

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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Soundtrack

“Confession is Good for the Soul”

Psalm 51

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It was reported back in 2018 that a curious looking Doritos bag washed ashore on to an Outer Banks beach in North Carolina. After examining the curious bag closely the National Park Service said in a report, “This bag was found last week ... on Harkers Island along with other storm debris. The bag design looked odd to us, but we couldn’t put our finger on why until we noticed the date in the lower corner—1979!” The rangers noted in their post that the bag has been floating in the ocean for nearly 40 years, which highlights just how long plastics can remain in the environment. “This serves as a reminder that plastic trash lasts a long time, in this case almost 40 years!” the National Park Service said. Just as the ocean has all kinds of pollutants in it that can last an unbelievably long time if not removed, so also our lives can be riddled, polluted with past wrongdoings that we have committed or that others have committed against us. There is a way to rid our lives of the trash of the past and the season of Lent lends itself to identifying the pollutants in our lives and then points us to the way God provides to remove the debris in our lives once and for all.

GUILT AND SHAME OF SIN

The writing of Psalm 51 came out of an extremely turbulent moment in the life of a famous musician, politician, one of the greatest leaders in the history of Israel, a great servant of God and a man whom God chose to be the King of His people because God said that he had a heart after God. One Spring afternoon, this great man, King David, the mightiest King and one of the best examples in his kingdom of a leader who loved God and led his people into peace and prosperity, got up from a nap and went for a walk on the roof of the palace. As David was walking on the palace rooftop, he was looking over the city below and he unexpectedly saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. Did King David look away? No! He watched her take a bath and then inquired about who she was. David discovered that her name was Bathsheba, and her husband was Uriah, one of David’s trusted, faithful, committed military leaders. David then had Bathsheba brought to him and then had sexual relations with her. In order to cover up his adultery, David sent for her husband to come home from battle to be with her and hopefully they would also have sleep together then if she were to become pregnant it would look like it was her husband’s baby and not his. Uriah though was such a faithful soldier he did not feel right coming to be with his wife while his men were at battle. Therefore, Uriah came to the King but would not go home to Bathsheba. When David could not get Uriah to go be with Bathsheba, he did not give up his effort to cover up his wrongdoing. David then sent Uriah back to battle and David instructed his military leader to place Uriah on the front lines of battle and when the battle would become intense, they were to pull back all the soldiers except Uriah. They did as the King

instructed and sure enough Uriah died in battle. It looked like David finally succeeded in getting away with lust, adultery, and murder, but David forgot that there was One who saw everything and was not fooled by David's selfish scheming. You can read more of the details of this tragic story in *2 Samuel 11-12* where we learn that God then sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront David of his many sins. I can't imagine the intensity of emotions that David must have felt when he realized that he did not get away with it. David must have felt overwhelming guilt, shame, anger, and fear just like Adam and Eve felt in the Garden of Eden when they disobeyed God and experienced the full force of sin in their lives.

Listen then to David's response to God as found in David's journal entry in Psalm 51:

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.*
- ² Wash me clean from my guilt.
Purify me from my sin.*
- ³ For I recognize my rebellion;
it haunts me day and night.*
- ⁴ Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.
You will be proved right in what you say,
and your judgment against me is just.^[a]*
- ⁵ For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.*
- ⁶ But you desire honesty from the womb,^[b]
teaching me wisdom even there.*
- ⁷ Purify me from my sins,^[c] and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*
- ⁸ Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
now let me rejoice.*
- ⁹ Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt.*
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God.
Renew a loyal spirit within me.*
- ¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence,
and don't take your Holy Spirit^[d] from me.*
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.*
- ¹³ Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.*
- ¹⁴ Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.*

- 15 Unseal my lips, O Lord,
that my mouth may praise you.*
- 16 You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.
You do not want a burnt offering.*
- 17 The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*
- 18 Look with favor on Zion and help her;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.*
- 19 Then you will be pleased with sacrifices offered in the right spirit—
with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.
Then bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.*

We may listen to this horribly tragic story of David's sin and say that we would never have done anything like that and yet, the truth is that the same sin that is found in David is found in us as well. David points out a truth about all of us in *Psalm 51:5* when he says, *"For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me."* We are all like David, in that we are born into this world as sinners. The Apostle Paul basically said the same thing in *Romans 5:12*, *"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned."* The moment we are conceived sin has corrupted us. Theologians call this **original sin** that can be traced all the way back to when Adam and Eve first sinned and as a result all of God's creation was polluted by sin and continues to be polluted by sin to the point that we are born with the natural inclination to sin. We have all inherited a corrupt, sinful nature. J.D. Walt in the Soundtrack devotional on Psalm 51 writes, *"I used to think I was a sinner because I sinned. This Song tells me the hard truth: I was born this way. I was born into the corrupted lineage of the human race. I am not a sinner because I sin. I sin because I am a sinner. Major difference!"* As sinners we selfishly sin and then we reap the guilt and shame as a result of sin because we are guilty. When we sin, when we do something wrong or not do something right, God works with our consciences to make us feel the guilt and shame of our sin which is meant to lead us to avoid doing the same wrongdoing in the future. Instead, many of us go deeper in our guilt and shame and it drags us down. The Psalmist says the same thing in *Psalm 38:4*, *"My guilt overwhelms me—it is a burden too heavy to bear."* Have you ever been weighed down with unresolved guilt and shame associated with hurt in your life? Are you hurting now because of wrong you have done or wrong that was done to you?

CONFESSION OF SIN

God gives us here in Psalm 51 a basic 2-part remedy for the burden of unresolved sin in our lives and the first part is that of confession of sin. The great King David humbles Himself before God in this Psalm and admits his rebellion, that it torments him as it haunts him day and night, that he has sinned against God, and done evil in God's eyes. David does not hold back. David is completely vulnerable before God as he candidly and honestly admits everything he has done and how he feels. David doesn't hold back but takes ownership for his own actions and takes all the blame. David doesn't make any excuses, or justify his actions, or shift responsibility by blaming someone else as we can so easily do when we sin. Archbishop Joseph Bernardin, once wisely stated, *"If we*

are honest, we must admit that much of our time is spent pretending. But when we turn to God in prayer, we must present our real selves, candidly acknowledging our strengths and weaknesses and our total dependence on him." That is exactly what David did. It is important when we have done something wrong or did not do what was right, both of which are sin, that we admit to God and take full responsibility for our actions. We cannot find healing and renewal and freedom from our past and our sins without first taking responsibility for our wrongdoing.

What we have in this passage is not just simply confessing sin. This Psalm of David is called a Psalm of Lament. When reading this Psalm with the knowledge of David's guilt and shame for his action you can almost see the tears on the pages and hear and feel his anguish and tremendous agony over his actions. David felt tremendous sorrow for what he had done and not just because he was caught doing something wrong. David was heartfelt in his sorrow for his wrongdoing. Every year we begin the season of Lent with an Ash Wednesday service where we put ashes on each other's foreheads. We did something different this past Wednesday for our Ash Wednesday service. If you were there online or in-person you know that we handed out little dark pieces of cloth to everyone. We then invited all of us to tear the cloth in half at the end of the service. Why did we do this, one of the reasons is that in the times of the Bible when someone was mourning or gravely upset, they would throw ashes on themselves and actually tear their clothes as a sign of anguish for whatever happened. As we tore the small piece of cloth, we were showing our anguish for our sin, our godly sorrow for all sin and brokenness and shame and guilt in our lives. The prophet Joel says in *Joel 2:12-13*, *"That is why the LORD says, 'Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. 13 Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.' Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish."* That is exactly what the season of Lent is meant to be a time where we come to God with hearts that are torn apart with grief over our sin, the brokenness in our lives and in the world around us.

The confession of sin that leads to healing is not one where we flippantly confess our sins but is a heartfelt godly sorrow that leads to a desire to not commit that sin again. The Bible describes this godly sorrow in *2 Corinthians 7:10* saying, *"For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death."* Godly sorrow leads us to God when we have sinned, and we then honestly poured out of sorrow over our wrongdoing to God without holding back the details of what we have done and our sharing all our feelings as well. This doesn't mean that if we do not confess every sin we will not be forgiven of the individual sins. The kind of confession that we read about in Scripture is not just a nonchalant listing of sins before God but is a real soul-searching cry out to God in sorrow for all that we have done or should have done. A great prayer to offer up to God in this season of Lent is that of *Psalm 139:23-24*, He writes *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life."*

RECEIVE GOD'S FORGIVENESS & RENEWAL

Once we approach God in all humility, honesty, candor, and transparency confessing our error then we are to receive God's transformational forgiveness. David here in Psalm 51 pleads for God's mercy, unfailing love, compassion, and forgiveness that cleanses him of all his sins. David asks God for a fresh start again that will bring back joy again as God removes the overwhelming guilt and shame he was feeling, and that God would give him a new heart that is willing to obey all that God's truth. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases David's plea for God to let him start all over again in verses 9-10, "*Don't look too close for blemishes, give me a clean bill of health. God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.*" David is ready to turn over a new leaf in his life. David knew that God is a God of love, mercy, compassion, a forgiving God who constantly gives 2nd chances. As a result, even after all the horrible things that David did, he knew he could turn to God ask for God to forgive Him and give him a fresh new start from the chaos that he has created.

One of the greatest challenges to God's forgiveness is to allow God to forgive us. Instead, we punish ourselves by carrying the burden of our sin instead of letting God forgive, heal, and create new hearts in us and thus redeem our lives. Early in Pastor Steve Brown's ministry he counseled a woman who, some 20 years before, had been unfaithful to her husband. For years that sin had haunted her. Pastor Brown was the first person she ever confessed to about her infidelity. After they talked and prayed for a long time, the pastor recommended she tell her husband. He wouldn't necessarily give this advice to everyone in her situation accept he knew her husband and felt that after the initial shock this would strengthen their marriage. It wasn't easy for her, but she promised she would tell him. But before she told him she said to her pastor, "*I trust you enough to do what you ask, but if my marriage falls apart as a result, I want you to know I'm going to blame you.*" She didn't smile when she said that, either. The pastor then commenced to pray with a high degree of seriousness for God's mercy in this situation. Pastor Steve Brown then writes about this in his book saying, "*I saw her the next day, and she looked fifteen years younger. 'What happened?' I asked. 'When I told him,' she exclaimed, 'he replied that he had known about the incident for 20 years and was just waiting for me to tell him so he could tell me how much he loved me!' And then she started to laugh. 'He forgave me twenty years ago, and I've been needlessly carrying all this guilt for all these years!'*" Perhaps you are like this woman: you've already been forgiven years ago, but you don't know God's forgiveness. Instead, you've been haunted by a load of guilt for years." God has already forgiven you. He is waiting for you to confess your sins to Him and then receive the free, fresh start of forgiveness. If we will accept God's forgiveness, we will find renewal, regeneration, recreation, redemption, and so much more. Through God's forgiveness God changes our hearts just like *Ezekiel 36:25-27* says, "²⁵ *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols.* ²⁶ *And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.* ²⁷ *And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.*"

Are you carrying around today unforgiveness for yourself or for someone else today and allowing it to drag down your life? God longs to set you free and give you a new start and a new heart. As we sing our final song won't you turn to God and accept the free gift of a fresh start from the chaos of sin that God offers?

Jude 24-25, "24 Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. 25 All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord. All glory, majesty, power, and authority are his before all time, and in the present, and beyond all time! Amen."

Icebreaker I – What is the strangest thing you've ever found washed up on the beach or floating in the ocean?

Icebreaker II – Have you ever confessed something only to find out the person to whom you were confessing already knew what you had done? Or perhaps the other way around – someone confessed to you something of which you were already aware? What was that like?

1. Can you remember your first real sin? Are you willing to talk about it?
2. Has covering up sin backfired in your life? If yes, how so?
3. How have you seen God's mercy when you owned up to your sin? What did it look like for you?
4. Do you believe it is possible to grow so full of the love of God that sin as you know it loses its power over you? Why or why not?
5. How can this group pray for you this week?