



### SETTING THE HEART

The Christian life is rarely an unbroken series of successes. The temptation to sin is always present with us. And no matter how spiritually strong we may appear to be, not one of us is immune to failure. Even David, the typically obedient king who was called by God “a man after my own heart” (Acts 13:22), was lured in by the powerful pull of sin.

As you study the Scripture passages that describe David’s great sin, you might feel a sense of horror as one unthinkable sin leads to another and then to another. You might wonder, “Why would God even include such a shameful account of spiritual and moral failure in the Bible?”

In studying Psalm 51, you’ll discover why. David’s example of moral failure is indeed shocking. But his outpouring of broken-hearted repentance is probably the best example of godly repentance recorded in the Bible.

As you study this week, praise God for the fact that He provides a door of forgiveness for us when we’ve sinned. A heart of sincere repentance (like David’s) is the key that opens that door!

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious...he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

—Psalm 103:8, 10-12

### DIGGING IN

The psalm you’ll be working with this week is Psalm 51. But before you begin studying this psalm, take a few minutes to look up passages that will give you some background on its author, David. (Your students will be looking up these same passages in the group sessions.)

Make detailed notes on what you learn about David’s life (the main events) and his personality from these verses.

- 1 Samuel 16:1-12
- 1 Samuel 17:4-11; 32-50
- 2 Samuel 5:1-4
- 2 Samuel 8:14b
- Matthew 1:6-17 (Note David's family ties to the coming Messiah)
- Acts 13:20b-22

Take a moment to summarize David's spiritual life as you've seen it thus far, including his relationship with the Lord and his level of success or failure as a servant of God.

A series of pivotal events occurred in David's life and were recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1-12, 25. It was because of these events that David penned Psalm 51. Although your group won't be reading this entire passage in 2 Samuel, it will help you to be thoroughly familiar with the story behind this psalm. As you read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25 in your Bible, outline the passage and record the important details. Some major headings are given to get you started.

- David Sins
- David is rebuked
- David repents

Now you are ready to dig into Psalm 51, which was written during the events you've just studied. As you read Psalm 51 on your Scripture sheet, mark any reference to David, including "me," "my," "I," and any other words or phrases that refer to him. After marking these words, use the space below to list everything you learn about David from this psalm.

Read Psalm 51:3-6 again. This time mark every reference to David's sin with a different symbol or color. Then list what you learn about sin from this psalm. (Remember that the facts you list are true not just of David's sin, but of our sin as well.)

Now read the entire psalm one more time. This time mark every reference to God with yet another color or symbol. List below everything you learn about God. Be sure to note what He is able to do for us and with our sin.

### **TAKING IT INWARD**

After you've looked back over the psalm, how sincere and how thorough was David's repentance? How does David's depth of repentance compare with your sincerity and level of repentance when you've sinned? Give these questions some thought and write your answers below.

Was David forgiven and purified from his heinous sins? Look up 1 John 1:9 and write it out below. If you've never memorized this important verse, there's no time like the present!

### **PUTTING INTO PRACTICE**

Your students may ask you, "So after David repented and was forgiven for his sin, did his life go back to the way it was before?" Sadly, it didn't. Forgiveness from God is freely given, but the price tag of sin is very costly. The Bible promises that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us completely and our right relationship with Him will be restored. But the Bible never promises that the consequences of sin will be erased. Sin always has consequences.

If time allows, browse through the remainder of the book of 2 Samuel following the account of David's sin (chapters 11-12). You'll see that for the rest of David's life, both his family and his nation faced crisis after devastating crisis. The luster of success had faded from David's life and kingdom, and now he must deal with the rebellion and murder of a son, famine, war, plague, and many other difficulties.

In your life as a Christian, have you observed this principle to be true? Have you experienced such consequences? Have you watched others experience them? Although God's forgiveness and cleansing is freely given, the scars remain. Your students may need to know about this principle and could benefit from being warned by your experience. Please take a moment to record your thoughts and experiences below.



### **Psalm 51**

**For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.**

- 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 you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.
- 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- 6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret 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, to sustain me.
- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.
- 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- 15 Open my lips, Lord, 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 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.
- 18 May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.