

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Confident Confession

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Scripture:

Psalm 51

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

² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

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

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

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

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

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

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

- 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- 15 Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- 17 My sacrifice, O God, is^[b] a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.
- 18 May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- 19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Transcript:

Well, good morning. It's great to be with you. Welcome to those of you over there in the Modern Worship Center. Shout out to our students. Let me hear it. And those of you joining us online, thanks for worshipping with us and all of you here, friends in the sanctuary, in the balcony. That's great. I'm Scott Mann. I'm the other pastor Scott and I do more teaching than preaching around here. We wanted our summer series on the Psalms to help us grow in our prayer life. Our goal is not merely to learn more about the Psalms, but practice using the Psalms to deepen our relationship with Jesus and become more like Him. The Psalms are somewhat unique among all the biblical books. The Bible is like a window to help us see God more clearly. The Psalms are a mirror to see ourselves more clearly in the light of God.

In the Bible, God reveals Himself to us so we know Him and what He wants to say to us. In the Psalms, they help us know ourselves and what we need to say to God. Now for millennia, the Psalms have taught God's people to pray, to bring our whole authentic self to God in prayer. Times of praise, times of lament, maybe angry prayers like last week, Thanksgiving, remembrance. We bring our whole self to God. Today we learn from the Psalms of confession, where we practice being truthful with God about our failures, regrets, and our desire to do better. Now, you might think confession sounds like a bummer, but Psalm 51 isn't a bummer, I promise. Even though David wrote this psalm after he committed adultery and murder, listen how it refocuses us on love, grace, joy, forgiveness, renewal and unshakeable confidence in God.

Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, oh God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. So you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter

than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."

"Then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you. So Jesus, help us learn to practice confession, confident in your love, forgiveness, and renewal." Amen. Well, did you hear it? David confidently trusts in God's unfailing love and great compassion. He is speaking to one he knows well, not some remote, impersonal judge. David doesn't hide from God his big feelings of guilt and shame and regret. He brings all of that right to God, the God he knows loves him. The first thing we learn is this confession focuses us on God's love, not our sins. When our confidence is in who God is and His saving purposes, we are free to practice confession and repentance because it's not primarily about our sins, but about God and His love. David knew God intimately, so he confessed freely. He trusted God's character of unfailing love and amazing grace. He had experienced God's love again and again in his life.

So he was confident not in himself but in God as he brought his failures to God. Like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, sinners instinctively hide from a holy God, but God doesn't cancel us. He searches out sinners, forgives, and welcomes us back into his presence and his purposes. David knew this well. That's why almost all of this psalm of confession looks forward confidently to God's forgiveness and restoration. David models God confidence, not self-confidence. Listen to verse seven again. "Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be wider than snow." Almost every verb in the entire Psalm is an action God will do in the future or David will do as a result of God's forgiveness.

David's prayer focuses on God, not his own past failures. Now, if confession is hard for you or you feel like it's a bit of a bummer, the best thing you can do is focus on getting to know God better rather than focusing on your sins. Praying or singing the Psalms is one way to get to know God better and put sin in its place. So David's confident confession relies on the bedrock of God's character of love and grace. But David's confident confession doesn't minimize his sins. He writes, "For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. So you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge."

No, David doesn't gloss over his sins. Quite the opposite. He uses his poetry to emphasize his confession and contrition. When the Bible wants to emphasize something, we often find it repeated three times. It's like ancient underlining. David refers to sin not three times, but 14 times in 19 verses. That's like all caps, like screaming at us. His poetry emphasizes his sin, but all within the context of God's loving faithfulness. David tells God how he feels about betraying God. He knows full well how he failed to reflect God's character and he failed to follow in God's ways. He knows it and he feels badly about it, but he brings all of this to God. Now, last Sunday, we learned to bring our anger at evil to God in prayer. But what if I am the evildoer?

Psalms of confession teach us to bring our guilt to God. Now, you may not be guilty of murder or adultery like David, but Jesus doesn't let us off the hook so easily. He reminds us that we can commit sins like these in our hearts through sinful anger and lust, even if we don't act on them. Practicing confident confession recenters our relationship with God. Now, it's a misconception that confession is merely informing God of your sin. Of course, God already knows everything.

The word confess means to agree with. Confession helps us see together with God. We see our life as God sees it. Praying the Psalms mirrors to us any ways that we are not aligned with God and helps us realign with both His character and His purposes. So David simply agrees with God about his sin, without sugarcoating it or minimizing. That's why confession always includes the idea of repentance, of turning back to God's right path.

We renounce the evil we have done and we seek God's help to be faithful to Him. Now, it's important to correct a common misconception about David's confession here. Sin is first and foremost a betrayal of God. When David says, "Against you, you only, have I sinned", the poetry is intended to highlight his sense of betraying God and his desire to reconcile with God. But of course, David has sinned against others, not only against God. David knows he has sinned against others by committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband, Uriah. Just 10 verses later, David asked God to deliver him from the guilt of bloodshed, a direct reference to Uriah. But in this moment, he is directly addressing God in prayer and his focus here is on his relationship with God. Another way to understand against you only have I sinned is against you, above all, have I sinned. Again, he's not minimizing his sin, but rather agreeing with God that his betrayal is first against God and secondly against others.

The most important thing is restoring our relationship with God. Making things right with others is essential, but it's not David's focus right here, and that is a sermon for another day. Another misconception involves the nature of David's poetry. David uses very strong poetic language to agree that he is prone to sin even from birth. Psalm 51, listen to what he says. "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb. You taught me wisdom in that secret place." Now, David isn't trying to teach doctrine about the state of an unborn soul inside the womb. His poetry is designed to affirm God's desire for our lifelong faithfulness and David's deep remorse over his failure. This is poetic, heightened language, so be careful not to over-interpret it beyond the author's intent. So David emphasizes God's faithfulness to teach us the right way to go in our life as well as David's innate temptation to sinfully go his own way.

One of my pastor mentors has a fun sense of humor and often a twinkle in his eye. He has a habit of asking people, "How are you?" And when people reply, "Good", he replies with this line, "Do you want a second opinion?" He doesn't do this to make people feel bad about themselves. This is his playful way of reminding us all that only God is good. And Jesus did the same thing. When someone asked Him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Jesus, my mentor, David, they all agree, God alone is perfectly good and our human struggle with sin is universal and lifelong. So sinners, you are not alone. We are in good company or bad company, I guess. Redeemed company, anyway. We are all in this together. So what have we learned about practicing confident confession? First, we focus on God's unfailing love, not our sin. Second, we confess our sin without excuse and turn away from it. And now third, we ask God for forgiveness and restoration.

David says, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me." David wants to turn back to God, to make things right, to experience God's renewal. David confidently asks for forgiveness and restoration because he knows God as a loving, forgiving God. The purpose

of confession is always reconciliation, restoring relationships after any rupture. Now, I love how David here not only praised to be returned to God's path, but he prays that God will give him the desire to stay steadfast on God's path. He knows that even this is God's work and not ultimately possible for himself. David reminds us that confession is not fundamentally about behavior change or sin management. He doesn't just need more godly behaviors and less evil ones. He needs a new heart. He needs a renewed spirit. So we can pray both these prayers. God help me to be faithful to you and then also, God help me want to be faithful to you.

A new heart and a renewed spirit is of course, exactly what Jesus and the Holy Spirit came to do for us. Speaking of Jesus, here is a tricky theological question for you. I can't help myself. When are your sins forgiven? Now, some of you are thinking, when we confess our sins, God forgives. That's what the Bible says. That is true. Many others of you may be thinking, our sins were forgiven when Jesus died on the cross. That's what the Bible says. That is also true. Here's how to resolve this dilemma and why it matters. From God's point of view, He forgave sin on the cross. That's why Jesus sacrifice is central to our faith. From our point of view, we experience God's forgiveness and restoration when we confess. Why does this matter? Because we do not get forgiveness because we ask or because of anything else we do. We get forgiveness as a sheer act of unmerited grace because of what God has done for us while we were still sinners. God did not wait for us to come to our senses before he forgave us.

That is the opposite of the gospel we believe. We believe God loves us and has done everything necessary for our salvation. Our salvation is secure in Christ. Amen. Amen. But we need to experience forgiveness. What happened 2000 years ago is absolutely central, but it's not in front of our faces. We forget and get distracted. We ghost God and we need the spirit to convict us in real time when we turn away from God. We need the Psalms, we need the Bible. We need other Christians as a mirror showing us how we fail to imitate Jesus. We need to practice returning to our relationship with God and to His purposes. That's why practicing confident confession is such an important prayer habit for us to develop to become more like Jesus. All right, so I know many of us are probably familiar with the first three movements of confession. Focus on God's love, confess sin, and ask for forgiveness and renewal, restoration. But David has a surprise for us.

There's a fourth forgotten movement, and it's repeated here and throughout the Psalms. Verse 13. "Then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, you who are God, my savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise." I may be tempted to think my sin is between me and God. Confessions a private affair, right? Nope. Just as the impact of our sin goes beyond just me and God, the impact of forgiveness needs to go beyond as well. David reminds us we need to respond to God's forgiveness. Beyond merely receiving it, as important as that is, we witness or testify about God's goodness to both sinners and the righteous. We tell people what God has done for us. We tell people who don't know about God's loving forgiveness and we praise Him in the sanctuary of God's people in worship. Remember, the Psalms are sung prayers used by God's people in worship for millennia.

When we pray or sing spiritual songs like these about God's love and forgiveness, the spirit moves within us, and these lyrics become our own words to God and to one another. Beyond my private confession, God wants us to witness to sinners, to unbelievers, to the nations about

the amazing grace of God. God even turns our failures into gospel conversations to save people. This is the fourth movement of confession, and I'm afraid we sometimes forget it. So why don't we practice confession more often and witness to God's grace to other people? Well, as a pastor, I've seen several reasons for this. Maybe you can relate to one of them. First, shame. Some people are so focused on their sin, they can't see God's much more powerful love and forgiveness. Shame makes them want to hide their sin, not testify to God's power to redeem. One way to focus on God, not your shame is this.

Make sure God is the hero of your story, not your sin. When God is the hero, it's much easier to tell your story. Second, pride. We know these people. Others minimize their sin. I'm not so bad. No one's perfect, better than the next guy. You know the problem with this one, right? Only sinners can be saved. If you don't have a problem, you don't need a savior, and there's no reason for Christianity at all. People who minimize sin will never testify to a savior. Third, despair. These people are those who keep confessing, but they don't really repent and realign with God. They want to be forgiven, but they're not cultivating an intimate relationship with God. It's kind of like an addict wishing to stop abusing, but not doing the hard work of recovery.

If we don't cultivate our relationship with God and allow our whole worldview to be shaped by the Bible, we aren't amazed by God's grace and we have nothing to sing about, well, we end sermons with practical action steps so we can become more like Jesus. Well, the action step for this sermon is pretty straightforward. Practice confident confession. Practice focusing on God's unfailing love, not your sin. Practice confessing your sin without excuse and turn away from it. Practice receiving God's forgiveness and renewal deep down, and then practice witnessing to God's grace. Have gospel conversations with God as your hero, but honestly, that's not what I want to be your action step today. I'm going to cheat a little bit here. We only have one more week in our Psalm series. Here's my heart for you, church.

The very best action step for you is this, pray the Psalms. Let the Psalms shape your prayers. Some of the best advice I ever got was this. Just start going through the Psalms, and when you get to something that resonates with you, camp out on that verse, that passage, and make it your own until the Holy Spirit lets you move on. The Psalms help us bring our authentic selves to God. Whether we feel sinful or angry or thankful, or joyful or defeated or whatever, it's all in the Psalms. For generations, the Psalms have trained people to reflect God's character and His purposes. If you think you're going to become more like Jesus without the Psalms, I've got some bad news for you. You're not better than our ancestors. Even Jesus needed the Psalms. We need them. They are God's gift to us, individually and corporately. Practice praying them and your reflection in the mirror will become more like Jesus. So Jesus, use the Psalms and all of scripture to deepen our relationship with you and make us more like you. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What aspects of David's psalm would expand your practice of prayer and deepen your relationship with God?
- How can your confidence in God's forgiveness grow? How can you share it with others?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.