

Summer in the Psalms: Exploring the “with God” Life Psalm 51

Kyle & Kelsey Lantz did a great job taking us through Psalm 51. I’m going to pass along some of their main points below:

Main Idea:

Through regular confession we are reminded of God’s mercy, compassion, and unfailing love, and are able to face our sins in freedom instead of fear.

Unlike many of the Psalms, we actually know quite a bit of the back story of Psalm 51. It is a Psalm of Confession from David after his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequently having her husband Uriah killed to cover it up. II Samuel 11-12 is where this story can be found. As was pointed out in the sermon, these chapters also outline for us the path of sin as we see it unfold in David’s life, but also how it can proceed in ours as well.

1. An opportunity for sin presents itself when we aren’t where we’re supposed to be in the first place.
2. Unless we practice regular confession, sin can lead us down the road to more and more sin.
3. Choices once unimaginable become reality when we actively seek to hide our sin.
4. Here’s the good news: God did not leave David in his sin (nor will He leave us in ours).

The “WITH GOD” life (which I hope is what we all desire) requires us to continually remember who we are in light of who God is. Psalm 51 highlights for us someone (in David) who understands who he is in light of who God is.

Verses 1-4 establish who God is. As God, He is the rightful judge. That being the case, “sin” is an offense against God. While our sin often wrongs other people, hurts other people, does all kinds of harm to other people, the primary affront is against God. Hurting other people is a sin against God. It offends Him because when we hurt/wrong other people, we hurt/wrong someone that God loves. So, “sin” as a category, when rightly understood, is an issue between us and God. While there may be all kinds of other repercussions and consequences that occur, and reconciliation and reparations that need to happen with other people, sin means a fracture in our relationship with God has occurred...even if the direct wrong was against another person. Perhaps another way of saying this is, God is the primary Other that we need to concern ourselves with. That does NOT mean that we have no concern for others, but rather that our relationship with God takes precedence over all others.

Sin distorts our ability to connect with God. Thankfully, God is merciful, compassionate, and unfailingly loving. He seeks a way to overcome that distortion...even though the fault/blame for that distortion/fracture is on us.

David recognized that the primary issue was his fractured relationship with God. (He recognized this because God took the initiative—God always takes the initiative—by sending the prophet Nathan to confront David.) We see David seeking reconciliation through confession and seeking forgiveness.

In verses 5-9 we see a “big picture” view of sin and its pervasive nature in our lives (we are sinful to our core), yet nevertheless, we see from David that the only way to deal with our sin is to take it before God. (Only God can cleanse us, wash us, fix us, make things right.)

Verses 10-12 are really the core of this Psalm. The “WITH GOD” life is one in which we enjoy God’s presence through His Spirit. This was precisely what David was afraid of losing because of his sin (see verse 11). In the “WITH GOD” life our hearts become increasingly pure, our spirits more steadfast. We experience joy in our salvation and a more cooperative spirit that sustains our relationship with God.

The rest of the Psalm reveals how the “WITH GOD” life is concerned with more than just “me and God”. In verses 13-15 David expresses how he wants others to come to know God, His ways and His goodness. In verses 16-17 David explains what is central to connecting with God and worshipping Him—a broken and contrite heart/spirit; honesty and humility before Him. In verses 18-19, again, we see how the “WITH GOD” life desires goodness for others (Jerusalem/Zion, in this case) and that goodness revolves around properly connecting and worshipping God in righteousness.

While David confessed his sin to God, the very fact that we have this Psalm today demonstrates that he also confessed to others (in this case, the entire nation of Israel and all who would read Scripture down the road). So, when do we confess only to God, and when do we confess to others as well?

In James we read, *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”* (James 5:16) The whole idea of confession actually shows us who we fear. If we think, “Oh, God is gracious and merciful, compassionate and loving...I confess to Him all the time, no problem”, but then can’t fathom the idea of confessing to another person might demonstrate that we fear people (and what they think of us) more than we fear God. (By “fear” I mean whose opinion of us really matters to us.) When we are confident and secure in God’s love for us, we don’t care too much about what others think of us...so admitting our sins, faults, brokenness, flaws, mistakes, isn’t that big of a deal. (Yes, some people can be mean and immature and hold our sins and shortcomings against us, but at the end of the day, as long as we have God, we have everything we need.)

Ideally, it is good to always have some people with whom we can be an “open book” to...nothing hidden. It is highly advisable that such people be highly trusted, mature, wise, and willing/able to “get tough” with us when needed (not simply commensurate with us). Additionally, it is good to have as our Rule/Rhythm of Life meeting with such people regularly (even if it’s just one other person). One of the most spiritually formative experiences/practices is allowing someone else into our inner lives, our hearts and minds—even and especially the dark, ugly, broken parts—on a regular basis. If this is something we want to avoid, the question must be asked, Why?

Q. What word, line, phrase or stanza stands out to you from Psalm 51 (or for that matter, any Psalm from this week in the devotional guide?)

Q. Do you have a practice/habit of meeting with someone regularly to share the good, bad, and ugly of your life? Explain. (Like, when/how did you start this practice? How has it benefitted your life? Etc.)

Q. Share your thoughts regarding the quotes from C.S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer below:

"It is essential [when confessing our sins] to use the plain, simple, old-fashioned words that you would use about anyone else. I mean words like theft, or fornication, or hatred, instead of 'I did not mean to be dishonest' or 'I was only a boy then' or 'I lost my temper'. I think that this steady facing of what one does know and bringing it before God, without excuses, and seriously asking for Forgiveness and Grace, and resolving as far as in one lies to do better, is the only way in which we can ever begin to know the fatal thing which is always there, and preventing us from becoming perfectly just." (C.S. Lewis)

"Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride...In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother - which means, before God - we experience the Cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation. The old man dies, but it is God who has conquered him. Now we SHARE in the resurrection of Christ and eternal life." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Q. In your own words, why is confession important?

Q. Describe a time when you confessed something to someone else.

Q. How have you experienced the reality of sin distorting our ability to connect with God?

Q. Thinking about David, how can someone who committed adultery and murder be considered "a man after God's own heart" (see Acts 13:22)? What does this tell us about God?

Q. Thinking through the "path of sin" as described above, how have you seen that play out in your own life?

Q. What practices, habits, disciplines do you employ so that you can constantly remember who you are in light of who God is?

Q. According to David (and the rest of Scripture) sin is pretty bad and deep. Honestly, do you agree with that assessment? How have you observed people making light of sin? (How have you, perhaps, made light of sin?)

Q. How has your "WITH GOD" life been a blessing and benefit to others? (Or, how do you hope it can/will be?)