

“Shedding Our Shame”

Who Needs the Past, Pt. 9

Today we wrap up our summer series in which we have been looking for ancient solutions to modern problems in the prayer book of God’s people, the book of Psalms. And we are landing this plane on one doozy of a modern problem. In fact, the sociologists have demonstrated that today’s subject is lurking beneath the surface of many of the other problems that we face in society like violence, bullying, eating disorders, depression and loads more.

What are we talking about? We’re talking about **shame**. I read a lot more theology books than I do leadership books, because I discovered a while back that the leadership books often fed something in my spirit that wasn’t very Christlike – this dominant spirit. But then I discovered Dr. Brené Brown’s work on leadership and vulnerability and everything of hers I read sounds like the Bible to me. And she says that shame is behind most of our leadership challenges. It’s like an iceberg, you don’t see a whole lot above the surface, but underneath is a mountain that can most definitely sink your ship.

Let me give you her definition of shame: “Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.” (*Dare to Lead*,

p.126). And I think that’s right. It’s the driving force behind the demon-like voices that sit on our shoulder and whisper, “you’ll never be good enough” and “who do you think you are?”

Now, before we get started, we need to address the terminology of shame, because there’s some confusion between shame and guilt – two terms that often get used interchangeably. But I don’t think they are the same. Let me give you what I think is the difference. Guilt is, “I did something bad”. Guilt is actually a helpful thing. We feel guilty when we hold up something we’ve done, or failed to do, against our values and they don’t match up. And that cognitive dissonance is very useful to motivate changed behavior. Guilt is psychology healthy.

But shame is “I am bad”. If guilt is “I made a bad leadership decision”, shame is “I am a bad leader.” And I unlike guilt, which can motivate us to make a better leadership decision next time, shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we can change and do better. Does any of this ring a bell to you? Can any of us own up to the feelings of guilt and shame that we wrestle with on an ongoing basis? It’s the healthy leader – the emotionally healthy individual – who is able to own it.

And our Psalm this morning is all about owning and dealing with the feelings of guilt and shame. It references a very famous story – a juicy story! - but before we get to that, we need to read our text for the morning, so please everyone – one last time – let’s all recite out loud together, **Psalm 51**...

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

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

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

*4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.*

*5 Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

*6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*

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

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

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

*10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

*13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.*

*14 Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my
tongue will sing of your righteousness.*

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

*16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.*

*17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite
heart, O God, you will not despise.*

*18 In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.*

*19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

In the entire Bible, this particular psalm is just generally recognized and understood to be the greatest passage in the Bible how to deal with guilt and shame. Now if you look this up in your Bible you’ll notice there’s a little heading that begins the psalm. The heading is, “A psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.” That’s the context. Have you heard of this story? It’s an amazing story, and it’s all in 2 Samuel. Here’s how it goes.

When David was a young man, he was so popular that his predecessor, King Saul, became so jealous of David that he sought to kill him, and David was forced to flee and live life as an outlaw, a Robin Hood sort of figure. Very romantic, very dashing, but actually wasn’t a terribly comfortable or a convenient life to live.

He had to live off the land, and he had to live in the wilderness. He was always being hunted. And he gathered to himself during that period of time what the Bible calls his “mighty men.” You can read about them in 2 Samuel chapters 22 through 24. These men were mighty warriors, and they were loyal to David.

Even as David became king, when the enemies of Israel attacked the kingdom to try to invade it and take it over, David was again forced to flee into the wilderness, and once more his mighty men went with him. These men would do *anything* for David. The Bible says three of the mighty men fought through Philistine lines just to bring David some water from the well in his hometown. These men were loyal. They were fierce. They were brave. They would do anything for David, and David owed them his *life*. 2 Samuel 24 names 37 of these mighty men each of whom was fierce and loyal, dear servants and friends of David to whom he owed his life...and one of them was named Uriah the Hittite.

Now some years later, David had sent all of the fighting men off to the front because enemies had invaded Israel again, and all the armies were out there defending Israel. But David, for whatever reason, was home in Jerusalem. And we’re told one night he was up walking around on the roof of his house, which of course, being the king, he had a high roof. He was high up, and he had a great vantage point.

And he was able to see into other homes and courtyards and onto other roofs. And he caught sight of a beautiful woman bathing, and he felt he *had* to have her. And he sent for her. And when he did, he discovered this woman was named Bathsheba, the *wife* of his old friend, Uriah the Hittite, a man who was a faithful and trusted servant.

But it didn’t matter, David wanted her more than anything, and he took her to bed with him. In earlier times I might have said he had “an affair” with her. But the MeToo movement has convinced me that you don’t call power-disparities in sex an “affair”. How do you say “no” to the king when he calls? This was sexual misconduct on David’s part and I don’t mind calling it rape.

Well sometime after the sordid dalliance, Bathsheba sent word to David, “I’m pregnant.” And David suddenly realized he was in trouble because, of course, her husband had been away at the front now for weeks and weeks and months. He had to do something to cover up the fact that she was going to have a child. So he sent for Uriah and brought him back, ostensibly to learn news of how the fighting was going.

So he brought Uriah back, and he sat him down and got a battle report. And then he said, “Well, Uriah, it’s too late for you to try to go back to the fighting today. Go home. Wash your feet,” which, of course, means, “You’ve been out living on the land. You’ve been living in hardship. Go home and have some comfort. Clean up. Put on fresh clothing. Have a good meal. Go to bed with your wife.”

And Uriah looked at David and said to him, “What are you asking me to do? My friends, my brothers, my countrymen are out there on the front. They’re living lives of hardship. They’re putting their lives on the line every day. They’re sleeping on the hard ground, and they are not with their wives. Far be it from me to enter in even under my own roof and take comfort there when my brethren are out risking their lives.”

So that’s the kind of man Uriah was - loyal, brave, trusted, a man of principle. And he refused to go back in underneath his own roof, and he slept on his own front step that night. Well, this wasn’t the plan. So the next morning David sent messengers and brought Uriah back to the palace, and he got him to eat, and he got him to drink. In fact, he got Uriah drunk – Love Potion #9 - but as hammered as he was, Uriah would still *not* go back into his home. It was a matter of principle. He was a fighting man. He was a soldier, and he was going to show his solidarity with his brethren. That’s the kind of man he was. Think of the integrity. Think of the honesty. So he slept again on his own front step.

Finally David wrote a note to Joab, the commander of the army, and sent Uriah back with the note. And in the note it said, “I want to get rid of this man. Put him on the line in the place where the fighting is heaviest. Then withdraw from him and make sure he dies.” Three days later, a messenger came back from the front and he reported to David all the goings on and then he said, “Oh yeah, and your servant Uriah the Hittite was slain in battle.”

Now what did David do? Not a pang of conscience. He sent a message back to Joab, and the message said, “Don’t trouble yourself over this. The sword devours first one and then another.” Hard-hearted. “Hey Joab, yes, we’ve lost a hero and a friend, but don’t bother yourself about it. He might have died anyway. That’s just the way things are. I mean more people die of the flu every year…”

And after Bathsheba was done with her period of mourning, David took her to be his wife. Just watching after his buddy’s family. What a great friend! And when the baby boy is born, nobody checks the math. Everything is cool. David got away with it. And no indication of shame or guilt. By the way, I said guilt is psychologically healthy – you know who *doesn’t* ever feel guilt? Psychopaths. So David is in a very precarious place, because he got what he wanted, *but...* the Bible says, (**2 Sam. 11:27**) “*But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.*”

One day a man named Nathan the prophet comes to court. And Nathan says, “Oh king, I have a sad incident to relate to you, and I would like your judgment on it.” “What is it?” says the David. Nathan says, “Well, there are two men in your kingdom. One is a very rich man. He has so many cattle and so many flocks you can’t even number them. On the other hand, there’s a very poor man who only has one animal, a little lamb. And this lamb is like this man’s daughter. She eats from his plate and she sleeps in his arms.”

“Well, do you know recently the rich man was entertaining a traveler and decided he had to entertain this man with a great feast? So instead of going to his own flock to get something for the man to eat, he stole the one little lamb of this poor man and *killed* it and fed it to his guest. What do you think of that?”

And the Bible says David arose in wrath and said, “The man who has done this does not deserve to live.” And Nathan stopped him with just a wave of his hand and said, “Thou art the man.” And in that moment, David was inundated with a wave of horror; the horror of self-discovery, the shame of it. Suddenly a mirror was held up to his face, and he looked into it, and he saw the ugliest thing he had ever seen in his life.

And at that moment, David was plunged, through Nathan, through that illustration, through the shock of recognition, through the knowledge of the magnitude of the evil he had done, into the depths. He was plunged into an emotional and spiritual dungeon deeper than any physical dungeon anywhere in the world. And there is no good human explanation for how he got out, but he did get out.

The guilt, the shame, the horror, the self-hatred...imagine it! He was in the spiritual and emotional depths, and yet this psalm is a record of his rescue. He got out. He came out of the depths. How in the world did he do it? How? The answer is right here. But before I show you, I want to point out here in the beginning that if this worked for David, it can work for anybody. You’ve done some stuff you feel guilty about – you’re not a psychopath – but I bet you haven’t murdered your best friend so you could cover up getting his wife pregnant. I could be wrong...but I doubt it.

If David was able to deal with his guilt and deal with his shame and deal with his self-hatred to the place where he was ready to get out there and tell everybody else how to live their life...You know at the end he said, (v.13) “*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.*” This cat is going back into the ministry.

The *confidence* at the end of that psalm...how did he do it? Here's how he did it: he made two critical distinctions, imperative distinctions to make. I'll tell you what they are and then we'll break them down. David discovered the difference between remorse and repentance. And he learned the difference between a reprieve and regeneration. And we need to learn them as well.

Here we go, the **first thing** he learned is there's a huge difference between **remorse and repentance**. He learned to repent. Now just a word about the importance of repentance. What do you think the purpose of this passage is? What do you think the purpose of this story is? The Bible is a very odd book. The Bible, unlike all the other ancient texts - go read them - read the other stories and accounts of the Greeks and the Romans and the Norse and the Germans and all of their great heroes, their men and women they lifted up as their leaders and heroes. You'll never see them treated the way the Bible treats it's heroes. Never!

It is incredible, frankly, the detail with which the Bible rubs David's face in what he did. You go read the account I just gave you. Do you know why it was so detailed? Do you know how I *knew* all those things? Because it's in the Bible. I didn't put *anything* in there. Second Samuel 11, tells you with unbelievable detail the premeditation, the hard-heartedness, the shocking things David said and did. The Bible does this. It does it to Peter. It does it to Moses. It does it to Abraham. It does it to everybody.

It takes all of these great men and women and shows you their evil, shows you their great flaws. Do you know why? The main message of the Bible is you and I are sinners. The Bible is not here to say, "Oh look how much worse David is than you and me." No! The Bible here is to say even a *great* man, a sublime poet, an athlete, a warrior, a king - I mean, David had it all - even as great a man as David is *capable* of this. You don't think you are?" See, the whole purpose of the Bible is to say, "You're a sinner."

I'll put it another way. The Bible says there is a prerequisite, an absolute indispensable prerequisite, for you to meet God. You must repent. Remember when John the Baptist knew the Messiah was coming? He prepared people for the Messiah. He only had one message. What was it? "Repent!" When the people said to Peter on the day of Pentecost, "What must we do to be saved?" what was the very first word out of his mouth? Repent!

The Bible does not argue about this. It just lays it right out. The Bible actually says, in a sense, "Until you repent, I have nothing to say to you. Until you repent, I have nothing to offer you. Until you repent, *nothing* else that I have to say to you will make any sense. Until you repent, *nothing* else I can offer you will you be able to receive. Repent!" Somebody says, "Anthony isn't that a bit harsh?" I don't know about harsh, but it's reality.

Look at the world around you. What is the one thing everybody agrees on? Something is *really* wrong. Everybody agrees on it. What's the main issue every time we have an election? There's something wrong. There's something *badly* wrong. And what we do is we put politicians in for a while until we get tired of them because they know there's something wrong, but they can't figure it out. So then we kick them out and put somebody else in so *they* can spend the next few years not knowing what's wrong.

The philosophers, the psychologists, they all know there's something terribly wrong. The economists know it. Look, socialism is pretty much a failed system, and yet everybody complains about capitalism. Everybody is unhappy with it. Why? I'll tell you why. The socialist systems look great on paper, but if you give all the power to the workers, do you know what happens? We've seen it. They get corrupt and selfish and unproductive. But if you give all the power to the managers, what happens? We've seen it. They get corrupt and selfish and exploitive.

Well, what's the problem? Don't you see? The Bible says it's sin. That's the reason the economic models don't work. That's the reason the political models don't work. Sin is the missing ingredient, without which *everything* about the world and your life is incomprehensible. You won't understand psychology.

You won't understand economics. You won't understand sociology. You won't understand international relations. You won't understand social relationships. It's *the* problem. The Bible says it's *the* key issue, without which you can't understand anything else. *That's* what's wrong!

You can laugh. You can say, "Oh, the biblical doctrine of sin. Ha! It's old-fashioned." Yeah, well so is the law of gravity. It still works. Look, you can make fun of the biblical doctrine of sin. But the Bible says until you believe it, you won't be able to understand hardly anything going on around you. You can make fun of it, but come on! Come up with a better explanation for what's wrong with the world. Go ahead. Just try.

This is the message of the Scripture. The message of the Scripture is sin is such a malignant evil and it is rooted so deeply in the heart of every one of us that even the *best* people - like King David - are capable of the worst deeds. The message is that unless you see the magnitude of the evil in your own heart and the magnitude of the evil around you and about you, until you realize it, you are the most gullible simpleton. You are naive, and nobody in Austin wants to be considered naive. That's the last thing we want, right? But you are.

You don't believe the biblical doctrine of sin, of the sinfulness of humanity? You don't believe that? You are a rube. You're a rookie. You are the merest novice in the things of life. Repent! The Bible says that's the *main* thing you have to do if you want to meet God. It's the *first* step in understanding anything. The first step to self-discovery. The first step to psychological healing. The first step to anything. Repent! Okay?

But, let me tell you why repentance is in such bad repute today. Because most of what people think of as repentance is really remorse. See, a lot of people say, "Oh gosh! Great. Repentance. Thank you. I'm so glad I came to church today. This is the very reason I *left* church. This is the reason I got out of Christianity. See, the whole problem with Christianity is it's always making me feel shame. It's always so terrible. It has hurt me psychologically. I only have felt a little bit of liberation since I left it."

Well, here's what I'm proposing to you. First off, yes, the doctrine of sin has been misused in the church to hurt a lot of people. I agree with Brené Brown – there's no useful place for shame – shame just makes everything worse. If someone wants to shame you, it's because they want to control you, to dominate you – and plenty of religious institutions, past and present, have been guilty of that. That's not what a proper theology of sin is. It's about leading you to freedom.

There's a big difference between repentance and remorse. In **2 Corinthians 7:10**, Paul says, "*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*" Did you hear that? There are two kinds of sorrow for sin! Godly sorrow over sin leads to freedom. See? Deliverance. No regret. And then there's a worldly kind of sorrow that leads to death. I think this is getting at the difference between guilt and shame. And the difference between the two is the difference I'm talking about. Repentance - and salvation – or worldly sorrow – and remorse, and shame. Which brings death.

Now what is that difference? Here, let me show you. David gets right to it. And this is so strange to us. On the surface it seems upside down, but it's not, David gets it. What does he say? **V. 4**, "*Against you, you only, have I sinned...*" "Now, hold on, David. What about the poor Uriah lying dead on the battlefield because of your treachery? What about poor Bathsheba, ripped away from her husband for your sexual gratification? What do you mean you *only* sinned against God? What are you talking about?" Ah, look. David is not denying the fact that he has violated those people, but what he is actually saying is, "I have discovered something profound about the nature of sin."

This is very, very important to understand. This makes the difference - as I'll show you in a minute - between remorse and repentance. What he discovered is sin is not primarily the breaking of the Law, but it is primarily and first of all an attack on the Lawgiver and the Creator. Let me show you really quickly what I mean.

Are you an accident, or are you created? Everything keeps coming back to this question, doesn't it? Do you believe you were created? If you *were* created, what does that mean? It means your *Author* has authority over you. If you write a character in a book, you have authority over that character. And if you were created, that means there is an author. There's someone *over* you. And that's the reason why at one point when the prophet Daniel is rebuking another king, he says, **(Daniel 5:23 ESV)** "...but the God *in whose hand is your breath*, and whose are all your ways, you have not honored."

"...the God in whose hand is your breath..." Boy, what is Daniel saying? Every second you breathe is because God is supporting that. Your molecules are being held together. Your heart is pumping. He's the cosmic Sting, "Every *breath* you take..." God is your Author. You owe him *everything*. You owe not only your existence to God but your sustenance to God, "... the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways..." Who owns you? Who sustains you? What do you owe Him? For a start, you owe Him honor.

But more than that, if you go back and you want to understand the nature of sin, you have to go back to the garden of Eden. There are Adam and Eve, and they've been given this paradise. They've been told, "Just don't eat from that tree." And along comes the Serpent, and the Serpent shows us exactly what David is getting at. The Serpent comes and says, "Hey, Adam and Eve. I've been watching you, and I'm very concerned for you. God is trying to hold you down. God doesn't want you to reach your fullest potential. God does not have your complete and best interest in mind...but I do. If you eat from that tree, it will be wonderful."

Now do you know what's going on here? *Before* Adam and Eve could eat from the tree - which was the disobedience, the violation of the rule - first of all, they had to decide they were wiser than God. Not only that, they had to put themselves in the place of God and they had to decide they loved themselves more than God loved them. They had to reject the goodness of God. They had to *attack* the goodness of God in their hearts. They couldn't possibly have disobeyed the rule to eat from the tree unless they had assumed they had their own best interest more in mind than God, that God was really trying to hold them down.

And therefore, the sin underneath all other sins, the primary sin, the original sin, is a character assassination on the love of God, to say, “God, I know what’s best for me. You don’t. God, I *want* what is best for me, and you don’t.” That notion, that belief - conscious or unconscious - is the sin underneath every other sin. Don’t you see? *Before* David could have murdered Uriah and slept with Bathsheba, first he had to put himself in the place of God and say, “Lord God, I know better than you what is good for me, and I want more than you what is good for me. I reject your goodness. I don’t believe you love me.”

Look, what if tomorrow you have an opportunity to tell a lie, which if you tell it will make you money and if you don’t tell it will lose you an awful lot of money? If you do the lie, there’s been a sin you’ve done *before* the lie. The lie is the second sin. The lie sin is a symptom. The lie sin is a result. You must determine in your own heart. You look at the Ten Commandments, which say, “Don’t lie,” and you say, “You know what? I *know* what’s best for me better than God, and I *want* what’s best for me better than God. I see what God says, but that couldn’t be in my best interest.”

In other words, you doubt the *goodness* of God, and that’s the reason why you break the law of God. You never break the law of God unless you doubt, unless you trample on, unless you spit in the eye of the love and the goodness of God. And therefore, David realizes *before* sin is the breaking of the law, it’s the stabbing of God in the heart.

Have you ever offered something to somebody and had them slap it out of your hand and say, “You don’t want anything good for me; you don’t love me?” Have you ever had that happen to you? Almost all of us have had that happen to us when we were really trying to do something for somebody, make a sacrifice and have it accusatorially slapped out of our hand. There’s nothing worse. Therefore, David knows enough to say the *ultimate* sin, the sin underneath all the other sins, all sin, is a rejection of God’s goodness. All sin is an attack on God. All sin is a form of cosmic treason.

Now do you want to know why this is the difference between remorse and repentance? Right here. As dire as that is, as awful as that is, it’s the secret that brings hope. Remember, guilt brings hope, shame does not. Look, in remorse – which brings shame - you’re looking at the *mess* you got into. You’re looking at how stupid you are. Here’s the language of remorse: “I was a fool. I was an idiot. My best friend, my trusted man. How could I have done this? What kind of idiot was I? It’s going to get out everywhere. I have undermined my own family. I’ve undermined everything. When this gets out, I’ve undermined my authority as a king. I’ve hurt everybody. I’ve gotten Joab into trouble for asking him to help me, to be a co-conspirator. How could I have done this? What a mess I’ve made!” That’s remorse. Do you know what remorse is? It’s just an aggravated form of self-pity, the very thing which is what got you into it to start with, the very essence of sin, which is the self-absorption and the self-centeredness, the very thing.

You're mad at yourself. You're stabbing yourself. You're trampling on yourself. You're hating yourself. You're looking in. You're looking in. You're looking in. But when you *repent*, you realize the main thing is not the mess you got into. The main thing is not even the *action* of murder or adultery or whatever. The main thing is the rejection of the goodness of God.

Therefore, when you begin to repent for the *real* sin - the rejection of God's goodness - you stop looking in and you start to look out. And the very thing that makes you feel guilty for having rejected God's goodness gives you hope too because, you see, if you start to repent that you didn't *believe* God was good, it opens you up to the possibility that God really *is* good and that God really *is* merciful, and God is really there waiting for you.

Don't you see? You know, you haven't really repented for sin if you're only feeling sorry for yourself. And you can't really repent of sin - you only repent of the *consequences* of sin - until you see your sin ultimately is against God. "*Against you, you only, have I sinned...*" But do you know what's so weird? The person full of remorse and shame doesn't want to have anything to do with God. He wants to get as far away from God as possible. It's the only way to get relief.

Don't you see? A lot of people have backed into agnosticism because of their remorse. If you feel tremendously guilty for having done something terrible, all you can do is start to justify it; "Well, maybe adultery isn't a sin. Maybe he deserved to be murdered. Maybe there isn't a God, and maybe basically you have to decide on your own what is right and wrong." Don't you see, remorse drives you away from God? Remorse absorbs you in yourself. Remorse gets you to hate yourself, but repentance gets you to hate your sin. And repentance moves you toward God.

And the very thing that makes you feel guilty also shows you there's hope, because if you start to repent of the *real* sin that you don't believe God loves you, the moment you do that, you begin to feel the love. You have to! Don't you see? And by the way, you can do this equally inside *or* away from the church. Here's a person over here who is irreligious. They say, "I came to Austin, and I have thrown off all this bourgeois Christian morality, and I'm living any old way I want."

And over here is a person who is super-religious and always down on himself or herself and always feeling guilty and always feeling unworthy. What do they have in common? On the surface, not much. One looks bad and one looks sad. But down below where the iceberg strikes, they're the same. They both reject the goodness of God. Neither believe the law of God is an expression of God's love. They don't believe the law of God expresses His loving authority and His wisdom.

I talk to people all the time that deal with shame. And I always say, “You know, God loves you.” And they almost always say, “Oh no. Not me. Oh, I’m just terrible. I’m so awful. Oh no. There’s no way God could forgive me.” What’s the problem? “I have higher standards than God. I know *better*. I am wiser than God is. I’m more loving than God is.” That’s the essence. But that’s ridiculous. That’s insanity. That is the sin underneath every other sin, “I don’t believe God loves, not as much as I do.” I don’t care what sin you came to see me about, *that’s* you real sin right there.

And when you get ahold of it, you start to come up out of the depths...but not until you do. Now that’s the first one, but there’s one more critical distinction that David makes. He learns how to get out of the pit of remorse and on to the stairway of repentance. But **secondly**, he also distinguishes between **reprieve and regeneration**

Now here’s what I mean. David doesn’t ask for one more chance. He doesn’t just say, “Oh Lord, forgive me, and give me one more chance!” He is not such an idiot. Why do you want one more chance? Let me tell you something. If you think you feel badly after having blown one chance, you have no idea how bad you feel after having blown *two* chances. David is not so stupid. David begins to realize, “I’m not so concerned just about the fact I did this. I’m concerned about the fact I’m *capable* of doing this. I’m concerned to know why I really did it.”

He says in **verse 5**, “...*in sin did my mother conceive me.*” And he begins to realize, “I have a nature. The reason I put myself in the place of God, the reason I think I’m better than God, wiser than God, more loving than God, is because there’s something *in* me. There’s a rottenness in here. There’s decay in here. There’s an evil in me.” And he does not ask for a reprieve. That wouldn’t do any good, because he knows it would erupt again in another way. So what does he ask for? Not a reprieve. “I want you to create in me a clean heart.”

He asks for a new heart. He asks for a new nature. He asks for new life, not just forgiveness. Here’s another huge difference between a Christian and just a religious person. A religious person, all they want from God is a second chance. You get down on your knees, and you say, “I know I did wrong. I know I did wrong. Please give me another chance. Let the disease go away. Let the person come back. *Please* give me one more chance.” That’s how a religious person looks...but not a Christian.

A Christian knows one more chance won’t help. “I’ll find some other way to blow it. I need a new heart.” And when David asks, “Create in me a clean heart...,” he is actually asking for the new birth. You might say, “Well, he’s just speaking metaphorically. He just means, ‘Let me start over.’” Well, if all we had was Psalm 51 maybe we could conclude that, but we don’t have just Psalm 51. We have the whole New Testament. And Jesus says to Nicodemus one night, (**John 3:3**)“*Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are **born again.**”*”

What is David asking for when he asks for the new birth? This is absolutely critical! Don't let anybody tell you there's such a thing as a Christianity that does not entail being born again. Don't let anybody talk to you about born-again Christianity as if it's a variety, or a sect. Go to Saint Augustine. What turned him from a sex addict into a great teacher of the church?

Remember? What turned Martin Luther from a guilty neurotic into a courageous leader in the church? What turned stiff old John Wesley into a street preacher in England? Ask them. Ask them all.

The leaders of the Catholic Church, the leaders of the Episcopal Church, the leaders of the Methodist Church, the leaders of the Lutheran Church...ask them, and every one of them will tell you, "I was born again." Don't you dare let anybody tell you being born again is for certain kinds of Christians, that born-again Christianity is for certain varieties of Christians. Come on! *Jesus* says, "Unless you're born again, you don't even enter the kingdom of God."

And this is what David is asking for. When he says, "Create in me a pure heart," he is asking for the Holy Spirit to do it. In the very next verse, he says, "Don't send your Holy Spirit away from me. Bring your Holy Spirit in. Create in me a clean heart, Oh God." See, in the very beginning of time, the Holy Spirit moved across the face of the waters and planted life. Right? And now what he is asking is that God's Spirit would move across the chaos of his life and plant *new* life.

How does that happen? The answer is found in **v. 6**, "*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*" Verses 10-13 are all about the new birth, but how does it happen? "By bringing your Holy Spirit in to me, and by planting truth in my inward parts." Let me show you what I mean.

How did David know God was merciful? Well, he knew God was merciful because God had helped him in the past. You see, on the basis of that truth, he said, "Oh Lord, take that truth, and put it in my inward parts. Plant it down deep." Now listen, friends. We know something far greater about the mercy of God than David did. Do you know what we know? You know the place here where David says, "Hide thy face from my sins...?" And three verses later, he says, "Cast me not away from your presence..." And of course – we talked about this last week - in Hebrew the word presence – *paniyim* – means "face".

So what he is saying is, "Hide your face from my sins, but don't hide your face from me." Now that's typical in relationships, right? If you have a friendship and somebody has really done you wrong, if you face his sins, you won't be able to face him. You won't be able to be friends, but if you want to face him you have to hide your face from his sins, right? You can't look at them both. You can't see his sins *and* see him! It's one or the other.

So David says, “Hide your face from my sins, Oh Lord, and turn your face toward me.” But *we* know what David didn’t know - couldn’t yet possibly know. We know what it cost God to answer the prayer of Psalm 51. When Jesus Christ had his hands stretched out on the cross and he was dying, he turned to his Father, and he began to pray. And for the first time in all of his life, he turned to the Father, and the Father didn’t turn to him. He looked up to heaven, and there was no one there. And he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

We know now, don’t we? *We* know why. Do you know why? God was hiding His face from His Son so He could hide His face from our sins. He couldn’t look at both. He punished Jesus so our sins could be blotted out. Now do you know what it means to be born again? You may have known all of your life that Jesus died for our sins. Here’s what happens when you’re born again. The truth of that goes down into your inward parts. This is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit, to plant the truth of the gospel down deep in your soul.

It used to be an abstraction. It used to be head knowledge. *Now* it’s actually down in there, and it begins to eat away at the lie - the sin underneath the sin - that’s been causing your problems all along, all of your life. You look at the *truth* of the cross, what Jesus did up there, God hiding His face from His Son.

You take it on in, and it begins to eat away at that terrible lie. What was the lie? “God doesn’t love me.” That’s the reason you worry. That’s the reason you’re bitter. That’s the reason you lie. That’s the reason you can’t resist temptation. In it comes. Truth in the inward parts.

Remember Brené Brown’s definition of shame? An “intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love, belonging, and connection.” The cross says, “No. Oh, you’re deeply flawed, sure. You *are* a sinner. But Jesus took that upon himself and gave you his own identity so that you can know that now you *are* loved. You *do* belong. And you *are* connected to the most powerful affirming force in all the universe.” That’s the power of true repentance through the cross of Jesus Christ. The great exchange. The Gospel.

In it comes, and it begins to eat away at your worry. You start to worry, but if you’re born again, the truth is so real, and you say, “Wait a minute. Look at what Jesus did on the cross. He is good.” You want to lie because it will make you some money? If you’re born again, you have truth in the inward parts, the cross. And you say, “Wait a minute. If he did all this for me, surely his revealed will could not be bad for me. If he says not to lie, I know that’s good. I know he loves me. And that means more to me than money.”

Don't you see? That's what it means to be born again. It means to have the truth of the cross of Jesus Christ, what he did for you - having God hide His face from His Son - the knowledge of that, that he did it for *you*, comes in. You trust in it. You believe in it. You rest in it. It comes in. It becomes real...supernaturally real. That's what it means to be born again. Has that happened to you?

I'm not asking if you believe Jesus died for your sins. Lots of people do who aren't born again. Augustine, Luther, and Wesley...those three guys I mentioned they all believed it for several years before they were born again, but they never got it because, you see, people don't mind being told they should be better. They don't get offended at that, but they don't like being told they need to be born again. That's offensive. Of course it is!

And once you realize it's true that you need it, until you say, "Create in me a clean heart, Oh God, because I know my sin is against *you* and all of my flaws and all of my sins throughout all my life are against *you*, and because I finally see that and I see I've been trampling on your goodness all of my life and I will always go on trampling on your goodness until you give me a new heart, I ask that you give me a new heart. Bring that truth in. Implant it in me. Give me a new nature." And He will. If God could do it for David, He will certainly do it for you.

Let's pray...

"Our sins are stronger than we are, but you will block them out." Psalm 65:3 NJB