba becomes pregnant, he conspires to have her husband moved to the front lines of the war. So that he would die to cover up his tracks of what he had done.

Here is David, guilty of adultery, and now murder – and no one will ever find out. Except that David is a child of God and God does not allow sin to go unaddressed in the lives of his children.

So, God sends the prophet Nathan to David and Nathan says I want to tell you a little story David, about two men, one is a rich and powerful man and the other a poor lowly man who didn't have much. The rich man had so many sheep and herds that he couldn't even keep track and the poor man, well, he only had just one little lamb, but he loved that lamb. He had grown that lamb since it was young and fed it food from his own table. He loved that little lamb as much as he loved his own children.

One day the rich man has a visitor who was coming over for dinner and the rich man didn't want to sacrifice any of his own lambs, so he forcibly takes the poor man's lamb and sacrifices and serves it for dinner.

And when David heard this punchline, he was furious, he was enraged at the injustice of it all and he cries out in anger...***“As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”***

Nathan turns the tables on David and says, you are that man! You are the man who had everything he needed, and God would have given you more if that were not enough. ***Why have you sinned and despised the Lord by striking down Uriah and taking his wife Bathsheba?***

David was confronted with his sin, and it was ugly, and shameful and it was painful, and he was broken when he realized how grievous his sin was before the Lord. He says, I have sinned against the Lord...

David... King David, the one who is described as a man after God's own heart. David, the line of the family from which our Messiah, our Savior, Jesus would come. David is caught in sin; he had sinned against God.

But when he is caught, he doesn't shift blame. He confesses his sin before the Lord.

Have you ever been there, where you have been confronted with your sin and the weight of it feels as though it's broken you? Maybe that's you here this morning, maybe there is sin that you're struggling with, some secret that is weighing on your heart and every time you're confronted with the reality of it, you feel burdened, broken.

What does the child of God do when they are burdened by their sin? Where do we go with that pain?

We bring it to the Lord. We bring our sin to the Lord.

## **BRING IT**

If you are here this morning, bearing that burden, if you are here this morning weighed down by guilt and shame, you need to bring that to the Lord today.

That's what David does in this Psalm, do you see? In verses 1 and 2 he cries out to God in his distress.

**Psalm 51:1–2 ESV**

***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!***

David is showing us what genuine confession and repentance looks like, it's coming into the presence of God, and notice that he isn't giving any excuses for his sin, notice how personal this confession is, have mercy on me.

Blot out *my* transgressions, *my* iniquity, *my* sin.

He is taking personal responsibility for his sin, no excuses. I'm owning my sin.

And he isn't trying to sugarcoat it either, notice the strong words he is using, transgressions. It's a word that describes an active rebellion against God. Iniquity refers to a twisting, a perversion or depravity. Sin describes a wandering or missing the moral mark.

David isn't trying to sugar coat it or soften the blow, he is bringing his sin before the Lord and confessing the ugliness of it.

He's feeling the weight of his sin, but before he can come to the Lord for grace and mercy, he needs to be willing to fully embrace and admit how grievous his sin is before the Lord.

He recognizes that he is guilty and deserves God's discipline and judgment.

In verse 4, he says, "you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." He is saying, I have sinned grievously against you Lord and you would be right and just to punish and judge me for that sin.

Too often I think we try to make light of our sin, we don't fully understand just how grievous it is before the Lord. We don't call it sin, we call it a misunderstanding, a lapse of judgment, a mistake. There is healing in laying it bare before the Lord, not because he doesn't know what it is, but there is healing in confessing the seriousness of it from our own lips.

See, there are two kinds of brokenness over sin, there is the selfish, superficial brokenness. There might be tears, there might be temporal change, there might be remorse, but it's not because we want to change, it's not because we are truly sorry, but simply that we're sorry we got caught.

You aren't ready to accept responsibility; you aren't really prepared to make any lasting changes about it. You're just upset because your shame is laid bare.

But repentance is realizing the gravity of and how grievous your sin is before the Lord. Recognizing, just as David said, that God would be justified in his judgment and punishment of your sin, that you need mercy, that something has to change, something drastically has to change in your life.

That's the brokenness that leads to repentance. The only way that you and I can deal with sin in our life, the only way that we can deal with brokenness over our sin, is if we bring that sin to the Lord in confession.

And here's what you can be sure of as you bring that sin before the Lord, here is what the promise is...

That he is gracious and merciful.

## **GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL**

Bring your sin to the Lord because he is gracious and merciful.

Do you see that? That's what David is calling on as he comes into the Lord's presence, that's what he is appealing to. He isn't appealing to his justice; he can't, he is pleading to his grace and mercy.

***Have mercy on me, O God... according to your steadfast love and according to your abundant mercy.***

That word mercy is a word that is asking for compassion, that's what David is asking for, Lord deal with me compassionately, don't deal with me as I deserve, but have compassion on me.

That word, steadfast love, comes from the Hebrew Hesed, for God's faithfulness, his covenant faithfulness. God made a covenant promise to show grace to those who seek him, that's what David is calling on. This promise, Lord, that your character is one of showing grace and mercy to those who fear you.

This is the promise that God gives over and over in the Old Testament, he is, by character, a God who loves to show mercy and grace and abounding in steadfast love.

We think of the words of [Psalm 103](#).

***The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love... He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.***

***<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;***

***<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.***

Praise God for his grace and his mercy toward us. So often, so often, we hide from God when we are weighed down from sin, because we have this image in our minds of an angry God, who is ashamed of us, an angry God who is just waiting to punish us for our sin and that we've let him down, once again. The feeling of how can we show our face, how can we dare enter into his presence?

But don't you know that God is waiting to shower his grace on those who come to him?

Don't picture in your mind an angry father with his arms crossed scowling at you saying, "Well, look who's finally decided to return."

Rather, picture in your mind the image that Jesus gives us in Luke 15, the father of the prodigal son, whose waiting, looking for his son to come home. And, when he sees his son returning home, he isn't standing there with arms crossed

saying it's about time. No! The father runs to him and embraces him and celebrates his return.

That's the image of our heavenly father to those who come to him in brokenness and repentance. Not one of anger, but one who is anxious and ready to forgive.

We remember that promise of 1 John.

**1 John 1:8–9 ESV**

***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

Yes, yes, we all struggle with sin, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If you are weighed down in your sin this morning, bring it to the Lord, bring it to him because he is gracious and merciful, bring it to him because he is the one who is able to cleanse you.

**CLEANSE**

That's what David wants more than anything isn't it? It's what he cries out for in verse 2.

**Psalms 51:2–3 ESV**

***Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.***

There is a sense in which we know that the damage, the depth of the impact of sin, runs deeper than just our actions. But there is also a sense in which we feel unclean because of our sin, filthy, tainted in some way.

It's like wearing the same clothes for two days in a row without washing them, this sense of discomfort.



We want to bring that to the Lord because it is in him that we find that cleansing that we so desire, we don't just want forgiveness, we don't just want mercy, Lord cleanse me, wash me, make me whole again.

The Hebrew word used there for wash, is the word that was used to describe someone doing laundry down by the water. Not like we wash them in a machine but the way clothes were washed against a rock or a washing board down by the water. We get this image of a garment being scrubbed, rinsed, washed, and rung out.

It runs deep, not just surface clean, but a deep cleaning within me.

Our hearts long for that cleansing, that releasing. And yet we hesitate to bring it to the Lord.

We hesitate because maybe, just maybe that pain will go away, maybe we can ignore it, maybe it will numb over time. I tried to do that with my toothache. I'm hoping it will just go away, maybe if I ignore it, maybe if I just chew to one side, maybe if I just sip or eat that cold stuff real slow it won't hurt as much.

We try to adjust our life to deal with the pain. But you know what happens, the more we ignore it, the worse it gets, the throbbing just increases.

Sin is much the same, do you see what David says in verse 3? "I know my transgressions; my sin is ever before me." David is saying I know, I know my transgressions. That word, know, communicates a deeply personal knowing, it isn't just knowledge, but the experience, the reality and the pain of it stays with him, it doesn't go away.

He says it's always before me, like it's always on my mind, playing on a loop, replaying the same failure over and over again. This is the burden the pain, the guilt, the stain that David wants to be freed from that he crying out to be cleansed from.

Maybe you can identify with David's pain this morning, cleanse me, wash me, make me whiter than snow.

I want you to know that the cleansing that you are looking for, longing for, the cleansing that David is crying out for was paid for at the cross by Jesus Christ, when he shed his blood, gave up his life, laid it down so that we could be forgiven, and cleansed from our sin.

David talks about a specific kind of cleansing in verse 7.

**Psalms 51:7 ESV**

**Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

David is asking for a specific kind of cleansing.

Purge me with hyssop, he says. Hyssop was a branch from a type of tree; it was the branch that they would use to spread the blood of the sacrificed lamb around the altar.

That's the kind of cleansing that David is asking for, the kind of cleansing that comes only from a sin offering, sacrificed on his behalf, I need to be cleansed, washed whiter than snow.

it's the kind of cleansing that God offers to those who trust in his Son, Jesus. God is saying to come, come let us reason together this morning and though your sin may be scarlet, they may be white as snow.

If you are weighed down by your sin, bring it to the Lord this morning, he is gracious and merciful, he is the one who will cleanse you, bring it to him because he is the only one who can deal with, truly deal with our sin.

## **ONLY ONE**

See, David realizes his issue with sin is deeper than just his actions. Like some times we minimize sin because we think sin is just a behavioral issue, but what we see as we read his words here that it's so much deeper than that.

We bring our sin to God, he's the only one that can deal with it, because when we sin, we sin against God first. Sin is an offense to God.

That's what David realizes in verse 4...

***Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...***

Do you see that?

Against you, God, and you only. You might think, well that's interesting, like didn't David sin against Bathsheba? And didn't he sin against Uriah; he sent him to his death.

But what makes those actions evil, is that before we sinned against another person, we've sinned against God.

Think about this, I can sin against my neighbour, but what makes the sin against my neighbour so evil is not just because I've hurt my neighbour, but because I have hurt a person who is created in God's image.

And I can sin against my body, I can do things to myself that are just sinful, but what makes sinning against myself such a tragedy is that my life is not my own, my body is not my own.

The damage is traced back to the God who created it all and placed the boundaries by which this life is lived.

We need to bring it to the Lord; he is the one who can forgive us because he is the one with the greatest offense.

But ultimately David realizes that when it comes to his sin, he is helpless, the problem runs far deeper than he thinks, it's a heart level issue.

We cannot minimize sin down to just our actions, this is more than just his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, but it's what's going on inside.

**Psalm 51:5–6 ESV**

***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.***

I was brought forth in iniquity, do you see what he was saying? I was born a sinner, ever since I was conceived, sin has been a part of me.

People love to think that sin is just mistakes made by people who are generally good, but the bible turns that thinking upside down and says no, people sin because they are born with a sinful nature.

See, we aren't sinful because we sin, rather we sin because we're sinful. Our nature, we're born into sin.

I always give the example of raising children, we have to teach our children what is right, don't we, we don't have to teach them wrong, that comes naturally.

We don't have to teach our children to lie, no, they figure that all out on their own. We have to teach them about honesty, we don't have to teach them about selfishness, no, we teach them about fairness and sharing.

Why? Because sin comes natural too us, it's a part of us. Ever since Adam and Eve ate that fruit in the garden, we're born into it.

This is why we need to bring our sin to the Lord, because the answer to dealing with evil and sin and guilt cannot be found in us, we are a part of the problem.

We don't have the ability or qualifications to fix ourselves, only God can do it.

Let me ask you, have you ever tried to self-diagnose some of your symptoms? Like, when you start feeling a pain that you aren't sure of, you Google it. That's the worst thing you can do because it always gives you the worst possible ending. The problem with trying to diagnose yourself is that you aren't a doctor, you don't have the qualifications, the education, the tools, the

knowledge it takes to bring about healing, you need to go see someone who does.

It's the same reason that you and I cannot heal ourselves from our sin, the answer isn't just rehabilitation, the answer isn't education, the answer is we need to come to the only one who can deal with the seriousness of the disease.

What we see in verses 1-6 of this Psalm is why the gospel is such good news. This is why we need the cross!

We need to hear the good news of Jesus because you and I have been born into sin, we have a sinful nature that compels us to live in sin. We can't help but sin.

Our sinful deeds are symptoms of a disease that we were born with and this disease impacts every aspect of our life.

The tragedy of our sin is that it is an insult to the Holy and Righteous God that has created us for himself. Our sin separates us from God and because of that we are in danger of, and deserving of judgment.

And yet the hope for us lies in the very nature and character that David is crying out for here, God's mercy, God's steadfast love.

God demonstrated his love and mercy by sending his son to this world, Jesus Christ. Jesus went to the cross to grant to us exactly what David is crying out for here. Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, you and I can find forgiveness and restoration. By faith in Jesus Christ our sin is blotted out, we have been washed in the blood of the lamb, cleansed from our iniquity.

Jesus lays down his life so that what David is longing for is ours by faith.

Maybe that's where you start today, this morning. Maybe you've come here this morning, you have this overwhelming burden and brokenness because of the sin, the failures, the regrets of your life. And you aren't sure what to do with it, but something tells you that you need to seek out God.

My friend, forgiveness what you long for, restoration from that brokenness is found when you place your faith in Jesus Christ and you commit your life to following him. That may be where you start.

But then we turn our attention to the Christian walk.

Let me ask you, is confession and repentance a regular part of your devotion with God?

And for some of us, I don't think the problem is brokenness over our sin, I think the problem for some of us is that we aren't broken enough. I think we have become numb to the seriousness of our sin.

Like, there are some who would say that once you come to Jesus, I mean that's it, there is no need for confession, no need for repentance.

Let me give you 4 reasons why confession and repentance need to be a part of your spiritual life.

### **Reason #1**

God is still working on us.

Notice David's words, his prayer here, in verse 10.

#### **Psalm 51:10 ESV**

**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.**

If David belongs to God already, why is praying for a clean heart and right spirit to be made and created in him?

Because David recognizes that even though he has given his life to God, there is still work that needs to be done. Notice it's in the present tense, create in me, it's a work that is still on going.

Everyday we wake up, we face that battle of choosing to live for Christ or to go our own way, and our heart is the issue, our heart being our desires, our

passions. And so, our prayer every day, my prayer every day when I wake up is Lord create in me a clean heart. I'm so prone to wander, so easily led astray with my own desires. Father create in me a clean heart.

Friend, even if you have given your life to Christ, God is still working on you, you need to be bringing your heart to the Lord everyday.

## **Reason #2**

Unaddressed sin in our lives steals our joy.

We see David crying out for that again in verse 8, don't we?

### **Psalm 51:8 ESV**

***Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.***

The great deception of much sin is that it promises joy, it promises happiness, it promises satisfaction and a good life. We think, here we are, over here, struggling to live holy and all those people live freely and seem so happy.

But it's the trap, the bait of the enemy. That sin, that was supposed to be so fulfilling that may satisfy for just a moment but ultimately leaves us feeling empty and unfulfilled, becomes this vicious cycle. Because we feel empty and unsatisfied we just keep going back to feel happy for a moment and then empty again – needing to go back and be filled.

We think of David, the pain and the agony that came from just a few moments of pleasure. Was it worth it? He's put up a good front, but deep inside his heart is grieved and his bones are broken. And so, he cries out, "Oh Lord, restore to me that joy I had before I wandered away, before I bought the lie that true joy could be found outside of your presence."

Sin makes us stay longer than we want to stay and pay way more than we're willing to pay.... It steals our joy.

### **Reason #3**

Unaddressed sin hinders our relationship with God...

Let's be clear if you are a believer, if you are truly a child of God, God will not forsake you, he will not give up on you, he will not turn his back on you. He will not take away your salvation.

But that doesn't mean that sin doesn't hinder, impact, affect our relationship with the Lord. That's what David is realizing, that sin impacts our intimacy with God. Verse 11, "Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me."

This one verse is not meant to be a theological statement on the Holy Spirit, but rather it communicates the distance that David feels between him and the Lord in his sin. If you have unaddressed sin in your life, you feel the distance of the Holy Spirit in your life right now. Maybe your prayers are short, without emotion, or feeling or maybe you haven't prayed at all in a long time.

Maybe you read the bible, but the passion for reading God's word is lacking, or again maybe you haven't read his word at all because the guilt, the shame, the burden, is eating you up.

### **Reason #4**

Unaddressed sin impacts our relationship with others.

**Psalm 51:18-19 ESV**

***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.***

Seems kind of strange, in a psalm of personal confession and repentance, for David to be talking about Zion or Israel. But here's why that makes sense. Because David is the King of Zion, and as the King of Zion his actions not



only impact him, but those who rely on him, those whom he leads, those who look up to him and trust him.

And I think this is the aspect of our sin that often goes overlooked, we often talk about the personal impact of sin. Our sin impacts those around us. Maybe we just stop and think for a moment how our sin impacts our spouse, our children. Our friends, and family. How my sin impacts the trust people have put in me, those who rely on me.

How my sin impacts the testimony of Christ, his church.

If you are here this morning weighed down by the pain of sin, the guilt, shame, and regret. Maybe you're saying I want that joy back that I once had in the Lord, maybe God feels so distant from you right now, maybe you look around and the relationships of those closest to you have been impacted by choices you've made.

I want you to know that pain that you feel in your gut, in your chest is there for a reason. It's telling you to bring that sin, bring that pain to the Lord this morning.

Bring it to him because he is gracious and merciful, he will forgive, he will restore. Bring it to him because he is the one who is able to cleanse and heal it, bring it to him because you cannot do it on your own, you need the help that only Christ can bring.