

THE LOOKOUT

OCTOBER 2022

Unit: Psalms (Part 1)

Theme: Rooted

Overview: “Texts have tunes,” preacher and professor Fred Craddock said. That is especially true of Psalms, the hymnbook of the Bible. Most biblical psalms were sung or prayed. They are poetic in genre and speak to every human emotion. Psalms (the book) consists of five sections—Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150—which makes it similar to the five books of the Pentateuch and the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. The main imagery of the book of Psalms coincides with a Middle Eastern agrarian culture, and the main characteristic of Psalms is parallelism (rhetorical pattern of likeness). In October, students will learn how righteousness, reality, repentance, reason, and worship are “rooted” in God.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Arrows point to the lesson aim, lesson text, and supplemental text. A vertical tab on the right side of the page is labeled 'LESSON 1'.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Arrows point to the Application and Discovery sections. A vertical tab on the right side of the page is labeled 'LESSON 2'.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 16, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Bring your broken
and contrite heart
to God for mercy.**

UNIT: Psalms (Part 1)

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 51

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 2 Samuel 12:1-20; 1 John 1:8-9;
Luke 15:17-24; 18:13-14

ROOTED IN REPENTANCE

BY MARK SCOTT

What do you do with a prodigal king? You allow him the privilege of repentance.

The backdrop to Psalm 51 is 2 Samuel 11–12. It was spring, when kings head off to war, but King David stayed home. In fact, he went to his balcony. From this vantage point he saw Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathing. He sent for her (so others knew what he was doing?) and was intimate with her. She became pregnant. David contrived a plan to bring her husband home from the war so that everyone would assume the baby was his. But Uriah, in his drunkenness, was more righteous than David in his attempted cover-up. Uriah carried his own death notice to the field of battle. Joab followed the king's order perfectly, and Uriah was killed. David received word of Uriah's death, and so he did the honorable(?) thing and married Bathsheba.

The prophet Nathan made a pastoral visit to the king and confronted him in Jerusalem's "Oval Office." When Nathan left the king, Psalm 51 was born. David was in a heap on the floor trying to restore his relationship with God. This psalm, as written in Hebrew, has 21 verses, but the English text has only 19. That is because the "supercription" (heading) may well be part of the text (though this is not always the case in other psalms with supercriptions). Verse 17 may well be the key verse to this well-worn psalm: *"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise."* The God of the Bible always welcomes repentance.

Repentance Leans into the Mercy of God

Psalm 51:1-6

Convicted of his sin, David cried out for God's *mercy* (grace), *unfailing love* (loving-kindness), and *compassion* (tender love). He knew he needed these due to his *transgressions* (sins) and *iniquity* (guilt or depravity). He desired to have his sins blotted out, washed away, and cleansed. He knew he could do nothing to merit God's forgiveness. He acknowledged that God's kindness was leading him into repentance (Romans 2:4).

The depth of David's sin is evident in verses 3-6. He could not get away from his sin—it was *always before* him. He felt his sin was primarily against God—*against you, and you only, have I sinned*—even though he had violated Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. He understood that God's judgment on him was *right* and *justified*. He

believed he must have been a terrible sinner since the day he was born (a great example of poetic exaggeration). No one is sinful at their conception, but one sometimes can feel that way. Instead, God's ways of *faithfulness* and *wisdom* should be learned *in that secret place*.

Repentance Appropriates Cleansing from God

Psalm 51:7-12

Repentance cannot pry God's forgiveness from his hand, but it can appropriate it when God wants to give it. David prayed for cleansing with *hyssop* (a plant used as a paintbrush). He wanted to be washed *whiter than snow*. He desired to hear *joy and gladness* again. He wanted his *bones*—crushed because of his sin—to *rejoice* ("dance," cf. Psalm 32:5). He was so embarrassed he asked God to *"hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity."*

In order to experience this, David knew God would have to *create* (as in Genesis 1:1) in him a *pure heart*. God would have to *renew* him. David pleaded to remain near to God (and not to be cast from God's presence, and not to have the Holy Spirit removed from him). David prayed for a restoration of joy. In this section he lived out 1 John 1:9.

Repentance Bears Fruit for God

Psalm 51:13-19

David was willing for his life to be "Exhibit A" of the grace of God. If God would forgive him, then everyone in Judea would know (*Then I will teach transgressors your ways*). David would try to persuade everyone not to take the road he took. David would bear the fruit of evangelism.

David would also bear the fruit of genuine worship. For months he worshiped God in hypocrisy. Now his worship would be clean. His *tongue, lips, and mouth* would now sing praise. His sacrifices would now be acceptable because they would be offered from a pure heart.

Some scholars think scribes added the last two verses sometime later. But are they not just saying that Jerusalem would be a different place because David had repented? The walls would be stronger, and the offerings would be acceptable. No one is beyond the call for repentance (Luke 13:1-5). ■

WHY IS CONFESSION SO DIFFICULT?

BY DAVID FAUST

Some prayers are easier to say than others.

It's natural to make requests like "Help me, Lord," asking God to meet our needs and solve our problems. It's more difficult to say, "Help *them*, Lord," for intercession requires us to care about others unselfishly and speak to God on their behalf. Thanksgiving is a pleasant form of prayer as we say, "Thank you, Lord." Praise comes a little harder. It takes effort to concentrate on God's character and say, "Bless the Lord, oh my soul."

Confusion About Confession

For many of us, though, confession is the most difficult kind of prayer. How often do you hear honest, earnest prayers of confession in a worship service? It's hard to say, "Lord, I have done wrong. Please forgive me" (or "forgive us"). I have been in small groups where no one had a problem doing what it says in Philippians 4:6, "by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God," but when it was time for prayers of confession, everyone got silent—or cautiously raised a few issues considered safe for public mention.

Why is confession so difficult? Here are four reasons we struggle with this form of prayer.

1. Confusion: *We don't understand what confession means.* The Greek verb translated "confess" in the New Testament (*homologeō*) literally meant to "say the same thing" or "agree." Confession means thoughtful agreement, not whiny groveling. Positively, confession of faith means saying the same thing about Jesus as the Bible: He is the Messiah, our Savior and Lord. Negatively, confession means admitting our sins and agreeing with God's Word when we have done wrong.

2. Rationalization: *We are quick to explain away our misdeeds.* We struggle with confession because lack of

transparency is part of the fallen human condition. Just as Adam and Eve tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden, we offer flimsy fig-leaf excuses instead of being honest with our Creator. Embarrassed and defensive, we cover up our faults and blame others rather than admitting our shortcomings.

3. Shallow relationships: *It's hard to "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other" (James 5:16) in a low-trust environment.* Through his Covenant Connections ministry, Alan Ahlgrim leads in-depth small groups for church leaders. He urges them to "be honest with all, transparent with some, and vulnerable with a few." It isn't always necessary or wise to spill your guts before the whole congregation, but we all need some high-trust relationships where it's safe to be vulnerable and share our struggles.

4. Pride: *We are too stubborn to come clean.* The Lord blesses the poor in spirit and gives grace to the humble. The garbage truck comes to my house each Monday morning and takes the trash away. I never run after the truck shouting, "Hey, bring that stuff back!" I'm glad it's gone. Likewise, let's rejoice knowing, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Christians often talk about how "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective," but do you remember how that verse begins? It says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (James 5:16). If we want our prayers to be more powerful and effective, let's pay more attention to the challenging art of confession.

Personal Challenge: Write your own personal paraphrase of Psalm 51, pouring out your heart in confession to God. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. This week we're talking about the difficult practice of confession. Tell us a story that happened before you were 12 years old. What's something you never got caught for that's funny in retrospect?
2. Last week we wrote "I will" statements about Psalms 42-43. What was your "I will" for last week and how did you follow through on that?

Ask two people to read aloud **Psalm 51** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to paraphrase the psalm, using as much detail as possible.

3. What does the author of this psalm want?
 - What does he think God wants?
4. In a few words, how would you summarize David's thoughts in verses 1-2? Verses 3-6? Verses 7-12? Verses 13-17? Verses 18-19?
 - How do these ideas fit together?
5. What does this passage teach us about God?
6. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?
7. Based on this passage, what's one thing you're doing well?
8. What's one thing you need to improve?
9. How will you obey what you've studied today?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖