

The Confession  
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Psalm 51:1-17

**Opening: Is guilt a good thing or a bad thing? Explain. How does guilt move a person to take action? What is the difference between confession and repentance? Does one work without the other?<sup>1</sup>**

Big Idea: When we become aware of sin in our lives, it should move us to confession followed by repentance.

- Psalm 51 is a classic chapter in scripture.
- Perhaps it's THE classic text about confession and repentance of sin.
- If you've studied the Old Testament, you know the back-story.
- King David, a man "after God's own heart" became so prideful and arrogant that he felt every thing and every person in the land belonged to him. That included the beautiful wife of one of David's commanders.
- David satisfied his desire; took what was not his; and launched a domino effect of adultery, deception, murder, pain, and family dysfunction that would alter the history of Israel.
- In this moving Psalm, David pleads with God for restoration. There were no excuses, no finger pointing, nor blaming others. David owned what he had done and turned to our Heavenly Father, the only source of cleansing.
- David's plea is a model for us of acknowledging sin, vowing to turn from it, and using our failure as motivator to help others avoid the same mistakes.

Psalm 51:1–17 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;

according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

<sup>6</sup> Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

- Verse one: David cuts to the chase pleading, *“Have mercy on me, God!”* **What does David say about God in this verse?**
- Forgiveness only comes by the steadfast love and abundant mercy of our Heavenly Father. We bring NOTHING to the equation except our sin.
- Verses one and two: David describes just how “dirty” his life has become because of his sin – *“blot out,” “wash thoroughly,” “cleanse.”*
- Notice the words David uses to describe his offense: “sin,” “transgressions,” and “iniquity.” Let’s look at each.
  - o Sin – Means “missing the mark” of God’s standard, sometimes even unintentionally. We’re born with a “sin nature” so we all sin. (See verse 5 of this Psalm, and Romans 3:23)
  - o Transgressions – Willful, intentional sin.
  - o Iniquity – “...is more deeply rooted...a “premeditated choice, continuing without repentance.” David’s sin with Bathsheba that led to the killing of her husband, Uriah, was iniquity.”<sup>2</sup>
- Example: Staying home from battle and “girl watching” was sin; taking Bathsheba in adultery was transgression; plotting to cover it up all the way to murder of Uriah was iniquity.
- Verse four: When we sin it hurts others, it hurts us, but ultimately it offends God. Because God is holy, He has every right to punish us.
- Question: **How does this verse contradict claims about something (i.e. – prostitution) being described as a “victimless” crime?**
- Verse three part a: “For I know my transgressions...” **How do we sometimes rationalize our sin? What substitute words do we use?**
- We have a tendency to think we don’t have anything bad enough to confess. What did John say about that in his first letter?

<sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- 1 John 1:8 calls us out if we think we have nothing to confess. David didn't have that problem because he didn't just have little sins to confess.
- Verse three part b: David said, "...my sin is ever before me."
- **How does unconfessed sin make you feel? How is it different for an unbeliever vs. a follower of Christ?** (Illustration: A sack, some rocks, some garbage, and no shower)
- There is an interesting Hebrew word for the verb confess:
  - o 3034. יָדָה **yâdâh**, yaw-daw´; to use (i.e. hold out) *the hand*; phys. to *throw* (a stone, an arrow) at or away; espec. to *revere* or *worship* (with extended hands); intens. to *bemoan* (by wringing the hands):—cast (out), (make) confess (-ion), praise, shoot, (give) thank (-ful, -s, -sgiving).<sup>3</sup>
  - o This word means both to THROW something away AND to raise hands in worship and praise. For example, the same word is used in these two verses:

Psalm 32:5 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

Psalm 33:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

- When we're lugging around that heavy, smelly sack of unconfessed sin we need to yadah (yaw-daw) and throw it

- down in confession to God. Then we need to yadah (yaw-daw) and raise our hands in praise for His mercy!
- In verses seven through nine David beautifully describes the “clean up” of our lives that only God can accomplish:  
*“Purge me...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.”*
  - **How does verse ten explain that God’s forgiveness is not superficial?**
  - Verse eleven: **Can a follower of Christ be cast away from God’s presence? Can we lose the Holy Spirit? Any difference in how this worked before Jesus died for our sins and today?**

The Bible Knowledge Commentary tells us:

*In the Old Testament, anyone who sinned as David did had to receive a word from a priest or prophet indicating he was forgiven. Only then could the penitent person again take part in worship and make a peace offering. In the New Testament the word of forgiveness is forever written in God’s Word—the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from sin (1 John 1:7). Yet even in the New Testament a believer must have a spirit broken of all self-assertion; he must acknowledge his need before God to find spiritual renewal and cleansing (1 John 1:9).<sup>4</sup>*

The Faithlife Study Bible:

**51:11 do not take your Holy Spirit from me** *The psalmist may have been thinking of when God removed His Spirit from Saul after Saul became His enemy (see 1 Sam 16:14 and note). The psalmist hopes his sin will not make him an enemy of God, but that he will enjoy God’s presence (see note on Ps 4:6; note on 21:6).<sup>5</sup>*

- **How does unconfessed sin affect a follower of Christ’s relationship with God?** Great illustration from ([www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org)) <https://www.gotquestions.org/unconfessed-sin.html> <sup>6</sup>

*“When we make that divine exchange at the cross, God chooses to see us as righteous. It is not our righteousness but the righteousness of Christ that God sees ([Titus 3:5](#)). He switches accounts with us: our tarnished rap sheet for His perfect record. We have the full approval and acceptance of God from then on.*

*But what happens when we sin after receiving that perfect record? Imagine standing by a south window on a cold winter day. The air is frigid, but the sun is shining through the window. It begins to warm you, and you bask in its glow. Then you pull the drape closed. Instantly, the warmth stops. Is it because the sun has stopped shining? No, it is because something has come between you and the sun. The moment you open the drape, the sun can warm you again. But it is up to you. The barrier is inside the house, not outside.”*

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Why would anyone want to go through life carrying a sack of rocks and rotting garbage (sin?) Or, getting dirtier and smellier every day without being able to take a bath!
- Unconfessed sin is a heavy load that stinks up our lives!
- The good news: Jesus has already paid the price for every sin we have committed or will commit.
- Accepting the free gift of salvation makes us righteous in God's sight.
- The bad news: Even if we're saved, as long as we're on this side of Heaven we will sin and fall short of God's standard.
- We can't be good enough or disciplined enough to clean up our own act.
- Verse seventeen describes the only “sacrifice” God wants us to bring: *“a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart.”*

- If we neglect to regularly confess our sin and turn away from it, our relationship with Him will become cold and joyless.
- However, when we confess our sins and repent, God does a miraculous thing (verse twelve,) He restores the joy of our salvation and makes us willing to obey Him! He creates a NEW HEART within us.
- That's the description of a happy Christian life! We can have that no matter our circumstances!
- This week, let's don't lug around a smelly sack of sin. Let's throw it down in confession (yadah) and throw our hands in the air in praise!
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.intouch.org/read/blog/repentance-and-confession>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/iniquity-sin-transgression.html>

<sup>3</sup> Strong, J. (2009). *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 47). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>4</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Psalms. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 833). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>5</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ps 51:11). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/unconfessed-sin.html>