

Shaping Our Souls - Reflection and Confession

Psalm 51

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

1 Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.
2 Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

3 For I recognize my shameful deeds -- they haunt me day and night.

4 Against
you...
and you alone...
have I sinned;

I have done what is evil in
your
sight.

You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

5 For I was born a sinner --
yes,
from the moment my mother conceived me.

6 But you desire honesty from the heart, so you can teach me to be wise in my inmost being.

7 Purify me from my sins,
and I will be clean;
wash me,
and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Oh, give me back my joy again;

You have broken me -
- now let me rejoice.

9 Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me.
11 Do not banish me from your presence; don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me again the **joy** of your salvation,
and make me **willing** to obey you.

13 Then I will teach your ways to sinners, and they will return to you.

14 Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves;
then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.

15 Unseal my lips, O Lord, that I may praise you.

16 You would not be pleased with sacrifices,
or I would bring them.
If I brought you a burnt offering,
you would not accept it.

17 The sacrifice you want is a broken **spirit**.
A broken and repentant **heart**, O God, you will not despise.

18 Look with favour on Zion and help her;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then you will be pleased with worthy sacrifices
and with our whole burnt offerings;
and bulls will again be sacrificed on your altar.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Video on Psalm 51

Song: "Change My Heart, O God"

"I never realized..."

It's what he told me as we sipped coffee together.

"I never realized how much she did.

I never realized how much I enjoyed her friendship.

I never realized how much I valued her input.

I never realized how important she was.....

until.....

..... until she left."

He was talking about his wife, who had recently moved out.

Not trying to assign blame or anything.

Just sitting there, regretting what happened, mourning what might have been, deeply saddened over what was now gone.

They'd been married 30-something years.

It started so good.

So together.

But life got busy.

Work and kids and church and sports - lots of commitments all round.

One day they woke up and the kids were gone.

They looked at each other in the middle of their empty nest.

And....

....well, neither of them had realized how far apart they had drifted these last years. It just sort of happened. Quietly.

Quietly - but **very** relentlessly.

A stealth enemy pulled them apart.

Without either of them realizing it, the cord of marriage love that had been wound around their hearts had become badly frayed.

And then it snapped.

"I never realized..." he said.

It happens, doesn't it.

We get busy, oh so busy and preoccupied with our lives that things sneak up on us.

Bills past due.

Kids suddenly no longer toddlers.

Work deadlines.

Declining health.

It's true, isn't it, that when you're living life in the express lane, you've got no time to watch the grass grow...

...or to notice where the weeds have sprung up in your life!

We all need time to stop.

Have a look.

Reflect.

Do an inventory of life.

Repair what needs fixing.

Give thanks for what is good.

Time to stop. It's part of healthy living, part of healthy spiritual life.

Time to reflect... and where needed, to confess.

In this season of Epiphany we've been focussing on what it takes to help us live out WWJD -

What Would Jesus Do.

Not just in big crisis moments.

But in the day to day routines of life - what would Jesus do?

How would Jesus pattern His life?
So we talked about prayer.
We talked about simplicity.
And today we focus on reflection.

Taking time to **stop** and do an inventory of where our lives are at.
Anyone who runs a business needs to do that. If you don't do an inventory, you have no idea of what's in stock or not.

If you have employees you do that - take time to evaluate performance, celebrating successes and identifying areas for improvement over the next cycle.

King David was so busy being ruler of Israel, building his palace and conquering his enemies that he didn't take time to stop.

Before he knew it, he'd committed adultery and murder.
Took the brave prophet Nathan to confront him.
Psalm 51 is the result.
A psalm of regret,
of honest self evaluation,
of confession.

STOP!

Reflect.
Confess.

Follow the path of Psalm 51.

What happens when we take time for honest reflection, and confession?
For most of us -
RELIEF!

Yes, relief.
And deep, inner peace begins to grow -
Peace from a Holy God who does **NOT** withdraw His hand, but in mercy and loving faithfulness that is far greater than our sin-stained failures offers new hope and eternal peace to us.

That's the theme of Psalm 51;
Perhaps we don't always think about it. Perhaps the depth of our violation of the relationship between God and ourselves doesn't keep us awake at night or stare us in the face while we're at our work station during the week. Perhaps we're so busy with making car payments and getting the kids through school that we don't stop to think about it – maybe not much; maybe not at all.

But trust me when I say that eventually it works its way to the surface. I've been in too many hospital rooms, funeral parlours; had lunch with too many people behind the closed doors of their offices to say otherwise.

Somewhere along the way we are all confronted with Almighty, Holy, Pure and Perfect Creator God and how we stand before Him.

Are we in.... or out?
Part of His family.... or castoffs?
Is He with us, for us..... or against us?
Put it real bluntly – *If I were to die tonight, do I know if I would go to heaven?*
Beyond a hope so, think so, guess so – do I **KNOW**????

If you **know.....know YES** -
then you have,
whatever else may come -peace.
Peace in knowing that the last word for your life is God's.
That you are His.

So, hear Psalm 51, the first words on the road to peace:

*Have mercy on me, O God.
My transgression - Blot it out.
Wash it away.
Cleanse me.*

Have mercy.....

*....For..... says v.3.....
And here comes the way in!! ----
I **KNOW** my transgressions.*

Understand sin – a deep stain on our soul, a dark blotch that smears, clouds, and impedes our relationship with the Lord.

Face it, up front.

Drop the pretense, quit the game playing and coverups, no more excuses or halfway steps.....

..you know, like the guy who wrote to the Canada Revenue Agency saying, "Lately I haven't been able to sleep. I cheated on last year's tax form. Enclosed find a cheque for \$2000. If I still can't sleep I'll send you the rest."

Face it, up front.

Honestly naming things for what they are!

Folks in 12 step programs know all about it. They know the hard truth that human beings have this amazing capacity for deception, including self deception. Therefore, for healthy living, everybody needs times in their life where they do a fearless moral inventory.

Alcoholics will tell you that the liquor is just a symptom. A reflection of the inner dirt. There is no getting rid of the booze addiction without confronting what's inside the heart.

Hence step 4 of the twelve step program -

"Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

Inner fact finding.

Honest fact **facing**.

Check for resentments. What..... and whom.

Have you got a grudge list? What has it affected in you?

Honest, now!

Who has wronged you?

Who have you wronged?

What fears linger inside?

What about your sexuality - what's going on there?

Where have you been dishonest, or inconsiderate?

What are you jealous of?

Write it down.

A private journal, perhaps.

Nothing brings it home so concretely, sometimes so painfully, as watching your own hand move the pen across the paper, laying out the hidden truth in black and white.

Then make the decision to bring it to God.

Do your personal version of Psalm 51.

True to God.

Honest with yourself.

Not sure where to start?

May I suggest the 10 Commandments.

God's blueprint for right, shalom-filled, joyful, wholesome living.

Reflecting those commandments, here are 10 questions to ask -
....if you have the time, that is!!

1. Is there something, or someone, that gets between the Lord and I? Something, or someone, that is more important to me than God?
2. Do I try to keep a nice clean outer image with a good religious appearance, when inside I KNOW there is stuff that I am avoiding dealing with, shady and dark stuff that I'm content to leave as is?
3. Is my language something I would be ashamed of using in heaven?
4. Do I have time in my rhythm of time and work to stop, to really stop, and rest, and dedicate a good chunk of that rest time to relationship with the Lord?
5. Do I have a broken relationship with my parents, or with others in authority over me?
6. Have I ever hurt other people, emotionally or socially or physically, in order to get ahead?
7. Have I looked at another human being and savoured lustful thoughts? Am I living in an impure way, inside or outside of marriage?
8. Do I cheat?
9. Do I lie?
10. Do I envy those who have more than I do?

Reflection.

Honestly.

Which can be tough. I mean - well - you know how it goes:

Others have prejudices, we have convictions.

Others have a foul temper; we are seized with righteous indignation.

Psalms 51:3 *For I **know** my transgressions, and my sin is always before me....*

And then this - verse 4:

"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

Think of the one who wrote this psalm - David. He had horribly abused Bathsheba, ruined her reputation, broke her marriage, murdered her husband.

He wronged her - sinned against her.

Ultimately, though, his sin was against God. The God of grace and faithful, unfailing love who made him, gave him his place in life and desired truth and purity for him...

...**God** had been violated!

Can you see that in your own life??

That your conduct: your words towards others, the way you handle your money, your faithfulness in marriage, your honesty at school

how you handle these all serve as a reflection of your relationship with the Lord.....

----- Can you see that?

David prays –

Cleanse me..... get rid of this rotten stain.

Create in me a pure heart.... Lord, sort out those mixed up motives.

Do not cast me from your presence.... If you aren't with me.....

Notice v.7: *Cleanse me with hyssop.*

Hyssop was a small bush that grew in Israel. Its leaves were gathered in bunches and used as a sort of paint brush. Hyssop was dipped in the blood of sacrificed animals, smearing it on the altar, sprinkling it on the worshippers.

Blood – the symbol of life, poured out and sacrificed in payment for the sin. Pointing ahead to the great sacrifice – when the Son of God would himself descend to earth as sacrifice for our sin.

The Father in Heaven would yank His holy hand free from the grip of His Son and leave him at the mercy of evil and death.

Jesus, to take the place of you and me and David.

Jesus, to take the place of **All** who come to him -
humble, open, no alibis or excuses
just honest repentance

For them -

- forgiveness.

And more than forgiveness – they are cleansed. God looks at those covered by the great sacrifice of Jesus and sees a pure person. No more walls. No more distance. No accusations. No remembering the wrongs.

Instead, the full, unhindered right to enter the presence of God at any time. And, as we considered this morning, the guarantee of the presence of God's Spirit....**always**.

And with **that** comes peace!

The peace of the Psalmist in v.13, turned to tell others of the way back, the way to peace –

The way of merciful grace found in the God of unfailing love,
the love so great that He sent His one and only son that **whoever**
believes in Him will **NOT** perish, but have everlasting life.

The way of peace.

The peace of v.14: *"My tongue will sing of your righteousness..."*

The peace that makes you sing a song of relief, this sense of freedom that makes you almost want to dance, this peace that comes to us through Jesus.

I never realized...

May you and I never have to say that.

And regret it.