

Prayer as Confession

By Matt Harrison

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the **Real-Life Scenario** paragraphs in the section **It's in the Book**. Then read 2 Samuel 11:1–12:15. Prepare to share with your group a brief summary of what happened in these verses.

Assignment Two

Read the **Real-Life Scenario** paragraphs in the section **It's in the Book**. Then read Psalm 51:1–2. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What three words did David use for his wrongdoing in these verses?

Assignment Three

Read the **Real-Life Scenario** paragraphs in the section **It's in the Book**. Then read Psalm 51:1–2. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What actions does David ask God to take in regard to his wrongdoing in these verses?

Scripture to Memorize

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Psalm 51:1

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand what heartfelt confession in prayer looks like and why it is important.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

David really blew it in his walk with the Lord. He knew he had done wrong. But, instead of dealing with his sin, he tried to ignore it. In his heart he had a sense of guilt over what he had done. It was a sense of guilt he could not shake.

Have you ever experienced something like this? What did you do to get through this situation? Did your first response include coming before the Lord with a heartfelt prayer of confession?

When you think about prayer, what elements of prayer come to mind? Perhaps you first think of giving praise and thanks to God. Or you might think of prayer as the way to make your requests or petitions known to Him. If we are honest, we would have to admit that our prayers tend to be filled with petitions because of all the needs in our lives. Praise, thanksgiving and petition are certainly biblical aspects of prayer (see Matthew 6:9–13; Colossians 4:2; Philippians 4:6–7). At the same time, we should also see heartfelt confession of sin as an essential element of prayer.

In Psalm 51, King David was a noteworthy example of one who confessed his sin to the Lord through prayer. One striking thing about his prayer was its depth and sincerity. His example should inspire us to move beyond the superficial when we confess our sins to God in prayer. The heading of the psalm indicates that it was written as a result of Nathan's confrontation of David's sin with Bathsheba.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share what happened in 2 Samuel 11–12:15. Note: These chapters provide important background for Psalm 51.

Read Psalm 51:1–19 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. Have mercy . . . steadfast love. David's prayer of confession began with words directed toward God. He asked for God's favor and steadfast love. David's hope was that God would stoop down in kindness toward him.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now discuss with the group the three words David used for wrongdoing in verses 1–2.

Studying the Passage

David saw himself as unfit to be in fellowship with God and with God's people. **Verse 1. transgressions.** Literally, the term suggests "a going away" and a departure or rebellion against God Himself.

Verse 2. iniquity. This Hebrew word speaks of crookedness, distortion, and a twisting of God's standards. **sin.** This term refers to an offense, a departure from the true path, or a missing of the mark.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can share with the group the actions David asked God to take in regard to his wrongdoing.

Studying the Passage

These actions in these verses reveal the riches of God's forgiveness. **Verse 1. blot out.** This suggests a "wiping away" or erasing as one would do with a debt in an accounting book.

Verse 2. Wash me thoroughly. This expression pictures a dirty article of clothing that needs to be washed and rewashed. **cleansed me.** David knew that *God Himself* needed to purify him. In summary, these were actions God alone could do.

Discussion Question

Refer to Psalm 51:1–2. What do these verses tell us about what God is like? Why is a correct understanding of what God is like important when it comes to confessing our sin through prayer?

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. I know my transgressions. David took personal responsibility for his sin. He did not shift the blame, nor could he erase the thought of his sin. His sin gripped his conscience.

Verse 4. Against You . . . have I sinned. David was not saying he had not sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah and others. Instead, he was noting that his sin was ultimately against God.

Discussion Question

Why is seeing our sin as ultimately against God important?

Studying the Passage

Verse 5. brought forth in iniquity. This expression does not teach that the act of sex and conception is sinful. Instead, David was saying that from his conception he had a sin nature.

Verses 7–12. Purge me . . . Wash me . . . Let me . . . blot out . . . Create in me . . . Restore to me. David's heartfelt prayer of confession included a string of petitions directed to God, asking Him for forgiveness of sin.

On Your Own

Explore verses 7–12. In the space provided below, write what David asked God to provide.

Discussion Questions

How should the petitions in verses 7–12 enlighten the content of your own prayers of confession? What do these petitions tell about the purposes of a prayer of confession?

Studying the Passage

Verse 13. Then I will. Interestingly, David's prayer of confession included a commitment to the Lord. Being forgiven and restored results in action.

Discussion Questions

According to verse 13, what does David commit to do when he has experienced the forgiveness and restoration of God? Why is moving from confession and restoration to commitment and action important?

Studying the Passage

Verses 14–17. my tongue will sing . . . my mouth will declare . . . The sacrifices of God.

These verses express fitting worship to the God of our salvation.

Verses 18–19. do good to Zion . . . Then you will delight. The final verses of the psalm asked God to restore the nation.

Discussion Questions

According to verses 14–17, what attitudes does God want His worshippers to display? How does worship relate to a heartfelt prayer of confession? According to this psalm, how would you summarize heartfelt confession through prayer?

On Your Own

In light of Psalm 51, bow your head now and seek Jesus in prayer. Ask Him to open your eyes to any sins in your life you need to confess. Sincerely confess those sins to Christ and give thanks to Him for His forgiveness. Be sensitive to the Lord's leading on any commitments He would have you make in response to His forgiveness and restoration.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Heartfelt confession of sin is an essential aspect of prayer. In Psalm 51, David is a noteworthy example of one who confessed his sin to God with depth and sincerity. Let his example inspire you to move beyond the superficial when you confess your sins to God in prayer.

Our hope in our prayers of confession rests on God's grace, compassion, and steadfast love. The Lord's goodness is shown in His willingness to stoop down and forgive us when we go our own way, twist His standards, and miss the mark He has set (Psalm 51:1–2).

The blessings that come through confession are great. According to Psalm 51:2, He erases our debt as one would do with a debt in an accounting book. Additionally, He thoroughly washes us like a dirty piece of clothing, and He purifies us. These are actions God alone can take. We rest in the truth that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:9). This happens because of Christ's finished work on the cross (see Colossians 1:14).

In Psalm 51:7–12, David's requests to God are instructive for us as we confess our sins in prayer. He asked God for purification, washing, renewal, the blotting of sins, restoration of joy, and the sustenance of his spirit. David then committed to teach sinners God's ways so that they might turn to Him (Psalm 51:13). Toward the end of Psalm 51, he asserted the importance of humble worship (vv. 14–17) and the restoration of God's people (vv. 18–19).

David saw forgiveness and restoration as a path to service. Therefore, as a disciple of Christ, be quick to confess your sins to Him. Pursue heartfelt confession through prayer that overflows into calling sinners to turn to Christ.

Follow up Question

What does heartfelt confession in prayer look like, and why is it important?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.