

DAVID, THE FAILED KING

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

God is gracious to forgive even the greatest of evil when a sinner repents.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGES:

2 Samuel 11–12; Psalm 51

+ SETTING:

If you love King David's victorious story, now might be the time to put down your Bible (but don't!). Though he was chosen of God, mighty in battle, patient in faith, and merciful to the needy (see 2 Sam. 9), he was in no way perfect. And though David was at the peak of his power, it took only one sinful decision to watch his reputation, family, and respect fall like a house of cards. Like a lion watching his prey from afar, waiting for the perfect moment to strike, Satan had chosen his strategy carefully. And it worked.

DAY 1

READ:

2 Samuel 11–12;

Psalm 51:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:1-2

NOTES

Spoiler alert: This week's daily readings are all focused on passages from Psalm 51, which David wrote after Nathan the prophet came to him with the honest truth. This psalm allows us to consider the story of David and Bathsheba from the end looking back to the beginning.

In the opening words of this psalm, we see David's pleas for God to be gracious and merciful, to "blot out" his rebellion, and to "wash" and "cleanse" him from guilt and shame. David had clearly seen the sin in his heart, mind, and body. He realized not only that he had sinned but that God alone could make him clean.

If you've ever gone several days without a shower, particularly if those days were hot, dusty, and activity-filled, you can relate physically to how David felt emotionally and spiritually. My husband and I took our kids to Moab, Utah, a few years ago . . . in July. The daytime highs were always over 100, and the dry, dusty climate left us all feeling coated in a fine layer of dirt. We got up early, hiked before the heat of the day, and found a cool place to spend the afternoon, such as a local creek or the library. Though we enjoyed the stay, our campground didn't have showers, so we spent four days in the heat and the dirt and the sweat without really getting clean.

I'll never forget the shower at the next hotel; I felt like a million bucks. Taking a dip in the creek and wiping off my arms and legs with a wet rag were no substitute for the real thing: I needed to get clean. And just as we can't ignore the dirt and dust on our bodies, God's people can't tolerate the stain on our hearts and minds either. Only God can make us clean, and only through His grace do we receive that cleansing.

When was the last time you physically felt the effects of your sin? How did you respond?

DAY 2

READ:

Psalm 51:6-9

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:7

NOTES

We don't often think of the word prophet when considering King David, but many of his words have prophetic implications pointing to the future he would never see physically. In today's passage from Psalm 51, David's words look back as well as ahead at God's hand of mercy.

David asked God to cleanse him with hyssop in verse 7. Hyssop, a small, bushy, minty-leafed plant, was the plant the Israelites used to paint the lintels and doorposts of their homes in Egypt so that the angel of death would pass over them and spare their firstborn children (Ex. 12:22). It was used by priests for ceremonial cleansing (Lev. 14). Obviously, David, sitting in the tabernacle worshipping the Lord, considered this plant as a living symbol of God's merciful deliverance and power to clean.

But hyssop's use wasn't limited only to the Old Testament. When Jesus, hanging on the cross, expressed that He was thirsty, the soldiers put a sponge full of "sour wine on a hyssop branch" for Him (John 19:29). It was just after this last earthly drink that He gave up His spirit.

It was David's ancestors who were saved through the application of blood on hyssop; it was David's progeny who would save all of humanity through His blood after drinking from hyssop. Spanning 1,500 years, God's beautiful hyssop sponge would be a beautiful picture of mercy, the picture of a lamb—or the Lamb—taking the place of another's death.

We don't need hyssop plants to remind us of God's mercy and atonement, but we certainly need the reminder. As we partake of the Lord's Supper, as we consider Jesus's death on the cross, and as we confess our sins, we look back to God's mercy and remember His faithfulness.

What images and memories help you focus on God's grace and mercy?

DAY 3

READ:

Psalm 51:10-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:13

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We can never cling to a besetting sin with one hand, and grasp Jesus Christ with the other. Until thou art content to reckon thyself dead indeed to every known form of sin, whether thou thinkest it small or great, thou never canst follow Jesus."¹

-William Hay M. H. Aitken
(1841-1927)

David sinned, confessed, received forgiveness and restoration, and vowed to teach the rebellious God's ways so that "sinners will return to you" (Ps. 51:13).

Paul was a murderer, was stopped in his tracks by Jesus, received salvation, and preached the gospel all over the world. His testimony affirms that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and he considered himself the worst of them (1 Tim. 1:15).

Peter walked with Jesus yet denied Him three times on the night Jesus was betrayed. After Jesus's resurrection, Peter was restored to his place in the brotherhood of apostles and led the early church until his death. His letters called others to live with hope, receive their call to holy living, and walk in obedience.

Every follower of Jesus has a similar story; each of us can recount our sin, our failure, and our woeful inadequacy. Every believer can point to the call of Jesus and the realization of our own depravity and desperation. Every Christian chooses to take up his or her cross and follow Christ, pointing others to Jesus as they watch us walk.

As we ponder how to live out our testimony, we can consider the ways in which Christ delivered us: Was it through sin or secrecy? Did He bring you through heartache, disease, or turmoil? Did He save your family, your marriage, or your life? How does Jesus give you the strength, focus, and resolve to walk in freedom, hope, and grace? Whatever your answers to these questions, consider others who need to hear your voice of hope and your testimony of forgiveness and Christ's salvation.

How can you use your past as part of your personal ministry to others?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 51:14-17

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:14-15

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #71: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ and not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

One of the biggest blessings of being a long-term member of a church is knowing the story behind so many of the people in the congregation. Through friendships, conversations that happen during fellowship time, or even public testimonies shared, we see God glorified in the lives of sinners saved by grace.

David had sinned. Once his confession came, surely he realized very quickly that his life would never be the same. His sin would be part of his story, part of his family, and part of his kingdom. Some people can't handle the weight of such shame and family-altering guilt. But in these particular lines of Psalm 51, David asks God to save him from guilt, and then he would praise the Lord with song (Ps. 51:14). David wasn't attempting to make a deal with God or script God's reply; instead, as he waited for the dust to settle, David would sing songs of God's righteousness.

There are times when the last thing we want to do is praise, when the anguish is so deep we can barely stand it, when the physical pain cripples us, when our relationships are so broken we can't even imagine repair, and more. We don't even want to get out of bed; how in the world could we want to praise?

If you find yourself in this predicament, pray as David did: "Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps. 51:15). If praise won't come out of the overflow of your heart, invite the Lord to put it there. He promised in Psalm 81:10, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." Turn your eyes and your heart to heaven, seeking to praise the Lord even when you wonder if the praise will even come. You'll find Him faithful to put the song in your heart and mouth.

What is your go-to song when praise doesn't come naturally? If you don't have one, talk it over with the Lord! Ask Him to point you to a song today.

DAY 5

READ:

Psalm 51

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 51:18-19

NOTES

We've walked slowly through this psalm all week. Almost every verse touches on the relationship between David and God: forgiveness, salvation, restoration, cleansing, and praise. In these last two verses, however, the psalm seems to take a hard turn, asking God to make Zion prosper, to build the walls of Jerusalem, and to accept the sacrifices and offerings on the altar.

Did David lose focus? Did he forget what he was talking about? I don't think so. I think David, in considering the effects of his sin, had realized that it wasn't just his own life and family that he had tarnished but the entire nation entrusted to him by God.

David's first mistake in this tragic tale was not being where he should have been when kings go off to war (2 Sam. 11:1). Joab was leading David's men against their enemies. On top of that, David gave Joab some terrible battle plans that would actually bring death to a mighty warrior and put other fighters in harm's way. Perhaps David was looking at his past steps and thought: "What did I do? How could I be so selfish? How could I put others in harm's way?"

We are wise to consider the same in our own lives. When the pull of temptation is strong and we believe that it won't hurt others or won't leave a lasting impact, we are lying to ourselves. Our sin is never a secret and is never isolated to us. We drag our marriages, our families, our reputations, and our kingdoms—whatever those are—into our decisions.

It's comforting to know that David went back to fighting with his men. In the verses immediately following the story of David and Bathsheba, we see him back with his troops, fighting and winning (2 Sam. 12:29-31). That's a good start.

Though our fellowship with God should be our primary motivation for a holy life, how has consideration for your marriage, family, and reputation reminded you of the importance of living righteously?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Temptation leads to sin and death (2 Sam. 11:2-5,14-17,26-27).

David put himself in the path of _____ and chose to _____. He then found himself in the position of needing to _____ his actions.

? What steps should we take to minimize our exposure to temptation and sin?

Keeping sin hidden requires _____ sins and piles on consequences, but we cannot keep our sins hidden from _____.

POINT 2: Sin leads to confrontation and judgment (2 Sam. 12:1-10).

David, who knew the law, was very quick to _____ sin in another's life while _____ and _____ up his own sin.

? Why do you think we are prone to be angry about the sins of others while overlooking our own sins?

When we disregard God's _____ by being _____, we disregard His sovereignty and rule, but God will not _____ our sin.

POINT 3: Repentance leads to grace and forgiveness (2 Sam. 12:13-15,24-25).

**ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #71:
JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH**

Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively _____ righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Never deliberate about what is clearly wrong, and try to persuade yourself that it is not."²

-Frederick Temple (1821-1902)

_____ (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through _____ in Christ and not as a result of human _____ or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

NOTES

? *What are some ways people mistakenly hope to justify themselves before God?*

God _____ and does not hold a grudge when we _____, though earthly consequences of our sin may still remain. In spite of our sin, the Lord remains committed to His _____ for our good and His glory.

? *How should we respond to the God who is faithful to forgive when His people repent?*

MY RESPONSE

Because we are a forgiven people, we live with appropriate transparency before others, celebrating Christ's transforming work so that they too might repent and find forgiveness of their sin in Jesus Christ.

- **HEAD:** What do your actions reveal about your beliefs regarding sin and temptation?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to repent of, and what steps will you take to combat those temptations in your life?
- **HANDS:** Who do you know that needs a confrontation regarding sin, an encouragement for obedience, or to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? How will you express these truths in love this week?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Beloved, don't go staring too long in the mirror examining your imperfections before lifting your eyes to the One who desires to meet you with compassion, relentless love and help."³

-Yana Conner