

Cedar Homes and Humble Hearts

May 5, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Psalm 51:10-13,16-17

Session Outline

1. Restoration of Heart (Psalm 51:10-11)
2. Renewal of Joy (Psalm 51:12-13)
3. Sacrifices of God (Psalm 51:16-17)

Theological Theme

God loves us and wants to restore us when we sin. David recognized the importance of seeking after the joy of his salvation and focusing on what is important to God.

Call to Action

Have you lost joy? Perhaps you are trying to offer God a cedar house instead of a humbled heart? Pray that God will restore to you the joy of His salvation that only comes through a broken spirit and a clean heart.



Leader Guide

Cedar Homes and Humble Hearts

Introduction

There is an unclaimed baggage center in Alabama where all lost, misplaced, and leftover bags that remain unclaimed are sent. This center takes the items and organizes them to sell to customers who come in to shop. Some items have been sold for low prices but were later found to be very valuable. This includes things like a Limoges Vase or a diamond ring that you would think the owner would do anything to recover when lost in baggage transfers.¹

It is surprising to see valuable items end up at unclaimed baggage because we tend to protect what is valuable to us. When something important is lost, most people will do extreme things to find it again. A person may take apart the plumbing under a sink if a ring accidentally goes down the drain. People will stick their hands in a toilet to recover a valuable item thrown there by a child if it means enough to them. When you have lost something that means a lot to you, you will do whatever it takes to regain it. Today we are studying what David was willing to do to regain something very important that he lost due to sin in his life.

- ❓ What is the craziest thing you've ever done to retrieve something of value that was lost?
- ❓ Why do you think people are willing to go to great lengths in these situations?

Session Summary

Everyone sins and all sin breaks our fellowship with God. The way we respond when we sin is a big deal and has far reaching effects in our lives. David experienced the spiritual weight that accompanies unconfessed sin until he couldn't take it and cried out to God for restoration. In this moment, David recognized that only God could bring the restoration He needed. When we surrender our lives to the Lord, we become new creations and experience the miraculous transformation that follows, but we must still stay vigilant about our spiritual condition.

Psalm 51 teaches us the importance of our heart's attitude when seeking to be cleansed and restored into a right relationship with the Lord. David specified that while animal sacrifice had its place in his day, a humble and contrite spirit matters more to God.

1. Restoration of Heart (Psalm 51:10-11)

King David experienced the agony of realizing his own sin and how far he could fall away from the Lord. David poured out his heart to the Lord as he acknowledged the great mercy the Lord bestows on those who humble their hearts in repentance. This psalm is familiar and dear to many likely because of the way we can relate to being confronted with our own sinful nature, spiritual failings, and need for restoration.

We can learn from the way David approached the Lord as he sought restoration and redemption. David wasn't just looking to have his heart cleaned up, but he wanted it to be transformed to the extent that it seemed new compared to the previous state. He wasn't just after a whitewash job on his old one but felt the need to have a completely new heart from God. The word *create* in Hebrew is *bara*, which is the same word used in describing creation in Genesis and references something that can only be accomplished by the Lord.

- When have you felt like David and needed the Lord to do something in your life only He could do?

Only God can give someone a new heart. David acknowledged that, even as a powerful king, he couldn't do anything to truly transform his heart. This was for David, and still is, only something that happens by the power of God. All who place their faith in Jesus will become new creations and be given new hearts.

- What is the difference between seeking an improved heart and a completely new one? Why is it necessary that our hearts be new?

David further expressed his desire for a right spirit. He knew the value in being prepared to stand against a persistent enemy and wanted to live in constant faithfulness to the Lord. This portion of David's prayer was an indication of humility as he declared his dependence on the Lord. This man who was rich, powerful, and influential boldly confessed how much he needed the Lord to live in godliness.

Conceived in Sin

"In sin my mother conceived me" (v. 6, KJV) may mean that as David's mother and father were sinners, so was he. Or it may mean that he had been sinful from birth. It does not mean that the act of procreation was itself evil.

David also begged to remain in God's presence. He knew having God's presence in His life was a blessing and privilege, and in the past, sinful leaders had the presence of the Lord removed. David did not want that to be his fate. His desire was to have his relationship renewed with God though it had been broken by his willful sin. It wasn't enough for David to have his heart cleansed if God remained distant. He wanted both cleansing and a close relationship.



Application: What has been causing distance your relationship with the Lord? How do you need to address this area and seek God?

2. Renewal of Joy (Psalm 51:12-13)

Over a period of living with unconfessed sin, David experienced the misery of a broken relationship with the Lord. He recognized the struggle of spiritual defeat that accompanies separation from the Lord. Think about times when you have been in a similar situation. Although we often cling to our sin and desire to make our own choices, when we choose to live outside the will of God in our own strength, things become dire in a hurry.


David acknowledged he had lost the joy of his salvation and the way to get it back was by drawing near to God. When you fall away from living in the joy that comes from being rescued from your sin and brought into fellowship with God, it is important to go back to the source of the joy: God.

David mentioned the Lord's willingness or generosity in his request. This expressed David's confidence in the Lord as well as his own limitations to gain what he needed apart from the Lord. When people believe they have the answers or the power to make their own choices that lead to life, it sets them up to fall into sin just as David did in the situation that led to this psalm of restoration.




Where are you tempted to rely on your own power and wisdom over God's?

David's own dark days were an obstacle to his teaching others what it meant to rely on and trust the Lord. To be most effective in the things God has called us to do, it is crucial that we first be in right relationship with Him. As is often said, we cannot give away what we do not have ourselves.


-  How does our spiritual condition play into our effectiveness in leading others to faith? When have you seen this to be true in your life?

David recognized the privilege and responsibility of pointing others to the truth about God. It is possible that after living in his own despair and spiritual defeat, David was even more motivated to bring the people into the freedom and joy of a relationship with the Lord. He wanted to be restored, and he wanted others to experienced restoration also.

-  Application: How can you use your own influence to point others to a right relationship with the Lord?


3. Sacrifices of God (Psalm 51:16-17)

The practice of offering sacrifices would have been foremost in David's mind when reflecting on his own sin and how to be restored. In these verses, he was not taking sacrifice lightly but stated clearly that God's greatest concern is our posture of heart and spirit. In these verses, David made it clear that he was willing to do whatever God desired most. Coming to this point displays true humility and sincerity of heart in submission to God.

-  What often holds us back from doing anything God desires of us? What is intimidating about this?

David's words also remind us that someone can offer physical sacrifices without a broken spirit and contrite heart. Think about how you have seen this to be true in your life. It is easier sometimes to do the right thing outwardly while avoiding the hard work of seeking a renewed heart.

It is possible David offered numerous required sacrifices over the past few months in a desire to absolve his sins and was admitting the emptiness of those actions. When we do something for the Lord without the proper spirit and motivation, does it really make any difference? David had learned the value of the condition of his heart and spirit over his actions.

-  What makes it easier to do the right thing outwardly rather than seeking a sincere spirit and heart?

Throughout his life, David demonstrated a focus on pleasing God over others. This served him well in this instance as he recognized the need for a broken and contrite spirit. The specific sinful behavior David repented of might have been normal for other kings in the time (2 Samuel 11).

However, no matter the views of others, God made it clear to David that he had sinned and needed restoration. As this was brought to light in David's life (2 Samuel 12), he knew only God could give the restoration He needed.



Application: Where do you need to seek restoration with God today? Where do you need to display humility and contrition?

Conclusion

David had committed a grievous sin and lived for months without repenting. During those days, he experienced the feelings of bleakness and spiritual defeat that follow sinful behavior for believers. David wrote Psalm 51 as a plea to be restored and cleansed from his sin, and it gives us an example to follow when we face similar consequences for our own sin.

Not only do we need to recognize our sin as David did, but we also need to ask for the same things he requested from the Lord. When we recognize our need for salvation and place our faith in Jesus, we are made new creations. When sin separates us from God, we should seek to be restored to the joy of our salvation and not continue to live in defeat. David acknowledged his need for God to do the restoration work. This need is the same for us, and we should be quick to see that we need to depend on God for righteous living as well as for restoration when we sin. Evidence of our dependence on the Lord will be displayed in our hearts and spirits. David proclaimed that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart. As we reach this point, we find God ready and willing to restore and forgive.

- ❓ Where do you need to confess your sin openly before God with a humble and contrite heart?
- ❓ How can we as a group encourage and support one another in approaching God in this way on an ongoing basis?
- ❓ How does openness about our sin give us opportunity for gospel conversations with others?

Prayer of Response

Confess your sin before the Lord as needed. Thank Him for loving you and restoring you into right relationship with Him when you ask.

Memory Verse

The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. You will not despise a broken and humbled heart, God. — Psalm 51:17

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Psalms, Volume 2* by David Platt, Jim Shaddix, and Matt Mason
- *Be Worshipful* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Psalms Chapters 42-89* by J. Vernon McGee

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Psalms

Purpose

There are myriad messages scattered through the 150 psalms, but overall, this record of the responses of God's people in worship and prayer serves the purpose of teaching us how to relate to God in various circumstances of life. The psalms also demonstrate God's sovereignty and goodness for his people in order to instill confidence in those who trust in him.

Author

Since the book is a collection of many different psalms written over a long time, there is not just one author for this collection. By far the most common designation in the titles is "Of David," which may refer to David as the author of those psalms. David's role as a musician in Saul's court (1Sm 16:14–23) as well as his many experiences as a shepherd, a soldier, and a king make him a likely candidate for writing many of these psalms.

Setting

The book of Psalms consists of many different hymns and prayers composed by individuals but used by the community. If one were to take the names in the titles as authors, the date of composition ranges from the time of Moses (fifteenth century BC) to a time following the exile (sixth century BC or later). Some of the titles do contain historical information that might indicate the setting of the composition, although even this (like the authorship) is ambiguous. They might not refer to the date of composition but to the setting of its contents, being composed some time after the events had taken place. This is a more likely scenario since some of these psalms describe life-threatening situations, where composing a psalm in the heat of the moment would not have been a top priority. In many cases, these psalms include thanksgiving sections as well, showing that they were written after God had answered the prayers.

Special Features

The word for psalms in Hebrew is *Tehil'm*, which means "praise." The English title is derived from the Greek translation (LXX) *Psalmoi*, which means "Songs of Praise." Praise directed to the Lord, the God of Israel, is certainly the primary emphasis in the Psalms. Some have referred to the Psalms as Israel's hymnbook, which is partially true but overall is insufficient to account for all that is in the Psalms. More than one-third of the collection is made up of prayers to God. Therefore, it contains both hymns and prayers that were used in the context of Israel's worship.

Extended Commentary

Psalm 51

Ps 51 title This psalm has a clearly defined historical setting, which was David's confession of his sins after being confronted by the prophet Nathan (2Sm 12:1; the entire background of the sins is in 2Sm 11–12). As in other psalms with a specific setting (such as Ps 18), the language of the psalm is general enough to be applied in other contexts. This fits the purpose of the psalms and their various applications.

51:1–2 Blot out ... wash away, and cleanse are terms for forgiveness, which is David's main plea (see note at 32:1–2 for similar terms). He relied completely on God's mercy, which is evident in the terms gracious ... faithful love, and abundant compassion. In David's case, his sins were severe enough that sacrifice was not acceptable (v. 16). According to God's laws, deliberate and premeditated sins such as adultery and murder were referred to as sins of "the high hand" (cp. "defiantly" in Nm 15:30–31). Their punishment was being "cut off" from the community, which in many cases meant death (see note at Ps 31:22).

51:3 Verses 3–5 include the recognition of sin without specifying the sins, allowing this psalm to be used in a variety of contexts (see cross reference at title). My rebellion is in the emphatic position in the Hebrew text, showing that this is the main focus of attention in this confession.

51:4 The statement against you ... alone does not mean that others were not involved in the effects of the sin, but that even in sinning against others the ultimate affront was against God. This was clearly David's emphasis when he was confronted with this sin (2Sm 12:13).

51:5 This verse has prompted a variety of interpretations. Some have interpreted it to mean that marriage and childbearing are a curse; this is untenable in light of the rest of Scripture (127:3; Heb 13:4). Another interpretation is that this refers to a specific sin, perhaps adultery, committed by David's mother; but there is no evidence of this in the biblical texts. Others connect this verse with ceremonial uncleanness in childbirth (Lv 12:2, 5; 15:18), but this is not the same as sin. Some say David is using rhetorical overstatement to describe his sinfulness. One of the most common interpretations in Christian history is that this verse teaches the doctrine of original sin. While not aiming to strictly identify the origin of human sinfulness with events at biological conception, David recognizes that sin pervades humankind as a universal condition from the very outset of our existence. Sin is everywhere and in everyone, and David confessed that it had been with him since birth. Far from forming the basis of an excuse (i.e., "Why should I be blamed for my sins when I was born this way?"), David's confession contrasts the "blameless" (Ps 51:4) ways of God with the innately evil ways of humanity.

51:6 God desires obedience to his commands from within (with integrity). The Lord is the source of wisdom (Pr 2:6), but it must be communicated to a person's heart. This is similar to the idea of God's commands residing in the heart (see Ps 37:30–31).

51:7 The use of hyssop can be seen in Ex 12:22 and Nm 19:18.

51:8 Bones are often mentioned in the context of suffering (see 34:19–20).

51:9 Turning away the face implies forgiving and forgetting (vv. 1–2).

51:10 The renewal of one’s heart and spirit are common images representing not only forgiveness (vv. 1–2, 7–9) but also a change that enables a person to live in obedience to the Lord’s commands (1Sm 10:6, 9; Jr 32:39; Ezk 36:26). Note also the use of “willing spirit” in Ps 51:12.

51:11 Holy Spirit is taken by some to mean the Lord’s presence. However, in the larger context of the biblical text, it seems to refer to God himself (Is 63:10–14) in the same way that “heart” and “spirit” can refer to people. The division among the persons of the Godhead (the Trinity) is not a concept developed in the OT, although texts such as this allow for the establishment of the doctrine as God’s revelation progresses through the NT (e.g., Mt 3:16–17, where Father, Son, and Spirit are all present yet distinct at Jesus’s baptism).

51:12 David wanted to experience again the joy of knowing that he was delivered. A willing spirit would be the attitude of a heart totally given over to the Lord.

51:13–15 Publicly praising God and teaching others about him was part of the response of God’s deliverance in a person’s life (see note at 22:22–24).

51:16–17 God desires a broken spirit (or heart) rather than acts of sacrifice (see 34:17–18; 40:6–8).

51:18 Some think build the walls refers to Nehemiah’s time, but this is not necessary if it is used figuratively. It simply refers to strengthening Zion, which is where the Lord dwelt among his people (65:1).

51:19 Righteous sacrifices must be connected with vv. 16–17, meaning those offered with the proper motives (see 40:6–8; 50:7–13).²

References

1. Laurie L. Dove, “9 of the Weirdest Lost-and-Found Items in the World,” HowStuffWorks, November 13, 2017, <https://money.howstuffworks.com/9-weirdest-lost-and-found-items.htm>.
2. Kevin R. Warstler, “Psalms,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 863–864.