

## Guilty but Forgiven! Psalm 51:1-19

Have you ever done something wrong that you knew was wrong, and then tried to hide it anyway?

But then to hide it you had to commit something else that was wrong and try to hide that, too. Maybe you got away with it for a while, maybe even a long while, but then you were found out. What you did was exposed. It brought shame, guilt and consequences.

Many years ago, I knew a guy who worked in receiving for a manufacturing company. His job was to take samples from components that came in from vendors and run them through a series of tests to ensure that they met the quality specifications. He would then log his findings to show whether they were within the specified parameters. Come to find out, he would pull the samples but not test them and then just write down random numbers that were within range. I don't know how long he had been doing that but long enough to get him fired for falsification of documentation.

We first meet Nathan the prophet in **II Samuel 7**. He is a no-nonsense prophet. What God said, he repeated – word for word. He's the kind of guy who had thick skin and didn't let what others said about him get under his skin because what he said wasn't his opinion, it was the word of the Lord.

By the time we get to **II Samuel 7**, David is firmly entrenched as king of Israel and the Ark of the Covenant has been brought to Jerusalem. Up to this point David is a man truly committed to pleasing the Lord. In chapter 7, David has a thought. It's a great idea. He scheduled a meeting with Nathan and told the prophet he didn't think it was right that he lived in a paneled house with all the latest luxuries while the place where God resided was in a tent. He wanted to build a beautiful temple for God. Nathan thought that was a good idea and told him to do whatever his heart desired and the Lord would be with you.

Later that night Nathan had a visit from God who told Nathan to tell David to hold his horses on those

plans. It wasn't that God didn't think a permanent temple was a bad idea, it was just that David wouldn't be the one to build it, his son would. But God did make a promise to David that his throne would be established forever. Humbled that God would do that for him, he responded with a prayer of gratitude.

David and Nathan had an established relationship. It was one of mutual respect that centered on a mutual love for and commitment to God. They were on the same page when it came to God and country.

David was the most powerful man in the world. He was wealthy. He was handsome. He had everything a king could ask for. Perhaps that's what started him down a fateful path. If you were to have told David the sins he was about to commit, he might have said that was the most preposterous thing imaginable and that you were out of your mind mad. Never in a million years would he ever think of doing what you suggest. But Scripture records for us that he in fact did commit those sins.

Perhaps he began to take his position as king for granted. Where once he guarded and measured his heart and actions with whether they would please God, he became lax and complacent. Years later, his own son, now sitting on the throne would pen some words that should have been heeded by both, words that would have saved them a lot of trouble and pain: **“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” (Prov. 4:23)**

Had he kept that advice, it would have spared him a lot of heartache, but then we would not have one of the most beautiful and encouraging passages that when we fail to guard our heart and fall into sin, there is a path to forgiveness and reconciliation.

David and Nathan had a second encounter. If on a scale of 1 to 10 the first meeting was a ten, this meeting didn't even measure a 1.

In **II Samuel 11** we read the disturbing account of David giving in to his fleshly passions by committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, who happened to be one of his 30 mighty. Some time later, David was informed that she was pregnant. He knew

he was the father because Uriah was out of town engaged in battle. To cover up his sin with Bathsheba, he hatched a scheme to have Uriah return home hoping to entice him into having a good time at home after being away from his wife for a prolonged period of time. But Uriah was a man of integrity and wouldn't comply with the wishes of his king. Because plan A failed, David went to plan B and had Uriah purposely placed in battle where he would be killed by the enemy. To further cover up his sin, he brought her to the palace and married her so that when the baby was born it would appear to be his after they were married. The cover up seemed to be going as planned.

Although there were probably rumors whispered around the palace by servants, David had kept the secret hidden from public scandal for about a year. No one knew the awful truth he let boil deep inside his soul. On the outside he was pleasant and went about his normal routine. I imagine that he went regularly to the Tabernacle to worship, bringing his sin and fellowship sacrifices – going through the religious motions of appearing to be in good standing with God. He sang his praises with the other worshippers, offered his prayers, showed up for all the ceremonies prescribed in the Law of Moses. So far so good. But inside his soul, his heart burned with guilt. Here's how he described it in **Psalm 32:3-4: “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever-heat of summer.”**

David compares God's heavy hand on him with the oppressive heat of day causing heat stroke. There is no relief. It sapped his physical energy.

It was probably a day David feared would come, but a day he hoped would never come. Maybe he hoped to take his secret to the grave. It didn't take TV shows like *Unsolved Mysteries* or *Forensic Files* to unravel this story. It took a prophet who listened to God, a prophet who was not afraid to lay out the cold, hard facts and confront the most powerful man on earth. One day while enjoying some lemonade on the terrace, the king had an unexpected guest. I'm not sure David knew what was coming. After all, they had

a history of friendship. The prophet started with a story. It involved a wealthy man and a poor man. The one had many sheep, the other had 1 that was like a pet. The rich guy had an unexpected guest show up around mealtime. Rather than take a sheep from his plentiful herd, he stole the pet from his neighbor and prepared a lavish feast for his friend. The king was outraged that someone would be so calloused and cruel and demanded the man receive the death penalty.

I imagine the prophet set his jaw square and looked at the king right in the eyes and said, **“you're that man!”** David had incriminated himself. The proverbial cat was out of the bag.

**II Samuel 12:13** has two of the most beautiful sentences recorded in Scripture.

**“Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’”**

**“Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin.’”**

Here's how the Message puts it: **“Then David confessed to Nathan, ‘I've sinned against God.’ Nathan pronounced, ‘Yes, but that's not the last word. God forgives your sin.’”** (emphasis added)

I'd like to think it was the same relief felt by Christian in John Bunyan's classic *Pilgrim's Progress* when the burden he carried rolled off his back at the cross. Everything David experienced in that moment is recorded for us in **Psalm 51**.

Before we look at **Psalm 51**, I want to say this. Nathan remained a trusted friend. Later when David's son Adonijah claimed to be King before David had named Solomon as his successor, Nathan was there to help foil the plot. He would also record the events of both David's and Solomon's reign. Nathan was a trusted friend because he spoke the truth with David even though what he had to say was difficult to hear. He served David as a loyal and faithful friend, especially when David needed it most. He was faithful to deliver God's message at a time when the king needed it most. I wonder if their friendship and the gratitude David had for Nathan standing up to the king, was a reason he and Bathsheba named one of their sons Nathan.

There are times when we need a friend like Nathan, someone who is unafraid to speak the truth rather than treat our sin as the elephant in the room.

**Do we have sins we are trying to hide that are eating at us like they did David? Psalm 51** is a psalm for every one of us. There was a time I well remember reading this Psalm, laying it out on the floor and weeping before God, broken by my sin, but then experiencing the joy of forgiveness.

**Is it possible that the reason we don't feel the same remorse as David is because we don't see our sin the same way God sees it?** Now, someone might argue that they have never committed adultery or murder. Yet, Scripture is replete with passages that remind us that all sin is an offence to a holy God.

As David reflected on his encounter with Nathan he penned this Psalm to help us understand that forgiveness is only a prayer away, that a joyful heart can be restored, that reconciliation with God is possible, and that God doesn't put us on the shelf never to be of service to Him again.

Here is something important to keep in mind. If we didn't have God's forgiveness, we would only have His justice. And if we only had God's justice, we wouldn't have this psalm or verses like **John 3:16** or **I John 1:9** or **Psalm 103:12** or **Romans 5:8, 8:1**. Without mercy there is only judgment.

The fact of the matter is, we need God's forgiveness. Without it, there would only be His justice and His punishment. We deserve what we would get because we have all broken God's law – period. No one is above the law, no one is outside the law. No one has kept the law. When it comes to our own sin, what do we see in David's response that can help us? I find seven things. The first is the call by David.

## I. THE CALL BY DAVID – vv. 1-2

David calls on God to act out of His mercy, His unfailing love, His compassion as a means of blotting out his transgression, washing away his iniquity and cleansing him of his sin.

Mercy is a divine attribute of God.

**Ephesians 2:4** says that God is rich in mercy.

**II Samuel 24:14** says that God's mercy is great.

One author describes God's mercy this way: "Mercy is revealed in the actions God takes to relieve suffering and demonstrate His faithfulness and steadfast love. Mercy is such an exceptionally complex concept that several Hebrew and Greek words are used to express the dimensions of its meaning. Synonyms like compassion, lovingkindness, favor, and steadfast love often appear in Bible translations to illustrate the idea of mercy. A brief biblical definition of mercy is 'the gift of God's undeserved kindness and compassion.'"

My college doctrine teacher simply defined it as *God not giving us what we deserve*. We deserve His wrath, but He withholds it so that we can repent and not perish.

David knew that he deserved God's punishment, but he pled with God based on His mercy. He knew God to be merciful.

On one occasion, Moses wanted to see God. God said He would pass by and cover his eyes. He then emphasized the importance of His mercy by telling Moses that He was a God of compassion, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness, one who forgives iniquity, rebellion, and sin. (**Exodus 34:6-7**)

In his sin, David asked God to act according to His nature. He appealed to God the only way he knew how in this moment of guilt – He looked to God's mercy. Why? Because he knew that God was merciful. He knew that God had unfailing and unaltered love. He knew that God's compassion was great. Asking for God's mercy is a way of saying we don't deserve what we're asking, but we're asking because of His nature.

*If you've ever been stopped for speeding and you know you were speeding, yet you sought mercy from the officer, you deserve the ticket, but you hope he will be lenient, if he let you go with a warning, that's mercy.*

Nehemiah expressed this thought regarding Israel who had been exiled due to their sin even though

they deserved it when he wrote **“But in your great mercy, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are!”** (Nehemiah 9:31 NLT)

When you sin, take a hint from David’s experience and plead for the mercy of God. His mercy will never run out.

Now David uses three terms in his plea that we need to understand.

**Transgression** is a presumptuous sin. It is to choose to intentionally disobey.

Cain willfully murdered Abel.

Samson willfully broke his Nazarite vow.

This person says “I know it’s wrong, but I’m going to do it anyway.”

David referred to this kind of sin when he wrote in **Psalm 32:1** that a person is happy whose transgressions are forgiven.

**Iniquity** refers to sins that are premeditated. They are sins that are thought out ahead of time. It also refers to sins you continue to commit without repentance.

**Micah 2:1** **“Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning’s light they carry it out because they have the power to do it.”**

Left unchecked, this kind of sin leads to no fear of God. **Revelation 17:4** refers to this as a cup of iniquity meaning that it is filled to the brim.

**Romans 1** says that this kind of sin leads to unnatural affections that result in a reprobate mind.

**Sin** is the more generic term and simply means to miss the mark and fall short of God’s glory by doing the opposite of what is right, something that is against God or others. If not dealt with, this sin can lead to transgression and then to iniquity.

David wanted all these sins blotted out and washed clean. To blot out refers to records that can be erased.

My senior year in High school I had a job helping the janitor clean classrooms. One of my jobs was to erase the chalk board, wipe it clean of all the stuff written on it. David wanted the chalkboard of his life wiped clean, all his transgressions erased, everything completely removed.

He wanted all his iniquity washed away, comparing it to washing clothes with a strong detergent.

He wanted to be cleansed of all his sin, which refers to a liturgical ceremony where a person was purified so they could participate in Temple worship.

David called on God to cleans him of all his sin. Don’t try to sweep it under the rug and hide it. God knows. Seek Him in His mercy to forgive.

In **verses 3-6** we see the confession of David.

## II. THE CONFESSION OF DAVID – vv. 3-6

Now let’s be clear that David wasn’t telling God something He didn’t already know. God knows everything we do, everything we say, everything we think, even the motives of our heart. So David telling God about his sin wasn’t a surprise to God. David took an important step in seeking forgiveness – he was owning his sin, admitting his sin, agreeing with God about his sin. That David says his sin was **‘always before me’** means it was on his mind, he couldn’t escape it. He was freely admitting his sin to God.

Folks, if we are going to seek forgiveness of sin, we need to come in humility to God and own up to our sin, admit we are guilty, put the blame squarely where it belongs – on our shoulders.

I heard about a little boy who told his mother he wanted a baby brother. Curiously, the mother asked why. He responded by saying that he could only blame so much on the dog.

We can’t blame anyone else for our sin.

We can’t blame our parents as David said he was born in sin. That means he was born a sinner. The sin nature was something he inherited, something we have all inherited from Adam whose sin caused all of us to be born in sinners so that it is right to say that I’m not a sinner because I sin, I sin because I’m a sinner. It’s part of our DNA.

We can’t say “the devil made me do it” like Flip Wilson.

We can’t blame the culture for our sin.

We can't blame God for our sin.

We can only blame ourselves and we need to admit it.

Now while David confessed his sin, there is also repentance along with it. Confession is the act of acknowledging our sin. Repentance is the feeling or emotion of regret or sorrow for our sin with a change in behavior by turning from it and a commitment to walk in obedience to God. You can force someone to confess, but repentance comes from within the individual. Nathan didn't pressure David to confess, but the facts he presented resulted in David's admission of his sin and a need to confess. His confession then brought about his cleansing.

### III. THE CLEANSING OF DAVID – vv. 7-12

The term '**cleanse me**' literally means "un-sin me" so it would read "**Un-sin me with hyssop and I will be clean.**"

At the very first Passover observed on the eve before Israel left Egypt, the Israelites were to take some hyssop, dip it in the bowl that held the blood of the Passover lamb and spread it on the door posts so that the angel of death would pass over their home when he saw the blood applied. The leaves of the Hyssop plant were hairy and held liquid. It was ideal as a sprinkling device used in their purification rituals.

David well understood the symbolism of using hyssop to make him clean from sin. He was like a filthy garment that needed washing, washing that couldn't come from a stiff brush and strong soap.

There are a number of hymns that come to mind:

**Are You washed in the Blood?**

**There is Power in the Blood**

**I Know a Fount**

**O the Blood of Jesus**

When we confess our sin, the blood of Christ is applied to us so that His blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness. There is no sin by which the blood of Christ cannot make me clean. David states that when God cleansed him he would be whiter than snow. It's not a maybe, it's a fact. It will be cleansed. David wanted his joy to return, he wanted the bones

God had crushed to once again rejoice. He wanted his whole self – physical, mental, spiritual – to be renewed so that he could be blessed and happy knowing that all his transgressions had been forgiven.

### **Psalm 103:1-5, 8-13**

When we know true forgiveness it should result in a heart that rejoices because it has experienced only what God can offer.

Your sin can't be washed away by observing rituals.  
Your sin can't be washed away by doing good deeds.  
Your sin can't be washed away by religious activity.

When we go to God for cleansing from our sin, something only He can do, we are promised that sin will be forgiven, and we are made right with God. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (**I John 1:9**)

David wanted to be right with God so that he could remain in God's service. For over a year, sin had caused David to be deaf to the voice of God. He wanted once again to hear joy and gladness. He wanted God to create a right spirit within him. It's the same word used in **Genesis 1:1** speaking of God creating the heavens and the earth. It means to create absolutely, supernaturally, to make something from nothing. David wanted a new heart.

### **II Corinthians 5:17**

He didn't want God just to change the old one, he wanted radical heart surgery. It's the same idea Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again. He wanted more than restoration; he wanted regeneration. He wanted God to sustain him. In other words, David was asking God not to let him sin like that again.

David knew it wasn't the blood of bulls and goats by which he could be cleansed but only by God Himself.

**Not all the blood of beasts**

**On Jewish altars slain;**

**Could give the guilty conscience peace**

**Nor wash away its stain.**

With this fresh start David made a commitment.

### IV. THE COMMITMENT FROM DAVID – v. 13

David was going to take what he learned and teach others. He wanted them to know that they too could

be free from the guilt of sin that plagued them and weighed them down. He wanted them to know that they too could be free from their burden of sin. He wanted to teach them the importance of always obeying God's Word, that they could be brought back into a right relationship with God.

Not that we want to air our dirty laundry, but sharing with God how we were restored but telling others that we have been forgiven can be a way of giving them hope when they might otherwise feel like nothing can help them in the mess they are in.

Paul reminds us that where sin abounded, grace superabounded. As the hymn goes, grace is greater than all our sin. There is no sin so great that God can't forgive. There is no sin so great from which we can't be restored. Point the way for others.

## V. THE CHORUS OF DAVID – vv. 14-15

**Verse 14** probably refers to the overwhelming sense of guilt David felt for having Uriah killed. Yes, the enemy had done the deed, but he gave the order to make it happen. If God would forgive him, then he would follow with open praise.

When I saw the cleansing fountain  
Open wide for all my sin,  
I obeyed the Spirit's wooing,  
When He said, "Wilt thou be clean?"

Refrain

I will praise Him! I will praise Him!  
Praise the Lamb for sinners slain;  
Give Him glory, all ye people,  
For His blood can wash away each stain.

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Praise should be our first response when we know we have been forgiven of our sin. Joy only comes after the pardon.

## VI. THE CONTRITION OF DAVID – vv. 16-17

Charles Spurgeon once said, "a heart crushed is a fragrant heart."

We have some roses outside our bedroom window and when the breeze blows just right our room is filled with a lovely aroma. But I understand that the best fragrance comes when the petals are crushed

releasing a deep aroma that is not otherwise possible except when it is crushed.

David knew that rituals wouldn't produce cleansing from sin. That's a works-based method of seeking forgiveness. David understood that God required a spirit of humility that resulted in a penitent heart, a broken spirit over what he had done. His sacrifice wasn't a burnt offering but a broken heart. He realized the heart was the problem. **What's the point of going through the motions of performing a ritual if one's heart is not in it?** We need to be serious with sin, to see sin as God does, not as what we want it to be or what the world says it is. Tony Evans writes: "A casual relationship with sin, means no authentic worship of God." When we sin, show how serious you are and be broken before God about it.

David concludes by speaking about how it affects the community.

## VII. THE COMMUNITY OF DAVID – vv. 18-19

It's a prayer for Jerusalem that they might prosper at God's hand. It's a reminder that unconfessed individual or corporate sins are like broken down walls that need to be rebuilt. Confession rebuilds the walls of the heart. Individual and corporate sins can affect more than just the person. They can affect the family and the nation, like Achan's sin. In the same way they can affect a church family. David wanted to see the city prosper through confession and reconciliation with God. The result is more than just a material blessing, it results in national worship.

When our heart of filled with pride, when we are ignorant about what constitutes sin, when we are complacent or flippant about our sin, those are factors that can keep us from confessing. But when we are humble before God, when we are honest with God, when we admit our sin, confess and repent of that sin, we will experience forgiveness and be filled with a joyful, worshipful heart that gives thanks for God's mercy, His unfailing love and great compassion and we'll want others to experience the same.