

Whiter than Snow Life Group and Personal devotional material

In preparation for our series 'Whiter than Snow', the following is a helpful overview of Psalm 51 for personal study:

Psalm 51 is the way God's people think and feel about the horrors of their own sin. This is a psalm about how we be crushed for our sin well.

David's Responses to His Sin

1. He Turns to God

First, he turns to his only hope, the mercy and love of God. Verse 1: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." Three times: "Have mercy," "according to your steadfast love," and "according to your abundant mercy." This is what God had promised in Exodus 34:6-7 "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty."

David knew that there were guilty who would not be forgiven. And there were guilty who by some mysterious work of redemption would not be counted as guilty, but would be forgiven. Psalm 51 is his way of laying hold on that mystery of mercy.

We know more of the mystery of this redemption than David did. We know Christ. But we lay hold of the mercy in the same way he did. The first thing he does is turn helpless to the mercy and love of God. *Today that means turning helpless to Christ.*

2. He Prays for Cleansing

Second, he prays for cleansing from his sin. Verse 2: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Verse 7: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Hyssop was the branch used by the priests to sprinkle blood on a house that had a disease in it to declare it clean Leviticus 14:51

David is crying out to God as his ultimate priest that he would forgive him and count him clean from his sin.

1 John 1:7-9 It is fitting that Christians *ask* God to do this. Christ has purchased our forgiveness. He has paid the full price for it. That does not replace our asking. It is the basis for our asking. It is the reason we are confident that the answer will be yes. So first David looks helplessly to the mercy of God. And second he prays that, in this mercy, God would forgive him and make him clean.

3. He Confesses the Seriousness of His Sin

Third, David confesses at least five ways that his sin is extremely serious.

HE SAYS THAT HE CAN'T GET THE SIN OUT OF HIS MIND.

It is blazoned on his conscience. Verse 3: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Ever before him. The tape keeps playing. And he can't stop it.

HE SAYS THAT THE EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF HIS SIN IS THAT IT IS ONLY AGAINST GOD.

Nathan had said David despised God and scorned his word. So David says in verse 4: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." This doesn't mean Bathsheba and Uriah and the baby weren't hurt. It means that what makes sin to be sin is that it is against God. Hurting man is bad. It is horribly bad. But that's not the horror of sin. Sin is an attack on God — a belittling of God. David admits this in striking terms: "Against you, you only, have I sinned."

DAVID VINDICATES GOD, NOT HIMSELF.

There is no self-justification. No defense. No escape. Verse 4: "so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." God is justified. God is blameless. If God casts David into hell, God will be innocent. This is radical God-centered repentance. This is

the way saved people think and feel. God would be just to damn me. And that I am still breathing is sheer mercy. And that I am forgiven is sheer blood-bought mercy. David vindicates the righteousness of God, not himself.

DAVID INTENSIFIES HIS GUILT BY DRAWING ATTENTION TO HIS INBORN CORRUPTION.

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

Some people use their inborn or inbred corruption to diminish their personal guilt. David does the opposite. For him the fact that he committed adultery and murdered and lied are expressions of something worse: He is by nature that way. If God does not rescue him, he will do more and more evil.

DAVID ADMITS HE SINNED NOT JUST AGAINST EXTERNAL LAW BUT AGAINST GOD'S MERCIFUL LIGHT IN HIS HEART.

Verse 6: "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart." God had been his teacher. God had made him wise. David had done so many wise things. And then sin got the upper hand. And, for David, this made it all the worse. "I have been blessed with so much knowledge and so much wisdom. Oh, how deep must be my depravity that it could sin against so much light."

So in those five ways at least David joins the prophet Nathan and God in condemning his sin and confessing the depths of his corruption.

4. He Pleads for Renewal

Finally, after turning helpless to God's mercy, and then praying for forgiveness and cleansing, and then confessing the depth and greatness of his sin and corruption, David pleads for more than forgiveness. He pleads for renewal. He is passionately committed to being changed by God. He pours out his heart for this change in at least six ways. **Forgiven**

people are committed to being changed by God. The adulterer, the murderer, the liar, the child molester hate what they were and set their faces like flint to be changed by God.

HE PRAYS THAT GOD WOULD CONFIRM TO HIM HIS ELECTION.

Verse 11: “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.” I know some say that Christians who are elect and secure in the sovereign grace of God should not pray like that because it implies you can lose your salvation. I don’t think so.

When David or I pray, “Don’t cast me away, and don’t take your Spirit from me,” we mean: Don’t treat me as one who is not chosen. Don’t let me prove to be like one of those in Hebrews 6 who have only tasted the Holy Spirit. Don’t let me fall away and show that I was only drawn by the Spirit and not held by the Spirit. Confirm to me, O God, that I am your child and will never fall away.

HE PRAYS FOR A HEART AND A SPIRIT THAT ARE NEW AND RIGHT AND FIRM.

Psalm 51:10 “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me”. The “right spirit” here is the established, firm, unwavering spirit. He wants to be done with the kind of instability that he has just experienced.

HE PRAYS FOR THE JOY OF GOD’S SALVATION AND FOR A SPIRIT THAT IS JOYFULLY WILLING TO FOLLOW GOD’S WORD AND BE GENEROUS WITH PEOPLE RATHER THAN EXPLOITING PEOPLE.

Verse 8: “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.” Verse 12: “Restore to me the joy of *your* salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

NOTE: Sexual Sin: Symptom, Not Disease

Is it not astonishing that nowhere in this Psalm does he pray directly about sex? It all started with sex, leading to deceit, leading to murder. Or did it? I don’t think so. Sigmund Freud may

think that all our hang-ups start with sex. But David (speaking for God) does not see things that way. Why isn't he crying out for sexual restraint? Why isn't he praying for men to hold him accountable? Why isn't he praying for protected eyes and sex-free thoughts? The reason is that he knows that sexual sin is a symptom, not the disease. People give way to sexual sin because they don't have the fullness of joy and gladness in Christ. Their spirits are not steadfast and firm and established. They waver. They are enticed, and they give way because God does not have the place in our feelings and thoughts that he should.

David knew this about himself. It's true about us too. David is showing us, by the way he prays, what the real need is for those who sin sexually. Not a word in this psalm about sex. Instead: "Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. . . . Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing, firm, established spirit." This is profound wisdom for us.

He asked God to bring his joy to the overflow of praise.

Verse 15: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise." Praise is what joy in God does when obstacles are taken out of the way. That is what he is praying for: O God, overcome everything in my life that keeps my heart dull and my mouth shut when they ought to be praising. Make my joy irrepressible.

He asks that the upshot of all this will be a life of effective evangelism.

Verse 13: "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." David is not content to be forgiven. He is not content to be clean. He is not content to be elect. He is not content to have a right spirit. He is not content to be joyful in God by himself. He will not be content until his broken life serves the healing of others. "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." Which brings us to the last point.

He discovered that God has crushed him in love, and that a broken and contrite heart is the mark of all God's children.

Verse 17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." This is foundational to everything. Being a Christian means being broken and contrite. Don't make the mistake of thinking you get beyond this in this life. It marks the life of God's happy children till they die. We are broken and contrite all the way home — unless sin gets the proud upper hand. Being broken and contrite is not against joy and praise and witness. It's the flavour of Christian joy and praise and witness.

Week 1: Background to Psalm 51

(Modified content from A Broken and Contrite Heart God Will Not Despise Resource by John Piper)

Life Group Study

Psalm 51 is one of the few psalms that are pinpointed as to their historical origin. The heading of the psalm goes like this: "To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba

Read **2 Samuel 11:1-5**

Points to ponder:

1. Was David in the wrong place at the wrong time?
2. Did David know that Bathsheba was a married lady when he summoned her?
3. Read Proverbs 6:20-29 and Proverbs 7. What are wise guidelines when it comes to facing and resisting temptation?
4. Imagine you are Bathsheba. How would you have felt when summoned by King David?...When discovered you are pregnant?
5. In this instance did Bathsheba have a role to play in David's sin?

Read **2 Samuel 11: 6- 27** David tried to cover his sin by bringing Bathsheba's husband Uriah home from battle so Uriah could lie with her and think it was his baby. Uriah was too noble to go in to his wife while his comrades were in battle. So David arranged to have him killed so that he could quickly marry Bathsheba and cover the sin that way.

- Can you think of a time when you have tried to cover over a sin in your life?
- Discuss Numbers 32:23b “You may be sure that your sin will find you out.” Have you found this to be true in your life? Do you feel some people seem to ‘get away with murder?’ (Jeremiah 12:1)

In one of the most understated sentences of the Bible, 2 Samuel 11 ends with these words:

“The thing that David had done displeased the Lord”.

Read **2 Samuel 12:1-14**

So God sent the prophet Nathan to David with a parable that entices David to pronounce his own condemnation. Then Nathan says, “You are the man!” and asks, “Why have you despised the word of the Lord?” David breaks and confesses, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Then Nathan says, astonishingly, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die”

“The Lord Has Put Away Your Sin” 2 Samuel 12:13

Uriah is dead. Bathsheba is raped. The baby will die. And Nathan says, “The Lord has put away your sin.” Just like that? David committed adultery. He ordered murder. He lied. He “despised the word of the Lord.” He “scorned God.” And the Lord “put away [his] sin”

- Psalm 7:1 God is a righteous judge. In the light of verse 13, do you feel that God is just in this judgement?
- Bearing in mind that this is the old testament, before the coming of Jesus, how is it possible that God is able to take away or cover over David’s pretty sizeable sin?

God’s Outrageous “Passing Over”

Read Romans 3:25-26 This is one of the most important sentences in the Bible for understanding how Christ relates to the Psalms — and to the Old Testament in general:

God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. In other words, the outrage that we feel when God seems to simply pass over David's sin would be good outrage if God were simply sweeping David's sin under the rug. He is not. God sees from the time of David down the centuries to the death of his Son, Jesus Christ, who would die in David's place, so that David's faith in God's mercy and God's future redeeming work unites David with Christ. And in God's all-knowing mind, David's sins are counted as Christ's sins and Christ's righteousness is counted as his righteousness, and God justly passes over David's sin. The death of the Son of God is outrageous enough, and the glory of God that it upholds is great enough, that God is vindicated in passing over David's adultery and murder and lying.

For further personal contemplation:

READ: I SAMUEL 13:13-14 (God's words to Samuel about choosing David)

READ: PSALM 78:72

QUESTION: How is it that David drifted so far?

Drift definition: to move slowly, especially as a result of outside forces, with no control over direction

What causes drift?

Can you identify 'outside forces' in your life that contribute to drift?

What are some signs for you that you have drifted?

What can you do to guard against drift? If you identify drift in your heart, what can you do to correct it?

Week 2: Understanding SIN

Recommend life group members use these selected chapters from the book Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp throughout this week in personal devotions.

Devotional 1 Transgressions, iniquity and sin

Chapter 29: The Terrible trinity (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” Psalm 51:1-2

Other Scriptures: Genesis 6:5, Romans 1:25 and 3:12, Luke 6:43-45; Mark 7:20-23

Devotional 2 Born a sinner

Chapter 24: Natal Trauma (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“...in sin did my mother conceive me.” Psalm 51:5

Devotional 3 Slaves to Sin

Chapter 11: Romans 7 (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do- this I keep on doing.” Romans 7: 18-19

Devotional 4 The Blame Game

Chapter 17 Somebody Else (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“...so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.” Psalm 51:4

Devotional 5 Sin is all about Foolishness

Chapter 38 Wisdom is a Person (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“You teach me wisdom in the secret heart.” Psalm 51: 6

Week 3 Consequences of sin

Life Group Study Guide exploring some of the consequences of unconfessed sin in our lives (Modified from Don Stewart: What are some of the effects of Sin on the life of the Believer?)

By sinning, Adam and Eve severed their relationship with God. So too our sin separates us from God. Isaiah 59:2

1. Robs us of our Joy

The Bible says that God wants our joy to be full. 1 John 1:4

Joy is a deep satisfaction that stems from knowing the channel is open between us and God. We are in the place that He approves. It is an inner happiness not dependent upon outside circumstances. Sin will rob us of that joy.

After his sin of murder and adultery David asked the Lord for restoration of his joy. Ps 51:12

2. Robs us of our PEACE

The believer is to be characterized by an inner calm and contentment. Col 3:15

Sin causes anguish of the heart - which is complete loss of peace.

Ps 32: 3-4 When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer.

3. Hinders our fellowship with God

1 John 1:3, 6

Fellowship can be defined as consciousness that everything is right between God and us at any moment. The same things that make God happy make us happy. Likewise the things that make God sad make us sad.

4. Loss of Confidence in prayer; Unanswered Prayers until Confession

1 John 3:19-22; Psalm 66:18

-Have you had the feeling that your prayers don't go further than the ceiling?

5. Become Fearful

Sin will cause us to be fearful of what is uncovered when Christ judges our works. Titus 2:13; John 2:28

- Are you currently experiencing a sense of separation from God?
- Are you hiding from Him in guilt?
- Is there a sin or sins God has put His finger on in your life?

The beautiful thing about God is that He pursues restored relationship with His children. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and hid from Him in guilt, God went looking for them!! Genesis 3: 8-9. He gives us a precious promise in 1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from ALL unrighteousness. The blood of Jesus is able to wash you whiter than snow and in so doing restore inner peace, joy and unhindered fellowship with God.

The turning point came in David's life when he acknowledged his sin against the Lord. He literally made known to God a sin God already knew, but David needed to confess it to experience the true joy of God's forgiveness.

- If God already is fully aware of our sin, why do you think we still have trouble honestly confessing it?
- How does God's grace and forgiveness encourage repentance?

APPLICATION

Do you struggle to believe that God can fully and completely forgive your sin and remove your guilt? Why?

Is there a past relationship or incident that might be keeping you from experiencing the forgiveness of God?

Is there anyone that you need to forgive based on how much God has forgiven you of in Christ?

What role are we meant to play in each other's lives in terms of helping each other repent? How can we help each other assume this posture of repentance?

PRAYER Spend some time praying for a renewed sensitivity to sin and the need for repentance. Pray together that the Lord would grant honesty and receptivity to the rebuke of sin in our lives.

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Devotional 1 Hardening of the Heart

“Uphold me with a willing spirit.” Psalm 51: 12

Chapter 39 The Hardening of the Heart (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“What’s worse than coming to a place where you actually have the capacity to feel right about what God says is wrong?”

Devotional 2 Blind to our Blindness

Chapter 46 The Amazing Grace of Self-knowledge (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“Since sin is by it’s nature deceitful, we need help in order to see ourselves with accuracy.”

Devotional 3 Self-deceit

Chapter 8 Aren’t You Glad You’re not like David? (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

Week 4 REPENTANCE

Life Group Study on Repentance (Adapted from GREAT WORDS OF THE GOSPEL by Francis Dixon)

Discuss:

- Define repentance
- Have you ever been sorry about something that you've done – and yet you still did that same thing again? Have you ever been pulled over for speeding? Did you mention to the officer that you were sorry? What were you most sorry about? Have you broken the speed limit since that incident? Did that sorrow lead to repentance? What kind of sorrow is that?
- Is repentance a once-off occurrence when you first come to salvation or is it a way of life for believers?
- Is repentance an Old testament principle which no longer applies to us since we are under grace?
- Is confession an out dated concept limited only to Catholics in their confession booth?

What does the Bible have to say about repentance?

Anyone who has any doubts as to the importance of the doctrine of repentance needs only to read the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 13:3. The Bible is full of this subject, and the word is used over one hundred times – fifty-eight times in the New Testament alone. Yet, someone has rightly said of repentance that it is “the missing note in modern evangelism.” It was the key-note of New Testament preaching: John the Baptist began his ministry with a call to repentance (Matthew 3:2); Jesus's first word was “Repent...” (Matthew 4:17); those whom He commissioned were commanded to preach repentance (Mark 6:12 and Luke 24:47); there is joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10); Peter preached repentance (Acts 2:37-38); Paul preached repentance (Acts 17:30-31); and repentance leading to faith is everywhere laid down in the Bible as the condition of salvation (Acts 20:21).

How is repentance brought about?

1. **Repentance is a Divine gift.** Look up Acts 5:30-31; 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25.
2. **The gift of repentance is bestowed through the preaching of the Gospel** – look up Matthew 12:41; Acts 2:38-41 and 19:8, 10 and 19, and compare 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10.
3. **The goodness of God leads to repentance.** Romans 2:4 tells us this. When we consider the love of God, especially in the gift of His Son (John 3:16), who went to the cross for us (1 Peter 2:24), then we are brought to repentance.
4. **The sorrows of life bring people to repentance.** Trials and bereavements are all instruments in the hands of God for bringing men and women to repentance – look up Psalm 78:34, and compare Genesis 42:21; Exodus 9:27; Job 42:5-6; Psalm 119:67 and Revelation 3:19.

5. **The emptiness of life makes some repent.** This was surely so in the case of the Prodigal Son – see Luke 15:17.

Is there a right and a wrong sorrow and which leads to repentance?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

The bible draws a sharp distinction between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Only godly sorrow leads to repentance.

v. 10... What does **godly** sorrow produce? What does **worldly** sorrow produce? What's the difference between these two sorrows?

When is the right time to repent?

NOW!!! – Acts 17:30-31.

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Recommend life group members use these devotional aids and selected chapters from the book Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp throughout this week in personal devotions.

Devotional 1 Take words with you and return to the Lord

Chapter 3: Something in my hands I bring (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp) Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Devotional 2 Worldly Sorrow

2 Corinthians 7:6-10 There is a sorrow that does **not** lead to repentance. The bible calls it worldly sorrow. Many so-called Christians tragically confuse this sorrow for repentance.

- What are some other indicators of worldly sorrow? Suggest: damage control, excuse making, minimizing, self-pity, self-focus, pride, defensiveness, etc.
- Why do these undermine true repentance?
- Do you battle with a chronic sin? How have you exhibited worldly sorrow in this battle? What would happen if you had godly sorrow?

Read Matthew 26: 69-75 and Matthew 27:1-5 Contrast the response of Peter and Judas when confronted with the realisation of their sin and failure.

What is the test of whether there has been true repentance or mere remorse or sorrow for sin? (consider John 21:15-19)

Devotional 3 Godly Sorrow

2 Corinthians 7:8-11

The bible draws a sharp distinction between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Only godly sorrow leads to repentance.

v. 11...

There are seven characteristics that real repentance will produce. It produces diligence, clearing, indignation, fear, desire, zeal, and revenge.

Fruit: Diligence (Earnestness)

The *New King James* says "diligence." The *King James Version* says "carefulness." This word in the Greek is derived from a word that literally means "speed," but in a context such as this, "speed" becomes used as eagerness, earnestness, dispatch, diligence, and even forwardness. It has this sense of a business-like haste and alertness to get something accomplished.

What a change! I Corinthians shows that the Corinthians were very casual about sin, and downright lethargic about their spiritual responsibilities and indifferent in their regard for each other. Now, because they had really repented, **they were on fire to set things right**. That is what diligence does to a person.

Fruit: Clearing of self

The underlying Greek word is **apologia** (*ap-ol-og-ee-ah*). It sounds like the English word "apology," but it does not mean that at all. The word literally means "defense," and it is often used to define an explanation of one's beliefs, but in this case we have got to go back a little bit further to the very root of that word *apologia*. The root of the word is *apolouho* (*ap-ol-oo-o*), which means "to wash away," or "to wash oneself." Now you are beginning to see a bit of the term "clearing" appear. When you wash, things become clear.

It involves clearing of a good name and restoring reputation before both God and man.

Fruit: Indignation

"indignation." *The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedia Dictionary* defines it as "anger aroused by injustice or baseness"—*righteous anger*. This is an anger with a specific narrow and righteous motivation. The Greek word is *aganaktesis* (*ag-an-ak-tay-sis*). It literally means "much grieved; to feel violent irritation."

[Job 42:5-6](#) I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Fruit: Vehement Desire

This is only one word in the Greek, and it is normally translated by one word in English. The word is “longing.” The word indicates a strong and persistent craving.

The point here is, how can one change unless one really and truly *wants* to? What if one could not care less? One of the fruits of real repentance is that God will instill in us a desire to change; a *longing* to change.

[Matthew 5:6](#) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Fruit: Zeal

Zeal signifies ardour, fervent enthusiasm, whole-heartedness, and passion for accomplishing a task. It can be any task, but we are talking here about growing and overcoming. Zeal tends to indicate a labour of love.

[Galatians 6:9](#) And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Zeal motivates one to drive on.

Fruit: Revenge (Readiness to see justice done)

The seventh one is “revenge.” Sometimes it is translated “vindication.” or “the setting things aright.” That may include the punishment that can be done to a person who is part of the congregation, and it can be done to the self as well by facing up to a sin and doing whatever is necessary to set things right, even though it may prove costly to oneself.

WEEK 5: FRUIT OF REPENTANCE

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Study 1: Something bigger

Chapter 10 Something Bigger (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

Psalm 51:13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

“True confession always results in living for something bigger.”

Study 2: Building the walls

Chapter 33: Building the Walls (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

Psalm 51:18 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.”

Study 3: Prayer for Prosperity

Chapter 16: The Gospel of prosperity (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“David prays for prosperity, not for his glory but for the glory of the Lord to whom his heart has now turned.”

Week 6 MERCY AND GRACE

Life Group Study: The power of grace and mercy (Modified JOHN MENDIS 24 AUGUST 2017)

How would you define mercy?

How would you define grace?

Think of life scenarios that illustrate these concepts and the difference between them if any.

Imagine you were pulled over by a cop for a traffic offense. You were guilty. You knew the penalty, the punishment. But wait. The officer turns to you, advises you to be mindful about traffic laws, and lets you off the hook. Just like that. If something like that ever happened to you, then you've been a recipient of **mercy**. You were let off the hook, when you didn't deserve it.

*Mercy is when you **don't** receive what you deserve: **punishment**.*

Maybe you haven't received mercy for civil law breaking, but if you've given your heart to Jesus, then you have met the God who is 'rich in mercy' ([Ephesians 2:4](#)). What did He do? He let you off the hook when you didn't deserve it. Paul wrote: "He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" ([Titus 3:5, NLT](#)).

Instead of punishing and giving us what we deserve ([Romans 6:23](#)), He saved us from the punishment. That's mercy. Isaiah said it this way: "He took the punishment we deserved, and this brought us peace" ([Isaiah 53:5, ERV](#)). Mercy is not cheap. It is expensive because it cost His Son's life to set us free. And while, mercy is good news, just wait till you hear about Grace. Grace is much more than mercy.

Here's the difference. Mercy is when you don't receive what you deserve: punishment.

*Grace is when you receive what you don't deserve: **reward**.*

Do you get the difference? Read it again until you've figured it out.

Here are a few examples of grace and mercy in action:

- The prodigal son received mercy when the father did not turn him away. Grace when he threw him a party.
- The thief on the cross received mercy when Jesus did not condemn him. Grace when Jesus promised Him paradise.
- We received mercy when God did not send us to Hell as punishment for our sins. Grace when He gave us eternal life ([1 John 5:11](#)); made us sons and daughters ([John 1:12](#)), and reserved an inheritance for us for eternity ([1 Peter 1:4](#)).
- If you write a test and fail it (score 10%) mercy is when the examiner decides to not count the test toward your year mark. Grace is when the examiner decides to give you 100% for the test!

Here are a few ways the Bible describes the grace of God:

Grace is God's gift to me: Romans 3:24

Grace is for everyone: Titus 2:11

Grace comes through Jesus: John 1:17

Grace is received by faith: Ephesians 2:8

Grace is God's gift for all eternity: Romans 6:23

Grace is God's gift of forgiveness: Romans 5:15

Grace is God's power to change: Hebrews 4:16 **The power to save a wretch like me ... and you** The apostle Paul made it clear that the gospel of His grace and mercy is intended to turn people to God and from their sins ([Romans 2:4](#)). Grace not only forgives; it changes, transforms, rewires everyone who enters into a relationship with Jesus.

There is more. When grace happens, **gratitude** happens. "And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more

glory” (2 Corinthians 4:15) You can live a life of gratitude to God, not because of anything you did, but because of what He did for you. If you have put your trust in His Son to save you, He says He has given you life, and has saved you:

“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

- Make a list of your grace and mercy experiences
- Talk with God over the list, and thank Him for each blessing
- Share your experiences with your friends, and spread the joy
- Praise God for His mercy! Praise God for His grace!

Recommend life group members use these selected chapters from the book Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp throughout this week in personal devotions.

Devotional 1: Mercy Me

Chapter 1: Mercy Me (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

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

“I come to the Lord with only one appeal: His mercy.”

Devotional 2: Big Grace

Chapter 4: Big Grace (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“Resting in God’s grace isn’t just about confessing your sin, it’s about forsaking your righteousness as well.”

Devotional 3: Violent Grace

Chapter 7: Violent grace (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

“ We have a perverse capacity to be comfortable with what God says is wrong. So God blesses us with violent, uncomfortable grace...He loves us enough to crush us, so that we would feel the pain of our sin and run to Him for forgiveness and deliverance.”

Week 7: FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION

Life Group Study: Living in Forgiveness (Modified: Brent Rinehart

www.apparentstuff.com)

Despite its prevalence in our lives, it seems that many of us have a mistaken view of forgiveness and its impact, not only spiritually and emotionally, but also physically. In fact, according to John Hopkins Medicine, forgiveness has a huge impact on your health: *“Whether it’s a simple spat with your spouse or long-held resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved conflict can go deeper than you may realize—it may be affecting your physical health. The good news: Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress. And research points to an increase in the forgiveness-health connection as you age.”*

Discuss:

Is God’s forgiveness selective? (In other words does God choose to forgive some people and not others?)

Is it conditional? If so, what are these conditions?

Is there a sin God cannot forgive?

What the Bible have to say about forgiveness:

1. All of us are in need of forgiveness.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ([Romans 3:23](#)). From a spiritual perspective, we were all born with a sin problem, eternally separated from God. We’d be lost forever without Him intervening and offering us forgiveness.

2. Forgiving others is a prerequisite for our own forgiveness.

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” ([Matthew 6: 14-15](#)). This is a difficult verse to process. God stands ready and willing to forgive us, but asks that we extend the same forgiveness to others first. If we have resentment and bitterness in our hearts, it’s time to give it over to God. Let Him heal us and give us the ability to forgive. Our eternity is dependent on it.

3. Lack of forgiveness breaks our fellowship with God.

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” ([Matthew 5](#): 23-24). The Bible is very clear that harbouring bitterness in our hearts is sin. And, if we aren’t actively seeking to kill it, it will break our fellowship with God. We won’t experience everything God has to offer us.

4. We owe others forgiveness even when they don’t ask for it.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” ([Matthew 18](#): 15). How often do we hold it against someone when they haven’t apologized? When we are wronged, we expect someone to come to us and say, “I’m sorry.” Yes, that is the right thing to do, however, the Bible doesn’t place that requirement on forgiveness. God commands us to be the initiators in the transaction.

5. We owe forgiveness to those who don’t deserve it.

“And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep” ([Acts 7](#): 59-60). There are numerous examples that charge us to forgive others, even when they don’t deserve it. In addition to this example of Stephen, I think about Jesus on the cross in the midst of his executioners: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” ([Luke 23:34](#)). Every time I find myself having trouble extending forgiveness to someone I’ve deemed undeserving, I think about how unworthy I am of forgiveness. Yet, God saw fit to love me and forgive me. When considering the magnitude of that, every situation in my life where I was reluctant to forgive seems trivial.

6. We owe others an unlimited amount of forgiveness.

“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” ([Matthew 18](#): 21-22). Forgiving is hard, but doing it over and over again can seem impossible. But, with God, anything is possible. Jesus is clear in this passage that there is no “final straw” that warrants us withholding our forgiveness. God doesn’t have a “final straw” for us. To be clear, this doesn’t mean allowing others to take advantage of your forgiveness. God also gave us the ability to be reasonable and make smart choices with our lives. Holding on to resentment only takes our joy, while doing no harm to the other party. We should forgive repeatedly because God commands it and He knows what’s best for our lives.

7. There are consequences for choosing not to forgive.

“And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” ([Matthew 18](#): 34-35). God takes forgiveness seriously, and this parable is proof. If we don’t forgive others, there are consequences – eternal consequences! That’s a scary thing, and it challenges me to evaluate my own heart. “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!” ([Psalm 139:23](#)). If forgiveness is needed, today is the day to make it right.

8. Jesus, our ultimate example, practiced forgiveness.

“And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” ([John 8:7](#)). Jesus calls us to examine our own lives first instead of focusing on the actions of another. It’s easier to forgive others when we have a understanding of our own shortcomings. Jesus forgives the woman, and lovingly encourages her to change her ways: “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” ([John 8:11](#)). Our challenge is to follow Jesus’s example and do the same.

9. God gives us the ability to forgive others.

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). Forgiving can be one of the hardest things that God requires of us. But, the good news is He doesn’t command it of us and then leave us to do it on our own. He gives us Jesus as an example. And, He gives us the power, through the Holy Spirit.

10. After forgiveness, comes love – even if forgetting isn’t possible.

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” ([1 Peter 4:8](#)). Sometimes things happen in our lives that we just cannot forget, even if we are able to forgive. While we may not be able to erase our memory, we do have control over our actions. We can love those who have wronged us after we forgive them. It’s hard to harbour ill will toward those we actively serve, love and pray for.

Application:

- Do you struggle to receive God’s forgiveness. If so, why?
- Is there someone you need to forgive today?

Suggested reading around the topic of receiving and extending forgiveness:

<https://www.desiringgod.org%2Ftopics%2Fforgiveness%2Fall&usg=AOvVaw3upqxQXI4Cv2qeMtNCZ7cQ>

Recommend life group members use these selected chapters from the book Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp throughout this week in personal devotions.

Devotional 1: Restoration

Chapter 25: Wrecking balls and Restoration (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

Psalm 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation

“In grace God hammers at you, not with the sledge-hammer of condemnation, but with the small hammer of restoration.”

Devotional 2: Immanuel

Chapter 36: Immanuel (Whiter than Snow meditations on sin & mercy by Paul Tripp)

Psalm 51:11 Cast me not away from your presence

“The whole redemptive story marches toward Immanuel, the Redeemer who would destroy sin’s dominion in our hearts by making our hearts the place where He, in His power, wisdom & glory would dwell.”

Week 8: Walking in Victory

Life Group Material (Adapted from Bible teaching by David Holt Boshart, Jr. and Shari Boshart)

Each of us is at a different place in our walk with God. Yet we all need to grow up to perfection (maturity) Matt 5:48

Discuss:

- What does Christian Maturity look like?
- Is it possible to live a victorious Christ-like life or will we always be stuck in a cycle of sin?
- How do you overcome the strongholds of sin?

Seven Keys to Freedom

Become dead to sin through repentance and faith in Jesus.

Those who are new creations in Christ are no longer slaves to sin! Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 5:24

Keep your eyes on Jesus. Come closer to God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Submit yourself to God and draw near with a heart purified by faith. Learn to hate what He hates. Hebrews 12:1-2; James 4:7-8

Saturate your mind and heart with the Word of God.

Read the Word, hear it, sing it, meditate on it day and night. I Peter 2:2; Psalm 119:133; Psalm 119:11; Matthew 4:4

The Word of God is a powerful weapon against the enemy. II Corinthians 10:4-5

We are to continually renew our minds with God's truth. Romans 12:2

Tear down the idols in your heart.

Turn off, put away, get rid of anything that makes provision for your flesh or hinders you from hearing the voice of your Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Romans 12:1; Colossians 3:1-3). God wants your whole heart and nothing less! Matthew 6:21

Know your enemy and know your overcoming position in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 2:13-15 and 3:1-3)

Stay humble. Identify your areas of weakness and see temptation coming ahead of time to avoid the ambushes of the enemy. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8.

Stay in accountable Christian relationships

Understand that the temptations you fall for are relatively predictable, and ask a brother or sister in Christ to pray for you. James 5:16. Don't try to be a lone ranger!!! Hebrews 10:25
Choose your friends wisely. 2 Corinthians 6:14

Be filled with the Holy Spirit and then Walk in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)

Herein lies the key to overcoming sin: it is impossible to sin when you walk in the Spirit! Galatians 5:16. Learning to walk in the Spirit doesn't happen overnight; it is a process which involves steadfast faith and daily renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2 As new creations in Christ, we have the "mind of Christ" (see I Corinthians 2:16), showing us the will of the Father. His will is that we know His Son Jesus, grow up to spiritual maturity, and overcome the lusts of the flesh by walking in the power of His Spirit (Galatians 5:16). In Christ Jesus,

there is liberty. "Only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"(Galatians 5:13).