

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(October 6, 2019)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

### **“God, I am so Sorry”**

(Psalm 51)

Study #5

**Sermon Series:** Learning to Pray  
(Studies in selected Psalms)

### **Introduction: Broken beyond repair...**

*Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall  
Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall  
All the King's horses and all the King's men  
Couldn't put Humpty together again.*

We know this little poem as a nursery rhyme, and, as such, it has been enjoyed by kids for centuries. As well, and for obvious reasons, has often been applied politically.<sup>1</sup>

The poem has roots that can be traced back centuries and forms of it are found in the literature of France, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, as well as England.

The poem is a riddle, and the answer to the riddle is - an egg.<sup>2</sup> The message is that some things, once broken, can never be restored. Eggs are like that. Once broken, they are irreparable.

So are cars totaled on Loop 1604 and homes destroyed by fire and flood. After suffering damage, some things might as well be trashed. They can't be rebuilt.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, political opponents of King Richard III applied it to him, believing that he had become too unpopular to reign as king.

<sup>2</sup> According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. (This book really exists)

So...what about a life? What about the life that is “broken”?

Many people today have been dealt devastating blows. Some of you here have suffered “broken” experiences, handed out by the cruelty of others or by seemingly random events.

Can a seriously damaged life ever be put back together again? Or is the mess of a broken life as impossible to repair as Humpty-Dumpty was after his fall?

The Bible's King David lived a messy life.

Prior to ascending to the throne, the king he would replace, King Saul, treated him shamefully. For ten years Saul chased David around in the wilderness and tried to kill him.

Later, as king, David suffered the messiness of warfare. In battle after battle, he fought valiantly and led his troops well.

But David faced other messes, too, and some of them of his own making. His brokenness sometimes came as a result of his own sin.

This morning, we'd like to know, what do we do when we have created our own do-it-to-ourselves, homemade messes. What do we do when we have come to recognize the gravity of our sin before God?

The Psalm we'll explore this morning is one written by David. He shows us what to do when our cry is, “*God, I'm so sorry.*”<sup>3</sup>

You may have never heard this story. If you haven't brace yourself, because you will see a side of David you've may not have known. If you do know this story, it's a good reminder that we're all like the moon. We all have a dark side.

We read of David's destructive run of sinful choices in 2 Samuel 11. It is not a happy chapter.

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<sup>3</sup> Among the best reads along these lines is Gordon MacDonald's [Rebuilding Your Broken World](#). I highly recommend it to all who want a guide in dealing with the wreckage of a personal moral failure.

## **Backstory: Terrible Sins Committed by a Godly King (2 Samuel 11)**

### **King David's Adultery, Murder**

One year, at the time of year when kings normally left their palaces to do battle with enemies, King David, the man after God's heart,<sup>4</sup> stayed home in Jerusalem.

There came an evening when David was alone, walking on his palace balcony. Looking out over the city, he saw a beautiful woman, bathing.

The language in which the Old Testament was written - Hebrew - makes it clear that this woman was actually obeying the Mosaic Law's command about monthly purifying baths.

She wasn't doing anything wrong - in fact, she was doing everything right. But King David wanted her. He sent for her, and, as the Bible says, "**...he lay with her.**"

Weeks passed. The woman, Bathsheba, realized that she was with child by David. She sent a letter to let David know.

Bathsheba's husband was away, serving with Israel's army. David called him home to visit his wife so that he and everyone else would believe that the baby was his, and not David's.

But, when the husband, Uriah the Hittite, refused to be with his wife, David had him killed in battle to protect his own reputation.

The end of the story is that David, the man who had caused Bathsheba's pregnancy and widowhood, married her.

Only, that wasn't the end of the story, because shortly after Bathsheba was brought to the palace, David awoke to the horror of what he had done.

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<sup>4</sup> So, the Apostle Paul, Acts 13:22.

## **A Miserable Year of Silence... (Psalm 32:3)**

During that year, people continued to look to David for political and even for spiritual leadership. Life went on. Matters of state still had to be dealt with. His subjects still knew him as God's man.

Only a few palace servants knew the whole story. Not many suspected that this very public king felt the burn of shame every time he was forced to spend a private moment.

That kind of secret-keeping does damage to a soul. It is dangerous to hide and to fake it. When we pretend that all is well when all is not well something precious inside of us dies.<sup>5</sup>

The final, haunting words of the narrative of David's sin (**[2 Samuel 11:27b] ...But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord**) assure us that the story was far from over.

The story continues to unfold as we read that David's old friend, the prophet Nathan,<sup>6</sup> approached David with an ugly story.

I picture Nathan pulling David aside, asking permission to tell David about a "situation" that requires wisdom. David gladly agrees to give sage advice.<sup>7</sup>

## **A Prophetic Sting (12:1-12)**

### **The "Set-Up" (vv. 1-6)**

*Nathan: "There was this rich man..."*

The story Nathan tells David (2 Samuel 12:1-6) bleeds injustice. It's a classic tale of a "have" oppressing a "have-not."

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<sup>5</sup> The Psalms we suspect David wrote during this year are referred to as Penitential Psalms: 32, 39, 102, 130.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan was the one who brought David the good news of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7.

<sup>7</sup> Was Nathan nervous? Do we assume that because he was a prophet, he entered every situation with bravado? King David had the power of life and death.

A wealthy man who had a large flock of sheep robbed a poor man who only had one little lamb that had grown up with his children. The poor man loved this lamb.

But the cold-hearted rich man was unwilling to give one of his own sheep to feed a guest. Instead, he stole and slaughtered the poor man's lamb and fed it to the guest.

Nathan doesn't even get a chance to ask King David for counsel. David speaks as judge and jury, declaring the rich man guilty.

*David: "He must pay!"*

***[5] Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. [6] He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."***<sup>8</sup>

The story was fiction, Nathan made the whole thing up as a "sting" to trap David. And just as David finished passing judgment on the heartless rich man, Nathan stepped out of character and moved from novella to the History Channel.

### **The "Gotcha" (vv. 7-12)**

*A real-time mirror to see self now (v. 7a)*

***[7a] Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!"***

The prophet has sucker-punched the king and David never saw it coming. But as soon as David heard the words, he knew exactly what Nathan was talking about.

***"You are the man"*** was just the opening shot.

David was the rich man who had robbed the poor man. He was the greedy man who defrauded his neighbor when he violated Bathsheba and killed Uriah.

The combination of the story PLUS ***"You are the man"*** was Nathan holding up a mirror for David to see his sin clearly. And Nathan wasn't finished.

The mirror turns into a rear-view lens. Nathan took David on a stroll down Memory Lane to remind him of all the grace that God had poured out on him in the past.

*A rear-view mirror to remember God's goodness (vv. 7b-8)*

***[7b]... "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. [8] I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these!'"***

Nathan doesn't even mention David's having been chosen over his older brothers, his victory over Goliath, or his friendship with the king's son, Jonathan.

He doesn't mention the covenant that God made with him, promising that his descendants will sit on the throne of Israel forever.

But what he does mention is enough to draw to David's mind how privileged and how blessed by God he has been.

And, having shown David the present and the past, Nathan now pulls back the curtain and gives David a peek at his future.

<sup>8</sup> Does David's immediate, harsh judgment suggest that he was extremely sensitized to injustice and to lack of compassion because of his own sins?

*A forward-looking window to view consequences (vv. 10-12)*

David had committed an ugly act of military violence<sup>9</sup> (murdering Uriah on the battlefield) and an ugly act of sexual violence<sup>10</sup> (against Bathsheba).

Both kinds of sins will plague David's house for generations.

If you would take time to read through the remainder of 2 Samuel and then through the books of 1 and 2 Kings you will see how frighteningly literal the fulfillment of this prophecy was.

Nathan has now used three sharp weapons to bring David to the end of himself, to the point of repentance before God.<sup>11</sup>

He has forced King David to look at:

- God's goodness to him ("*I have been blessed richly*");
- his own sin ("*I have sinned miserably*"); and
- the consequences of his sin ("*I will pay dearly for my sin*").

The confluence of these three streams - God's grace, his sin, real world consequences - drives David to God.

The season of cover-ups and silence is past. David comes clean and admits his guilt. He gives no rationalizations. No justifications. No excuses. No denials. This is David's repentance.

### **A Royal Repentance (v. 13a)**

***[13a] "I have sinned against the Lord."***

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<sup>9</sup> Absalom, David's son, killed his half-brother Amnon for having raped his own sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13); Joab killed Absalom (2 Samuel 18:14); and another of David's sons, Adonijah, was killed by Solomon (1 Kings 2:24, 25).

<sup>10</sup> God will raise up evil against David from his own household. And it happens exactly as Nathan has predicted. Absalom will lead a successful revolt against his own father - David! - and will violate his father's wives and concubines in broad daylight. (2 Samuel 16:22)

<sup>11</sup> Paul tells us (Romans 2:4) that it is the kindness of God that leads us (believers) to repentance. God was kind to use Nathan to prompt David's repentance here.

David is not denying that he wronged Bathsheba and Uriah. He knows that he has committed crimes against innocent people.

But David now sees that life is fundamentally about God. And it is God's Law he has disobeyed.

This - "***I have sinned against the Lord***" - is the summary of David's repentance, but it's not all we have of it. Fortunately, we have the fuller text that expands his one-liner.

It's Psalm 51. We believe David penned this Psalm at about the time of his repentance, and it traces the work of God in a broken soul. This is the path of repentance.

First, there is personal, inner conviction.

### **David's Repentance (Psalm 51)**<sup>12</sup>

#### **Personal Conviction (vv. 1-4)**

*Cleansing needed (vv. 1-2, 7)*

Over the years, I've spent a lot of time being dirty.

Normally, I plant and tend a spring and fall vegetable garden. I get dirty doing that. Back during the years when cars were more workable-on-able than they are today, I did what I could to repair our cars. That got me dirty and greasy. And I still enjoy going camping, and that's dirty business, too.

After these dirtinesses, I pay pretty close attention to washing up. If I don't, nobody wants to get close to me. I've conducted experiments. It's true. So, I've gotten pretty good at cleaning up.

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<sup>12</sup> The opening line of Psalm 51 reads, "***For the choir director, a Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone into Bathsheba.***" The sense behind these words is that David fully intended this Psalm to be used in public worship - a gutsy move on his part. This is not to say that all confessions are to be as public as David's. But David's was extremely public.

David understands sin to be a dirty, smelly, greasy stain. When he woke up to the horror of his sin, he begged for a soap only God could provide.

***[1] Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.***

***[2] Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin...***

***[7] Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.***

Normally, it is babies or very young children who need to be washed by someone else.

When it comes to his sin spot, David was as helpless as a child. There was nothing he could do to remove this stain from his soul. Sin removal is a God thing. It was for David. It is for Dave. It is for you.

Next, David gives us a glimpse into his soul, into what life was like, internally, after his sin.

*Constant awareness (v. 3)*

If we had seen David during the year after, the year of his silence, we might have thought everything was fine with him.

He carried out kingly duties. He conducted matters of state. He even led in worship when that was expected.

But he was not fine. All was not well with his soul.

***[3] For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.***

David felt the burn of God's conviction throughout the entire year between the adultery / murder event and Nathan's rebuke. He was constantly conscious of the evil he had done.

He experienced the pain of conviction. Next, he confesses.

### **Honest Confession (v. 4)**

***[4] Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.***

Under the Mosaic system, there were no burnt offerings or sacrifices that would atone for the sins David has committed.

If you were found guilty of either adultery or murder, you were liable for the death penalty. Period.

David's sins are what the Jews considered "high-handed" sins. He knew what he was doing was wrong when he did it - and he did it, anyway. Just because he could.

By his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, David caused untold damage to their families and friends.

So, he confesses. He agrees with God that what he did was sinful.

What he did wasn't a dumb move. It wasn't an error of judgment or a mistake. It was sin, plain and ugly. He offended a holy God and he had every reason to expect to experience God's judgment.

Instead, he cried out for grace and forgiveness.

### **Begging Forgiveness (vv. 5-6, 8-9)**

***[5] Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.***

***[6] Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.***

***[8] Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.***

***[9] Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.***

He is asking that he might not get what he so richly deserved - death - and that he might receive what he could never earn - life.

He's asking for grace.

David is affirming that sin has been all over him from the very beginning. He was born with a sinner's propensity for sin.

The thought from what we just read (v. 5) is NOT that there was anything sinful in the union of his mother and father to conceive him. He is just affirming that corrupt parents - which we all have - can only produce corrupt children - which we all are.

This sinfulness has put David in God's debt.

Hence the request, "**Blot out all my iniquities.**"

Imagine that you have a significant balance on your Visa card. So, in desperation, you call Visa, explain that there is no way you can pay what you owe and beg the guy in the call center to work with you.

You're not surprised to hear, "*We're sorry, Sir, we can't do that. You owe what you owe.*"

That's what we expect. If we owe, we have to pay.

Let's suppose, though, that in this case, the president of Visa takes the call.

He's feeling magnanimous, and tells you, "*Let's just call it square. As of today, you've got a clean slate. We'll forgive your debt.*"

Outrageous, right? Such a thing would never happen in the financial world.

Here, David is asking God to do it in the moral world - and that's even more outrageous! - "**blot out all my iniquities.**"

But, grace upon grace! God answered David's prayer and forgave him. He won't suffer for his sins.

And, grace upon grace upon grace, there will be countless others who won't be punished for their sins.

People like me and people like you who have put our trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross are forgiven. We have taken God's gracious offer of salvation and traded in our sins for Christ's righteousness.

Jesus was born to live and to die and to rise again to save those who fall, like David, and like me and you.

David knows he needs cleansing and asks for it. He knows he needs a debt forgiven, and he asks for that.

But there is something else he needs that only God can provide. He needs personal restoration. He needs spiritual wholeness - and he asks for that, too.

#### **Restoration to Service (vv. 10-19)**

*Please re-create me! (vv. 10-12)*

**[10] Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.**

**[11] Do not cast me away from Your presence  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.**

**[12] Restore to me the joy of Your salvation  
And sustain me with a willing spirit.**

For a solid year, there has been no joy in David's life. Worship has been a rote routine. Obedience to God has been mechanical.

Been there? Are you there right now, with David? The joy of God's salvation is missing, and maybe it's missing because you have sinned, you know it, and you know you need God's cleansing.

If so, watch David and do what he did.

Knowing that God is responsible for sustaining a relationship between himself and God, he begs God to rekindle a spirit of joy. He asks God to give him a *“willing spirit.”*<sup>13</sup>

This is what David longs for. An inner work of God so powerful that he pursues God because he WANTS to. Re-inserting that “want to” into a sin-wounded heart is the work of God.

And it is exactly the work God delights to perform when we ask Him to do so.

In short, David, who has sinned, needs what only God can provide. He needs his soul cleansed (vv. 2, 7), his moral debt erased (v. 9), and a renewed willing spirit to worship and serve God. (v. 10)

And what will happen when all of THAT happens?

When God cleanses and forgives and renews, the tonnage of guilt he’s been carrying will be gone.<sup>14</sup> He’ll be traveling light.

Yes, David will still have a lifetime of earthly consequences for his sin. But passionate worship will flow and zealous service to God will again flow.

Worship and service always flows from people who have tasted grace.

*Use me to serve You, Lord (vv. 13-19)*

***[13] Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners will be converted to You.***

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<sup>13</sup> Zaccheus, the tax-collector (Luke 19), led a small, selfish life until he met Jesus. When Christ passed by one day and invited Himself over for lunch, Zaccheus was launched on a new life - and was given a “willing spirit.” He decided to repay those he had defrauded 4X what he had taken from them, exactly what David planned to require of the rich man who stole the lamb.

<sup>14</sup> The image of the lightness that occurs when we experience God’s forgiveness (for the first or the 1000<sup>th</sup> time!) is captured in John Bunyan’s classic, Pilgrim’s Progress when Christian loses his burden at the foot of the cross.

***[14] Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation;***

***Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.***

***[15] O Lord, open my lips,***

***That my mouth may declare Your praise.***

***[16] For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering.***

***[17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;***

***A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.***

***[18] By Your favor do good to Zion;***

***Build the walls of Jerusalem.***

***[19] Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,***

***In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;***

***Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.***

The year-long spiritual drought is over for David. He has come clean before God and has received what he needed: GRACE. He sinned terribly and was completely. Now he lives freely.

That’s what you and I can look forward to when we follow David’s lead and get honest with God about our sin.

### **Conclusion:**

Today, David has put on a clinic in how to deal with sin. It is a really important clinic because there is a 100% chance that we will each sin.

The question is not, “Will I sin?” When it comes to us and sin, it is a “when” not an “if” thing.

And when we sin, when we like David, have a great fall, we are to make three crucial moves.

- *First, we must each become aware of and acknowledge my sin. We must maintain a constant openness to the presence of sin in our lives.*

If that sounds morbid, it isn’t. It’s necessary and life-giving.

It is *necessary* because the potential for self-deceit is real, and the Bible says that if we say that we have no sin, we're just deceiving ourselves. (1 John 1:8)

It is *life-giving* because our every discovery of sin drives us to a fresh experience with God's grace.

- *Second, we must learn to focus on sin in the first person (me), not the second person (you) or the third person (him, her, them).*

If we have come to this point in getting to know David's story and are only able to more accurately accuse him and point out how badly he sinned, then we have missed the point.

God's Spirit is not speaking through His Word to King David today. He is speaking to me. He is speaking to you. It is so easy to go second or third person.

Watch David listen to his personal prophet, Nathan, tell a story about someone else who has sinned. David gets all worked up over this other person's sin. He rails and accuses and condemns. He has compassion for the poor man. He's angry at the heartless rich man.

Now, there is something beautiful about feeling compassion for victims. Clearly, oppressors need to stop oppressing and we can have a hand in that.

But there is also something dangerous about pointing out the wrongs of others.

When I'm focused on the wrongs others have done, I may end up feeling morally superior. And that doesn't help me grow in love or holiness.

Growth happens when you and I move from third person observation to first person conviction.

To read David's story right requires that we see Nathan saying to us: YOU are the man. YOU are the woman.

- *Third, as important as it is that I acknowledge my sin, it is more important that I dwell on God's grace.*

David's sin, enormous as it was, is completely overshadowed by God's grace. I would never minimize the horror of what he did. But his sin is microscopic compared to the enormity of God's grace.

God's work of forgiveness is always the main event, not our work of failure. Psalm 51 gives God's grace center stage.

In the Psalm, there are only four different words used to name sin.<sup>15</sup> Just enough so that it is out in the open, so that we know what David's writing about. Just enough to where it can be faced.

The Psalm's central action is carried by over a dozen different verbs that focus on God's work of forgiveness and restoration.

There are only a few dehumanizing, diminishing - and soon, dull and boring - ways to sin. Our sins just aren't that interesting. They are reruns

God's saving work is creativity itself. It's God's work that's innovative, and fresh.

So, after it's been recognized and confessed and turned away from, the less said about sin the better.

It's best to give our energy to worshipping the God who forgives, loving others the way Jesus loves them, and sharing the good news with people who have never yet been forgiven.

Humpty-Dumpty's story proves that some things, once broken, can never be put back together again.

David's story assures us that other things, like our lives, once broken, can indeed be put back together by God's amazing grace.

And the sacred path to un-messing our messes is repentance.

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<sup>15</sup> Transgression (v. 1); Iniquity (v. 2); Sin (v. 3); Blood guiltiness (v. 14).