

## ***Fruitful and Free***

*Abiding through Repentance*

*Psalm 51*

Today is Day 7 of our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. So far almost 370 people here at Faith are participating. If you haven't already, you can register for the last two week of this experience through the Church Center app (under "events") or you can check the box on the online connection card and we'll send you a link to the registration.

During this 21 Days we are practicing three core disciplines (Scripture, prayer, and fasting) to help us abide in Christ and let His words abide in us. Jesus promised that as we abide, He will give us freedom and fruitfulness. Last week we talked about practicing these disciplines with faith. Today we're going to talk about practicing these disciplines with a spirit of repentance. Psalm 51 gives us an up-close-and-personal view of what repentance looks like. Psalm 51 is David's expression of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba.

You can read the account behind this psalm in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, but I'll give a quick summary here. David had stayed home in Jerusalem when his army went to war. One day he saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba bathing on the roof of her house; her husband Uriah was away at war in David's army. As a matter of fact, Uriah was one of David's "mighty men" (see 2 Samuel 23:8) - a select group of soldiers who had fought alongside David on special missions. David was captivated by Bathsheba's beauty, sent for her and had an affair with her; it was an egregious abuse of power for David to take the wife of one of his men.

Bathsheba let David know that she was pregnant with his child. David devised a plan to cover up his sin. He called Uriah back from the frontlines under the guise that he wanted to know how the battle was going. But he really wanted Uriah to go sleep with his wife so everyone would think that Uriah was the father of the child. But Uriah refused to go home to Bathsheba; his integrity wouldn't allow him to enjoy his wife while his fellow soldiers were in danger out in the open field.

So David devised a plan with his general Joab to have Uriah abandoned on the battlefield and killed by the enemy. The plan worked and David took Bathsheba as his wife. End of story, right? Wrong. The LORD sent the prophet Nathan to David to tell him a story. Nathan told David about a rich man who had many, many sheep and a poor man who had one single lamb that was a cherished member of their family (think of you dog or cat). When the rich man had guests, he didn't take a sheep from his own flock; he took the poor man's lamb, slaughtered it, and fed it to his guests.

David was enraged when he heard what the rich man had done, and he said, "That man deserves to die." Nathan's reply was, "You are the man." David could no longer pretend everything was okay. He was at perhaps the most consequential crossroad in his life: He could do what most of Israel's kings did, namely harden his heart against God and walk in pride; or he could humble his heart before God and repent. David repented. Psalm 51 records David's prayer of repentance.

Psalm 51 is incredibly helpful and because it gives us a simple template for repentance. At some point all of us will find ourselves at the crossroad where David found himself. We've come face to face with our sin and need to decide our next move. Psalm 51 shows us what true repentance looks like. As we'll see, true repentance is a radically God-centered process in which we turn back to God and trust Him to restore our relationship with Him FULLY.

***Repentance involves turning away from sin and turning toward God.*** (Psalm 51:3-6) The first two verses contain a cluster of petitions for mercy and cleansing; we'll return to them in a few minutes. But we'll first skip down to verses 3 through 6 since they give the reason why David made the petitions he did. Notice he begins with the word "for"; he's about to explain why he made the petitions he did.

3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

There was a time when David minimized his own sin; he knew about it, but it wasn't something that got his full attention. But now his sin is front and center; it is ever before his mind's eye. Notice in verse 4 how David understood his sin as an offense against God Himself.

4 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.

Of course David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah and Joab and many others. But David now saw his sin against God as towering far above his sin against everyone else (see also 2 Samuel 12:13). This doesn't trivialize his sin against other people; they each suffered terribly because of David's sin. But he understood that first and foremost he had sinned against God. He both turned **from** his sin and **toward** God.

My own experience and my observation is that sometimes we seem to think that God only wants us to stop sinning. Actually He wants our love. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and might. The goal of repentance is to get right with God so that we love Him from the heart. Therefore we have to take the time and invest the energy to press in close to God, make eye contact with Him, and say, "Against you, you only, have I sinned." Unless we do this, we haven't actually repented (turned from sin and toward God).

So how did David sin against God? I'll just mention the two most obvious ways. First, David sinned against God when he disregarded the covenant of marriage that bound Bathsheba and Uriah together as husband and wife. That covenant came from the heart and mind **of God**. When David sent for Bathsheba, he was saying to God, "My lust is more important than Your design for marriage."

Second, David sinned against God when he had Uriah murdered. Uriah was created in the image **of God**. Murder is an attack on the image of God, as is anger (as Jesus implied in Matthew 5:22).

In the last two lines David expresses: "God, You are fully justified in declaring me guilty. I cannot accuse You of being unjust or unfair when You pronounce a judgment against me." True repentance acknowledges that we as created beings don't sit in judgment against our Creator, but that He sits in judgment against us.

In verse 5 David went so far as to say that his history with sin predated his birth:

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

He isn't saying that there was anything sinful about the circumstances of his birth. He's saying that he inherited sin at his conception.

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

David understood that God wanted more than good behavior. It is possible to change your external behavior (temporarily anyway) while inwardly wishing you hadn't. But David understood that God wanted agreement with Him and His ways in his innermost being. God wanted David to love Him with all his heart.

David show us that **Repentance involves turning away from sin and turning toward God**. This type of repentance is essential for everyone who wants to experience salvation. As a friend said this week, a Christian isn't someone who says, "I'm basically a good person, and Jesus makes me an even better person." A Christian is someone who admits, "I am sinful by nature and by choice. I have sinned against God Himself, and I have no excuses. God is fully justified when He says that the wages of sin is death. I believe that Jesus' death paid for my sin." If you have never repented of your sin and turned to God through faith in Jesus, please understand that this is a standing offer that God makes to you. Repentance isn't a punishment for your sin; Jesus took the punishment you deserved. Repentance is a **gift** (Acts 11:18) that God gives us, allowing us to turn from our sin and turn toward Him to experience life in Christ.

Once we do, our relationship with God is whole. We are now family with all the privileges (and responsibilities) of sons and daughters. When we sin we are still family, but our relationship with God is strained. When your kids stray and wander and sin against you, they're still your kids. You want more than anything else for them to admit what they've done and to turn back to you in humility. That's what our heavenly Father wants also.

And when we come back to Him, He restores us completely. That's what we need and that's what He wants. It's not that there aren't any consequences for our sin (there are).

But we don't let those consequences rob us and rob God from experiencing the fullness of our relationship with Him. In new covenant terms, we'd say it this way:

***Repentance is accompanied by faith in Jesus for full restoration.*** (Psalm 51:1-2, 7-19) I count 19 petitions/requests in Psalm 51. We've only got time to consider a few. Beginning in verse 1 David asks very boldly that God would take care of his sin completely. David wasn't like the younger brother in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal; he's the one who wanted to negotiate a deal with his father whereby he could re-enter the household as a servant, not a son. Jesus' point there was that if you repent, the Father will restore you completely (e.g., the robe, the ring, and the celebration). That's what David wanted from God - a full restoration.

1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

He's appealing to God's "steadfast love" (*hesed* - covenant love). "God, I ask You to blot out (i.e., remove completely) my transgression (my crimes against you). Not because I'm good but because we're bound together by covenant. You are love and You are abundant in mercy!" David asks God to remove his transgressions completely.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!

Sin left David feeling dirty, unclean. David asks God to cleanse him thoroughly.

Down in verse 10 David prays for his heart. We saw earlier in verse 6 that David acknowledged that God wants truth in his inner being. Therefore he prays this:

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

David wanted a heart with no remnant of sin or iniquity. He wanted a "right spirit" (or "a steadfast spirit"), one that is steady and stable, intent on doing God's will. One more verse:

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

Remember that David's sins included adultery, murder, abuse of power, and corruption. And yet he wanted to be restored to the place where he experienced the joy of salvation again. In other words, he wanted full restoration with God. That sounds presumptuous and reckless, doesn't it? Remember, full restoration is what David needed and what God wanted. This is what every parent wants with their kids - full restoration.

Therefore, for our good and God's glory, ***Repentance is accompanied by faith in Jesus for full restoration.*** That's what we are pursuing during this 21 Days of Prayer

and Fasting. We are seeking to abide in Christ so fully that He gives us freedom and fruitfulness in the area of our lives where it's lacking. [You'll notice in Psalm 51:18 David was looking forward to fruitfulness after being restored: "Then I will teach transgressors Your ways. . ."]

Let's take a few minutes to ask: ***How might we practice "disciplines of abiding" with repentance?***

***Approaching the Scripture with a spirit of repentance.*** (2 Timothy 3:16) Paul writes this about Scripture:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

If we allow it to do so, Scripture will confront us much like Nathan confronted David, saying to us, "YOU are the man (or woman or boy or girl)." As you read Proverbs this week, be open to ways that God is confronting sinful attitudes and actions. None of us walk in obedience perfectly, therefore we should approach the Scriptures assuming that there are ways we need to understand the truth in your innermost being.

***Praying with a spirit of repentance.*** (Psalm 139:24-25) This psalm shows how David invited- God to convict him of sin so that he might repent.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart!  
Try me and know my thoughts!  
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!

As you read Proverbs this week, pray these verses in faith.

***Fasting with a spirit of repentance.*** (Nehemiah 9:1-3, Psalm 35:13) Scripture gives several different reasons for fasting. One of the most prominent reasons is repentance. Fasting is a way to humble ourselves before God. We have an example of this in Nehemiah 9.

1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.

Nehemiah goes on to explain how they confessed their sins to God. As you fast this week - whether from food or something else - you will likely feel weak. Let your weakness remind you that you are turning ***from*** your sin and turn ***toward*** God through Christ Jesus.

At Faith we seek to be a disciple-making church that loves God, one another, and our neighbors. It all begins by loving God with all our heart, soul, and might. Repentance is a gift that allows us to turn from sin and turn back to loving God. This week let's seek God with a spirit of repentance.

