

UNIT 2 THE BEAUTY OF FORGIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

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Obey God and Deny Self

As we live a life in Christ, we are called to deny our flesh that can carry resentment and obey God who calls us to forgive others in the same manner we are forgiven.

Writer Bio

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A BIBLE STUDY ON FORGIVENESS RECEIVED AND EXTENDED

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Opportunities to give and receive forgiveness come up every day of our lives. The instances may be relatively trivial. Someone cuts us off in traffic, a family member or friend may utter a thoughtless remark that hurts a loved one's feelings. On the other hand, there are also serious harms that can be inflicted by individuals and groups, such as abuse and discrimination.

The person who has been offended must choose how to deal with it. Forgiveness is not minimizing sin nor is it removing justice or consequences. Biblical forgiveness does not ignore truth but walks through it with God. It releases bitterness while still pursuing justice, healing, and restoration where possible. The forgiveness that God gives us serves as the basis of our ability to extend forgiveness to other people and even to ourselves. Over the course of seven sessions, we will consider forgiveness from various angles:

- *The Cry*
- *The Source*
- *The Picture*
- *The Reason*
- *The Path*
- *The Declaration*
- *The Evidence*

A common thread weaving through stories across various times and places is the fact that God has always intended for forgiveness to be part of the lives of His people. We will look at the biblical narratives of people seeking, needing, experiencing, and celebrating forgiveness.

Believers serve a forgiving God and should be known as forgiving people. Join us as we reflect on one of the hallmarks of the Christian life and learn why forgiveness is truly beautiful!

SESSION 1

THE CRY FOR FORGIVENESS

Leader pages on pp. 132-135

THE POINT:
WHEN WE SIN, WE SIN
AGAINST GOD—SO ONLY
HE CAN FORGIVE US.

PSALM 51:1-13

- ¹ Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion.
² Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin.
³ For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me.
⁴ Against you — you alone — I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge.

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⁵ Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me.
⁶ Surely you desire integrity in the inner self, and you teach me wisdom deep within.
⁷ Purify 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 Turn your face away from my sins and blot out all my guilt.

MEMORY VERSE

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¹⁰ **God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me.**
¹¹ Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.
¹² Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit.
¹³ Then I will teach the rebellious your ways, and sinners will return to you.

KEYWORDS

Rebellion (v. 1)—The Hebrew term (*pasha*) refers to transgressions against God. Sin is rebellion against God, not merely a shortcoming or failure.

Purify...hyssop (vs. 7)—Jewish law required that hyssop be used in ritual cleansing and purification. Keeping with these rituals that David called upon the

Lord to cleanse him from his sin.

Do not banish me (v. 11)—The Lord cannot allow that which is unholy into His presence, so there are only two options: either banish the unholy, or make the unholy holy.

Sinners will return (bold)—The Hebrew term (*shuv*) is the same word for “restore.”

WHY IS FORGIVENESS NECESSARY FOR A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

Do you remember the last time you left your phone unplugged when you thought you had plugged it in? You may have bumped into it, knocking the cord loose or failed to plug it in correctly and probably did not notice until you grabbed it on your way out of the door to go to work, school, or to run errands. The phone still looked good on the outside, but it was lacking the benefit of connecting to its power source.

As important as our phones are to our daily lives, our relationship with God is much more important. Unfortunately, when we sin, we break the fellowship connection we have with God. We may think everything is okay until we are confronted with the reality we cannot ignore. In our lesson for today, we will consider how David responded when he found himself in this situation. While David's sin broke his fellowship with God, all is not lost.

As David cried out for forgiveness, God was ready, willing, and able to forgive him. We have assurance that God will forgive us as well when we cry out to Him. He patiently waits for us to desire to be made right.

Our Sin Is Against God

//Psalm 51:1-4

The inscription at the beginning of the psalm sets the context for the words and feelings that David expresses. Background information is found in 2 Samuel 11. That passage reveals what may have been one of David's worst moments. Being the king of Israel, he saw Bathsheba, wanted her, and took her. In an attempt to cover up his sin and Bathsheba's resulting pregnancy, he first tried to coax Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to sleep with her and so pass off the baby as being the child of Uriah. When Uriah refused, David orchestrated his killing on the battlefield. God was aware of all of this and was not pleased. He sent the prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin.

Upon being confronted, David was repentant and expressed his sentiments in the psalm that is considered today. In this psalm, David reaches out to God, unlike humanity's first parents, Adam and Eve, who hid from God's presence after they sinned in Genesis 3. In crying out to God, David did not list his accolades, which were insignificant in the immediate context. While he had schemed to



THE POINT: WHEN WE SIN, WE SIN AGAINST GOD—SO ONLY HE CAN FORGIVE US.

get himself into this mess, he realized that he could not scheme or finesse his way out of it. Instead, he began by asking God to be gracious to him, based upon God's own attributes. David based his request on God's faithful love and abundant compassion. He recognized the magnitude of God's love and compassion and because of this, did not view them as commodities that were in short supply and must be rationed. Rather, God's love and compassion are limitless, and God freely gives them to His people.

Because of God's faithful love and abundant compassion, David wanted God to deal with his sin. He used a number of images to describe how he wants God to remove his sin. David begged God to blot the sin out, like a writer would blot an error made while writing on a scroll, completely wash the guilt away, and cleanse him. These images portray an active God, rolling up His sleeves as it were and getting to work scrubbing away the stain of sin. God is aware of the problem and has the solution. Using an eraser or correction fluid when writing may still leave residue from the mistake made, but David trusted God to completely erase the residue of his sin.

David continued by acknowledging he too is aware of the problem. He acknowledged that he had sinned against God, picturing God as being both the offended party and the judge. This is important because sin is an act against God as it violates His laws and His image-bearers. David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah was also against God. Because of this, David understood that God would be right and just to reject his request, so he had no option but to throw himself on the mercy of the court.

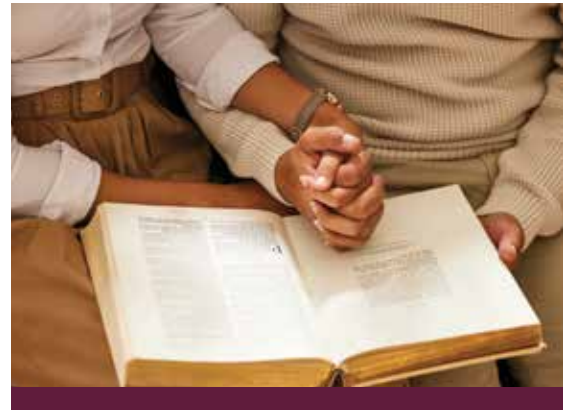
HOW DOES BEING AWARE OF GOD'S ABUNDANT COMPASSION AFFECT YOUR VIEW OF YOUR SIN?

We Must Turn to God in Repentance

// Psalm 51:5-9

Here David declared that he had been sinful, not only from birth, but also from conception. The images of conception and birth, both of which are private experiences, are not hidden from God though they may be hidden from other people. This is not to say that David's conception resulted from a sinful act (unlike his baby with Bathsheba), but rather David is saying that he acquired a sinful nature, even from when he was an infant. The point here is that David recognized his sin was not a "one and done" activity but was part of his humanity. He did not minimize his actions or try to justify them but expressed how much sin had been part of his life.

Staying with the idea that God knows what goes on in secret, David declared that God desires for His people to demonstrate integrity



DIGGING DEEPER NO GREATER LOVE

David roots his petition for forgiveness in God's "faithful love" (Ps. 51:1). Different Bible translations use terms as "lovingkindness" (KJV) and "unfailing love" (NIV). In Hebrew, the term is *hesed*. Throughout the Old Testament, God's behavior toward His covenant people Israel is identified by the powerful love that He shows for the people. When Moses asked God to show him divine glory, God proclaimed Himself as "abounding in faithful love" (Ex. 34:6). People engaging in Israel's worship practices were commanded to "give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His faithful love endures forever" (Ps. 136:1). This instruction was given to Israel repeatedly. In making his request for forgiveness, David asks God to deal with him personally as He had done with His people collectively throughout the history of the nation of Israel. The same God who showed covenant love to Israel is the God who sustained His people through hurt, harm, and danger.

Why do you think the biblical writers spent so much time emphasizing God's love for Israel?

in the inner self. God is concerned about what is on the inside of us. Looking good on the outside is not enough: our hearts must be right with God. God expects truth and honesty from us as we are meant to reflect God's own character. This psalm demonstrates that David understood he fell short of this ideal and standard. David understood he is a sinner. Furthermore, David understood that God places wisdom inside of His people and expects them to live by the lessons He has taught.

Even though this psalm is an example of David's personal act of penitence, it nonetheless highlights David's participation in God's covenant group of people, the Israelites. David mentioned that if God would purify with him hyssop, he would be clean. The mention of hyssop recalls the first Passover described in Exodus 12. As Moses and the Israelites prepared to leave bondage in Egypt, God commanded them to use branches of the hyssop plant to spread the blood of the Passover lamb on the top and sides of their doors (Ex. 12:22).

Just as God delivered Israel from the pain of enslavement in Egypt, so too can He deliver His people from the pain and penalties of sin. Later, the Torah laid out the requirements in using hyssop for cleansing of lepers (Lev. 14:4-7). David likely has this image of healing physical disease in mind and sees hyssop as being useful symbolically in healing his spiritual disease caused by sin.

For David, the results of this spiritual healing would involve wholeness and restoration. He expressed hope for restoration in his body and his spirit and believed that God could provide this. But there was a part for David to play. His repentance was required for him to be surrounded by joy and gladness. David believed this could happen if God would treat his sin as if they never occurred.

For David, God hiding His face from sin is the same as blotting them out, which David had already asked God to do.

WHAT, IF ANYTHING, HAS HINDERED YOU FROM TURNING TO GOD AFTER YOU HAVE SINNED?

God Restores the Joy of Our Salvation // Psalm 51:10-13

David understood that getting rid of the sinful parts of himself was not enough; good had to be put in place of the sin. This is exactly what he asked God to do next. He asked for a clean heart as well as a new start. As the Creator of all things, God is certainly able to create a clean heart in one of His creatures. David also asked to be renewed. Again, he recognized that he needed a makeover.



This makeover is not just a touch up or cosmetic change, however. David acknowledged that he needed a complete overhaul in his spirit, and this overhaul was one that only God could provide. Thankfully, God is a God of another chance. A second chance is good for one time, but another chance is good for each time that it is needed. So, David reached out to God as a spiritual heart surgeon, able to do more than just repair his heart, but make it new. David's prayer serves as a model for believers to follow each time we find ourselves in need of God's forgiveness.

Likely recognizing the broken fellowship between God and himself, David asked not to be banished from God's presence. Being holy, God could rightly refuse to allow sinners in His presence if He chose to do so. David, however, again relied on God's mercy to beg Him to avoid doing just that. He continued by asking God not to remove His Spirit from David's life. It had been the Holy Spirit enabling and empowering David during his ascent to the throne. He probably had forgotten or ignored this when seeking to fulfill his own fleshly desires, but then rightly remembered his dependence on God. David did not want to be away from God's presence. The longing for closeness

THE POINT: WHEN WE SIN, WE SIN AGAINST GOD—SO ONLY HE CAN FORGIVE US.

shows the relationship is still there, even though fellowship has been broken.

In asking God to restore the joy of salvation, David showed he recognized that the pleasures of sin are fleeting. The tangled web he had woven seemed right and good at the time, but David realized just how temporary his pleasure was. Lasting pleasure and joy come from being in right relationship with God and so David asked for God to sustain him by giving him a willing spirit. He asked God to undo his propensity for going his own way. He asked for the ability to persevere in God's ways.

David desired restoration and to be useful again. He wanted to help others who had rebelled against the Lord to return to Him. God will restore us to a place of fruitfulness as well—if we will turn to Him.

David recognized others could benefit from this closeness to God as well. A person with a truly restored relationship with God will never want to hold onto it just for himself or herself. Rather, that person will seek to make others aware of it as well. The good news of forgiveness is meant to be shared!

HOW HAS GOD RESTORED THE JOY OF SALVATION IN YOUR LIFE?

DID YOU KNOW?

Many, if not most, people would characterize themselves as “good people” if completing self-assessments. This usually involves making implicit comparisons to other people they deem to be worse than themselves. But as David shows us, the only comparison that actually matters is between us and God. Other people's actions do not constitute the standard for goodness. Only God does. When we as people each make that comparison, we realize that we are not perfect. Unlike God, Who is perfect and righteous, we must admit we need to be forgiven and cleansed. God is merciful, however, and wants to forgive and cleanse us. When we approach God, we cannot do so on our own merits but must instead humbly rely upon His grace. God stands ready to forgive our sins, so we just need to ask Him to do so.

Biblical Truth: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

What prevents people from humbly seeking forgiveness from God?

LIVE IT

What is preventing you from acknowledging your need for God's forgiveness?

We all need forgiveness—regularly. Do not allow anything to prevent you from seeking God's forgiveness when you have done wrong. Strangely enough, both pride and shame can prevent us from seeking forgiveness. While pride may cause us to think we are too good to ever need forgiveness, shame may make us believe that we are unworthy of it. Neither is true. Commit Psalm 51:10 to memory this week. Make this verse a part of your prayer pattern.

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- **Recognize.** Be honest with yourself. Have you done anything contrary to God's will for your life? Since God knows all and sees all, there is no point in trying to hide the truth from Him.
- **Recommit.** Despite your sin, God wants to have fellowship with you. Repent and return to God if you have wandered from Him. Acknowledge the need for accountability and seek someone who can walk and pray with you.
- **Rejoice.** Give God praise for His faithful love. Reflect on the times He has forgiven you in the past and His readiness to forgive true repentance.

DAILY READINGS

1. FESS UP // JAMES 1:15

Sin rarely feels like sin in the moment. In fact, it's usually quite satisfying, but James 1:15 reminds us of the consequences, stating, "Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and...sin...fully grown,...gives birth to death." In David's case, not only had he sinned with Bathsheba, but he'd murdered her husband to do it. God had entrusted to him the kingdom, but he'd not chosen wisely and now he had to answer. Instead of running, we see David throwing himself at the mercy of God, owning up to his sin. If we desire to receive forgiveness, we would do well to take responsibility and own up to ours as well. Confession must always be the first step.

God can't forgive what we won't confess.

2. WHY HIDE? // JEREMIAH 32:17B

I recently came across a song entitled "Walk with You." It speaks of knowing God rather than just knowing about Him and loving Him rather than just being a recipient of His love. In short, it speaks of intimacy, proximity, and relationship. This type of fellowship with God should always be the goal. Sin is a disruptor of that. We feel the distance with every fiber of our being, but so does He. Instead of staying there, our response must always be to run to God and His loving arms, lay it before Him. He saw it anyway. There is no logical place or reason to hide, so don't.

Our God is omnipotent for a reason, and there is nothing too great or too small for Him.

3. LIGHT IT UP // ROMANS 3:23

We're quick to find the light switch in a dark room. Even in an unfamiliar one, we search until we do. Most people don't go around eschewing the light. Yet, when it comes to our sins, we aren't always as desirous of the light. In fact, human nature is to seek cover from the light. Our God desires that no matter what, we make our home in the light. Romans 3:23a tells us that "...all have sinned...." The truth is at some point or another, we will fall into sin. However, there is no condemnation.

His desire is simply that we confess and repent, making room for the light and thereby Him as well.

Darkness carries fear and shame, but light brings clarity. Always choose light.

4. PICTURE OF LOVE // PSALM 138:8

Think back to a time when you specifically heard God tell you, "no," and you did "it" anyway, and "it" ended in disaster. I imagine that David heard something similar before his sin with Bathsheba, yet he chose to satisfy his flesh anyway. Thank God that David's sin was not the end. Even God sending the prophet Nathan was a picture of His steadfast love to heal and restore. He still had a plan for David if he chose repentance. The same is true today. Even in our mess, He is still pursuing, and if we'll allow Him, he is faithful to heal and restore if only we choose repentance. "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. Lord, your faithful love endures forever; do not abandon the work of your hands."

Forgiveness is God's gift to you, allow yourself to receive it.

5. I GOTCHU! // 1 JOHN 1:9

Man has been choosing himself over God all the way back to the garden when Adam chose to sin rather than to lose Eve. How he must have loved her to choose to die rather than live without her! The Bible is clear: she was deceived. He was not. Still our heavenly Father sought them out and covered the sin they could not cover themselves. Just as it was His nature then, it remained his nature with David and is still His nature now. If we will lay ourselves and our sin bare before Him, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Why would we not, then, choose Him? Christ gave His life for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus was fully aware of His sacrifice and our nature, and He still chose the cross.