



LESSON 11: LORD, HAVE MERCY!

PSALM 51(32)

BACKGROUND

*Sin will take me further than I want to go
Sin will keep me longer than I want to stay
Sin will cost me more than I want to pay*

King David didn't write the lyrics to this song, but he could have! He learned the hard way the truth of these words. Psalm 51 is a *Song of Lament* in which King David expresses distress and sorrow over his sinful actions and cries out to God for mercy and deliverance from his prison of guilt.

Because sin is an universal problem, we all can relate to this Psalm. In his letter to the Roman Christians, St. Paul wrote: *For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.* (Romans 2:23)

The good news is that Jesus has provided the solution to our sin problem. St. Paul continues in his letter: *Yet now, God, in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For*

God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us . . . (Romans 3:24-25)

But, even if we have received Jesus into our lives as our personal Savior from sin, *we still sin.* When we do, sin and disobedience become a barrier between us and God. Unconfessed sin prevents us from hearing God's words, feeling his love and seeing his truth. Every sin that we commit, whether it is "big" or "little", needs to be confessed to God so that we can receive his forgiveness, cleansing and the restoration of our relationship with him.

King David, in this beautiful Psalm – prayed out of the depths of his heart after being confronted with his terrible sin – shows us the way back into the loving, compassionate and forgiving arms of our Heavenly Father.

DISCUSSION STARTER

- Think of a time when you received something you absolutely did not deserve. How did it make you feel?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 51**, **ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth** (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law.*
2. Read **Psalm 51** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that are meaningful to you and put a question mark by anything that you don't understand.
3. Write out a verse from this Psalm that you would like to remember.

QUESTIONS

4. In order to understand the setting for this Psalm, read what led to David writing it in **2 Samuel 11-12:14**. (It's not a boring story!)

Considering David's statement and Nathan's reply in **2 Samuel 12:13**, why do you think David found it necessary to compose **Psalm 51**?

- ♥ How did David the Psalm-writer, react to God's correction? How do you react to God's correction?
5. What three things does David ask God to do in **51:1-2**?

Why did David dare to ask for these things? **51:1**

6. What terms does David use to describe himself and his wrongdoing in **51:1-5**?

- ♥ Sin has become an unpopular and little-used word in our culture. What do you think it is and how would you define it?

7. What is David's attitude toward his sin? **51:3-5**

- ♥ How honest are you about your sin? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10.

- ♥ Do you ever recall getting your hand "caught in the cookie jar" as a child? An adult? How did you react?

8. What effect (physically, emotionally and spiritually) did David's guilt have on him?

Psalm 32:1-5 (specifically **verses 3-4**) -

51:2,7 -

51:3 -

51:8 -

51:10 -

51:12 -

- ♥ How do you feel when there is unconfessed sin in your life? How does God convince you of your sin?

- ♥ As Christians, we know we are sinful. Why then, is it so painful to be confronted with a specific sin?

9. Since David's sin involved others, what is the meaning of **51:4** and what does this show us about the nature of sin?

10. If we are born as sinners (51:5), sin must be something more than doing wrong things. What else is it?

11. According to 51:6, what does David infer to be the opposite of sin and guilt?

Can sin and truth coexist in the heart (your inner being)? Why or why not?

- ♥ What role does honesty play in our receiving forgiveness and what part does denial play in our remaining guilty?
- ♥ How would you answer the person who says, "I've never done anything as bad as what David did. Psalm 51 doesn't really apply to me."
- ♥ Are you ever tempted to rationalize your sin? How should you view your sin?
- ♥ Why did David verbalize his sorrow and confession so specifically? What can we learn from his example?

12. David asks to be *restored* in 51:7-12. What does the word *restore* imply?

Using at least two translations, paraphrase David's requests for restoration below (two per verse).

51:7		
51:8		
51:9		
51:10		
51:11		
51:12		

- ♥ If you put David's requests for restoration in order of importance for yourself, which one would be at the top and why?
13. David doesn't use the word forgiveness in this Psalm. Consider the following verses and state the one thing that David seems to most desire. 51:1, 2, 7, 9

How confident is David that God can do this for him? 51:7

Why do you think David places so much value on being clean, not just forgiven?

14. Where, according to 51:6 and 10, does God desire the work of cleansing to begin and what is the significance of this?

15. In Biblical terms, *create* means to "make something out of nothing" and in Scripture, only God *creates*. In light of these facts, what is the significance of David's request in **51:10**?

16. What, specifically, does **Psalm 51** have in common with **1 John 1:9**?

- ♥ How often do we need to make good on God's offer in **1 John 1:9**?
- ♥ Have you ever struggled with a sense that your sin was so great that you could never be fully forgiven? What hope do you find in David's prayer?
- ♥ On what basis can you plead and claim God's mercy and forgiveness for your sin?

17. Why do you think we are sometimes hesitant to confess our sin, even when we know God will forgive and cleanse us?

18. What positive things did David expect God to bring out of his whole ordeal? **51:13-15**

- ♥ What experience have you had with forgiven sin that could help someone else?
- ♥ How can we help others receive God's grace and return to the Lord?

19. Rephrase **Psalm 51:16-17** into contemporary language.

- ♥ What do you consider a *broken and contrite* heart to be? What is your experience with this condition?
- ♥ When are you likely to come to God with an "offering" for sin instead of a broken and contrite heart? Why?

20. First David says that God *does not* delight in sacrifices (**51:16**) and then he says that sacrifices *do* delight God (**51:19**). What makes the difference?

RESPONSE:

21. Does forgiveness and cleansing mean we will not suffer the consequences of our sin? According to **2 Samuel 12:13-23**, what was one consequence of David's sin? Can you think of others?

22. How complete was God's forgiveness and cleansing of David's sin? Consider **2 Samuel 12:23**, **Matthew 1:1** and **6**.

23. What do the above truths mean for your own life? Consider **Romans 8:28** in your answer.