

Pray, as David taught us

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Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] This has all the makings of a juicy scandal.

Let me just very briefly retell the story which is found in 2 Samuel 11-12 in your Bibles. So there's a war going on. And by right, the king should be the first man leading his army against the enemy.

Instead, he's at home having an afternoon nap. And once he's up in the evening, from his rooftop, he spots a beautiful woman having a bath. Unlike the tabloids, however, we're not given tons of details.

Simply that David summons this lady, Bathsheba. And before you know it, they're sleeping together. But there's a complication. Pregnancy. And then one thing leads to another.

David tries to get her husband back from the battlefield so that he can have intimate relations with his wife. And then everyone will hopefully think that the kid is theirs. But that doesn't work.

[1 : 11] And so the king arranges to have the husband killed. I doubt very much that David ever imagined that his moment of pleasure would eventually lead to him committing murder.

But that's what the chain of events lead to. Well, in any case, David marries Bathsheba eventually. The kid is adopted. And case closed.

Or is it? Think of Jesus' words from Luke 8, verse 17. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed.

And nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. And at this point in David's story, we're told the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

God sees. God knows. God knows. God knows. And he sends the prophet Nathan, who tells the king a parable about a rich man who exploits brutally a poor man.

[2 : 15] But of course he's actually telling the king about himself. The king burns with anger, saying, this rich man should die. And this is when Nathan delivers the punchline.

David, you are that man. This is you. But that was the big tabloid scandal in Israel.

It has everything. Sex, violence, confrontation. But tabloid scandals usually come and go. We forget about them within weeks.

So why is this tabloid scandal preserved for us in the Bible? Is it just to shock and excite us? Well, no.

In 1 Corinthians 10, we're told one reason these Old Testament stories exist is because they are instructive. They serve to tell us things that we need to know about ourselves.

[3 : 15] And this story is told because this is our story as well. The people in this story are not just people out there, but people just like us.

This is us. We're obviously not kings like David. We're not all physical adulterers and murderers like David.

But like David, we share in the same struggle. His biggest enemy, you see, wasn't out there in the battlefield fighting against his army.

His biggest enemy was inside him, leading him to go down the path of destruction and death. And that same enemy lives inside us too.

We too know temptation and failure and brokenness. We all know that moment when we give in to saying those murderous words, or thinking those lustful thoughts, or doing those deceitful actions.

[4 : 20] Ours is a story of knowing how far we fall short of what God wants. We are the bad guys. We need forgiveness.

So if you hear this story of David and come away saying, well, I'm glad I'm not like David, you've completely missed the point. If you react that way, you won't be able to understand Psalm 51.

For this is the psalm that David wrote in light of that scandal. And this psalm, a word spoken by David to God, is now the word of God for us.

Psalm 51 is instructive because it's actually a prayer. It's a prayer for all of us who have to wrestle with temptation, and failure and brokenness.

It's a prayer for all of us who have skeletons in the closet, who know the shame of trying to hide from God, who hear the whispers of our guilty consciences.

[5 : 28] It's a prayer that models repentance for us, helping us to see how we say sorry to God. And it's a prayer of raw hope for broken sinners everywhere, on how we can be completely honest with God, and yet stand before Him without fear.

So we're going to explore Psalm 51 as a prayer this morning. And I hope that by the end of this morning, this prayer of David is going to be our prayer as well.

What are we to pray for? Well, here are four things from Psalm 51. Firstly, plead to God for mercy.

Verse 1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

To begin with, let me make a strikingly obvious but important point. This Psalm, this prayer is addressed to God.

[6 : 34] That's where he begins, with God. And that's really important because so often, when we know we're not okay, when we know we've done wrong, when we know we're in trouble, that's not where we begin.

Instead, like Adam and Eve in the garden, we try to hide. We retreat into ourselves. Or we distract ourselves with busy activity. Or we go to a modern-day motivational or leadership guru, like Jay Shetty, or Simon Cernak, or Robin Sharma, and try to improve ourselves.

We do everything except pray. But David, after his big scandal, does none of those things. He goes to God.

The first step in prayer is not to actually hear more sermons about prayer, as we've been doing the last few weeks, or have deep, long reflections on prayer, but to actually pray. Speak to God.

Plead with Him. Ask Him stuff. And as David goes to God, he knows he has no standing in himself. He's a king, but like Harvey Weinstein, the Hollywood big shot, he has fallen big time from his high position.

[7 : 54] But he goes to God anyway because he knows this one thing about God. God is merciful. For as Andrew Murray beautifully puts it, David, the omniscience of God, the omniscience of God, is a wonder.

The omnipotence of God, is a wonder. God's spotless holiness, is a wonder. But the greatest wonder of all, is the mercy of God. David knows who God is.

The one who possesses in himself, unfailing love, and great compassion. That's what he stands upon. And this is not just a theological truth that he knows in his head.

Have mercy on me, he cries out. He pleads for God's personal touch, God's personal action, on his very soul.

Isn't it true that the Bible always speaks of us as pleading for mercy, crying out for mercy, and receiving mercy? And the Bible always speaks of God as having mercy, giving mercy, and showing mercy?

[9 : 07] To begin to pray is to live out these twin truths. We have need of mercy, and God is full of mercy. And more than that, God is not someone who wants to be merciful but can't really do anything much about it, like a PKR supporter who is sympathetic to Anwar while he was in prison, but unable to do anything about it.

David obviously thinks God can wash and cleanse him. Blot out my transgressions, verse 1. Wash away my iniquity.

Cleanse away my sin, verse 2. All these requests are directed to God as if he can do something about it. David knows that when it comes to dealing with his sin, well, God is far superior to your purine enzyme liquid detergent, or your dynamo power gel, concentrated washing liquid, whatever that is.

So he prays. My friends, that's the thing you and I need every single day. We need to go to God to stand upon his love, to stand upon his compassion, and to receive his mercy.

We need to acknowledge who we are and who he is as we pray. We need self-knowledge and God-knowledge. And when we have that, we will naturally plead for mercy.

[10 : 47] Secondly, confess our sin. Verse 3. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

Let me show you how I so often face up to my sin. The moment that I know I've done something which is not pleasing to God, even if it's just a little thing, an inner struggle erupts within my soul.

And usually, instead of doing what David does and appeal to the mercy of God, in the face of my sin, I usually appeal to my inner defense lawyer.

I'm already thinking of the many ways I can prove that I was actually right after all. He was mean to me first. What about that other person and what he did?

I'm way better than him. I've actually been good in all these other areas. So this is just a small thing you can overlook, right? I was just looking out for myself.

[11 : 54] I can't let other people walk all over me. I'm trying to prove that I'm in the right. Or if not, perhaps I'm trying to prove that I'm the victim.

I had such a tiring day counselling people, so cut me some slack. It's not my fault that my parents brought me up this way.

It's all because we are such a rubbish government. It's really because of all those greedy businessmen make those DVDs so expensive. That's why I have to download this. That's my normal immediate reaction.

But notice what David does. He owns his sin. He comes clean. He could have argued theology.

He could have said, it's okay, I just have to offer a few sacrifices before God and God and I will be buddies again. It's not such a big deal. He could have pointed out the circumstances.

[12 : 58] She was so beautiful. What guy could resist? He could have appealed to his feelings. How could it be so wrong when it felt so right?

He could have played the blame game. She started it. Why was she bathing out in the open in the first place? It was consensual. Why just blame me? He could have carefully consulted his PR team to craft a carefully worded statement.

Mistakes were made. Apologies to everyone who's been offended. But that's not what David does. He confesses.

No excuses. No buts. Instead, he uses three different terms to accurately describe what he's done. He talks about his transgressions, verse 3.

That is, the crossing of a line. It's the thing you do when someone says, don't touch, and you immediately want to go and touch it. And he has touched what is not his.

[14 : 03] He talks about his iniquity, verse 2. He knows it's not just that he's broken the law, but he has done something that has twisted something beautiful, like his marriage and Beersheba's marriage, into something ugly.

And he talks about sin, verse 3, which in the original language means something along the lines of missing the mark, of not meeting the standard.

He's not behaved like a son of God. Notice that David doesn't simply talk about making a mistake, or slipping up, or exercising wrong judgment.

He doesn't try to downplay his wrong. When the prophet Nathan confronted David with a word from the Lord, in 2 Samuel 12, verse 13, David simply confesses, I have sinned against the Lord.

Just six words to accurately describe what he's doing. God's word, through God's messenger, exposed him.

[15 : 11] And he accepted the verdict that God had rendered upon him. So as we come to God in prayer, we should be ever ready to confess our sin.

Did you notice how verse 4 is worded? Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight? So you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

Wait a minute. Surely David has sinned against Beersheba? He's abused his power as king to sleep with her. Surely he has sinned against her husband, Uriah?

He murdered him. Surely he has sinned against the nation? He failed to be the righteous leader. But David declares, against you, God, you only, have I sinned.

You see, sin is ultimately God's word in nature. Now, I don't think David is saying that he has not sinned against all those other parties.

[16 : 20] What he is saying is that ultimately in sinning against those people, he has sinned against God. He's not playing down his sin against others, but he's playing up his sin against God.

You see, when he sleeps with Beersheba, he is ultimately violating God's good design for marriage. When he kills Uriah, he's actually seizing God's right to give and take away life, and he's not respecting the image of God in man.

When he fails to lead the nation, he is not taking seriously God's mandate for him to be the human king of his people. In God's world, God rules by his word, and any violation of that word is to betray God himself.

And indeed, the reverse is often true. When we sin against God, we often end up doing harm to others as well. That saying, it's okay since it doesn't harm anybody, is often a lie.

So here's the point. When we pray, we should regularly say, forgive us our trespasses. We come in repentance.

[17 : 46] We don't say sorry mainly because of the consequences of sin, or because it makes us feel bad, or causes us to lose face. We say sorry because of the sin itself, and the way it grieves God.

And actually, we begin by confessing our righteousness. Eh? What do I mean? You see, when you are convinced you are righteous, when you are convinced you are in the right, you won't seek the restoring mercy found in Jesus Christ.

You won't ever feel the need to approach God in prayer. And when you pray, you'll act more like a demanding boss. But if like David, you say, verses 5 and 6, surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me, yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb.

You taught me wisdom in that secret place. If you say that, then you're halfway there. Because when you come to the Lord, after you've blown it, you really only have one argument to make.

It's not, I didn't really mean it. It's not, those people were so difficult anyway. It's, Lord, I know my sin.

[19 : 20] I know what I've done. So, Lord, have mercy on me according to your great love and compassion shown to me in Jesus.

That's our only defense. And that's really the third thing to do in prayer. Thirdly, ask for cleansing and renewal.

That's verses 7 to 12. Let me just read verses 7 to 9. Hyssop, mentioned here, was a kind of plant, dipped in water and used in rituals of cleansing to sprinkle water on a person who needed to be purified.

So, for example, a leper who would be ritually unclean would come and present themselves before the priest and he would take the hyssop and then sprinkle it all over them.

And David here is asking the Lord to act as his priest to take the hyssop and cleanse him from all his sin. But here's the good news.

[20 : 48] As I was reading verse 7, I was debating with myself whether David is praying this line with confidence or not. At the very least, it's certainly a bold prayer because he's asking for a total transformation from the dark self that he's just confessed.

He's asking God to de-sin him, to make him completely stainless. But here's the good news. Regardless of whether David was confident or not, we can be.

Look again at Jesus. See a leper running before him, begging him, if you are willing, you can make me clean.

And Jesus says, I'm willing. And he doesn't just take out a hyssop, but he reaches his hand out and touches the leper.

And the leper is cleansed, while Jesus becomes unclean. He takes his place. That's our priest.

[22 : 02] Jesus. When we appeal to God on the basis of God's mercy, we are appealing to God on the basis of this Jesus, who reaches out to touch sinners, who eats with them.

And this puts us in an even better position than David, because we see God's mercy in an even more concrete way. We see God's Son acting out God's mercy.

For let me tell you what else his son is associated with. It's associated with the Passover lamb. That's the day in Israel's history when God struck down every firstborn son in judgment, except those who painted their door frames with blood, dip in the hyssop of the Passover lamb.

And our priest, God's Son, is our Passover lamb. God's son. So far as we've been going through this psalm, we've only hit verse 7.

But I hope that as we've been reading through this psalm, you can see how every line cries out for Jesus. Every word tells of our need for Jesus. Every plea says we need Jesus.

[23 : 17] Because if not for Jesus, what is this psalm except a wishful prayer of a broken man? God will lots of love, we can hear joy and gladness.

Verse 8, let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Verse 9, God will hide his face from our sins and blot out all our iniquities when we hang on to the cross of Christ in all of its blazing glory.

Dogs bark, birds, fly and sinners sin. That's what you and I were from birth. But in Christ that's not what we are now. Instead as 1 Corinthians 6 verse 11 puts it, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Your transgressions are no longer recorded in God's book.

And that gives us complete freedom in prayer to admit our sin and ask for cleansing. The pastor Tim Keller helpfully contrasts two kinds of repentance. Religious repentance and gospel repentance. In religion he says, our only hope is that we would live a good enough life. So every time we sin, every time we need to repent, we feel threatened.

Because then we have to admit that we are hoping in the wrong thing. We don't say sorry properly and our prayers to God just become promises to do better.

[25 : 13] But in gospel repentance, well we say words like the words of David in verses 16 and 17. You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it.

You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Because we already know that we are loved and accepted in Christ, because we know that cleansing is freely and definitely available in Him, well that actually frees us to admit our flaws.

When we ask ourselves, why is it that I am less generous than I should be? Why is it that I am not motivated by the glory of God? Why do I desire things that God says are wrong?

Well, we can honestly say to God, because I have an unclean heart. We can admit to Him how dirty we are.

[26 : 20] But how wonderful it is that God provides in Jesus what we cannot. Clean hearts. For our hope is in Christ's righteousness, not our own.

And this creates a new dynamic in spiritual growth. For the more we see our sin clearly, the more precious and amazing God's grace will be to us. And the more we see the beauty of God's grace, the more we will be free to truly repent more, to come to God, to say, I'm sorry.

And that actually makes times of prayer sweet for us. For we don't come scared, we come grateful. And we don't stop at asking for God's cleansing.

We ask for renewal. Verses 10 to 12. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

[27 : 33] David is not merely treating God like a car wash service. Okay, God, give me a good, clean hosing. All done? Okay, thanks for your service.

Bye, see you next time after I sin again. Instead, he's asking to become a new person. He's asking for a new engine. The commentator, Derek Kidner, puts it this way.

With that word, create, David is asking for nothing less than a miracle. Now, that's what we're asking to. We're asking God to recreate us.

And we thank God that in Christ, we are new creations. But we now ask to act as those new creations. We ask that we will stand fast in the difficult times, in the despairing times.

For Christians are people who are committed to being changed by God. Let me say that again. Christians are people who are committed to being changed by God.

[28 : 40] And that should show up in our prayers. We pray that within us, there will be a greater kindness, a stronger faith, a deeper self-control. And most of all, we pray for a deeper joy and gladness in Christ.

What is the strongest antidote against sin? When we find the most pleasure in Jesus, not in anything else. And so that's what we pray for. And that naturally leads us into the next request.

Fourthly, ask for a life overflowing with praise. A life overflowing with praise. That's the basic message of verses 13 to 15.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior.

And my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. I have a friend who loves Star Wars.

[29 : 55] He can tell you all about the ways of the Jedi, the ways of the Sith, the ways of the Mandalorians, and all the other Star Wars characters in between. He loves Star Wars. He's absolutely captivated by it.

And when the love of God captivates us, when God's rescue becomes so beautiful to us, well, just like my friend, we wouldn't be able to stop talking about it. Declaring his praises in word and deed becomes natural to us.

Well, that's the sort of thing David is asking for. Oh, Lord, he prays, remove every barrier that keeps my mouth shut. Take away everything that makes me less joyful in you.

And that's the kind of prayers we pray. Lord, remind me that I'm justified, no longer guilty, and what a privilege that is. Lord, keep me centered on this gospel which releases joy and thankfulness and delight in you for that alone will change me and pray that I will speak the same gospel to others where there is opportunity.

That's the shape of the prayers of forgiven sinners. He enjoys God in himself and he wants others to enjoy God too.

[31 : 16] and notice, he doesn't just pray in an individualistic way. In the final words of this psalm, we find a prayer for Zion.

Verse 18, may it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole, then booze will be offered on your altar.

David's praying for God's people. Now, this seems to be at first to us a prayer that comes from out of the blue. But if we enlarge our vision, well, this begins to make sense.

You see, during that time, Jerusalem was the center of the national and spiritual life for God's people. It's the city of God. And when Jerusalem prospers, that means God's favor is with his people.

Now, David wants to see God's name glorified. He wants to see the people of God truly worshiping their God to offer sacrifices in the right way.

[32 : 27] When he prays for the walls of Jerusalem to be built up, what he's really doing and what he's really praying for is he's putting God's kingdom first.

That's really what he's doing. And so, if we're Christian today, the way we pray verses 18 to 19 is like this. Your kingdom come, your will be done.

And that's what we'll hear more about next week. God's kingdom is like this. But we are really praying that it's not just our individual lives that are going to overflow with praise, but that we as a church, we as KEC, as BEM, will be overflowing with delight in Jesus.

We delight in the sacrifice of the righteous ones. But do we pray this way? Pray for us, not just for our individual lives, but for us as a church.

And so, as we come to the end of this morning, well, my prayer is that Psalm 51 will certainly shape our prayers profoundly. I know that from preparing the sermon this week that I still have a very long way to go in this regard.

[33 : 52] But I pray that I will pray more this way, and I pray that you will as well. I'm just going to give us a minute now to reflect, and yes, to make David's prayer your own, and then I'll lead us in a short prayer from the words of Psalm 51, and then the music team will come up and lead us in praising God in the words of our final song.

So, just take this minute now and go to God. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your unfailing love. According to your great compassion, blot out our transgressions. Wash away all our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin.

But Father, thank you that you have cleansed us with the blood of the Passover lamb. And that because of Jesus, we shall be clean.

[36 : 20] We are washed and we shall be whiter than snow. Amen. So create in us a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.

Do not cast us from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from us, but restore to us the joy of your salvation and grant us a willing spirit to sustain us.

All this we pray with great joy in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.