



WHEN YOU'VE LET THE SIDE DOWN

A few years back Christina Aguilera had a hit with a song called *Blank Page*. The opening verse goes like this:

*I know there's hurt; I know there's pain;
But people change, Lord knows I've been no saint.
In my own way, regret choices I've made;
How do I say I'm sorry? How do I say I'm sorry?*

As a pastor, I have known so many people who ended up asking that question – or needed to (and that includes me!). Today we're going to look at a psalm that answers it – a psalm that deals with the realities of guilt, and forgiveness:

Psalm 51

This is another psalm where we're given the historical background. The story goes like this ...

King David sleeps with a beautiful woman, Bathsheba (even though she's married to one of his special ops, Uriah the Hittite), and then discovers she's pregnant. He tries to cover things up, but when it doesn't work, he sends Uriah on a suicide mission. Uriah dies, David marries Bathsheba, the world keeps spinning ... and then, a year later, Nathan the Prophet blows the whistle on him, and David's sins are exposed (check out 2 Samuel 11-12 for all the gory details).

Now how do you come back from a fall like that – or from your own? It's like ignoring the Sat-Nav on a car journey, taking a wrong turn, and realising you're not where you're supposed to be. You have to follow the re-route.

In Psalm 51, David gives us 5 instructions to help us do that; to get us back on track, with God and others:

1) Repent (vs1-2). The first thing David does it to mentally change direction: he turns to face the God he has walked away from (the definition of 'repentance'). And he's able to do that because of the God he's turning *to* - a God who is full of mercy (Hebrew *chanah*, 'grace', a kindness we don't deserve), of love (*chesed*, an unfailing, unending, unbeatable love), and of compassion (*racham*, the enveloping love of a mother for her child). I.e. David cries out to God, knowing that God is always ready to forgive. No matter *what* the sin. And so can we.

2) Relent (vs3-6). We need to acknowledge that we've sinned – against others, yes, but ultimately, against God. Now we can often struggle with this: we'll hide it, deny it, justify it, underestimate it (at least, if it's *our* sin. Not so others). What does David do? He 'fesses up – because God's seen it all anyway! He knows the *whole* story! If our lives were a movie then He's watched it all, from start to finish, in full HD, surround-sound, the works. Would you want people to see that movie? Well, God has - the *whole* thing. And that's why there's no point arguing over it.

3) Receive (vs7-12). David asks for several things here: "Cleanse me with hyssop" (a leafy plant that was used to sprinkle water on people who had sinned); "Let me hear joy" (may my life cause people to celebrate again); "Blot out all of my iniquity" (a reference to the blotting out of ink before it becomes indelible); "Create in me a pure heart" (not the emotions, but purpose and direction); "Do not cast me from Your presence" (a picture of rejection); "Grant me a willing spirit" (help me to be a person who works with You, not against). In a nutshell: God, change me!

4) Renew (vs13-17). David's saying, "Lord, I want to live for You from now on." And he refers to a broken spirit. I knew someone once who dropped a frozen turkey on his foot, and walked around for days with toes like balloons. It was only when he went to the doc that he realised he'd broken every toe in his foot! In the same way, God's not interested in people who just go through the motions – whether it's offering sacrifices, or attending church. He's interested in people who recognise their brokenness and go to *Him* - because it's only then that they'll find healing.

5) Repair (vs18-19). David here prays that God will "build the walls of Jerusalem", as in the people of God. David, as king, has jeopardised the safety and security of his entire kingdom. In a similar way, each of us has a particular sphere of influence - family, friends, loved ones. And when we sin, we not only hurt God, we hurt them too – whether it be betraying their trust, or encouraging them to follow our example. So, we have to go and make amends, we have to go and say sorry, we have to 'rebuild those walls.' And we need God to help us do it.

From Negatives To Positives

So how do we find our way back from a wrong direction? 5 steps: repent, relent, receive, renew, and repair.

Now if you'd been King David, how would you have felt? My guess is, you probably would have felt as though your relationship with God was over, that your reign was over, that all of God's promises to you were over. And you'd be wrong! Tragically, David and Bathsheba lost their son: the child had some kind of condition and God allowed nature to take its course, as a sign to David and Israel. Not only that, but David's relationship with those around him – family, friends, subjects – had been damaged and was going to take years to fix. The point being: there are consequences to the decisions we make.

But in the midst of all this, God blessed David and Bathsheba with another son – Solomon – who went on to become king of Israel after David. And if you look at Matthew 1, you'll discover it was through David's family tree, 1000 years later, that Jesus was born. God allowed David and Bathsheba to play their part in the forgiveness of the whole world –

Which just goes to illustrate what repentance can do.

Now there are 2 possible responses to this subject, both of them extremes – and both equally destructive:

- Dismiss it.
- Refuse to forgive yourself or allow yourself to move on.

The biblical response is Psalm 51. In a similar vein, 1 John 1:8-9 says this: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." I saw a meme a few months back featuring everyone's favourite bad-boy-come-good, Kanye West. It went like this: "Kanye, if you think simply saying 'I've given my life to Jesus now' can absolve you of years of obscenity, profanity and immorality, then, my friend, you are absolutely right."

Now you may not be a fan of Kanye West or the Kardashians (or even care). But the truth of this psalm is that there is always a way back. *Always* a way back. *Always*.

But – you have to take it.