

## Are You Ready? – The Gift of Confession

Psalm 51 | Sunday, March 10, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

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# ARE YOU READY? THE GIFT OF CONFESSION

## Psalm 51

*Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.  
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.  
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.*

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*Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.  
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.  
Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem;  
then will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

**I want to help you get ready for God. I'd like to help you this morning get ready for what God is doing and wants to do in your life.** God made you. He created you. He created you for his purpose. He uniquely fashioned you. When we say that God made you, we don't mean that God just made you as in something is made on an assembly line. We don't mean that you are unique in the sense that you just have different color floor mats. You are uniquely and wonderfully made, as in the difference between a plane and a car, and a car and a truck, and a truck and a bicycle. **God fashioned you for a purpose.**

If you are a college student and you are broke and you have absolutely no money, and the closest parking lot to your dorm is two miles away and you can't even afford a parking sticker, then what you need is not a car; you need a bicycle. God has fashioned you for exactly his brilliant, beautiful, wonderful purpose. So the question is: **Are you ready? Are you ready for what God is doing and wants to do in your life?**

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Today's message is designed from this passage to help you with a skill that is necessary to get ready and stay ready and stay on track with God, and that skill is the skill of confession. This is one of seven penitential psalms, psalms of confession. It's probably the most famous by far. It's written by David after he is confronted regarding some terrible sin. Maybe Psalm 32 is the next most famous of these types of psalms. They provide for us some instruction. They provide for us vocabulary. They help us come before God and pour out our hearts before God so that we might be renewed in our relationship with him.

Confession is like blocking and tackling, like rice and beans. It's basic. It's fundamental. Friends, sometimes as we believe that we are progressing in abilities, we forget the basics. In order to be sound, we must flourish in the basics of the spiritual life in Christ. David, as a mature man of God, falls dreadfully, and this skill is life-saving, as God is life-saving for him.

As we discussed repentance last week, and we are discussing confession this week, I'm aware of the fact that these words are a little foreign to the modern ear. They are almost offensive to us, but they are such wonderful gifts. There are four stanzas, four movements in the psalm. Let me just describe it to you like this, before we break it down and go through it.

1. **Run** to God in biblical confession.
2. Linger there and **Reflect** on the depth of your need.
3. Very important, third movement: **Receive** from God his help, his grace, his provision.
4. Then **Resolve** to arise and to go and to serve the Lord God with all your heart.

That's the picture, that's the progression of the psalm. **Run** to God in confession. Run to him. Then linger there and **reflect** on your need. If I could say it this way: Reflect on the depth and the complexity of your sin. Then **receive** from the Lord, **resolving** to arise and to go and to serve him. Let's jump in and start with #1.

### I. **Fully embrace confession.**

Verses 1 and 2. It will help you if you understand a very important principle: **Confession is not the same thing as repentance.** Repentance represents: I'm going one direction and I do an about face and turn; I pivot and turn. I'm going my own way and I have a whole new way of thinking, an entirely new orientation. I repent and I turn to follow God.

Confession is a little bit like the first step. If repentance is a first step in getting ready, then confession is the first step of the first step. It's alright, don't panic. There is no first step of the first step of the first step. We won't go there next

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week. This is a really vital principle.

This past week someone sent me a confession -- an article, a public confession of a pastor who had fallen in terrible immorality in the last couple of years here in South Florida. It was a beautifully written confession. Someone said, "Oh, it's wonderful that this man has repented." The problem is, he has confessed, but you have no idea if he has repented. I'm not insinuating he hasn't, and I'm not wanting to undermine the value of the confession. But we often will not know if we've just confessed or truly repented for some time. As John the Baptist taught, as he came to prepare the way for Christ, "Are you ready?" he came preaching a message of repentance. He said, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

This is so helpful because we don't want to despise moments of confession, whether they be our own or someone else's, but wisdom is: Let's wait and see what the fruit is. This will especially spare you in romantic relationships. "Mom, I've met a guy. He's wonderful!" "Where'd you meet him?" "Well, I was doing jail ministry. It's okay. He has repented." Now, if you have a history where you've done time, I'm not making fun of your situation or insinuating at all that you are beyond God's reach. You're not. The point is that repentance and confession are not the same.

So, we begin with this idea that confession is simply fully admitting, "God, I need you. I'm running to you. Forgive me. Cleanse me. Help me." Now when you pivot, it's as if God is knocking on the door and you get up and go to the door to let him in. That's what confession feels like. Actually, confession feels to you like you're knocking on the door saying, "God, open up." But in reality, it's God knocking on the door and you're just going to let him in. It's a wonderful experience. Understanding this distinction between confession and repentance is helpful because it takes you through the movements of the rest of the psalm and why they're so necessary.

Fully embrace confession because it's a gift. It's just wonderful. David's sin is recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. David is the king and we are told in 2 Samuel 11 that his armies were out at battle. Typically the king would be out with them and a point of this is made in the text. He doesn't go. He's in his palace, in his castle. He looks out and sees a woman bathing on the rooftop and sees that she is very beautiful.

There are a lot of problems with this, right? He desires her and has someone go and bring her even after he is told that she is the wife of Uriah. Now, Uriah is not a nobody. He was one of David's mighty men. David was established in his leadership. He collected this group of outcasts and misfits and nobodies and they became this amazing band of mighty men who did incredible exploits.

This man was incredibly loyal. He had risked his life over and over and over for David, so there is a deep betrayal that's taking place here when David is intimate with Bathsheba. He sends her away, then in time he receives notice that she's pregnant.

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In this moment, there is probably an open window for David to confess his sin and receive forgiveness. The gift of confession is right there before him. “Oh, look at what I’ve done! Let me own it. Let me run to God.” But he doesn’t. He fears the consequence of his sin, so he begins his cover-up. He sends for Uriah. He brings him in from the battle and says, “Hey, tell me how things are going.” He tries to cover the whole deal, why he’s there. He says, “Okay, you’re doing a great job. Go get ‘em. Go spend a few days at home. See your wife,” hoping to cover up his sin.

But Uriah is so faithful and so loyal, he does what David failed to do in the beginning. He says, “It’s unthinkable that the men of this nation would be out serving God and laying down their lives while I’m here eating rich food and drinking and being intimate with my wife. No, God forbid that I dishonor God this way.” He refuses to go in and spend time with his wife. He refuses to go into his own home. He stays outside with the king’s servants. This is an amazing man!

Then in one of the most unattractive elements of David’s sin, David constructs a plan where he will have his general put Uriah up in the very front of the lines, in the most intense place of the battle and have them put Uriah’s life at stake. Maybe they’ll withdraw and he’ll be killed in battle. He’s trying to cover up his sin. The most distasteful part is that he sends the message with Uriah. “Carry this message to Joab.” He carries his own death sentence. It’s dreadful, isn’t it?

Then he comes back. When the messenger comes back, Joab says, “Listen, David’s going to be upset when he gets this message, that we’ve lost some men. We got too close to the wall. When you give him the message, tell him, ‘Uriah, your servant is dead.’” It happens. It’s done. David waits for a time and brings Bathsheba into the castle and makes her his wife.

In 2 Samuel 12 you are feeling like, “Man, my heart has sunk,” and Nathan, the prophet, comes to confront David. It’s a model of confrontation. He tells David a little parable. He says, “There was this man who had one lamb. It was just precious to him. He fed it from the table. He let it drink from his cup. It was like a daughter to him. And he had a very wealthy neighbor with tremendous wealth. One day the wealthy neighbor had a guest come, and instead of taking one of his lambs, he went to this poor man and took his only lamb. He slaughtered it and fed it to his guests.”

When David hears this parable, he’s outraged. He says, “This man must die! Okay, we’re not going to put him to death, but he’s got to repay four times what he took.” Then Nathan says these famous words: “David, you are the man. Thou art the man. You’re the one that’s done this.”

Then God tells David through the prophet, “I’m not going to take your life, but there will be three consequences for your sin, three terrible consequences.

- 1) The sword will never depart from your house. Your house is always going to be characterized by internal violence.

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- 2) Your wives are going to be taken from you and publicly be with someone else immorally. So you see the connections to his sin. His private, immoral sin and murder will now become public and characterize his house.
- 3) Then thirdly the child that Bathsheba carries will die. Those are the consequences of your sin.”

That brings David to this point of confession. When you hear that story, don't you want to say, “Oh David, if you had just confessed in the beginning, or sooner.” Every step of cover-up brings this greater consequence and greater pain and suffering, because we are getting further from God and further entangled in our sin until we are entrapped and engulfed in it. We thought we were doing this and now it owns us. That's the nature of sin.

**Confession is this gift which offers you an exit. You run to God and say, “God, I've just come to my senses. This is crazy. Forgive me! Help me! Open my eyes. I'm sure I'm already blind to the depth of my need.” We see that confession is God's gift to us.**

Just one of two elements here quickly, then we'll move on. **David focuses on God. He has no standing on his own.** What is he going to say to justify what he's done? Nothing. “She was exceptionally attractive,” is not a good defense. “I did it for the good of the nation. I covered it up to protect.” There is no defense, so he pleads for God's mercy. **He grounds his appeal to God on who God is – his compassion and his mercy. This is an invitation for us. He freely admits his sin.**

So then #2.

### II. Reflect on your need.

In verses 3-6 we see a deeper, more reflective explanation. “God, my sin – it's just staring me in the face. I can't get away from it. It's ever before me. Ultimately, though I've sinned against other people, my sin is against you.” He uses three words to describe his sin.

1. The first word, “**sin**” is the general word used almost 600 time in the Old Testament. It's missing the mark, falling short, not arriving at God's will, or obeying God.
2. The second is “**transgression**,” which describes a rebellion. “I've rebelled against God's leadership, God being God in my life. I've put myself on the throne of my life to make myself God. I've rebelled against God and his rule in my life.
3. The third word is “**iniquity**,” which takes us deeper, because the word “iniquity is a word that speaks of being twisted or bent. He is saying, “God, I not only failed to do what you require, I not only sinned, and my sin is

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against you, but I aggressively rebelled against you. And when I look deeper it's because there's a bentness, a propensity in my life toward what should not be there.

Friends, when we start to confess our sin in a way where we make no justification, no rationalization, we sweep all of that aside and say, "Lord, as ugly as this is, as hard as it is to say, Lord, I did this because I wanted to, because there was something in me that was drawn to this. And if I look deeper, my sin is more than just the symptom, more than just the fruit hanging on the tree; there is a root to it.

In my own battle against anger, one of the most helpful things for me was to realize, "Okay, I've got to come and I've got to look at the fruit of what that anger looks like. And, Lord, I'm going to confess it to you. I'm going to describe it to you in the detail in which it happened. But Lord, then I want to trace that down to the prideful roots that push out that fruit. At the base root, that fruit in my life looks like me wanting glory instead of giving glory to you; me in my pride wanting to be right, wanting to be exalted, wanting to exalt myself over others. And not trusting, God, that if you reign and rule in my life, it will be more glorious and more wonderful and more joy-filled, and that peace and happiness and significance and substance all come from you, and imagine this: Not from me!"

The moment you make someone else or something else God, they cannot be God. Whether that is something in you, or something made, or material, or a relationship, we'll never again have those things in proper perspective. They will begin to rule us and produce unhealthy patterns of thinking and dark emotions, because there's a bentness, there's a twistedness to the condition of our souls. So it serves us to say, "Let me reflect on the sin under the sin. Let me think about the challenge."

Maybe this is foreign to our culture, but if this sin has grown in my life, to where, if I'm honest, I feel an addiction, I feel like I can't not do it, confession begins with the honest admission of that. That's not a justification for the sin. It doesn't mean I'm less in need of cleansing. It means I'm more in need of cleansing. It doesn't mean I'm less in need of confession and repentance. It means I'm more in need. And where else am I going to go but to God? So now we're discovering a little bit about how not all confession leads to repentance. It's not all the same.

Friends, one little personal explanation from when I was a student in seminary. In Bible school I got the Dean's Award for the best student in theology. I mean, "Wow!" You're not impressed. I felt like there was this anger that ruled my life. I remember getting angry at a specific event and losing self-control, feeling so angry about my anger and so humiliated. Literally, I was kind of spiraling into a cycle of despair. I remember going on a jog so vividly and stopping, saying, "God, where are you? I feel like I believe this lie that I have to always win, and I can't get free of it!"

Friends, listen, if you are in a place where you know the helplessness and the hopelessness of feeling like this sin just

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owns you, I want to say to you: **Jesus Christ is greater than your sin.** The fact that anger doesn't rule my life is just the grace of God.

I have to say, "Okay, Lord, lead me not into temptation. Keep me from evil. Don't let me hurt the people I cherish the most because of a lack of self-control in this area." The people that know me and love me, our elders – as I know them, they know me, and they know that if I'm going to sin, these are the areas I'm likely to sin.

But, brothers and sisters, I want to tell you -- I celebrate the fact that that doesn't have the hold on my life that it once did. Lord, I don't want to be tested on this in the near future, or ever. Listen, it could be drugs. It could be sex. It could be gossip. I don't know whatever the fruit is that looks so attractive to you. But for me, when you begin to taste how that sin poisons everything that's precious in your life, the overwhelming knowledge of your need rises up and it drives you to this third point.

### III. God, I need you.

God, I am seeking your grace. I cannot do this, Lord, unless you do it. And that's not a copout. That's not an "I'm not responsible" statement. I'm seeking your help with all my heart. Listen, David is saying, "Purge me, O God. Cleanse me. Wash me. Let me hear joy. Let me hear gladness. My bones are broken, Lord. Restore me. God, don't look on my sin any longer. Blot out my iniquity, my twistedness, my bentness. O God, create in me a clean heart. Renew a right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Uphold me with a willing spirit."

When he says, "Cast me not away from your presence," I think he is thinking of King Saul. I think many people feel that. The king that preceded David was a man called by God, anointed by God, a gifted and amazing person, and he fell so out of disfavor with God. He was a man who hated the consequences of his sin, but not his sin. So he confessed, but he never repented. David is longing not to fall into that category. He's saying, "Lord, I want to know the joy of your salvation. I want to know your presence. I want to know your favor on my life."

This is not so much like, "I don't want to lose my salvation," as much as, "Lord, I don't want to go through life without you." So he calls out and cries out, and God meets him.

Now, we receive from God, and we receive from God in a lot of ways. **Really, the heart of this passage is that we are praying for God to restore us with him and to get us on track and to fill us with his Holy Spirit.** Amen? Yes. There may be some consequences to your sin. If you sleep with your neighbor's spouse and kill their mate, there may be consequences. So, what do we do when we are receiving God's help? Well, we take our consequences to God. "God, I

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was really, really irresponsible with the credit card in the last six months. Wow, there is this bill, Lord. There is this huge mountain of debt.” What do you do with that? Well, bring it to God. You want to know what God’s going to do with it? Somebody said, “He’s been looking at my credit cards!”

Okay, you have three options. Unfortunately, they’re not really your options, but let’s look at them. There’s **disciplining grace**, **glorious grace**, and **erasing grace**. They are all grace. They are all God working in your life. But what God does with the consequences of your sin, of your going off track, generally falls in three categories. One is:

- A) God loves you and says, “Listen, I’m happy to remove this consequence, but I need to discipline you. If I remove it in a way where you don’t learn what you need to learn, it’s not going to be grace. It’s going to be a punishment, because you’ll just run right back to it. There are these consequences that I’m going to leave in your life as my loving discipline.”

I always use the illustration: I’m the dad and one of my kids stands right in front of a candy bowl. “Dad, can I have this?” “No, dinner is 10 minutes away. You can’t have it.” They look at me. They look at the chocolate. They look at me. They say, “I think I want that chocolate more than I’m afraid of the consequences of what happens if I eat it.” So they eat the chocolate. What does a good dad do? Obviously the consequences are not enough, and if I love you I’m going to somehow serve you through some discipline. **Disciplining grace**.

- B) Secondly, **glorious grace**. There is a place where your sin dishonors God, and if God removes the consequence in a certain way...there’s a way in David’s life where his sin has become public. You can begin to trace the people that know. Joab knows. The messenger knows. Bathsheba knows. The whole castle knows. And now the whole kingdom knows. What happens when you so dishonor God that his glory is besmirched? He says, “You’re still mine. I still love you, but so that there will be no confusion, so that the whole kingdom won’t think it’s okay to go out and do this and go out and live in a dishonoring way, there are going to be consequences. They are connected to what’s happened in your life.” Very similar, but actually a higher aim and a higher goal.
- C) Then, here’s our favorite: **erasing grace**. That’s where God just erases the consequences. He says, “You know what? I’m providing for you to pay off that whole credit card debt.”

Now which should you pray for? I always pray for C! Don’t be ridiculous! “O God, please discipline me.” No. You see it in David’s life. David got this. He understood: “I can’t pay for my sin.” That’s not a presumption. Before the cross he had this knowledge of grace that “my only hope is in Christ. My only hope is in God providing for my need.” So when he is told by the prophet, “The child in Bathsheba’s womb will die,” what does he do? When the child is born and dying, he fasts and prays for God to have mercy. Audacious, bold faith in the mercy of God.

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I pray for this church to be debt-free. I don't think our debt is a consequence of bad behavior. I pray that Beth and I would be debt-free. (You notice, I didn't say that's not a consequence of our bad behavior, but I don't want to go there. I don't think it is, generally.) That's the point, isn't it? I'm not going to come to God and say, "God, I've done so well with what you gave me. I don't deserve to have this."

No, I'm going to come to God and say, "God, I want you to remove all debt in my life. I want this church to be so debt-free that we are giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to ministry purposes every year. Lord, get us ready so that we can be trusted with that kind of resource. Lord, pour it out! Lord, would you prepare Beth and me so that we are in a place of complete financial liberty and that, Lord, we would have a heart to bless other people, not about us, but about you." So we pray for erasing grace but listen, quickly, the point being that as we receive help, there is this focus on God renewing us and restoring us, and trusting God as we seek him to help with the consequences.

Finally, very quickly:

### IV. We resolve to worship.

The last five or six verses is now David saying, "I'm going to worship you." He's saying, "You really don't want religious acts of worship if my heart is not right with you, and those will never be a substitute of being right with you. In fact, what you really want is a broken and a contrite heart. You want me understanding that I'm away from you and I'm grieved over what I've done to you and that my help comes from you. I'm in a place of humility, receiving from you, living by grace, walking in grace. Now, Lord, as you renew me and as you give me strength, I'm resolving not just to not do that again, but to live wholly for you in a life of worship."

**There is a place where we run to God, we sit down, we reflect, we pray, we receive, and we arise to go and serve God with all of our hearts as he gives us strength.** Part of that is an indication that I'm not just hating the consequences of what's happening in my life. I'm not just trying to erase consequences. But I'm also seeking something much deeper -- to repent, to turn, to follow God and to be restored to him.

Would you bow your head? I want to ask you to reflect for a minute. Has this happened in your own life, in terms of trusting in Jesus Christ once and for all? Maybe there are individuals here where that's just never happened in your life. There has never been that stake you've driven down that said, "You know what? My hope is in Jesus Christ. He has paid for my sin and I'm going to confess my sin and ask for God's help and receive it by faith. Today is going to be the day of salvation for me. Today is going to be the day of renewal, my whole relationship with God being restored."

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Friends, the Bible tells us to follow Christ in this way and this is how we begin. This is repenting of our sin, turning from it, confessing it, and believing in Christ and receiving forgiveness. If that's never happened in your life, I pray that right now, you would just pray a simple little prayer to the Lord, admitting your sin. Just tell him, "Lord, I know I've sinned and I'm asking you to forgive me. I believe that Jesus died for my sin and I'm receiving forgiveness because of what he's done for me."