



MAIN POINT

When confronted by our sin, the only proper response is to repent and humble ourselves before God.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Share a time when you were caught breaking the law without being aware you were doing so. Did the fact that you were unaware of the law lead to lighter consequences? Did it make you any less guilty?
2. Share about a time when you knowingly broke the law. Why do we sometimes do this? What does this tell us about ourselves?

Leader: While we tend to measure the severity of our sins in accordance with our own personal understanding, that is not the way God operates. In Romans 2:12 Paul said, “All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.” In other words, what matters is not how we think of our own sin but how God thinks of it. Therefore we should not concern ourselves with whether we were ignorant of the sinfulness of our actions at the time we committed them. Rather we should consider how God would have us respond when we are caught in sin. Today, as we look at Psalm 51, we will see that the only proper response to being caught in sin is to repent—to turn away from sin and humble ourselves before God.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 51:1-5.

3. How would you define “repentance? How do you know if repentance is real? What is the result of genuine repentance?

Leader: Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of that sin, and a sincere commitment to turn from it and walk in obedience to Christ. Repenting doesn't mean we all of a sudden become perfect. Until Christ returns we will continue to struggle with sin. In fact if you feel like you are struggling, that is a good sign that you have a repentant heart. Those who struggle understand that their sin is offensive to God and they long to turn away from it and grow to be more like Christ. Being a Christ-follower isn't just a matter of thinking and doing the right things and avoiding the wrong things. Foundational to being a Christian is a personal relationship with Jesus that empowers us to live for God and make decisions out of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we are led to repentance because we desperately want to keep the intimacy of our relationship with God, not simply because of a need to behave rightly.

4. This Psalm had a context (2 Sam. 11:1-27). How did David try to cover up his sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, and ultimately, against God (2 Sam. 11:1-27)? Did he succeed in doing so? What does this tell us about the nature of sin and the necessity of true repentance?

Leader: Psalm 51 is an example of genuine repentance. This psalm was written soon after David slept with Bathsheba and had her husband killed by sending him to the front lines of the battle to cover up his sin. David was king, and didn't want anyone to find out about his mistakes, so he continued to sin in efforts to avoid confronting his original sin (see 2 Sam. 10-12). Nathan the prophet approached David and rebuked him of his sin in 2 Samuel 12, but David still did not admit his sin initially. Nathan's rebuke helped David realize his need to turn away from his sin and back towards obedience to God. Psalm 51 relays David's prayer of repentance to God, and characterizes the heart posture of genuine faith and repentance. God desires that we take up this posture in our own lives so that we may have intimacy with Him.

5. How did David feel about what he done (vv. 4-5)? Why is our sin always ultimately against God?

6. What is the main thing David is asking for in verses 1-5? How would you describe his attitude? Why is it important that we, like David, acknowledge God's character when we ask for forgiveness?

Leader: The Bible assures us that God is willing to forgive us and cleanse us from every sin (1 John 1:9). Sometimes we are attempted to avoid asking God's forgiveness because of our pride. We may not want to admit we have a deep spiritual need that only God can meet. Each of us has sinned and fallen short of God's design for us (Rom. 3:23). We need to take responsibility for our sins and confess them to God. When we do, we'll find Him ready to forgive us.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 51:6-12.

7. What is David's general prayer in these verses? How do David's specific requests reflect his view of sin and of God? What changes when we acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness?

8. What does David do that demonstrates godly grief? What is the difference between godly grief for sin and just grieving for being caught? What can we learn from David's example of godly grief when confronted by our sin?

Leader: Sin ruins people's lives every day. David knew this all too well as he pondered the depths of his moral failure. Yet David clung to the hope of God's forgiveness and cleansing. Worldly grief results when we regret being caught in sin. We need to claim the same vital truth—God's grace can cover the worst of sins. Godly grief results when we recognize and mourn the fact that we have sinned against the God who created us to worship Him. David demonstrates godly grief by honestly confessing his sin and looking to God for forgiveness and cleansing.

9. David prays for spiritual renewal in verses 10-12. Why is this an important follow up to our prayers for forgiveness? How do David's requests in these verses contribute to spiritual renewal?

Leader: The joy of fellowship with God is one of God's greatest gifts. Loss of that fellowship is the greatest tragedy. For David, God's salvation meant deliverance and freedom from the inner consequences of sin. Sin had bound and burdened him, taking away energy and hope. When God restored the joy of David's salvation, it meant that He had set His child free from the bondage of sin to be who He created David to be.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. Reflect on what you know you struggle with. How might an unrepentant heart affect our worship, our relationships with others, or our service in the church? What are some practical steps we might take toward cultivating an attitude of repentance before God?

11. How does repentance open up opportunities for us to be used by God? How have you experienced this?

12. How can we help each other express our repentance here at Okotoks? How can group members help one another live in the freedom that repentance brings?

Leader: You may not feel comfortable sharing your personal struggles with sin with our entire group, but there are people in this group who want to help you overcome sin and grow in your relationship with Christ. A fast track to moral and spiritual failure is to keep your sin private. If you have been consistently struggling with the same sin, don't try to bear it on your own. Seek out someone in this group who you could meet with privately for prayer and accountability. God has given us brothers and sisters in Christ in the church to help us fight against sin and grow in our relationship with Christ. Scripture calls us to pray for each other, confess our sins to one another, and bear each other's burdens and sorrows (Gal. 6:2; James 5:16).

PRAYER

Close with prayer, inviting God to help your group members recognize His willingness to forgive and their need to ask His forgiveness. Thank God that He does not hold sins against us but that He is faithful and just to forgive. Pray that the group would be known for their confession and repentance, and that as a church body here at Okotoks, we would honor God with the focus of our minds and the make-up of our hearts.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **How have you, like David, been trying to cover up your sin? What would it look like for you to stop trying to hide your sin and instead begin living a life of repentance?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Psalm 51:10-12.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

PSALM 51

This psalm has a clearly defined historical setting, which was David's confession of his sins (his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah) after being confronted by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 11–12). David's main plea is one of forgiveness (vv. 1-2). He relied completely on God's mercy, which is evident in the terms gracious ... faithful love, and abundant compassion. In David's case, his sins were severe enough that sacrifice was not acceptable (v. 16). The statement "against You... alone" does not mean that others were not involved in the effects of the sin, but that even in sinning against others the ultimate affront was against God Himself.

David knew God wanted to change him from within, not merely externally (v. 6). When David's heart was right, righteous actions would follow (Matt. 12:34). David also affirmed that the Lord wanted to teach David wisdom deep within. Biblical wisdom is God's gift (Prov. 2:6), and David's turning to God in reverent fear was the beginning of a life change for him (Prov. 9:10). David asked God to purify him thoroughly. Clean signifies both ceremonial and moral cleanness. God would have to do a lot of cleaning to make David whiter than snow; yet, David longed for exactly that.

David longed to hear joy and gladness again in his heart, but his sinful condition prevented it (v. 8). Only God's cleansing could bring it again. Nathan the prophet's indictment had pierced David's soul, and the ache of David's sin had caused him much pain. He felt really beaten down, helpless under sin's load; and God was his only hope. Turn your face away (v. 9) literally means "hide your face." God often had warned His people He would turn or hide His face from them when He judged them (Isa. 54:8; Mic. 3:4). Here, David asked the Lord to look at his sins no longer. Forgiveness includes the idea that God no longer would hold David's sin against him (Ps. 32:1). The renewal of one's heart and spirit (v. 10) are common images representing not only forgiveness (vv. 1-2,7-9) but also a change that enables a person to live in obedience to Yahweh's commands.

David knew his sin merited the worst sort of punishment (v. 11), but David did not want such treatment from God. He also asked God not to take His Holy Spirit away. David did not want God to set him aside and no longer use him as He had done with Saul, Israel's first king (1 Sam. 16:14). David needed the Lord to restore the joy (v. 10) of David's salvation to him. He needed God to remove his sin to make room for joy again. David also asked for a willing spirit—one that would help him follow God closely again. He knew that without such inner conviction, he quickly could return to a life of sin.

David's words sound astounding; he actually believed God still could use him effectively in His service. He would teach others about God's perfect ways, and they could be restored just as God had restored David. David's sins were great and the consequences staggering; yet David trusted in the forgiving, cleansing, renewing grace of God. Publicly praising God and teaching others about Him was part of the response of God's deliverance in a person's life.

God desires a broken spirit (or heart) rather than acts of sacrifice (vv. 16-17). Build the walls (v. 18) refers to strengthening Zion, which is where Yahweh dwelt among His people (65:1). Righteous sacrifices refers to those offered with the proper motives. Outward actions don't matter if the inward heart attitude isn't right.