

Forgive Me

Favorite Psalms Part 14

Psalm 51:8-11 3-11-2012

Summary: Satan will try to derail the process by causing you to turn inward after step one (contrition) - pushing you toward moralistic reform, self-justification, or discouragement/self-condemnation. But the right response is to look upward at God’s mercy, love, and compassion. Then seek the two forms of grace needed to repair the two areas damaged by the sin: 1) your relationship with God (forgiveness) and 2) your inner man (restoration). Forgiveness is when God no longer allows the sin to control how He feels about you. He stops seeing you as dirty because He turns His attention away from your sin (which essentially erases your sin as something that matters), and stops banning you from His presence.

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Step 1: Rend your Heart | 2 |
| Step 2: Lift your Eyes..... | 2 |
| <i>Moralistic Reform.....</i> | <i>2</i> |
| <i>Self-Justification.....</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Discouragement (self-punishment, self-condemnation)</i> | <i>3</i> |
| <i>Mercy.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Love.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Compassion.....</i> | <i>4</i> |
| Step 3: Seek His Grace (Forgiveness and Restoration) | 5 |
| <i>Forgiveness is when the offended party decides to no longer allow the sin to control how he feels about the one who sinned.</i> | <i>6</i> |
| 1) Wash Me..... | 7 |
| <i>Lingering filthiness.....</i> | <i>7</i> |
| 2) Erase My Sin | 8 |
| 3) Do Not Ban Me from Your Presence..... | 8 |
| Conclusion | 10 |
| Application Questions: | 10 |

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** Behold, I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. **6** Behold, you desire truth in the inner parts; 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, 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.

Introduction

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

A Christian is someone who routinely confesses his sins to God. What does it look like, exactly, when you do that? If we take the word “confess” from that verse and zoom in with a telephoto lens so that we can see all the various aspects of it, what would we see? In other words, what should our prayers look like when we approach God after we have sinned? If you take that word “confess” and blow it up so you can see all the nuts and bolts of what it looks like, what you will see is Psalm 51. This psalm gives us a beautiful and moving example of the right way to confess your sins to God.

Step 1: Rend your Heart

And we found last week that step 1 is brokenness and contrition.

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.

The word translated **contrite** is the normal Hebrew word for “crushed.” So step 1 is a broken and crushed heart. Or in the words of Joel, a heart that is ripped and shredded.

Joel 2:13 Tear your hearts, not just your clothes

If you feel like you are dirty and repulsive in God’s sight, you may be right. But if you have a broken spirit and crushed, torn up, contrite heart, then you do not have to worry about being dirty in God’s sight. He will not despise a heart like that.

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is crushed and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the crushed.

God opposes the proud. People who think they are just fine - God is against them. But God will not despise the broken - even though they are broken because of their own rebellion and sin against God, And there is a number of ways to tear up your heart and bring about that contrition. In David’s case it came through exposure, consequences, and consideration. His sin was exposed by Nathan. Painful consequences ensued. And David spent time contemplating and thinking about and writing about all the various things that magnified his guilt.

Someone asked me this week about the exposure part, and that conversation highlighted again in my mind the value of making yourself accountable to someone. This is why we ask everyone in leadership at Agape - and I urge every member as well - to make yourself accountable to a brother or sister in the body every week. The best way for me to do that is to fill out a daily accountability sheet with pre-written questions that address my areas of weakness, and send that every Monday to an accountability partner. For you maybe something else will work better. But one thing that for sure will not work is privacy. Nothing makes you more vulnerable to sin than privacy.

Step 2: Lift your Eyes

So step 1 in returning to God is to rend your heart - contrition and humility and sorrow before God. That is step 1, but step 1 does not get you all the way there. As soon as you take step 1, Satan goes to work to keep you from ever reaching step 2. And to do that, he pushes you in one of several different wrong directions.

Wrong Responses

Moralistic Reform

For example, he might push you in the direction of moralistic reform. I just need to clean up my act, try harder, get my act together... Not only does that not work, but even if it did work it would not do anything about the damage done to your relationship to God.

Self-Justification

“Stop being so hard on yourself. Give yourself a break - after all, you’re not as bad as him. And at least you haven’t done this or that. And given the circumstances, who could really blame you? You’re a good person at heart.”

Discouragement (self-punishment, self-condemnation)

And if you know self-reform will not work, and you can see right through the whole self-justification lie, the enemy will pull out one of his most effective tactics of all – he will push you in the direction of self-condemnation or discouragement. Discouragement is Satan’s last chance of keeping you from being restored.

And it *will* keep you from being restored. Make no mistake - discouragement and contrition are totally different things. Contrition is always good; discouragement is always bad. Look up every reference to discouragement in the Bible and you will see it is never presented as a good thing. It is never appropriate, never fitting, whereas contrition and repentance are always fitting and good.

Discouragement comes when your sadness over your sin turns inward instead of upward. You do nothing but beat up on yourself, and then turn around and feel sorry for yourself for being such a wretch. Discouragement is almost always connected to self-pity. That is why discouragement puts you in a grumpy mood and true contrition does not.

And if you think about it, self-focus is the one thing that all three of these wrong responses have in common. Whether it is moralistic reform where you fix yourself, or it is self-justification where you excuse yourself, or discouragement where you condemn yourself or feel sorry for yourself, the fatal mistake when you are broken over your sin is to turn your attention inward instead of upward.

Right Response: Look Up!

Do you need to think about yourself some? Yes. Do you look inward and examine your own heart? Of course - you cannot confess your sin if you are not aware of your sin. But for every one look inward there should be multiple looks upward. Step 1 is rend your heart; step 2 is lift your eyes.

When you are in the pit of the blackness of sin and guilt and regret, it will not help to look anywhere but to the glory of God. Looking at your resolve to or strategies for change will not help. Looking at the “bright side” (at least I didn’t do this...) will not help. The only place to look is at the attributes of God.

Someone might say, “In Psalm 51 David is totally self-focused. He’s constantly talking about himself. “I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. I have sinned and done what is evil. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” That is true - he talks a lot about his own sin. But look how much his attention is on God. Three attributes of God just in verse 1 before any mention at all of his own sin: **mercy ... unfailing love ... great compassion**. He speaks of God as the One who erases sin, who washes away iniquity, who is the standard of righteousness, the supreme Judge, the great Lawgiver, Giver of joy, Crusher of bones, Creator of pure hearts and willing spirits, Renewer of spirits, Savior, worthy of praise, Giver of prosperity, the Source of all blessing, the Object of all true worship.

David is confessing his sin, and he is talking about his own wickedness, and yet his mind is so saturated with thoughts about what God is like that over twenty different attributes of God emerge in his remarks. That does not happen by accident. It takes about a minute and a half to read this entire psalm. When you talk about your sin, do you refer to twenty different attributes of God over the course of ninety seconds? That just does not happen unless the person has spent considerable time with his thoughts focused on God and what God is like.

You get the feeling here with David that none of his sorrow was wasted. Every pang of guilt forced His eyes upward to the only Solution to his problem. He has such a clear view of his guilt, and such a great knowledge of God's nature, that the only thing in the universe bigger than his sin is God's compassion. That is the way you feel when you come to God in genuine repentance. You feel like the second-biggest thing in the whole universe is your sin. And the biggest is God's mercy.

When it feels that way to you, what you are feeling is reality. That is reality. Your sin really is the second-biggest thing in the universe, and it is only when a person realizes that, that true repentance comes. First comes the crushing brokenness of guilt. And it is crushing because there is nothing in the whole universe that can solve the problem. And when you finally get to that point, oh, what a welcome sight is the mercy of God!

Mercy

You *have* to focus your attention on His mercy, because if you put your attention anywhere else it will be nothing but despair. So you come to God and say, "God, my sins outnumber the hairs on my head, but Your mercy outnumbers the stars in the sky!" You cannot over-inflate the magnitude of God's mercy. It is greater than you think. It is greater than you *can* think.

His mercy is not that big a deal when you do not feel a lot of guilt, but when you are crushed to powder by the horror of your sin, and you can actually feel the flames of hell that you deserve, oh, what a beautiful and welcome sight is the Lord's mercy! One of the reasons why it is a good thing that God allowed sin to enter the world is the fact that it is only from the bottom of the pit of guilt and brokenness over sin that we can really see the glittering beauty of the glorious mercy of God.

Love

So David asks for mercy, and then points to two other attributes of God that are the basis for his request.

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your love according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

God, give me an amount of mercy that matches the size of Your love and compassion. That is how much I need. My sin is so galactic in size that my only hope is the greatness of Your vast love and great compassion.

The word for love here is HESED. It refers to that which grants access to God's presence.

Psalm 5:7 But I, by your great HESED, will come into your house

God's HESED is what He removed from Saul in 2 Samuel 7:15. So if you want to know what HESED is – it is the difference between the way God dealt with David and the way He dealt with Saul. God's HESED is the thing that David said is better than life at its best (Ps.63:3). It actually works in opposition to His wrath (Ps.25:6-7), it grants you special access to God (Ps.36:10, 86:5), and it overlooks and protects your life (Ps.6:4).

Compassion

So David says, give me mercy on the basis of Your HESED - and also on the basis of your **great compassion**. His **great compassion** is vast both in quality and quantity. God shows mercy over and over and over as we keep repeating our sins. And the depth of His compassion reaches far beneath even the lowest and most base of our sinful motives and rises far above even the highest, most prolific evils. It is really a beautiful thing that God's forgiveness is a function of His compassion. He is motivated to show mercy because He feels compassion inside His heart for you. Your sin offends, angers, and repulses God; but it also generates real compassion in His heart as He sees the horrible disease with which you have infected yourself. He feels for you. He is displeased with you, and He actually feels sorry for you that you have to endure His displeasure and discipline.

That is something that is so far from the natural, sinful, human heart that we can only learn it from God's example. When someone sins against you, now that person is in trouble with God. God is unhappy with them, you are unhappy with them, they are facing some consequences, and if you are like God, that will cause you to feel sorry for the person, and will generate compassion in your heart for the person. Your spouse sins against you and hurts you, and you think about the fact that they have forfeited a certain amount of grace from God and are now somewhat estranged from God, and that makes you feel sorry for them. That is the heart of God.

So when you sin, do not let your sorrow turn inward. Let it force your gaze upward.

"But if I look upward to see God's attributes, what happens when I see His attributes of holiness and wrath and justice and hatred of sin?"

Sometimes people purposely avoid looking to God because they are afraid that is what they will see. And if your vision of God is clear, that is what you will see. It is exactly what you will see - but it is not all you will see. Time and again in Scripture God presents His wrath as awesome, but His mercy as even greater. If you are in Christ, then God's favor and compassion and pity and tender love for you actually retards and impedes and dissolves His great and glorious anger over your sin. That is why when He revealed Himself to Moses He said, "**The LORD, the LORD, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger...**" For His children, God's grace and mercy are so quick and freely dispensed. They are on a hair trigger. But His wrath and chastisement are sluggish. When God begins walking down the path toward the woodshed, His steps are slow and unhurried, with many loving pauses and frequent stopping and waiting along the path - giving opportunity after opportunity for us to confess and repent. Those who try to imagine there is no woodshed are in a fantasyland. Those who truly know God know that woodshed exists and it is the greatest horror there is in life. But we also know about and treasure that reluctant shuffling of His feet on the way to the woodshed. And it is on that attribute that we fix our gaze when we are crushed with sorrow over sin.

So think long and hard about God. The Santa Claus image of God will not cut it. Neither will the irritated, grumpy father image. Both those images ignore half the story. God's holiness is as vast as the heavens, and His compassion is like the great deep. "How can I reconcile the two? How can I think of Him as being holy and awesome and wrathful and dangerous and also merciful and compassionate and desirable?" I'll tell you one thing - it is not going to happen after sixty seconds of meditation.

I don't know about you, but I can tell you that the biggest problem in my life is not enough focus on God. Not enough understanding of what He is like. Not enough appreciation of His glory. Not enough fellowship with Him. Not enough enjoyment of His presence. Everything that is bad about me would be better if more of my attention was on God.

Step 3: Seek His Grace (Forgiveness and Restoration)

Two Areas of Damage

OK, so we have done step 1 and looked inward, we have done step 2 and looked upward, now what? What is it exactly that we are seeking from God? What kind of grace are we asking for? I think if you look at all the requests David makes in this psalm, they all boil down to two basic things. There were two things that were damaged by David's sin that need to be repaired.

And that is how it is with our sin too. When we sin against God, it is like setting off a bomb that brings devastation on two things. It damages our relationship with God. It damages our inner man. And when I ask God to repair the damage I have done to my inner man (my heart and mind and attitudes and desires, etc.) - we could put all that under the heading: "Restore me." "God, I have set off this bomb, wreaked devastation on my inner man, and only You can restore me to factory specs.

And do not just repair the damage in my inner man - also repair the damage done to our relationship. Do not just restore me; also forgive me."

I believe all of David's requests in Psalm 51 fall into those two categories. So what I would like to do today is look at all his requests that have to do with forgiveness, and then next week look at all the requests that have to do with restoration. But I think to start with I should probably take a minute to defend this definition of forgiveness, because I think most people probably do not think of forgiveness in those terms.

What is Forgiveness?

Very often people make the mistake of thinking forgiveness is the removal of penalty. People think that "God, forgive me" means exactly the same thing as "God, don't punish me." But that is a mistake. Mercy and forgiveness are two different things. A child can disobey his father, and the father can forgive his son, but still keep the penalty in place. God forgave David, but the baby still died. So it is possible to have forgiveness without the removal of penalty.

And conversely, it is possible to have the removal of penalty without forgiveness. If a drunk driver ran over your child, a judge could waive the penalty. The governor could pardon that person so he does not have to go to jail. They could remove the penalty, but they could not forgive him. Only you could forgive him. Only the person who is upset with him can forgive him. And if you do forgive him, that has no impact on whether he goes to jail or not, since you do not control that.

Now, there is a close relationship between forgiveness and removal of punishment - especially when the person you offended also happens to also be the Judge. If part of the reason for the punishment is the wrath of the One who was offended, then when the relationship is restored and the wrath is done away with, very often the penalty will also be removed. That is why forgiveness of sins allows us to be exempted from going to hell. That penalty of hell is waived, not because that is the definition of forgiveness - it isn't. The penalty of hell is waived because hell is where you go to experience the wrath of God, and when God forgives you, that means you have peace with God and you are no longer the object of His wrath.

So forgiveness is the restoration of the closeness of an undisturbed relationship with God, and if God then exempts you from punishment, that is not forgiveness - it is the result of forgiveness. Forgiveness puts you into a position to be able to request mercy and the waiving of penalty. Forgiveness is a matter of the heart.

Matthew 18:35 This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

If forgiveness were just a matter of withholding punishment, it would not be a function of the heart - just the will. Forgiveness has to do with the way you feel toward the person, and your attitude toward them. In Mark 11:25 forgiveness is the opposite of holding something against someone (also Col.3:13). So from everything I have studied in Scripture, this is how I would define biblical forgiveness:

Forgiveness is when the offended party decides to no longer allow the sin to control how he feels about the one who sinned.

Imagine someone in this church loses his temper and just lets loose on you verbally - cusses you out in front of a bunch of people. That sin now affects how you think about that person and how you feel toward him. You see him through the lens of that sin. He comes walking down the hall, and what you see is the guy who yelled at you. And as a result, you are alienated from each other. The relationship is disrupted by the sin. Forgiveness brings that disruption to an end. "I forgive you" means "I will no longer allow that sin to control the way I feel about you."

A child lies to his father. The father finds out, and as a punishment, the child is grounded for a week. But beyond that, the father is hurt and angered and disappointed, and the way he feels toward

his child is governed mainly by the fact that the child lied. Later the child comes and says, “Dad, I’m so sorry I lied. Will you please forgive me?” And the father’s heart is touched, and he feels a flood of warmth and forgiveness and compassion, and he says, “Yes, of course I forgive you!” And now when he thinks about his son, he does not think about the lie anymore. He has put that out of his mind so that sin does not control how the father feels anymore. Now, the child may still be grounded. The father needs to teach the child, and so maybe the punishment stays in place, but after that moment when the father forgave the child, now there is no estrangement. There is nothing between them. The child does not have to hang his head around dad anymore. He can talk to his dad about whatever is on his mind - even joke around - that sin is no longer disturbing the relationship.

Now, it is possible for the sin to continue to disturb the relationship even after forgiveness, if the forgiven person still dwells on his own guilt. Some people will not receive forgiveness. So the sinner can allow his own sin to disrupt the relationship even after it is forgiven, but forgiveness means the offended party does not allow the sin to cause any disruption from his side, and does not desire the relationship to continue to be disrupted.

When you sin, that sin has the power to banish you from closeness with whomever you sinned against. And forgiveness takes away that power. After you are forgiven, that sin no longer has the power to banish you from drawing near and enjoying relational closeness.

So with all that in mind, now I hope you can see that all David’s requests in Psalm 51 really boil down to two things - restore me and forgive me. Repair what was damaged in my inner man, and repair what was damaged in my relationship with You. In verses 2-7 he says “wash me.” The washing metaphor means, “Make it so I’m no longer dirty and ugly and repulsive in Your sight,” which is another way of saying, “Repair what was damaged in our relationship.” In other words, “Forgive me.”

Then the next section in the psalm is verses 8-12. And those verses alternate between David saying, “Restore me, forgive me, restore me, forgive me, restore me.” So today we will look at the odd numbered verses, which are all about forgiveness, then next time we will plan on looking at the others.

If we put verses 7, 9, and 11 together we will have a picture of the anatomy of forgiveness.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

1) Wash Me

Cleansing we looked at last week. Sin contaminates. It is filthy to think of, filthy to talk about, filthy to desire, filthy to do. It is utterly detestable and offensive to God. So for God to wash David means to remove that which causes David to be disgusting in God’s eyes. But how? If the thing that makes David disgusting in God’s eyes is the fact that David had committed this sin, what can God do to change that?

Lingering filthiness

He has to do something, right? David is asking God to do something that changes the current situation. I find that interesting because this sin took place more than nine months prior. The baby had already been born when Nathan comes. David is asking for cleansing months after the sin.

That sounds kind of shocking to us, because we have memories that fade. We sin, we put it out of our minds, and after a period of victory, there is no sense of lingering filthiness. In fact we will sometimes even look forward to the passing of a few days so we will not feel the intensity of the guilt as much. But the passing of a few days (or a few decades) does nothing about our past sin – nothing at all. The only thing that happens is our memories fade. Our guilt feelings fade away, but the passing of time does nothing about actual guilt. If I rob a bank then I am still guilty of robbing that bank years later whether I feel guilty or not. Nor does the passing of time change how God feels. But God does

not have a fading memory. Time has no effect on God at all - none. It does not affect His memory or His emotions. In God's memory, and in His affections and the way He feels, there is no difference between five seconds ago and five decades ago.

So the only thing that can repair my broken relationship with God - the only thing that can fix the problem of me being dirty and disgusting in His sight, is if God does something about my guilt. But what?

2) Erase My Sin

9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

God can blot it out. To "blot" means to dab something with a rag. When the people in ancient times wanted to erase something they had written, they would dab the ink with a cloth and try to wipe it off. So the modern day word for that would be "erase." Or even a little more modern - "delete." So David is saying, "God, repair the rift in our relationship by erasing my sin. Hit 'delete'." In fact the word in verse 7 translated **cleans** is literally "to un-sin" or "de-sin."¹ De-sin me with hyssop.

But what does that mean? How does God erase our sin? Is David asking God to go back in time and change the past so David does not actually commit the sin? No. If you want to know what David means, take a look at the parallelism of verse 9.

9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Those are the same thing. The way God erases our sin is not by going back in time and undoing what we did. He erases it by hiding His face from it. He stops looking at it. The sin is still there; God just stops looking at it. He erases it - not from history, but from His thoughts. He stops letting that sin control the way He feels about you, and instead He starts letting His mercy and love start controlling the way He feels about you.

"But wait a minute. Maybe God has turned His attention away from it, but I can still remember it."

So what? If you can remember your sin and your heart is still ugly and repulsive in your eyes, that is only a problem if your opinion is what matters, and it isn't. Self-condemnation is only a problem if your judgment counts, and it doesn't. The **ONLY** thing that matters about anything is what God thinks. If God is not looking at something, that thing does not matter at all. If God is not looking at it, it might as well not exist. So even though the reality of the sin still exists in history, for all important purposes, the moment God turns His gaze away from it, it does not exist.

3) Do Not Ban Me from Your Presence

So what is forgiveness? What is David asking for? Cleansing and erasing. Or more specifically, cleansing by means of erasing. As soon as God erases my sin from his attention by turning His eyes away from it, I am no longer dirty or repulsive in His sight. Now look down at verse 11 and you will see the third aspect of forgiveness.

11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

There he describes the same thing from two different perspectives. "**Cast me from your presence**" – that is me being sent away from Him. "**Take your Holy Spirit**" – that is Him withdrawing from me. Two different ways of describing separation from the presence of God.

His presence comes to us through His Spirit. When God allows a person to draw near Him and enjoy fellowship with Him, He does so by His Spirit.

Psalm 139:7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

¹ WBC, Ps.51:9.

Being separated from the Spirit is the same as being distanced from God's presence, and there is nothing worse that could possibly happen to you. That is the worst of all consequences of sin.

If you were here when we did our study on loving God, you may remember our study of the meaning of the presence of God. When Scripture speaks of God's presence, it does not mean God exists in a certain place. God exists everywhere, but His presence is not everywhere. The term "omnipresent" is actually a bit of a misnomer. The word "presence" in the Hebrew is the word "face", and it refers to God turning His face toward you in a favorable way. Withdrawing His presence means He turns His face away from you - and that is the worst thing that can possibly happen to you. If He turns His face away altogether, you are in hell.

Now verse 11 creates a lot of consternation for a lot of Christians. Some people do not even like to sing that worship song from Psalm 51 because of that line. Does God cast believers away from His presence? Does He actually remove the Holy Spirit² from His children? Or is David talking about things that are impossibilities and absurdities? No - removal of the Holy Spirit is very real. David had firsthand knowledge of the Holy Spirit being taken away from someone.

1 Samuel 16:14 Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul

1 Samuel 18:12 Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had left Saul.

1 Samuel 28:15 Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "... God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me"

Saul no longer had access to guidance from God, empowerment from God, or fellowship with God, and in 2 Samuel 7:15 it says God took His love away from Saul. And the train wreck that ensued in Saul's life stands as one of the greatest tragedies in all of God's Word.

Now, we all understand that God never withdraws His Spirit completely from a believer. As long as you are a believer you have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside you. However our experience of the Holy Spirit comes in degrees. It is not an all-or-nothing thing. That is clear in Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit...

He is obviously speaking to Christians, and he constantly prays that God will give them the Holy Spirit. Every Christian already has the Holy Spirit, but we experience the Him in varying degrees. Paul prayed for that experience to increase because he knew that it can go up and down. So will God ever take His Spirit from you? Yes - not completely as long as you are a believer, but in degrees, yes. Every time we sin we forfeit grace that could be ours, and we provoke God to withdraw His Spirit from us and push us away from His presence. And in the case of Saul, I believe there was total apostasy and the Spirit left Him altogether, because he came to the point where he was not even a believer. So given what David had witnessed with the train wreck of Saul, this is quite a request he is making here - **Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.** So when David asks God to forgive him, what is he asking for specifically?

Cleanse me – do not let me be ugly in Your sight anymore. Un-sin me. De-sin my past in Your memory and turn Your attention away from my sin. Do not allow my sin to be the determining factor in how you feel about me any longer. Do not ban me from Your presence. Do not distance me from Your favor. Turn Your face toward me, not away from me.

All that is what we are asking for when we say, "God, forgive me." But forgiveness is only one aspect of grace that we seek. Forgiveness repairs the damage done to our relationship with God - the

² The phrase "Holy Spirit" is very rare in the Old Testament. This is the first time it appears in the Bible, and after this you see it twice in Isaiah, and that is it for the Old Testament.

other form of grace we seek is restoration. Repair the damage I have done to my heart. That is where we will plan on picking it up next time.

Conclusion

But for now, I would like to close our time with two songs that express the things we have been learning. Some of you noticed when I was doing the series on corporate worship, I did not spend much time on repentance and contrition as an act of corporate worship. And it is good that you noticed that because repentance really is an important aspect of worship. So let's close our time today with two songs of repentance. The first one goes with last week's sermon - "My eyes are dry." The other song comes from today's text - "Create in Me."

Benediction: Ephesians 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins

Application Questions:

- 1) Of the three wrong responses to your sorrow (moralistic reform, self-justification, and discouragement/self-condemnation), which tends to be the greatest problem for you?
- 2) Can you think of any change in your routine that could increase and deepen your understanding of God's attributes?
- 3) God does allow our sin to make us displeasing in His sight, and, in response to our requests, He stops looking at those sins so that we are pleasing in His sight. Which part of that is hardest for you to believe?