

Authentic Confession and Repentance

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[0 : 00] Thanks Natalie. Let's quickly pray and then we'll get into this psalm. God, I thank you that you speak to us as your people.

That you see our lives and you do not turn your face away. But instead, you welcome each one of us towards you. And I pray as we look at your word tonight, that would be our story.

I've said in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as Robbie said, we're looking at through the series of psalms at the moment. We've been doing that in the morning service and we'll continue to do it in the evening.

And the psalms are an anthology of God's people's prayers and songs as they've wrestled with what they experience in life from the high points to the low points. I'll just put a timer on quickly.

And how they've sought to understand who God is in the midst of that. And today, we're going to be thinking about the ideas of confession and repentance. The idea of praying through when life kind of explodes in your face because of some of the things you found yourself doing.

[1 : 05] This idea that when you come across these moments, whether you chose to deliberately do it or not, you find yourself in a really dire place. And if you're a Christian, then that will probably happen all the time because seeking to follow Jesus and seeking to follow God is actually tricky.

Because in line with who God is, there's this constant tension of finding out who we are along the way. How our hearts try to reconcile themselves with who God said he is and the temptation to kind of fly off the other way a lot of the other time as well.

And even these words, confession and repentance, may for some of you have really negative connotations. Like for me, confession, when I was a little boy, was as you went into this dark box with a man and you just told him things.

Now, with fear, you told him many of these priests, sorry, just to clarify, you told him these things to kind of keep him off your back, to keep God off your back. This psalm actually presents that the key to life, the key to freedom, is actually through these postures of confession and repentance.

Now, some of the psalms, we don't know a lot of detail about why they were written or the occasion they were written, but this psalm we know fine well why it was written. And the context is which we're going to look at briefly of this psalm is in 2 Samuel 11 and 12.

[2 : 18] The points I'll make are in the notice sheet if you want to use them to go through, but feel free to do your own thing. If you're familiar with the Bible at all, this is the infamous story of David, the king of Israel, God's anointed leader, who chooses to do a variety of things that lead further and further into this spiralling of deception, of murder, of using his position to sleep with someone.

And it's the story of David and Bathsheba. So the story goes, David is the king of Israel, and Israel is at war, he chooses not to go, and instead one day he sees Bathsheba, and there's no beer on the bush, he essentially uses his position to sleep with this woman.

Then he gets her pregnant, then he tries to hide it, and he tries to hide it by getting her husband to come home. But then that doesn't work, so essentially he has her husband killed. And what you see is this truly chilling story of the depths of man's heart when he wants to get what he wants, and will pursue it and try to hide all the consequences at the same time.

David has used his position to influence in so many different ways to wreak havoc and destruction on the lives of other people. Now unfortunately that is not our new story, is it?

And unfortunately there's loads of that even in church history as well. I've been watching the TV show *Under the Banner of Heaven*, I don't know if any of you have seen it, where Andrew Garfield plays a Mormon detective trying to solve a crime in a Mormon town, and he's constantly faced with the idea of hiding and playing down the truth in order for the reputation of the town, of the church, and everybody around about them.

[3 : 51] And some of that is going on in David's heart, the idea I'll play this down, I'll hide and I'll hide and I'll hide. But God calls out David's abuse. That's one of the first points when we get into this psalm, one of the postures in the hearts of God is he does not stand for the abuse of others and sin among people.

He calls out, and in the psalm he uses, sorry, in 2 Samuel he uses Nathan the prophet to come along, and Nathan tells a story to David about a rich man who's stolen a poor woman's sheep, and David's furious, and he's like, kill that man.

And Nathan says, that man is you. And he is exposed. And it all comes unraveling. These points in life where you've been hiding and chasing and running, and then suddenly it's out in the open.

It's blown up in his face. So what does he do? When life brings these moments, when these things that you either feel or think or do are unraveled and unseen by everybody around about you, how do you engage with God?

What we're going to do is just go through this psalm simply and see how David processes and understands when he's been convicted and exposed in this way what he does. It's very quickly and very simple to begin with.

[5 : 02] The first thing David does is he draws near to God in verses 1 and 2. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love and compassion, according to your great compassion, blow out my transgressions, wash away all my nicotine, and cleanse me from sin.

He does not hide. He does not attack or defend. When he's exposed to everything that's happened to him, he goes straight to God. He doesn't launch a smear campaign on Nathan as some sort of troublemaker, what a lot of people will do.

I know when sometimes somebody confronts me about things in life, my instinct is to attack and self-defend. Instead, he goes straight into the presence of God. Now, I might feel counterintuitive for some of us.

Some of us might believe that when you're exposed for the worst of who you are, the last thing you want to do is go and speak to God because God is probably like some sort of angry parent. He says, get out of my sight. Do not even speak to me.

I am so furious with you. Now, it's not to downplay the idea of God's wrath against sin, but David seems to come straight to God. And he really does it for one reason.

[6 : 10] Who God is. His mercy and love. Because he understands God is merciful and loving, as he says here, it's a fundamental part of God's character that David appeals to this idea, this appeal for forgiveness in verse 2 because of this part of who God's character is.

Understanding that God is compassionate and loving means that in this dire and dark place, he actually runs towards God. And he's in desperate need here. He knows full well he's got nothing to offer.

There's nothing he can say here that will make it different, make his situation different. There's a humble approach based entirely on God's mercy, on God's love, and nothing David has to offer.

He knows full well, probably, he does not deserve the reality of who God is. And then in verse 3 onwards, in verse 3 to 5, he goes from drawing near to start owning and confessing what has happened.

It's very quick. You just look at this. He's straight in, in verse 3. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

[7 : 22] He's right there. He's got nothing to hide. He's been exposed and he essentially uses that as in, we all know what's happened here. It's mine. I have done this and I bring it before you.

And he says he does it in front of, in God. I've done, I've sinned and done what is evil in your sight. And that's important because David's reference for understanding sin is God alone.

That's his understanding of where sin comes from. There's a standard of right and wrong that is far higher than my feelings, my community, my family, my friends. And he understands sin in the light of who God is.

It's very tempting, I think one of the most sinful things we can apparently do in our society is to tell people that if you make a decision based out of how you feel, that's wrong. But David doesn't use any standard other than who God is to understand who, how he responds to the situation in front of him and how he's made choices in life.

And I guess there's a challenge there. He says, I've sinned against you and you only. Well, if you think of the story, he's clearly not just sinned against God, has he? He's wreaked havoc on people's lives. He's caused murder. He's caused adultery.

[8 : 32] But actually, I don't think David is dismissing and understanding like he doesn't care about the people who are involved here. There's an understanding that if it's before God and God is the judge of all, then that doesn't make lesser what he's done, but actually increases the weight.

Because the reason we know it's wrong is because in the scriptures, all people are made in the image of God. They've got dignity. They've got worth. They've got value. And to use those people to meet your own needs gets very close to the heart of sin.

And so actually doing it before God and God alone actually increases the weight of what he's done. This is not a statement about he doesn't care about the people involved. But I don't think he's just making a point about the value of humans.

I think he's also making a point about his relationship with God. If he wants God to be compassionate and loving, he's essentially saying, I have done this thing which is complete contrast with who I know you to be.

David is saying, I have sinned against you personally, God. Against a good friend. Against a loving king. A compassionate ruler who's told me and given me all these new ideas of who I am and who you are.

[9 : 37] And in spite of that, I've chosen to do something different. He even says, he's so focused on this, I think, that's why he says, so you are right and just and you are verdict and justified when you judge people which is kind of essentially, I don't actually care about the consequences of what happens here.

All I care about is I have done this thing before you. Which is a challenge because often for me, I don't know about you, when I think about what confession is, it really means I've done this bad thing and I feel guilty about it.

Could you remove my feeling of guilt and potentially minimize the consequences of my decisions? It's really about how I feel and how life might go for me. as opposed to this idea there's a disconnect in how he's related and understood God to be.

Confession here is not about the removal of a bad feeling or the consequences. He doesn't confess his circumstances but he starts to confess his heart. Yeah, he starts to confess his heart.

But he knows there's something more than that. This is what verse 5 goes on to say. He knows it's about something deeper than his actions. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

[10 : 45] Again, that's not a comment on his mother or the circumstances of his birth. It's this idea that there's something deep within him that's been here all along. And sometimes when you hear the word sin, again, it can be quite a shallow thing.

It's just, for I was a Christian, sins seem to be don't do these things that Christians seem to think are bad. Some of them are very good but for some reason you're not supposed to. It's actually a very deep, broad understanding of our hearts the Bible holds out.

And David uses these three words to unpack what he is actually experiencing. He uses transgressions and transgressions is this idea of knowing there's a moral line.

You see it and you do it anyway. I don't know if you've been in these positions where my anger is through the roof and have days from like, do you know what? I literally do not care. I'm just going to do what makes me feel good right now. Sometimes that's fine.

Sometimes that means I'm going to get pizza. But a lot of time it is more darker and hidden than that. Then iniquity comes from the idea that life is a journey. The Psalms are full of this.

[11 : 43] This path of righteousness and the path of not righteousness. And that there's a good one and there's not a good one. And you need to go in the good one and not the bad one. And this word is about choosing the other path.

And sometimes it is you're conscious of it and sometimes you're not. Sometimes it's this idea of wandering. It's not quite a clear decision. It's the wandering. And then sin which I as most basic means to fail.

Kind of like slightly missing the mark. Which is mainly moral in the scriptures but has this idea behind it that there's a way we're designed to live. There's a way we're designed to live in unity with God and with others that leads to flourishing.

And sin is when you miss that and start to head in different directions. It's failing to be who God has made us to be. Which is actually the start of the scriptures. The origin of the sin story is Adam and Eve the first humans are faced with a choice about whether they're going to humbly put themselves under the leadership of God.

What he says is right and wrong. What he says is to do with wisdom. Representing this tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And whether they're going to choose to do that or they're going to seize autonomy and authority for themselves.

[12 : 54] So they can define what is good and evil. And they can draw the lines. Because they start to suspect God is holding out on them. And the more control they have on their part would lead to more freedom and flourishing for them.

So in an attempt to get full and free and abundant life apart from God they choose to go their own way. It's far more than just don't eat an apple. It represents the state of the human heart constantly and there's a kind of tension of war against is God really good?

Actually I could decide to do this for myself and take things into my own hands. The New Testament picture that Jesus uses a lot is it's seen as a sickness that we need healing from and is literally killing us.

So David outlines all the ways we can make terrible decisions intentionally and unintentionally and gets all out before God. This is the heart of confession.

It's about owning and bringing all before God. When he does more than just owning he returns and looks to restore his relationship with God in verses 6 to 8.

[14 : 00] You desired faithfulness even in the womb. He taught me wisdom in the secret place. Then he asks for cleansing and he asks for a new and joyous heart. So David moves into this language of restoring our relationship.

This is the idea of repentance. It's returning to God. So if confession is here's my reality repentance is the kind of turning away from that back towards God.

It involves honestly admitting to God who we are and who we are not and like all people have headed in one direction and are actually called to return in the context of relationship. That's why he asks for these things of like purify my heart.

Like help this place where my actions come from to be changed. Help me to have a new experience where he craves a fresh sense of his presence in verse 8. Let me hear the joy and gladness.

Let me know the bones that are being crushed rejoice again. To simply say God I was bad because I did this bad thing and you're going to get me so please have mercy on me is not really what David prays.

[15 : 00] He confesses everything and wants to be restored to his God to his loving and compassionate God. In a very famous quote which I'm sure many of you might have heard CS Lewis talks about our nature as not simply an imperfect creature who needs some improvement he's a rebel who must lay down his arms.

This idea of repentance is I've chosen to continually seek my own autonomy and I need to lay that down and head back to your love and your compassion. Because there's a kind of repentance that ends up focusing on the consequences and essentially uses God as a means to get rid of that.

And when we do that you kind of one you end up consistently getting caught in these cycles I don't think you go really deep with sin and it becomes more about me managing these situations before me and every now and then God maybe a bit infuriated turns up and says you again how many times do we have to go through this?

And actually the focus becomes more on me and my management as opposed to who he is and what he is like. And the irony of lies but the moment we look at God and who he is like that's the very source that convicts us at the same time.

The moment we look at the loveliness and beauty and the majesty of God it's the same thing that holds a reflexive glass up to us and we're like wow here's the many directions my heart wants to head. Yet because you look at God repentance means you're looking at the God that says your worth your dignity your value they're totally met in me it gives you security that allows you to repent where you're not caught in cycles where you just end up hating yourself but actually you see the value and security of your identity that allows you to bring all the broken fragments of sin iniquity transgressions in our lives before God in honesty.

[16 : 41] and in restored relationship with a merciful and loving God knowing he has nothing to give and knowing this problem with sin goes right to the core of him David knows he needs something more he needs something deeper and that's what he goes on to pray for next this idea of renewal from verse 9 onwards so verse 9 hide your face from my sin and blot out all my iniquity society that's forgiveness you want to think about what forgiveness is forgiveness is God sees the reality of our lives and chooses not to base who he engages us to be on that reality it's the choosing to say which will come on to the end and why he does that that is not how I see you anymore and in verse 10 create in me a pure heart oh God and renew a steadfast spirit within me because forgiveness is a language of relationship isn't it forgiveness means you have a fragment fracture in a relationship with someone that needs to be forgiven in order for the relationship to continue to exist and to grow forgiveness needs to be happened debt needs to be absorbed and he knows at the same time that he cannot just continually manufacture that because of the way he sees his sin he knows that he needs his heart to be changed so David does not pray

God I will try harder next time he does not pray well this will never happen again I'm sure he regrets completely what he does the tone of this is he mourns this this is not to downplay what David did but the posture of his heart before God is one of you need to change me I need a new heart this is what he prays for so create create me a new heart the ongoing a new work everyday that God is generating and making something new a clean heart pure unblemished all the vacuums of our hearts look for other things filled complete peaceful renewed our renewed heart is renovated rebuilt restored as close to the idea of Eden as humanly possible this side of eternity and a steadfast spirit the one that is loyal and right it's in sync with God that your motivation your energy your life is totally in line with God again where's the focus it's not I need to do all this new stuff it's like this is who I want to be you need to change my heart and it can only come from you and I think part of the reason I've put not more willpower there is because I believe part of faith is growing in understanding that we do have our own capacity don't we we embrace the challenge of self-guided personal responsibility of change without that becoming a replacement for the transforming power of God in our lives it's not supposed to replace that but we do have obviously responsibility within that because willpower is an internal resource that we draw on to make a change in our lives internal in the sense it comes from our own strength and the ability to say yes and no to certain things but when it comes to embracing the transformed life that God has for us willpower alone is never enough and I'm sure most of you know that maybe that's a basic statement to make but I feel it's important to reiterate it

I don't know if you've been caught in these cycles of like I will change I will do this I've had a few of them in the past week I'm going to limit how much social media I use I'm going to get up at a certain time and some of it's good some of it's up to me if I don't get up in the morning at the right time I feel that's on me not God however when it comes to this idea of I need to become who I want to be is that even biblical let alone the idea of transforming the darker parts of my heart because we all know that it will really run so far it will fizzle out life my willpower when I'm tired is useless willpower rarely addresses the heart the root of all sin is the heart's desire to move away from God towards our own means I'm not sure David's heart was laid before in this situation maybe it was love maybe it was to be known maybe he felt he wanted to feel power again because he was not at war wherever it was as soon as he saw a beautiful woman on the rooftop his willpower disappeared willpower might temporarily restrain sin but it does not transform your heart we need a new heart and that's what God offers each one of us transformation of the heart is a strength that slowly comes through feeding on

God's goodness his grace trusting his compassion and love which he says it is here for you it is all for you here now and to walk and live in that as individuals and as a community so having drawn near to God having owning his real reality and confessed having returned and repented having craved a new heart purely because of forgiveness but don't stress that enough that's because of verse 9 God does hide his face from our sins and brought our iniquities when we put our faith and trust in him that's what he says he will do that's even more true for the body of Christ which we'll come on to in a minute but the psalm does not end there that's not the end of the story David then says I think quite a remarkable thing when he goes on we go into verse 13 onwards he starts to re-own his own story so verse 13 onwards so verse 12 he says restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit again that's that same idea of the spirit changing your hearts to sustain me and then for me that's sometimes where confessional repentance ends it's like right this is horrible

I've come back to you I've understood your forgiveness and I actually believe you're changing my heart but then David goes on to say then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you I don't know how you feel about that verse but you might be like David who on earth are you to tell me how to not sin have you looked at what you've just done if the emphasis is on like well David is now amazing then that might be a fair point but David has gone through this process of like look at what God has done I can bring all of who I am before him even this point where I've got nothing nowhere left to go he sees it and I can move towards him because he's loving and compassionate he gives me a new heart and because of that I actually can tell a new story I think for me a lot of time when I think of some of the darker moments in my life it's like well let's pretend that never happened let's just package that away and never talk about it again David seems to say I'm actually going to tell everyone this fact the psalm exists because of this

[23 : 37] I'm going to tell people who God is what he was like and how he took some of the darkest moments of my life and made something new like verses 13 onwards you've got like sing aloud declare sacrifice they're all points to public worship he's reowning his own story but it's not his story anymore it's the story of what God has done in his life because God uses our wounds not our competencies to heal and minister and tell a new story of the grace of a loving and merciful God to tell a story of who he is in the midst of our lives if you believe that the most effective way to show who God is to the world is to hold out some sort of squeaky clean moral purity that's not something you shouldn't aim for that you'll do as David might do and you'll be tempted to hide denial of sin and the reluctance to confess leaves us alone and in denial James tells us to confess our sins to one another this is partly what

I think David is doing here guess what happened I'm going to stand in front of the assembly of God's people and tell the story of what I had done where my heart was and who God is to me David Bonhoeffer says in his book The Life Together sin wants to remain unknown it shuns the light this can happen even in the midst of a pious community so a community that's really focused on being good in confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and the seclusion of the heart God breaks the gates of brass and bars of iron confession and repentance are the terrifying choices to be yourself before God even though he completely already knows everything about our hearts anyway and each other as opposed to the temptation to hide which was what Adam did in the story of the original story of sin and when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden the entrance to that garden which represented fullness and the abundance of life was guarded but when they leave they do not go alone

God goes with them this is not a story of a compromising God who's like well I better try a new plan it's a story of a pursuing God who pursues us in our brokenness and sin God does not lower the standard in holiness in doing this but instead finds a new way to make us holy that is not dependent on our performance anymore this is what David I think is discovering when he says in verse 17 my sacrifice oh God is a broken spirit a broken and contrite heart you God will not despise God does not despise the broken heart he does not despise that this is a mess and I don't know what to do but you're loving and you're compassionate so I come to you in this confession David is doing what Adam and Eve failed to do he is running to God naked and not hiding and when he sees himself his true self the parts of him that will make him feel utter shame and grimace he does not cover and hide and for each one of us that prayer of David is answered fully in Jesus you can read the entire

New Testament it's full of it the whole scriptures point to this but just one reference would be for me 2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us that him is Jesus so that in him we might become the righteousness of God in Christ each one of us are loved unconditionally in a way that you cannot lose this is grace this is the good news all of this is the ability to draw near to own who we are to return to God to be renewed and sin in contrast is the places we constantly choose to do the opposite and attempt to create this reality that only God can give for ourselves Jesus shows up to people like me and you wedged between these two realities and says I do not condemn you either if I could give myself for you because you cannot do this and in doing so in his death accomplishes forgiveness and in his resurrection provides a new heart through the spirit of God transforming and working and calls us to learn new ways of life as to his disciples and his followers so if you want the presence of God in your life and sometimes this is a hard one for me to have learned over the years an abundant life that Jesus offers each one of us confession and repentance are part of the deal not because they're negatives but actually they're the raw reality of where life is and it's a place we meet God and he says something new but it involves coming and being like here it is here's the mess including the stuff

I don't know I mean I'm just basing this on the stuff I do know let alone what's going on in my heart 90% of the time when I think everything's fine I mean you look at this it's a beautiful story that David can then be like I'm not going to hide this instead I'm going to sing a new song about my God and who he has been in my life it's beautiful and transformative in today's culture David would have had to hide this up and there would have been a scandal or he'd have been fired were the only options we really have in our culture this is a completely different way this is ownership of everything that's happened nothing hidden but points to the redemptive work of God the ability to change our lives because confession and repentance are not primarily about the omissions of our failures they are obviously but they're a declaration of the triumph of God and who he is in the midst of that reality and because of Jesus our most devastating failures become a new story because they are the places his grace steeped deepest into our innermost being and starts to change my life and your life individually and corporately what we're going to do now is like David he wants to sing of who God is and that's what we're going to do and then we're going to head into communion together so I'm going to invite the band up and I'll quickly pray

[29 : 40] God we know that you do not delight in sacrifice or we will bring it you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings but our sacrifice oh Lord is a broken spirit a broken and contrite heart you God will not despise Father I pray that if we've ever been taught that you do despise us when we humbly come before you that you would help us to know that you are good and compassionate for us who sometimes like myself don't even think we need this because we think everything in life is fine would you help us to re-appreciate the reality and depth of sin not in a way that condemns us but helps us to come to you for freedom ask that in Jesus name Amen