

Take a Moment

1. When you are dealing with the often difficult realities of life in this fallen world, what are the “if onlys” that tend to flood into your head?
2. Are there places where you tend to question whether God has given you what you need to do what he has called for you to do? What would change in your life if you really believed in the completeness and sufficiency of his provision for you?

10 | Something Bigger

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

PSALM 51:13

I have a confession to make. My confession is that I think I went for years as a Christian and didn't really understand confession. I think there's a subtle, yet significant, difference between the admission of wrong and true heart confession. Let me give you an example. Let's just say (and you know this would never happen in my marriage) that in a moment of busyness and irritation, I speak unkindly to my wife. And let's imagine that a friend overhears what I've said and comes to me and confronts me with this wrong. Now I've been caught. He heard my words; there's no way of escaping it. And so with him watching and Luella listening, I say, "You're right; I shouldn't have spoken that way. Luella, please forgive me." Now this doesn't sound so bad on the surface, but it bears examining.

I've admitted that what I said was wrong, and that's a good thing, but there are two potential flaws in this confession. The first is it could be that the only reason I admitted to this wrong was that I was caught red-handed. I may not have been grieved at all by what I'd said. I may have confessed simply because I was in trouble. The second flaw could be that the confession was only a confession of the behavior (and that's a good thing as far as it goes) but not a confession from the heart that's behind the behavior. Here's the point. It's only when I'm grieved by my sin and acknowledge that this sin is heart-deep that my confession will be followed by the turning of repentance. You see, I speak unkindly to my wife not because my schedule is busy or because she's less than perfect, but because there are things that I want (such as success, control, approval) and when she gets in the way of these things, I'm immediately irritated.

When David, in Psalm 51, prays for a pure heart and a steadfast

spirit (vv. 10–11), he's acknowledging that his struggle with sin runs deeper than just behavior. He's not only confessing to the physical acts of adultery and murder, but also to the reality of a heart that's corrupt; that is, it loves personal pleasure more than it loves the Lord. When he talks of God's desire for a truthful and wise heart (v. 6), he's confessing to a heart that's craved what's impure and that's loved what's foolish.

What results when you confess because you're deeply grieved by what you've done? What happens when you acknowledge that your physical sin is caused by a heart that's run amuck? The result is that you turn, really turn. What do I mean? I mean that you don't just turn away from the physical sin pattern, but your heart turns to God in new and deeper ways. What does this mean? It means that rather than being driven by the craving for the delivery of your little kingdom desires by the people and circumstances around you, your heart begins to be motivated by big kingdom purposes. True confession always results in living for something bigger.

And so David, once obsessed with the temporary and impure pleasures of his claustrophobic little kingdom of one, now becomes excited with and engaged in the transcendent purposes of God's big-sky kingdom. So he says:

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,
O God, God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise. (vv. 13–15)

A truly broken and contrite heart will always turn to live for something bigger. Is your confession leading you there?

Take a Moment

1. Do the things you confess tend to be limited to wrong words and wrong actions, or do you confess to the wrong thoughts and desires that lie behind the behavior or words?
2. Does your confession result in an excitement with living for something bigger than your own wants, needs, and feelings?

she had once greeted with surprised gratitude were now the sources of major anxiety. The things that had once seemed out of place in her life had become the very things that defined her life. And so she lived with a low-register drone of fear through every day.

But there was something else that had changed. The thing that was meant to define her life, and that once did, no longer defined her. There had been a time when everything in her life was defined and evaluated by her relationship with God. There was a time when she greeted God's grace with a surprised gratefulness. She'd been quite aware of her sin and deeply appreciative of the forgiveness that she'd been given. She'd once carried a lively sense of privilege in having been given an acceptance with God that she could have never earned or deserved. There was a time when she would greet each day wondering what she would have done if God hadn't made himself known to her, hadn't accepted her in his family, and hadn't graced her with his presence.

But now these thoughts were no longer center stage. No longer would she identify herself as a sinner, rescued by grace. No longer did she get her meaning, purpose, and sense of well-being from the Lord. Now she was more concerned about losing her mansion than being cast out of God's house. Now she was more concerned about losing her husband than about God removing his Spirit from her. That once heartfelt and wholesome question, "Where would I be without the Lord?" had been replaced by the question of how she'd cope with the loss of any one item in her personal catalog of material things.

But I didn't think long about David or about my friend, because my mind turned to me. What is the thing in the world for which I'm the most thankful? The loss of what thing do I fear the most? The existence of what in my life gives me meaning, purpose, and that inner sense of well-being?

Take a Moment

1. Be honest: what is it that brings the most fear into your heart?
2. What things in your life are you convinced that you cannot live without? Pray for a heart that is so fully satisfied with God that you are able to be content with what he has placed in your life.

33 | Building the Walls

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.

PSALM 51:18

It's always the fruit of true repentance and it's captured in these words: "Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem." When my heart turns from sin, it turns to concern for what God wants and what others need. In repentance, my heart turns from the love-of-self-driven purposes of my kingdom of one to the transcendent purposes of God. And what is God's purpose? He calls me to love him above all else and to love my neighbor as myself. What does this have to do with praying that God would "build the walls of Jerusalem"? Everything!

David's sin wasn't just a sin of the eyes and the body. No, all the wrong that David did was rooted in the sinful thoughts and desires of his heart. David allowed himself to think things about Bathsheba that he should never have thought, and he allowed himself to crave what didn't belong to him. Then he permitted himself to plan what he should never have planned. With a heart now captured, David committed adultery and murder.

The war of sin is not first a war of the body. The battleground on which the war of sin rages is the heart. There's a war of thought and desire that rages in every situation and relationship of daily life. It's a war between the desires of God and the desires of the sinful nature. So, is true repentance just about letting go of wrong behavior? No; true repentance begins with the heart. In true repentance I confess to my selfishness. I confess that my problem isn't just that I do bad things, but that I do bad things because I'd rather have what I want than what God has willed for me. What does this have to do with building the walls of Jerusalem? Everything!

So, it's not only that the battle of sin is a matter of the heart; because it's a battle of the heart, all sin is against God. Sin is rooted in worshipping the creation more than I worship the Creator. Sin is about loving myself more than I love God. Sin is about desiring to be sovereign and constructing my own kingdom rather than finding joy in the greater purposes of the kingdom of God. Sin is about forgetting God and living as if I were at the center of the universe. In my sin I exchange God's holy will for my selfish desire.

But because I've replaced God's will for what I want, in my sin I not only don't love God, I don't love my neighbor either. David didn't love Bathsheba; he wanted to possess her. His lack of love is powerfully portrayed in the fact that he murdered her husband! The very fact that sin is about self-focus and self-love guarantees the fact that I'll not love you the way that I should. Here's the principle: if you and I are ever going to keep the second great commandment, we must first keep the first great commandment. It's only when I love God above all else that I'm free then to love my neighbor as myself. Now, what does this have to do with building the walls of Jerusalem? Everything! Let me explain.

Having confessed his sin and having rested in God's forgiveness, David's heart now turns toward the Lord and toward his neighbor. Jerusalem was the epicenter of the national and spiritual life of the people of God. It was the City of God, the place where the great temple of Solomon would be built. For Zion (Jerusalem) to prosper meant that God's blessings of grace were on his people. You see, in this prayer, David is no longer thinking of himself. No, he's praying that the riches of God's grace would be on the lives of all those around him.

But there's more. When he asks for the walls to be built, it's very clear that David is praying for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. You know that because he says (in v. 19), "Then you will delight in right sacrifices." Rather than his mind being dominated by his own purposes, his heart now goes to the purposes of God's kingdom. He's praying that God would receive the worship he deserves and the glory that's due his name. No longer is David's vision dominated by a woman he wants. No, now he finds joy in envisioning hundreds and thousands of people making their pilgrim-

age to Zion to worship the One who alone is worthy of the adoration of their hearts.

Here's real personal transformation: the man once captured by dark and evil lust is now filled with love for others and a deep excitement with the glory of God. Only grace can create such a fundamental transformation.

Take a Moment

1. Where in your life does a desire for what God wants functionally need to replace a desire for what you want?
2. How is God giving you specific opportunities to be part of what he is doing in your family, neighborhood, community, church, and world? How are you responding to God's call?

whiter than snow

ter than we actually were. We don't have to be paralyzed by remorse and regret. We don't have to distract ourselves with busyness or drug ourselves with substances. Isn't it wonderful that we can stare our deepest, darkest failures in the face and be unafraid? Isn't it comforting that we can honestly face our most regretful moments and not be devastated? Isn't it amazing that we can confess that we really are sinners and be neither fearful nor depressed?

Isn't it wonderful that we can do all of these things because, like David, we have learned that our hope in life is not in the purity of our character or the perfection of our performance. We can face that we are sinners and rest because we know that God really does exist and that he is a God of:

Mercy,
Steadfast love,
Abundant Mercy
Because he is, there is hope—hope of forgiveness and
new beginnings.

Yes, we really can fully acknowledge our sin and failure and yet be unafraid.

Take a Moment

1. Are there places where your living still portrays an unhealthy fear of God's anger, judgment, and rejection? Do you ever doubt that he could love a person like you?
2. Is there a place in your life where you are still holding on to regret even though God has forgiven you and does not respond to you based on your past performance?

16 | The Gospel of Prosperity

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.

PSALM 51:18

It is an interesting way to conclude a prayer of humble confession:

In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar. (Psalm 51:18–19 NIV)

Yes, this prayer of confession really does end with a prayer for prosperity. David is so bold as to not only ask God for mercy, but also to ask God that he would bless him, and not only him but all of Israel! You may think, "Hasn't this man learned his lesson? After all of this, hasn't he learned what is really important?" But we need to look at this final piece of David's prayer again and this time more closely.

What David is requesting is completely different from the modern "health and wealth gospel" prayers for prosperity. Those prayers for prosperity have one fatal flaw in them. They are prayers for prosperity for the purpose of the delight of the person praying the prayer. Not so with David. He has lived a little, self-focused life. He has now been caught up in the call to live large, that is, for a kingdom greater than his own. This prayer is evidence that he's learned the lesson of the danger of living for his own delight. This prayer for prosperity is the result of a radically changed heart.

Why does David pray for prosperity? For one reason, he asks it for the glory and delight of the Lord. When God prospers people who

are no longer living for their own little kingdoms but are living for his, the result is the furtherance of his kingdom purposes on earth, which results in his glory. Give wisdom to a man who is living for God's kingdom and he'll use that wisdom to advance God's kingdom. Give money to a man who loves God's kingdom and he'll look for ways to invest that money in kingdom causes. Give a house to a person who seeks God's kingdom and his house will be a place of hospitality, love, and ministry. David prays for prosperity, not for his glory but for the glory of the Lord to whom his heart has now turned.

But there's more. When people are blessed by the Lord they turn to him in humble, sacrificial worship. It's in those moments when I am cogently aware of God's forgiveness and gratefully aware of his undeserved blessing that I willingly offer to him what I would have once held to tightly. God delights in the sacrifices of his people, because when they are worshiping him in this way, they are doing the thing for which they were created. When I've quit looking for satisfaction in the created world and begin to find my satisfaction in the Lord, then I'm willing to hold loosely to the things that once held me. It's here that my delight is the Lord's delight.

So is it right to pray for prosperity? It is and you should, not for the sake of your kingdom, but for the success of his. Not for the sake of your delight, but for his. You see, when God prospers people who are living for him, they use that blessing to serve him all the more, and for this he gets glory and in this he finds great delight.

Take a Moment

1. What kind of blessing do you crave? What are the "good things" that you wish God would give you? If you had your way, how would God prosper you?
2. How *do* you hold the blessings God gives you? How do you tend to use the things that he has entrusted to your care?