



Women's Bible Study
A Godly Response to Life's Realities: A Study in the Psalms
Psalm 51: In Repentance by Jann Wright
December 6, 2006

Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. This is our last lecture in our series on the Psalms. We have been studying Godly Responses to Life's Realities. I want to begin our time together with a letter describing a very painful reality that many of you may have watched unfold in the news.

My Dear New Life Church Family,
I am so sorry. I am sorry for the disappointment, the betrayal, and the hurt. I am sorry for the horrible example I have set for you. I have an overwhelming, all-consuming sadness in my heart for the pain that you and I and my family have experienced over the past few days. I am so sorry for the circumstances that have caused shame and embarrassment to all of you.

. . .The last four days have been so difficult . . . and I have further confused the situation with some of the things I've said . . . But I alone am responsible for the confusion caused by my inconsistent statements. The fact is, I am guilty of sexual immorality, and I take responsibility for the entire problem. I am a deceiver and a liar. There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it all of my adult life.

. . .The accusations that have been leveled against me are not all true, but enough of them are true that I have been appropriately and lovingly removed from ministry. . . . Please forgive me. I am so embarrassed and ashamed. I caused this and I have no excuse. I am a sinner. I have fallen. I desperately need to be forgiven and healed.¹

Those words are excerpts from a letter written by Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church and read to his 14,000 member congregation in Colorado Springs, Colorado on November 5 following a firestorm of media accusations. Haggard also served as President of the National Association of Evangelicals, and resigned that position during that same week.

I include his letter not to bring further bring pain to him or his family but to illustrate that Psalm 51 is as relevant to our lives in 2006 as it was when David wrote it almost 3,000 years ago. It is an example from which we can learn and it is a warning for us to heed.

¹ For full text of letter see www.newlifechurch.org, letter dated November 5, 2006.

Our passage for study this morning/evening is Psalm 51. The author is King David. He was at least 50 years old when this was written perhaps a bit older.² The context is the time immediately after Nathan the prophet confronted David with his sin of adultery and murder which was around 990 B.C. The account is told in 2 Samuel Chapters 11 and 12. To briefly summarize: David sends his commander of the Army, Joab, off with the army to fight the neighboring Ammorites. They had some unfinished business with this nation because they had attacked and humiliated a diplomatic team from Israel. In that battle, chronicled in Chapter 10 David played a key role; but this time David stays at home in Jerusalem. We pick up the account in 2 Samuel 11:2-5.

² One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite."⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home.⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

David now has an additional problem, this pregnancy cannot be concealed for very long and Bathsheba's husband is out on military maneuvers so he will obviously know this baby is not his. So David sends for her husband from the front. After unsuccessful attempts to get Uriah to go home and be with his wife, David must come up with another plan. So he sends her husband back to the front with orders for his own execution. The letter to Joab instructs him to place Uriah in the front line where the fighting is the most dangerous and then withdraw his covering troops so that he will die. The whole incident will then be framed as an accident of war. Joab obeys, Uriah is killed, Bathsheba becomes David's wife, and there is a new baby born in the palace.

All seems outwardly well, but it is not. 2 Samuel 11:27 says, ". . . But the thing David had done displeased the Lord". David, the King of Israel, God's specially chosen political and religious leader is guilty of a great sin. There is now a breach in his relationship with God. At least 9 months have passed since David's sin of adultery and David has not confessed his sin before the Lord. So Nathan the prophet confronts David. Psalm 51 is the outpouring of David's heart as he comes face to face with who he really is.

Psalm 51

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner part; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. ⁷ Cleanse 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 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit,

² Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible. 2 Samuel 11. Available on-line at www.crosswalk.com. Click on Bible Study Tools and then Commentaries.

to sustain me. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. ¹⁴ Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ¹⁸ In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Commentator James Montgomery Boice noted that Charles Haddon Spurgeon was the prince of expositors. Boice writes that Spurgeon could get more out of a passage than anyone he had ever heard or read. But in the preface to the second part of his first large volume on the psalms, Spurgeon tells how he postponed working on Psalm 51 week after week and often sat down to it and got up again without having written a line. Spurgeon concluded,

“It is a bush burning with fire yet not consumed and out of it a voice seemed to cry to me, ‘Draw not nigh hither, put off thy shoes from off thy feet.’ The psalm is very human, its cries and sobs are of one born of woman; but it is weighted with an inspiration all divine, as if the Great Father were putting words into his child’s mouth. Such a psalm may be wept over, absorbed into the soul, and exhaled again in devotion; but, commented on—ah! Where is he who having attempted it can do other than blush at his defeat?”³

Those words didn’t exactly encourage me to press on in my preparation for this lecture. My first thought was that if Charles Haddon Spurgeon struggled that much in writing about Psalm 51 who in the world am I to try to teach on this text. But in full recognition of my meager skills, I offer Four Reflections on this Psalm. Christmas is a good time for reflections. Somehow even amid the busyness of the season; the twinkling lights, the brightly colored packages, and the warm memories of Christmases past beckon us to reflect on our year. So this morning/evening I offer Four Reflections.

Reflection #1: We Must Pray for Our Leaders

As we look at the life of David, we see that even with all he had he still needed someone to intercede for him. Our leaders by the very nature of their positions are in highly visible roles. Their words and actions are taped, televised, and reported almost daily. Any error from a rude comment, to an angry outburst, to sexual immorality is quickly discovered and reported. When our leaders succumb to temptation and fall; the impact is widespread and devastating especially in this age of television and the internet.

David of course was both a political and religious leader for the nation of Israel. In our country that is not the case which simply means there are more individuals out there who need our prayers. There are religious leaders. These include pastors, leaders of ministries both national and local, teachers, small group leaders, and many others who serve in leadership roles. We need to pray for these individuals. There are political leaders. These range from the local to the national and include: county commissioners, city council members, school board members, state senators, state representatives, Members of Congress, the President, and many others.

³ Boice, James Montgomery. *Psalms: Volume 2*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan 1996. page 424.

Pray Magazine, produced by the Navigators and identified by their website in your notes, has some excellent resources to help us pray in a Biblical Way for our pastors and leaders. Here are a few of their suggestions.

Prayer Prompts for Religious Leaders.⁴

- Priorities. Lord, give my pastor wisdom to prioritize the tasks of each day. Guard my pastor against the tyranny of the urgent, and help him discern what is most important.
- Holiness. Jesus, keep my pastor holy in every way. Protect him from seducing spirits, especially when he is tired and hard-pressed.
- Protection. Set your angels around my pastor, and let no power of the enemy harm him. Turn aside rumors, gossip, criticism, abuse, and ungratefulness.
- Family. Almighty God, shelter my pastor and his family. Cover their home, and preserve their time together. In Your faithfulness, meet their financial needs in Christ Jesus, and cancel the assignments of the enemy against them.

Prayer Prompts for Political Leaders⁵

Their first suggestion is a caution and that is not to become overwhelmed by all the needs out there. Just select a leader or group of leaders and pray one thing for them each day.

- Pray that our leaders would be God fearing and recognize that they are accountable to Him for each decision and act.
- Pray that they would be granted wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.
- Pray that would have compassionate hearts for the poor and needy.

I don't think I need to convince you that we should pray for our leaders; but rather I want to implore you to actually do it. God commands us to pray for our leaders. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—²for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

I think it would be a bit like ignoring the elephant in the room at this point if I didn't acknowledge my husband's recent political life. I considered just compartmentalizing that area of my life and not talking about it in this environment; but given the fact that all of you were seeing billboards with his picture, receiving mailings, and other forms of publicity it seemed a bit convoluted; and frankly that is just not my style.

It is not my intent to be partisan in any way; however, this experience has taught me some spiritual lessons that I think I would be remiss if I did not share. One of those lessons is that many of those running for and in political office really do need your prayers and they are not that different from all of you.

⁴ Scripture-Based Prayers to Pray for Your Pastor by Terry Teykl. www.praymag.com Click on prayer cards. Adapted from Preyed On or Prayed For by Terry Teykl, Prayer Point Press. 2006

⁵ 30 Ways to Pray for People in Authority by Gary P. Bergel. www.praymag.com Click on prayer cards. Adapted from Intercessors for America newsletter (Vol. 22. No 3). Excerpted from Pray! Magazine issue #13. 2002.

Reflection #2: We Need to Put on the Full Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-11 says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Back to the life of David, 2 Samuel 11:1 says, In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. It was springtime and it was the time when Kings went to war. David should have been with his men, leading the attack. It was his role and his responsibility. But things had been going well for David. He was wealthy; he had a nice house, clothes, many wives and concubines, prestige, and no serious threats to the kingdom. He had capable advisors to whom he had delegated much, perhaps too much. So David was at home in Jerusalem.

The Danger of Complacency - David had become complacent. Perhaps it was the absence of crises that made him feel he could handle his life better than he could. Perhaps he wasn't using his free time very profitably as he had done in the past when he filled his days with the business of governing, prayer, meditation, studying the word, and writing. What about us? Are we guilty of complacency as well? Sometimes our greatest spiritual challenges come when we seemingly have everything. Beware of complacency it can set you up for disaster.

Storing the Armor - David doesn't go to battle. Apparently his battle armor is in storage, after all he doesn't need it or does he? It seems David had also stored his spiritual armor as well thinking that since there are no serious threats. We are the same way, storing our spiritual armor because we are unaware of spiritual dangers.

We have four children, three daughters and the youngest is a son. And despite what I learned in college the differences between boys and girls are not environmental. This little male creature is very different from the four women who interact with him. Several months ago his grandmother bought him an armor set. (Picture)

For the longest time, it seemed daily he wanted to put on his armor. So each morning I would help him get "dressed". We would put on the: Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Shoes of the Gospel of Peace, Shield of Faith, Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit.

Although I knew the Ephesian's passage; when you help a 3 year old get dressed for battle morning after morning you begin to ponder it a little more deeply. After a while it dawned on me that maybe I needed to give a little more attention to putting on my own spiritual armor each day.

The final week of the campaign was one of the most grueling experiences of my life. Each day Scott and I didn't know what we would find when we opened the newspaper, retrieved our mail, turned on the t.v., or listened to the radio. I remember when I awoke each morning that week thinking: "Lord, I can't even put my feet on the floor without talking to you. I have no idea what is coming today; but you do. Let Scott and I take up each piece of armor and put it on. Help us to stand firm in our principles and

not say anything or do anything that would reflect poorly on you no matter what." I felt like I was in the middle of a war zone.

But you know what, we as Christians need to understand that each day we are in the middle of a war zone. We may be oblivious to it as David was, but we had better take it seriously. We have an enemy, we are in a battle against the forces of evil and we need to put on the armor God has provided.

David didn't realize that day that he was going into the most significant battle of his life. He had the world by the tail and everything just seemed great. He was complacent and he was unprepared. How many days do we feel like we have life so well in hand that there is no need to study our Bible that morning or talk with God before we begin our day? Don't be foolish, don't be complacent, don't leave your spiritual armor in the corner and thus be unprepared for battle. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

While we must diligently war against sin in our lives we must also acknowledge that at times through our deliberate actions we fail to put on our armor, fail to stand firm, yield to our sinful nature and so succumb to temptation and we sin by disobeying God's commandments. That leads us to reflection number three. We must confess our sins.

Reflection #3: We Must Confess our Sins.

1 John 1:8-9 says, If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

God's Mercy - David comes to God seeking mercy. He cannot come to God appealing to His justice, holiness, or righteousness because David has failed in each of those areas. He would be condemned. But mercy, David can appeal to God on the basis of mercy and so can we. David further describes God as unfailing in his love and compassionate. Remember this is God as revealed in the Old Testament, and David knows him to be merciful, loving, and compassionate. We can only approach God according to His mercy.

David's Sin - David in contrast has only his sin to bring to God. David uses three words to name his sin in verses 1 and 2: transgressions, iniquity, and sin. Transgression is translated from a Hebrew word that means to cross a forbidden boundary. It carries with it the understanding that this action is serious rebellion. Iniquity means perversion and refers to "original sin" or the depravity of our natures. This is the same Hebrew word that is used in verse 5 when David says he was sinful from the time his mother conceived him. The third word is sin itself and it means to fall short or miss the mark.⁶

The Weight of Sin - The weight of sin is heavy. David says his sin is always before him. Physically his sin is incapacitating, a feeling he likened to the very bones in his

⁶ Boice, James Montgomery. Psalms: Volume 2. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan 1996. page 426.

body being crushed. Perhaps you can't really identify with his sins of adultery and murder; but David was also guilty of covetousness, deceit, pride, and considering his own needs above the needs of others. I think we can all identify with those and the weight we feel when we have sinned. God does not allow his children to continue in unconfessed sin without great discomfort. We should be thankful for this work of the Spirit for it brings us to repentance. If you are able to sin without feeling the disturbance of the spirit you need to question whether you indeed are a child of God or whether you have allowed unconfessed sin to take root and harden your heart toward his voice.

Acknowledging Our Sin - Notice David clearly acknowledges his sin. He doesn't make excuses or try to explain it away. He doesn't try to bargain with God, listing his prestigious role as the monarch of a great kingdom. He doesn't list the times he has been a shining ambassador for God; like when he defeated Goliath with only a sling shot and 5 smooth stones. No, you don't bargain with God. You don't list your good qualities and your sin and ask God to weigh them out hoping the good will be heavier. With God you either have either lived a sinless life or you have not. If you have not then you must approach God; acknowledge your sin and rely on His mercy.

Against You Only Have I Sinned - Incidentally, much has been made of verse 4, Against you, you only, have I sinned . . . This has troubled many because surely David had sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, Joab, and the very citizens of his kingdom; but the ultimate offense is committed against God. God is the very one who defines sin. He is the one who draws the boundaries. When we cross those boundaries we sin against God.

It is helpful for us to think deeply about the fact that all sin is committed against God. When we look at our sins only from the perspective of hurting someone else we are tempted to explain away our actions. In the case of David—if the focus is on the offenses committed against Bathsheba, Uriah, and Joab; you might be tempted to assign each of them some degree of fault: Bathsheba shouldn't have been on her rooftop bathing, Uriah was being unreasonable; Joab should have investigated David's order before carrying it out. See how our reasoning becomes very twisted. But when we sit before a holy God there is no negotiating these points. We are guilty, we know it and He knows it. We must confess our sin.

Reflection #4: Our Sins are Taken Away

The last reflection is that Our Sins are Taken Away. Back in 2 Samuel Chapter 12 when Nathan confronted David with his sin. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD and Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."

David, when confronted, confessed his sin and the LORD took away his sin. David through this Psalm seems to be processing what that actually meant. We often need that process time as well. We know intellectually that our sins are taken away; but sometimes we need to fortify our will from the Word to believe it and accept it. David

uses many verbs in the passage as he requests God to take away his sin. He asks God to:

Blot Out My Transgressions - Spurgeon gives the following word picture: “My revolts, my excesses, are all recorded against me; but, Lord, erase the lines. Draw thy pen through the register. Obliterate the record, though now it seems engraven in the rock forever: many strokes of thy mercy may be needed, to cut out the deep inscription, but then thou hast a multitude of mercies, and therefore, I beseech thee, erase my sins.”⁷ God will blot out our transgressions.

Create in Me a Pure Heart - The Hebrew verb here translated for create is actually the same word used in Genesis 1:1⁸, “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.” This creation is only something that God can do; man cannot manufacture or replicate it. God can create in us a pure heart.

Cleanse Me with Hyssop - Hyssop was actually a plant and because of its shape it was often used as a small broom. It was also because of its internal structure able to absorb a lot of liquid. The first time Hyssop was mentioned in the Bible is at the Passover when the Jews were leaving Egypt: “Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe” (Exodus 12:22). When the angel of death passed over the Jewish households and saw the blood on the doorframe the firstborn son would be spared and not die.

David is saying cleanse me with the blood of the sacrifice of the lamb so that my sin will be covered, atoned for, and I will not die. This is what Spurgeon was referring to when he said of this Psalm that it was “as if the Great Father were putting words into his child’s mouth”. David from his side of the cross could not have comprehended how absolutely accurate those words were. Our sin is forgiven by the blood of the lamb. That precious baby in the manger, who grew into a man, the very Son of God, who died on the cross once and for all time, backward and forward, paid for the sins of David. And he paid for your sins and for mine. God takes away our sins. He blots out our transgressions. He creates in us a pure heart. He cleanses us with the blood of the lamb.

And so our study of Psalm 51 ends. As the celebration of the birth of our Savior approaches and the year draws to a close, take some time to reflect. Review your year, ask God if there are any issues in your relationship that need repentance. Confess your sins, and allow God to restore the joy of your salvation. Determine to pray for your leaders. Resolve to keep your spiritual armor in good shape and wear it. With these things in mind let us enter into the new year with a clean conscious and a determination to focus on the work that God has laid before us.

⁷ Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. The Treasury of David: Vol. 1 Psalms 1-57. MacDonald Publishing Company, Mclean, Virginia. Page 402.

⁸ Nelson Study Bible. NKJV Page 930.