

SESSION 6

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

▶ **The Point**

God forgives when we come to Him in repentance.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 6:12-13; Psalm 51:1-7,10-12

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

He told me he hadn't sinned in seven years. While sharing the gospel, I asked a man the simple question, "Have you ever committed a sin?" I've asked that question hundreds of times. Almost everyone readily admits they have. But I didn't expect this man's answer: "Yes, I have sinned, but not in seven years."

Culture likes to rank sins and continually redefines what is a sin—and what is not. On an individual level, we do this too. Many of us even try to rationalize away our sin, coming up with a way to justify what we do as if to say it's okay.

The fact is all of us have sinned, and we all need forgiveness. More than anyone who has ever lived, Jesus understands the depth of our sins. He willingly died to set us free from those very sins. In the Model Prayer Jesus taught us, He gave us the privilege of praying a prayer of confession. Jesus let His followers know we can come to Him anytime for forgiveness and renewal.

▶ **The Setting**

Jesus taught His disciples how to pray using what we call the Model Prayer. He instructed them how to ask the Father to forgive and protect them. Psalm 51 serves as a fitting example of a prayer for forgiveness and restoration. King David wrote the psalm after Nathan confronted him about his sin. (See 2 Sam. 11–12.) In the psalm, David described his willingness to confess his sin and seek God's forgiveness. He also prayed for spiritual renewal and restoration.

What does the Bible say?

Debts (Matt. 6:12)—The Greek word literally refers to something we owe. This term identifies our sins as debts we owe to God and ask Him to forgive.

Hyssop (Ps. 51:7)—A small plant with a stalk that produces small flowers in bunches, which made it suitable to serve as a brush.

Matthew 6:12-13; Psalm 51:1-7,10-12

Matt. 6:12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

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Ps. 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

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

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

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Ps. 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 109 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “What makes it so hard to say, ‘I’m sorry?’” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 110 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of confronting our sin by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 110 of the PSG: “God forgives when we come to Him in repentance.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, set up a table at the front of the room. Directly behind the table, attach a sheet of paper at table height (where it can be seen by participants sitting in chairs around the room). On the sheet of paper, write “JESUS.” You will also need some items that you can stack such as blocks, red plastic cups, cans, boxed food, or other similar items. After group members arrive, lead them to call out examples of sin (not specific, personal examples, but common examples of sin). As each example is called out, put one of the items on the table. The goal is to build a wall tall enough to cover the JESUS sign on the wall. After the wall is built, say: “Our sin creates a barrier between us and Jesus. Just like this wall keeps us from seeing the sign, our sin keeps us from enjoying fellowship with Him.” Leave the items stacked until the end of the session, or you may choose to remove some of the blocks as nuggets of truth are revealed throughout the session.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us see the depths of our sins and to have the courage to confront them. Thank God for the forgiveness He offers us through Christ.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 6:12-13

¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 6:12-13 on page 111 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand why forgiveness is so important for us.

RECAP: As we've already seen, the Model Prayer begins with a focus on God and a desire to honor Him and live in line with His lordship and kingdom. (See Matt. 6:9-10.) When we focus on God, any unconfessed sin can also come into focus. As we turn to His lordship over us, we also turn from our sin. Prayer without regular confession could barely be considered true prayer.

In the original language, the form of the verb translated *forgive* urges immediate action. It's as if Jesus was urging us to pray, "Forgive us *now!*" We have a need to confess our sins without delay. The verb also indicates a completed action, which communicates that we desire forgiveness that is thorough. We never need to deal with the sin again because God's forgiveness is final and complete.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are the dangers of unforgiveness?

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 111 of the PSG: ***"What are the benefits of forgiving others?"***

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see why we must confess sin and ask God's forgiveness.

Matthew 6:12-13 Commentary

[Verse 12] Once we ask God to provide us with what we need so we can do His will, we're ready to talk with Him about another critical prayer concern. We turn our attention to praying for forgiveness and protection from future temptation. Jesus brought forgiveness to our attention by teaching us to approach the Father as a debtor. Our sins count against us as a debt that needs to be paid. Granted, Jesus paid the debt for our sin by dying on the cross. When He went to Calvary, He paid the price required so our sin could be taken away from us forever. In fact, the Greek word for **forgive** in this verse means "to send away." When we received His gift of salvation, He took our sins away, never to return.

Although we have the assurance of salvation, we still sin against God. We're forgiven sinners, and we can't pretend we no longer sin. Instead of living in denial, Jesus instructed us to talk candidly and honestly to the Father about the debt of our sins, and He intends for us to go one step farther. Jesus expects us to ask the Father to forgive us. When we take that vital step in prayer, we help our relationship with God to become more robust and durable.

Asking to be forgiven has two dimensions. While we concentrate on our relationship with the Lord, we cannot overlook our connection with other people. We know what it's like to be wounded by injustice or cruelty. The pain of the wound can make us think we have a right to retaliate against the people who wronged us. Or we may foster the notion that we would be justified in holding a grudge against them. Instead of taking either of these options, we forgive them by sending their sin away from our hearts. Then we're ready to experience the fresh joy that comes when He sends our sins away from Him.

[Verse 13] Along with forgiveness, Jesus showed us how to pray for protection, which comes in the shape of spiritual direction. Our misguided steps have caused us to sin against Him in the past. By coming to God with repentant hearts, we experience His forgiveness in keeping with our determination to forgive others. But we don't stop there. Growing Christians do well when we ask God to guide us as into the future. Trying times regularly place us in difficult situations that require tough choices. Without the Father's leadership, we may be tempted to turn the trial into an opportunity for selfish advantage. We find ourselves handling the trial in a way that feeds our sinful desires or habits. That's why we're wise to ask the Father to lead us away from temptation.

In this portion of the Model Prayer, Jesus brought the source of temptation into view. Jesus described him as **evil**. He's malicious, and we need to be protected from his schemes. Jesus taught us to ask for the Father's protection by praying for Him to **deliverer us**.



STUDY THE BIBLE

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Psalm 51:1-7

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 51:1-7 on page 112 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand how to confess our sin and seek God's forgiveness.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 112 of the PSG: **"What are the benefits of confessing specific sins?"**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, "Good for the Soul," on page 113 of the PSG to help them understand the importance of confession.



Confession of sin is good for us and our relationship with God. Spend a few minutes considering the importance of confession and then complete this acrostic to describe the importance of confession. [The PSG has the word CONFESS written as an acrostic.]

RECAP: Jesus called us to do what David did: confess. To remedy the guilt and that feeling of always being unclean, Jesus told us to cry out to God in prayer, "Forgive us" (Luke 11:4). God wants us to acknowledge sin, confess it, turn from it, and be forgiven!

TRANSITION: The next verses show us how we can seek restoration and renewal from the Lord.

Psalm 51:1-7 Commentary

[Verse 1] King David taught us how to confess our sin and seek God's forgiveness. His experience of forgiveness started with the jarring awareness he had sinned against God. He had an affair with Bathsheba, then had her husband killed. Nathan confronted him and David's heart melted in repentance. (See 2 Sam. 11–12.) David turned to God and begged Him to be gracious and compassionate toward him.

[Verses 2-3] As he prayed, David pled with God to **wash** away his sin. The ugly and vile sin needed to be removed like filth had to be washed out of dirty robes. In David's day, God's people would go through a ceremony of washing themselves before they came into His presence in worship. The ceremonial cleansing prepared them to meet Him. In the same way, David asked God to cleanse him spiritually so he could be fit for worship once more. David could never get the guilt of his sin to subside on his own. It always troubled him. He couldn't get his mind off his rebellion against God. It pierced his conscience.

[Verses 4-5] David's sin affected the lives of countless people, but it had mangled his relationship with God. God alone had given David the life he had enjoyed. He had protected David from harm and placed him on the throne of Israel. With David's sin, he had squandered what God had done for him. He had sacrificed it on the altar of his own lust. Therefore, David had to agree with God's assessment of his sin. David came to terms with the fact that the responsibility for what he had done rested on his own shoulders. He couldn't blame God. Sin had been a part of his life ever since the day of his birth, and his tendency to sin had accompanied him in his mother's womb.

[Verse 6] Dealing with his sin had shown David something about God too. While David had a sinful nature, God had a righteous desire. While David gave himself to a desire that led him to deception and lies, God desired integrity in his life. Anyone who followed Him would seek to be characterized by integrity too. Such honesty didn't show up only on the surface. It would permeate deep inside so what others could see on the outside, God could see on the inside.

[Verse 7] David prayed to be forgiven. David asked the Lord to remove the contamination of his sin. When he brought up **hyssop**, he had God's mercy in mind. Just before God delivered His people from Egyptian bondage, He told them to use hyssop stalks and smear lamb's blood on the doorposts of their houses. The blood would protect them from the plague on Egypt that would bring about the death of the first-born males. (See Ex. 12.) Priests also used hyssop to drizzle blood on lepers who had been made whole and could be restored to the community. (See Lev. 14:6-7.) David again asked God to wash him. The filth of his sin needed to be removed, and only God could cleanse him thoroughly. Once God washed his sin away, David knew it would be gone for good. He would be forgiven.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Psalm 51:10-12

¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.* ¹¹ *Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*
¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 51:10-12 on page 114 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: **Question #4** on page 115 of the PSG: **“When have you experienced a clean heart and renewed spirit?”**

RECAP: When King David committed adultery and murder, his life certainly went off course spiritually—and we can veer off God’s path for us in much the same way. Though we may not be guilty of the same sins as David, all of us have strayed from the path. The good news is God allows us to start over. We can begin again. That’s what happened for King David. He sought the Lord in prayer to find restoration.

So what made David a man after God’s own heart? It certainly wasn’t his sins and failures. It was his spirit and desire afterwards. David turned back to God wholeheartedly. He sought more than freedom from sin; he sought the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit in his life. David *desired* a heart like God’s. A heart like God’s can also be ours as we pray, “Forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12a).

DISCUSS: **Question #5** on page 115 of the PSG: **“What role should confession play in our group?”**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): To end this session, **say:** “Confession is the process God gives us to tear down the fellowship barrier that sin creates between us and Jesus.” Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 John 1:9-10. Remove the stacked items as you explain that confession of sin removes the barrier between the Lord and us.

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“God forgives when we come to Him in repentance.”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How would you describe the joy of God’s salvation?

Psalm 51:10-12 Commentary

[Verse 10] Seeking restoration and renewal comes on the heels of asking to be forgiven. David turned to God with a repentant heart and prayed for forgiveness. Then he sought a renewed relationship with God that would enable him to rejoice again. David's sin had deteriorated his walk with God; he needed a fresh start. If his intimacy with God had any hope of being restored, something miraculous would have to be done in his heart. His damaged relationship with God had created a distance too vast to be corrected with his own efforts. That's why David asked God to do something miraculous. The Hebrew word for **create** that David used had a distinct connection with Genesis 1:1. The same word conveyed the work of God in creating the world. David asked God to perform something like a miracle of creation in his life. His relationship with God had to be restored, but it would require the creation of a new heart. Only God had the power to create it. By creating a new heart in David, God would initiate the beginning of a renewed relationship. With a heart open to an intimate walk with God, David asked for something else. He prayed for God to work so a sense of consistent, loyal devotion would be nourished within him. He had ignored it before, and to his own peril. Now David wanted to be able to stand firm in the convictions God had planted inside him. He did not want to disappoint God again.

[Verse 11] At first glance, this verse may give some Christians the impression God would separate Himself from them permanently if their sins crossed a line. A careful reading doesn't allow us to come to such a conclusion. We don't lose our salvation if we sin like David. Rather, we lose the ability for usefulness in the work of God's kingdom. Maturing Christians want to learn how to pray effectively so we can serve Him well. By the same token, we embrace other spiritual disciplines so we can be more like Christ as we share the gospel in our world. When sinful behavior takes over our lives, our usefulness to Him suffers. David seemed concerned God might consider him useless. Such a possibility troubled him. His usefulness to God gave David a unique sense of fulfillment that nourished his closeness with God. Being dismissed from God's presence would leave him empty and dissatisfied. The possibility he would no longer sense the presence of God's Spirit tortured David. His uneasiness prompted him to ask God to allow him to stay connected through an intimate relationship that would restore him to usefulness.

[Verse 12] Years earlier, David had given his life to the Lord. The Lord's salvation had been responsible for the direction his life had taken. Across the years, David had been refreshed by the spiritual joy that could only have come from God's work of salvation in his life. Once his sinful behavior took over his life, David no longer experienced that unique sense of authentic joy. Now in the wake of his repentance, David prayed for the joy of the Lord to be restored in his heart.

Read the article "Was David's Adultery a Crime?" in the Fall 2018 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "David's Desire—A Clean Heart" (Summer 2017), "Hyssop" (Fall 2009), and "A New Creation" (Fall 2002) relates to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 116 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Confess sin.** Each time you pray, ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin. As God reveals things to you, turn from them, seek His forgiveness, and thank Him for His cleansing.
- ▶ **Read.** Read and pray through Psalm 51. Ask God to give you a renewed dependence upon Him.
- ▶ **Seek forgiveness.** If others have been hurt by some sin you've committed, confess that sin to him and/or her and ask for forgiveness.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 116 of the PSG:

Prayer is the natural path to travel as we confess, repent, and seek God's renewal. Let God's forgiveness lead you to be a person after His own heart.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for offering His forgiveness and for making it possible through Christ. Ask Him for the courage and strength to confront our sins by confessing them to Him.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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