

## Greatest Hits: Psalm 51

**Big Idea:** Only God can make us clean.

**Purpose:** To encourage people to confess our sin and be made clean.

**Passage:** Psalm 51

### Outline

#### 1. Opening

##### a. David Monologue

-It was one year ago that my life began to fall apart. It was springtime, which marks the end of the rainy season in my country. With the roads finally in good condition it was time to go to war. I am weary of war. Ever since I killed Goliath as a young boy, I have been a man at war. Then it was the Philistines, now it is the Ammonites. After the Ammonites there will be someone else. While it is the king's duty to lead all able-bodied men into battle, I just didn't have it in me. Kings deserve vacations don't they? So, I asked Joab, my trusted friend and commander, to lead the men into battle. They didn't need me. They routed the Ammonites in one day and presently are laying siege to their capital city. I know, you probably think I have gotten soft in my old age. But I am no coward. I have killed many men in my time. Hundreds. I am just tired of bloodshed. But I knew God wanted me to lead my men. I just didn't listen to him. That was my first mistake.

-It was hot that night. Perhaps that is why she decided to bathe outdoors. The heat was so oppressive that I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned and finally decided to go for a stroll on the roof. Normally it would have been perfectly safe for her to bathe outdoors but not on this night. Little did she know, the palace roof was the only place she could be seen. When I saw her form in the pale moonlight it took my breath away. In one quick glance I discovered the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I have known many beautiful women but she was beyond compare. If I had only decided to turn away this would all have been avoided. I knew that what I was doing was wrong but I decided that one more glance wouldn't hurt anyone. That was my second mistake.

-As I watched her uncontrollable lust welled up in my heart. I coveted this woman. Although I had many wives and an entire kingdom at my command, I did not have her. I awoke my most trusted servant and asked him to go find out who she was. He was sleepy and confused but dutifully obeyed. He discovered her name was Bathsheba. Oh, Bathsheba. She was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a mercenary warrior who was away fighting the Ammonites. The irony is he was doing what I should have been doing. She was also the daughter of Eliam, whose father serves as one of my counselors. I knew I had seen her before. She had grown into a magnificent woman. I sent messengers to bring her to my residence. They obeyed my orders but none of them could look me in the eyes. I had only planned to talk with her but I did far more than talk. She was so young, and scared, and confused. She trembled as I took her into my arms. She silently wept as I consummated my lust. What was I thinking? I am almost 50 years old! I am the King of a great nation! I am the

shepherd of God's people! He blessed me with everything any man could ever need. And yet, I felt I was entitled to more.

-When I awoke the next morning, I sent Bathsheba on her way and tried quickly to forget the previous night. Several weeks later I received a letter from her. She was pregnant with my child. At the time only a handful of trusted servants knew about that night. The pregnancy would reveal my darkest secret to the entire kingdom. I could not allow that to happen. So, I sent for Uriah hoping that he would return from battle to sleep with his wife and cover my tracks. There was only one hitch in the plan, Uriah refused to sleep with Bathsheba because his fellow soldiers were at war. Again, the irony. I was the one that I had established that precedent as a way to keep the men sharp. I couldn't believe that he actually was abiding by the decree. I invited Uriah to dinner the next night. I had my winemaker bring my very best red wine. I got him quite drunk. I figured if he were intoxicated, he would certainly take his wife to bed. But all he did was stumble to the front of the palace gate to sleep with the rest of the men who were home on leave. What was wrong with the guy?

-So my hands were tied. I had no other options. I sent Uriah back to the battlefield with a letter for Joab. In the letter I asked Joab to send Uriah to the front lines where the battle was the fiercest. I figured he still had a shot. If God chose to take his life, so be it. But Uriah knew exactly what I intended. He pushed the army closer to the city gates, which not only ensured Uriah's death but also brought the death of many other men. The plan worked like a charm. After a few weeks of mourning, I took Bathsheba as my wife and no one was the wiser. It even appeared as though I were doing a royal favor for the granddaughter of a trusted friend. The assumption was that the child was Uriah's. Sure, I knew deep down that what I had done was wrong but I was able to keep it hidden and I tried to move on with my life.

-That was until last week when Nathan the prophet visited. Prophets always creep me out. I think it is the whole speaking for God thing. It's like they are reading your mind. He told me this strange story about two men that lived in a certain town. One was rich and the other was poor. The rich man had tons of livestock. The poor man only had one little lamb. He raised it and it grew up with him and his children. It ate his food and drank from his cup. It was like a daughter to him. A traveler came to visit the rich man. Instead of preparing one of his own livestock for a meal he took the poor man's lamb and slaughtered it. When I heard this story, I burned with anger. I demanded to know the identity of this arrogant rich man. He certainly deserved death for his crime.

-And then Nathan turned the tables on me. I was the rich man and Bathsheba was the little lamb that I had stolen from Uriah. #blindspot God was rebuking me for my sin. The sin that I had pushed into the deepest recesses of my heart was brought into the light. I was exposed for who I was (hands to face). My anger was replaced with fear, shame, and deep remorse. How could I have been so blind? Nathan then decreed that one day someone would take my own wives from me. Furthermore, he pronounced the coming death of my young son. As quickly as he appeared he was gone.

-Over the last week I have slept little. I have been fasting and praying for the life of my son. Every night I hold him tight to my chest knowing that it could be our last moment together. If only God would take me instead. My son is innocent. The blood is on my hands.

-I wrote a poem last night that I would like to share with you. It expresses the deepest yearnings of my heart. I plan to give it to our worship leader who will put it to music. I am a dirty, dirty man. I need desperately to be made clean. And only God can make me clean.

**b. Reading Psalm 51 (read from Bible/kneel while reading)**

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

Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

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

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.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.

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.

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.

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.

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 bulls will be offered on your altar.

### c. Series

-I am obviously not King David. I attempted to embody a scene from his life we find in 2 Samuel 11-12. We cannot understand Psalm 51, which is our passage today, without reading it within the context of 2 Samuel 11-12. If you look at the preface to Psalm 51 it reads - ***For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*** We are meant to read and understand this great prayer and song of confession through the lens of David sins. **Perhaps you feel like God couldn't possibly forgive your sins. King David was guilty of sexual assault and murder. There is hope for all of us.**

-We are in the middle of our summer series called **Greatest Hits: The Bible on Repeat.** (slide) This series is devoted exploring the passages of Scripture that have most deeply formed followers of Jesus throughout the ages. There are seven penitential or confessional Psalms in Christian tradition. **Psalm 51 is the most well-known and beloved. It provides a pathway for becoming clean. Let's pray.**

### d. Prayer

## 2. Color Commentary

### a. The Nature of God

-Let's explore Psalm 51 for a bit before we talk about how it provides a pathway of confession for our lives. Remember this is poetry that became a song. We aren't meant to dissect it. **It is meant to be felt and embodied and lived into.** With that said I do want to make a few observations about broad themes David is making through some poetic devices that aren't easy to in our English translations.

-**The Psalm is anchored in David's petition in verse 1.** David is casting himself on the mercy of God according to God's revealed character. David says – ***God have mercy on me, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion.*** For any Jewish reader those two phrases are a hyperlink to Exodus 34:6. In that verse God's presence and character is revealed to Moses with these words, ***The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness...***(Ex. 34:6)(slide) **David is pleading with God have mercy on me by being who you declared yourself to be. If David is going to be made clean it will be because God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love.**

### b. The Nature of Sin

-Now that the foundation is set David uses a poetic device to describe his sinfulness and state of uncleanness. **David will describe his sin with the three primary Hebrew words for sin. He will then repeat the words for effect.** Let's briefly discuss each of these Hebrew words for sin. If you are interested in digging deeper *The Bible Project* has a video for each word in their **Bad Words** series.

### **-3 Words to Describe David's Actions (slide)**

#### **1. Transgressions:** violating the trust of another (1,3)

...also: *rebellion, trespass*

...**God asks us to do something and we do something else**

...Paul uses the Greek version of this word to describe how **Adam, as the original image-bearer broke trust with God by going his own way**

...this is not just theft, it is **theft from someone who trusted you**

...idolatry, adultery

#### **2. Iniquity:** behavior that is crooked (2,5,9)

...also: *wickedness, guilt*

...**God wants us to take a path and we take another**

...related to Hebrew verb meaning **to be bent or crooked**, crooked behavior

...crooked or twisted world, crooked consequences, boomerang

...**bent boards at Home Depot**, trying to build with warped boards

#### **3. Sin:** moral failure (2,3,4,5,7,9)

...also: *to fail* or *miss the mark*

...**God establishes a target and we miss it, to fail or miss the mark**

...**the mark: imaging God, representing God, love God/love others**

...**to sin is to sin against God** (David)

...God to Cain – *sin is crouching at your door*

...**in Romans Paul describes it as a power or force**

-What's the point? You probably won't remember much of what I just said. The point is that **sin is not a simple one-dimensional concept. Sin is multi-faceted, complex and comprehensive.** David could not describe his condition with one word. He needed three words.

-I think it is helpful to think of **two dimensions of sin**. The first dimension is what most of us think about when we think about sin. That is the **dimension of bad behavior**. Humans behave badly. People are not perfect. Everyone messes up. God asks us to do something and we do something else. God establishes a target and we miss it. It is important to note that bad behavior does not just consist of things like lying, gossiping, stealing, adultery and murder. **"Good" behavior can also be bad behavior. We can do "good" things with bad motives.** Jesus was always calling out the religious leaders in this day for things like praying and giving in ways that were sinful. **When we talk**

about sin, this is usually what we mean – bad behavior, particularly other people’s bad behavior. I often hear people complain about all the bad things people are doing. I often think – *it is way worse than you think it is.*

-But there is a second dimension of sin that we often ignore. We do so at our own peril. This is what I call the **dimension of crooked hearts. This is a collective human condition. We don’t just commit sins. Our hearts are sinful.** The Scriptures tells us **our hearts are bent and crooked.** The writers of Scripture depict **the heart as the control center of each person.** Dorothy Sayers says that *sin is a deep interior dislocation at the center of every human heart.* Our hearts, apart from being set right, have a **natural propensity to rebel against God and go our own way.** We are made in God’s image and dearly loved but our hearts are under the power of sin and **naturally bent away from God. Just watch toddlers play.**

-To properly understand David’s sin, to properly understand our own sin we must acknowledge both dimensions of sin. We behave badly and we have crooked hearts. One aspect of sin is more personal and one is more collective. One is more particular and one is more pervasive. One is more cosmetic and one is more foundational.

-I have lived in several older homes during my life. One constant in older homes are cracks in the wall. You can do some cosmetic work and paint over cracks in the wall but guess what? They will always reemerge. That is because the issue is with the foundation of the house.

-David acknowledges both dimensions of sin in his prayer of confession. David freely admits his bad behavior. He talks about *my transgressions, my sin and doing what is evil.* But David also acknowledges the second dimension of sin. He says – *surely, I was sinful from birth.* Something happens when we come to life in a broken world under the power of sin that bends and deforms our hearts. **The foundation is off.**

-The poetic imagery that David uses to describe his sinful state is *being dirty or unclean.* I counted nine references to the image of being clean and unclean. This was a common image for the ancient Hebrews and the Jewish people in Jesus’ day. Much of the Mosaic law revolved around cleanliness and uncleanness. Sin was connected with being unclean. Holiness and righteousness were synonymous with being clean.

-The Jewish people were very embodied in their worship and in their repentance. **It was common for a person who was repenting of sin to put on sackcloth and dump ashes on their head. When Job realized his sin, he repented in dust and ashes. (Job 42:6) When Jonah called on Nineveh to repent, he told them to do so in sackcloth and ashes. (Jonah 3:5-6) Jesus said if certain towns he preached in would have received his message they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. (Matt. 11:2) Sackcloth was made from goat’s hair.** It was coarse, itchy and really uncomfortable to wear. It was used primarily for sacks to store stuff in. **Dust and ashes refer to our human frailty. We were made from the dust and to the dust we shall return. We are frail because of sin. If you cover yourself with dust and ashes you are also really dirty. When used in repentance it is a visible confession of being unclean due to bad behavior and a crooked heart. David is using a multitude of words and images to convey the reality that due to his sin he is really, really dirty.**

c. Only God can make us clean

-David is a master poet. He uses three different words to express the comprehensive nature of sin. He then uses three different words to convey his desire to be clean. And like the words for sin, David repeats each word for poetic effect. Lingering and reflecting on these words will help bring to life the forgiveness that is freely offered to those who turn to God.

### -3 Words for what David was asking God to do: (slide)

#### 1. **Blot out:** to erase (1,9)

...The word means **to erase words from a written scroll or tablet**. Now we use just delete key. In David's time all written words were permanent. **To erase it was a tedious process. It would be like erasing a tattoo**. How many of you have a tattoo? I would like to get one but my mom would freak out. Some people who have gotten tattoos now want them to be "blotted out" especially if it is the name of an old girlfriend or boyfriend. **If the tattoo says "Cindy" and you are married to a woman named "Rebecca" you want that tattoo "blotted out."** That's kind of how it is with our sin. Sin is tattooed to our hearts. Let's pretend this board is our hearts and this ink is permanent.

...**Illus. – erasing sins from a white board** (Write out sins one at a time/erase – pride, anger, greed, and lust, Cindy)

...**God makes dirty things clean again**

#### 2. **Wash away:** to pummel (2,7)

...This word was used for **washing clothes**. Literally, it means **to tread** or **to pummel**, since clothes were washed in this way.

...**Illus. cleaning a stain (stain stick)** - I hate when I get stains of my clothes. It's super annoying when I am out somewhere and I spill some coffee on my shirt. I feel like everyone is looking at it and judging me for being clumsy. When this happens, I invariably go into the bathroom and try to scrub it out with cold water. It drives my wife nuts because I emerge from the bathroom with a huge wet spot on my shirt. My wife argues that it just makes the stain worse.

...I love Eugene Peterson's translation of a few of David's lines. **Scrub away my guilt, wash out my sins in your laundry.** (Psalm 51:2) **Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean, scrub me and I will have a snow white life.** (Psalm 51:7)

...**God makes dirty things clean again**

#### 3. **Cleanse: scour clean** (2,7)

...Literally the word means to **scour clean**. The same word is used for **pronouncing clean** in priestly literature. It commonly refers to the ritual cleansing or purity people would experience before they entered the Temple to worship. **They are called mitveh baths. We saw them all over Israel.** (slide) How many of you showered before you came to church today?

...**Illus. – washing our bodies (loofa)** - Years ago I used to make fun of my guy friends who used a loofa. I thought it was just for ladies. Then one of my friends asked me how I removed all my dead skin cells when I was showering if I didn't use a loofa. That comment kind of freaked me out so I did a little research. **Scientists estimate that the human body is made up of around 10**

trillion cells in total. Your skin makes up about 16 percent of your body weight, which means you have roughly 1.6 trillion skin cells. Between 30,000 and 40,000 of them fall off every hour. Over a 24-hour period, you lose almost a million skin cells. So we are really like the walking dead. Dead skin is literally hanging on for dear life. When I realized that the loofa became my best friend. The loofa scraps off that layer of dead skin to allow your body to breathe. It literally scraps the death of your body. Here is my loofa. It is still really challenging to find a manly looking loofa. Dudes, get a loofa. You will thank me later.

...God make dirty things clean again

-David recognizes he is a dirty man. He has done evil in God's sight. His sin has wrecked his own life and the lives of others. He also acknowledges that his dirt is not just something on the outside that can be simply washed off. His dirt permeates to his very heart.

-Psalm 51 is David's prayer to be made clean from his sin. David cries out to God this prayer in verse 10 – **Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.** (Psalm 51:10, KJV)(slide) David is desperate to be clean inside and outside. And David comes to realize this very simple, transformative, literally life-saving truth – **only God can make us clean.** (slide)

### 3. Pathway of Confession

#### a. Admit we are unclean

-David provides us with a pathway of confession in Psalm 51. I think one of the things the modern church struggles with the most is practicing a healthy confession of our sins. I observe three steps in the pathway. They all start with an A which is kind of corny but will perhaps help us remember the steps.

-Step one in the pathway of confession is – **admit we are unclean.** (slide) The first step is to acknowledge our problem – we sin and we are sinful. All the way back in the 80s *People Magazine* published an index ranking sins. They called it a *sindex*. The sins rated the highest were murder, rape, child abuse and treason. Parking in a handicap parking spot and cutting in line were also listed pretty high. **It will not surprise you to learn that most of the people taking the survey considered themselves relatively righteous. Overall, the readers said they commit about 4.64 sins a month. 4.64 sins a month. I commit 4.64 sins before my morning coffee.**

-Jesus consistently railed against people who considered themselves self-righteous. Why? It is the self-righteous who are furthest from God. Step one in the pathway of confession is to **admit we are unclean, admit we sin and are sinful.** The Scriptures are unequivocally clear on this point. Remember from a few weeks ago, what animal are we? We are sheep. The prophet Isaiah writes, **We all like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to our own way.** (Isaiah 53:6a)(slide) This is the most basic definition of sin in the Bible – going our own way. As I shared my mentor used to always tell our staff team – sheep sh\*t. Paul declares that no one is righteous and **that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.** (Romans 3:23)(slide) Not that dude at work or your crazy uncle or that driver that cut you off. All have sinned. **I hate that advice that says – love the sinner, hate the sin. I prefer – love the sinner, hate your sin.**



-And it is not just that we behave badly. We all behave badly. It is also that the power of sin has given us crooked hearts. The writers of Scripture speak again and again about humans being enslaved to sin. I am not the exception. You are not the exception. I watched a few seasons of *The Walking Dead*. I don't recommend it. But in the first season there is an important scene where the main character learns from the scientist that every person on the planet has the zombie virus. That is what the Bible is trying to tell us. **We all have the virus. Apart from the grace of God we are all unclean.**

-Writer G.K. Chesterton once responded to a newspaper editorial asking people to answer the question – *what is wrong with the world?* Chesterton's simply replied – *I am. Yours truly. G.K. Chesterton.* Chesterton believed that **the reality of sin in the human heart was the only part of Christian theology that could be readily proven.**

-And yet we often are the last to see our sin. **Sin is like a kick-me sign that is taped to your back. Everyone sees it but you. Self-righteousness, or the blindness to our own sin, is the number one reason people do not experience the cleansing grace of God.** Cornelius Plantinga says it so well, **For slippage in our consciousness of sin, like many fashionable follies, may be pleasant, but it is also devastating. Self-deception about our sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What's devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for the wrong notes in our lives, the music of creation and the still greater music of grace whistle right through our skulls, causing no catch of breath and leaving no residue. Moral beauty begins to bore us. The idea that the human race needs a Savior sounds quaint.** (Dr. Cornelius Plantinga)(slide)

-I have a pastor friend who while traveling gave in to his pornography addiction. He was committed to accountability and truth telling. He called me and several other friends who served as an accountability team for him. When he returned home, he confessed to his wife. He was heartbroken how his sin had wounded his wife once again. He decided he needed to lament his sin in a tangible way. **He went out to their chicken coop, sat down in the dirt and covered himself with dirt that was intermingled with chicken poop. His wife graciously joined him. They sat and prayed and grieved and wept. Like David he cried out to mercy and grace from God. He told me it was a profoundly holy moment. We must admit we are all unclean.**

**b. Acknowledge that only God can make us clean**

-The second step in the pathway of confession is to **acknowledge that only God can make us clean.** (slide) Much of the world, including many Christians, seek to be made clean and right through their own efforts. This is what the entire self-help industry is predicated upon.

-It is a futile effort because sin is not just bad behavior. Sin is a human condition that demands radical and Divine intervention. This was one of the primary things Jesus was trying to teach the religious leaders in his day. They were committed to cleanliness. But their efforts at cleanliness were about doing certain things perfectly and not doing other things. **Jesus called them cups that were clean on the outside but dirty on the inside. He called them whitewashed tombs, clean and white on the outside but filled with death on the inside.** (Mt. 23) On several occasions Jesus chided the religious leaders from being concerned about what they put in their mouths. **Jesus told them**

**that it is what comes out of their hearts that is the problem.** This echoes the prophet Jeremiah – **the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure who can understand it?** (Jeremiah 17:9)(slide)

-Sin is not just our bad behavior. It is so much more. It is an enslaving power that bends our hearts and makes them crooked. When we see sin as simply bad behavior, we will be on an endless quest of just dealing with the next sin that pops up. My wife likes to say this is like **playing Whac-a-Mole.** (slide) We can knock down the one moles, and another emerges.

**-I used to live in an old farmhouse with several of my good friends after college.** As in all farmhouses we had mice issues. So we set traps. What would often happen is that the mice would take the poison from the traps and then die inside the walls of the house. For weeks at a time the smell of dead mice would emanate throughout the house. Our only remedy was to constantly burn scented candles. Our house smelled like a mixture of rotting flesh and cinnamon apple. One winter the smell got especially nauseating. After a few days we discovered a mouse carcass had fallen through our main heating duct and was literally being roasted on our furnace. We scraped his little body right off the furnace and the smell disappeared instantly. **We did all we could to try to cover up the smell but the ultimate remedy was to find and dispose of the dead bodies. The same is true of sin. We spend most of our time dealing with the effects of sin and little time focusing on the cause. Sin is a heart issue. David wanted God to clean out his heart. That is something only God can do.**

**-David knew that his sin wasn't just about bad behavior that could be fixed with good behavior. David declares that *God doesn't want his sacrifices.* David knew his problem went far deeper. David didn't think he could run down to his local bookstore and pick up a copy of 6 ways to avoid murder and adultery and that he would be o.k. David knew he needed outside intervention. David isn't asking God to come in and help him clean up his mess. David is asking God for a new heart. David realizes that the only thing he can give to God is his broken, sin ravaged heart. *Create in me a clean heart O God. Renew a right spirit within me.* God, give me a heart transplant. God, set right the dislocation deep within me. This in line with God's promise to Ezekiel that God would give people a new heart.**

-It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for **create** always has **God as the object.** When it is used, we know that only God can do what follows. It harkens back to Gen. 1:1 – ***in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Only God can make something out of nothing. Only God can give us new hearts. Only God can make us clean.***

### c. Ask God to make us clean

-The third and final step in the pathway of confession is **to ask God to make us clean.** (slide) We can acknowledge that God is the only one who can make us clean without asking God to actually make us clean.

-1 John 1:9 captures the simplicity and power of this vital third step. ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*** (1 John 1:9)(slide) **If we admit our sinfulness, turn to God and ask for forgiveness we are made right.** This is the answer to David's prayer – ***create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.***

-The first three steps in the pathway of confession are very similar to **the first three steps in AA. We admit our problem. We acknowledge that God is the only answer to our problem. We surrender ourselves to God's deliverance.** This is not surprising because the 12 Steps were originally created in a church setting. John Ortberg sums up these first three steps very simply. ***We can't. But God you can. We think we will let You.***

-There is a story about Frederick the Great. He was inspecting the Berlin prison. As he walked through the hordes of shackled men, they fell pleading at his feet, protesting their innocence. They claimed to be falsely accused, models of virtuous living, completely innocent of all crime. Only one man didn't do this. Frederick called to him, "Prisoner, why are you here?" "I robbed a man, Your Majesty." "Are you guilty?" "Yes, Your Majesty." Frederick called the guard over. Pointing at the man who confessed, he said, "Release this man immediately. I will not have this scoundrel thief kept here where he might corrupt all these other fine, virtuous, and innocent men." That's the lovely irony of confession: The one who actually confesses gets to go free.

-Mark Buchanan says that ***confession is nothing more than presenting our real self to God. We are admitting who we are and what we have done. God knows anyways. The freedom comes in bringing our real selves out into the light of God's mercy and grace.*** Someone once said ***our secrets make us sick.*** This idea is explored in-depth in the famous novel **Crime and Punishment.** The main character **Raskonikov** commits a double murder. **He initially "gets away with it." But the secret eats him alive. That is what unconfessed sin does it eats us alive.** This is what David must have been experiencing during the year between his adultery and murder and his confession. It is a living hell. This is why David declares that **God wants us to be truthful in our *inmost place.*** This word was also used to plug up water sources so that they could not be shared with neighbors. David is inviting us to unplug our hearts and share our secret sins.

-Jesus offers us a way out of the slavery of our sin. **On the cross Jesus bore all my sin and all your sin, and all your sin, and all your sin and all the sins of the world. And as only God could do, Jesus broke the power of sin and death by bearing the costs of our sin and rose again to offer freedom and new hearts to all who would turn to him. This is our only hope. Only God can make us clean. Some people in this room have never turned to Jesus as the hope for their sin. I encourage you to do so this morning.**

-Other, like myself, made the decision to turn to Jesus a very long time ago. And yet, until our bodies are fully redeemed and evil is forever vanquished, we will continue to sin. The pathway to confession is something all followers of Jesus should practice on a daily basis. For some of us, maybe on an hourly basis. Because sin is forever crouching at our door and only God can make us clean.

#### 4. Closing

##### a. Prayer of Confession

-Let's practice the pathway of confession right now. The church used to do this sort of thing all the time. We need to get back to it because it is a source of life and freedom.

-If you are willing close your eyes and hold out your hands in front of you. Clench your fists. This is posture is the opposite of confession. In this heart posture we are holding onto our sins. We don't want to confess them to God or anyone else. In this state our sins will eat us alive. Our clenched right hands represent our bad behavior – the things we have done that do not align with God's will. The many ways we miss the mark. Our failure to properly love God and love others. These things can be intentional and unintentional. I have a friend who shared that he accidentally kicked his wife under the breakfast table one morning. He said, *I'm sorry, I didn't mean to kick you.* His wife responded – *and yet you did.* Where have we fallen short of the glory of God? I want to give us a few moments of silence for you to reflect on what some of those sins might be. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal them to you. (silence)

-Now we will ask God to forgive us these sins using one of the church's most ancient prayers called the Jesus prayer. The Jesus prayer simply says – ***Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.*** Let's say that together as we open our right hand – Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner. Ah, freedom.

-Our clenched left hand represents all the sins we have committed that we are not aware of. Like David we all have many blind spots. On Yom Kippur, the Jewish high priest would sacrifice a bull to atone for all the sins he had committed that he was not aware of. These are actions or inactions that cause us to participate in sin without knowledge. Jesus died for those sins as well. Let's take a moment of silence. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal our blind spots. As we release our second fist let us pray the Jesus prayer – ***Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.*** Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner. Ah, freedom. **Because of Jesus, and only because of Jesus, we are made clean. Only God can make us clean.**

-As prepare to come to the Lord's Table let's say a final prayer of confession together. This is another ancient prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. ***Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen. End by acknowledging God's mercy and realizing that He has forgiven your sins in Christ Jesus. May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and strengthen us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, all our days. Amen.*** (Book of Common Prayer)(slide)

## b. The Lord's Table

-One of the church fathers once observed that if we don't see the sacrifice of Jesus as essential to our being made right with God then we do not understand the full weight of our sin.

-Grace is free but it is not cheap.

c. **Worship**

d. **Benediction**

-push to serve in Kid's Ministry//need to open first service/not every Sunday

-Sunday Extra

-confession prayer

*-Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?*

*<sup>4</sup> The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.<sup>[a]</sup><sup>5</sup> They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior. <sup>6</sup> Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.<sup>[b]</sup><sup>[c]</sup><sup>7</sup> Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. <sup>8</sup> Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.<sup>9</sup> Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. <sup>10</sup> Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty - he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24:3-10)*

**Slides**

-Greatest Hits **slide**

-Ex. 34:6

-3 Words to Describe David's Actions

1. *Transgressions*: violating the trust of another (1,3)
2. *Iniquity*: behavior that is crooked (2,5,9)
3. *Sin*: moral failure (2,3,4,5,7,9)

-3 Words for David was Asking God To Do:

1. *Blot out*: to erase (1,9)
  2. *Wash away*: to pummel (2,7)
- mitveh* bath pic
3. *Cleanse*: scour clean (2,7)

-Psalm 51:10 (KJV)

-Only God can make us clean

-Pathway of Confession

## 1. Admit we are unclean

-Isaiah 53:6a

-Romans 3:23

-"For slippage in our consciousness of sin, like many fashionable follies, may be pleasant, but it is also devastating. Self-deception about our sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What's devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for the wrong notes in our lives, the music of creation and the still greater music of grace whistle right through our skulls, causing no catch of breath and leaving no residue. Moral beauty begins to bore us. The idea that the human race needs a Savior sounds quaint." (Dr. Cornelius Plantinga)

-Pathway of Confession

1. Admit we are unclean
2. Acknowledge that only God can make us clean

-Jeremiah 17:9

-Whac-a-Mole pic

-Pathway of Confession

1. Admit we are unclean
2. Acknowledge that only God can make us clean
3. Ask God to make us clean

-1 John 1:9

-"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

CARDS TO HAND OUT:

*Take a few moments to pray to confess your sins and acknowledge your need for God's grace and forgiveness.*

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.

*End by acknowledging God's mercy and realizing that He has forgiven your sins in Christ Jesus.*

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and strengthen us to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, all our days. Amen.