

Dealing with Moral Failure

One of the most cherished, memorized, and quoted psalms in the Bible is the one King David wrote after the worst moral failure of his life. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband. The prophet Nathan had called him to account. David's response is recorded in Psalm 51. One of the most important components of our Christian lives is our willingness and ability to recover from our own moral failures. Let's take a close look at this psalm, to see what it is we must do when we fall into sin.

1. Ask God for help. (v.1, 2)

Psalm 51

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

We can only be helped when we ask God for it. We can only fully confess when we know of His willingness to forgive. David immediately calls upon the unfailing love and compassion of God.

2. Make a good confession. (v.3–6)

Notice here that David comes completely clean with his failure:

A. I did it. (v. 3)

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

B. I offended God. (v. 4)

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

C. I'm like that. (v. 5)

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

D. I've no excuses. (v. 6)

⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

We can only be healed of what we fully, candidly confess.

3. Seek full restoration. (v.7–12)

A. Complete cleansing (v.7)

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

B. Joy of forgiveness (v.8, 9)

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

C. Spiritual renewal (v. 10)

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

D. Intimacy with God (v. 11,12)

¹¹Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

God is gracious not only to remove our offense but to bring us joy in our recovery. Don't stop until you know the joy of restored intimacy with Him.

4. Re-engage God's mission. (v. 13–10)**A. Witness with zeal. (v.13)**

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

B. Worship with brokenness. (v.14-17)

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

C. Work with vision. (v.18,19)

¹⁸Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; ¹⁹then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Our moral failure may change our circumstances in some ways or alter the types of ministries we can perform, but we are always His grateful servants.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How do we sometimes make “partial confessions” or “qualified confessions?” What are the effects of these approaches?

- 2) Why is it important that we consistently experience full restoration from our moral failure? Why do we sometimes doubt that this is possible?

- 3) How is our witness, worship, and work diminished without a full recovery from moral failure?

Digging Deeper

Is there some sin or moral failure for which you have not fully confessed and made proper restitution? Draft a plan for how you can to that this week.

How are you not experiencing a fully recovery from sin? Take steps to discuss this with a pastor or mature Christian.

Suggested reading:

by Sinclair Ferguson

[The Doctrine of Repentance](#)

by Thomas Watson