

<b>Book</b>	Psalms – Study 4
<b>Topic</b>	Praying our Repentance
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God's power in our life to change you is basically is repentance. Repentance is a vehicle for change and Psalm 51 is a template for us to move in that direction. There are four things that we will examine in this psalm.

- A. A Change of heart
- B. Confession of guilt
- C. Asking for forgiveness and restoration
- D. Recommitment to worship and service

#### **A. A CHANGE OF HEART**

Psalms (ESV) To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

*Psalms 51 (ESV) Have **mercy on me, O God**, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy **blot out my transgressions**. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

So, this is a story of David. One day David was supposed to be going off to war but instead he sent his generals to go to war. The whole trouble is that when you are too free then your mind will start to wonder. So, he was sitting outside in his terrace and low and behold he notices a woman bathing, naked on the rooftop, I don't know what happened. Why is she doing that? It winds up that he has an affair with her and not only having an affair with her, the worst part of it was she had a husband. Her husband was Uriah.

#### **Who was Uriah?**

Uriah was one of the 37 who was with David in desert on the run from Saul. To whom he owed his life. This is the guy who is the husband of Bathsheba and he sent Uriah into a battle and told the commander to, let's charge and then after you charge let Uriah deal with them and you pull back. So basically, David arranged Uriah's murder and not only he arranged his murder, he actually kept quiet about it. He married Bathsheba and it took about a year before Nathan came and using a

little bit of a parable about the sheep actually accused David and then David confessed.

A lot of people have this trouble of understanding that how David can be a man after God's own heart, as he is a murderer and an adulterer. The only way you can understand that is to look at Psalm 51. So, if you actually have David as a man after God's own heart, the story tells you that the criteria is not what you have done, because this is the worse specimen. It shows you that the faith is about your heart. So, this is an important thing to look inside. So, it is a change of heart. He said,

**Psalms 51 (ESV) Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy**

This change of heart takes time. Nathan went to David after one year. So basically, the Lord gives you sometime to repent. When you actually look into the world, you will find a lot of people doing bad things and you are wondering why God doesn't do anything and sometimes God is long suffering and his long-suffering is to allow you time to basically repent. So, David goes to God.

The basis of prayer is the kind of person God is. Steadfast love is the defining characteristic of God. This is his covenantal love. It encompasses three ideas, grace which is unmerited favor, unmerited forgiveness, and unexpected favour. It is something that is undeserved and yet something that involves God's total commitment. New Testament example is prodigal son.

Prodigal son took all his inheritance, ran away, cut ties with his father. When you actually tell your father, I want an inheritance, it means that for me you are dead already. He went away and after he went away, he actually repented and came back, and his father ran after him, which is a total indignity. So that's a picture where you will never let your son go. Everlasting mercy and love is there.

The other one is the Good Samaritan. Here we have a Samaritan who has got no relationship with a Jew and the fellow is at the side of the road is being butchered and he is dying, the priest walks past, the Levite walks past which are basically the best specimen that Israel has to offer. A Samaritan stops and actually helps this total stranger. As far as the stranger is concerned, I don't deserve it, I got mugged and a total stranger comes to help me. That's unmerited favor.

The last one is Jesus Christ. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Love out of the blue for people who are totally undeserving. So, these three stories tell us what God's loving kindness is. So, when we actually come for repentance, King David knows one thing. He knows the character of this God. So, when you are actually repenting and praying and having had done some horrible thing, hopefully not quite as bad as King David, when you turn your heart you are turning to a king, a God who basically loves you with this kind of love.

Psalms 136:23-25 (ESV) It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his **steadfast love** endures forever; 24 and rescued us from our foes, for his **steadfast love** endures forever; 25 he who gives food to all flesh, for his **steadfast love** endures forever.

It is always celebrated. It is the most wonderful thing in the world.

The golden calf incident when Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments and when he came down the people were actually celebrating, they were worshiping the golden calf and God was so angry that he said these words

Exodus 32:9-10 (ESV) And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you."

The word 'let me alone' is not something leave me alone. It means 'let me go'. Israel is bound to God by covenant. In that covenant, there is a covenantal love. God is saying, I am so pissed off, please release me, let me go. I don't want these people anymore. That's what he says, I want to kill them and I will make a nation out of you. I have a new covenant with Moses. This is something very serious if God goes to this extent. If we look at the Covenant was established with Abraham. This covenant was very symbolic. He asked Abraham to cut the lamb, few animals into half, one half he puts on one side, the other half he puts on the other side and that's what they do in Middle Eastern culture when you make a promise. Both parties walk through. When you walk through it means you must keep the promise. If you don't keep the promise, you will be like the three animals, cut into half and die.

Abraham didn't walk through that, God walked through it. There was a vision of a boiling teapot and God moved through the animal parts to show you that he is totally committed to you. That is the covenant and He was so upset at Mount Sinai that he wanted to just break this covenant.

Psalms 51 (ESV) Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my **transgressions**. 2 Wash me thoroughly from **my iniquity** and cleanse me from **my sin!**

There are three Hebrew words when you talk about sin. The first one is transgression which is 'Pesa', which means rebellion. So when you actually sin, sin is actually rebelling against the rule of God. The second idea is 'Awon', which is basically perversion, disrespect for God. It is like going to God and sticking your middle finger up. That is what sin is. Sin isn't nice, isn't respectful, it is grotesque, it is vulgar, it is horrible. The last one is 'Hatta', which is iniquity, which means missing

the mark. That means, this is what God has intended for your life for its flourishing and you miss the mark. So, He wants a change of attitude towards sin. He blocks it out. He wants to scrape it off. He wants to wash me thoroughly from me iniquity. Sin is so terrible, I want to beat it off, I want to scrape it off. I want to have it cleansed, because of a total change in attitude.

Our sins are like our tattoos. We were proud of it once, but now instead of being an emblem of pride, it becomes an emblem of shame. So basically, that is when you have a change of heart. Once we are proud of our sin, now we are totally ashamed, that's a change of heart.

## **B. CONFESSION OF GUILT**

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against 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

So here is a confession of moral failure, a betrayal of God. You have to own your sin and confess it. You cannot have any excuse. We are always pointing towards others. So true confession is having to own your sin and confess it. So basically, the sin actually is not necessarily completely true, I think it is a hyperbole.

Potiphar's wife was desperate for Joseph, threw her clothes off for him. Joseph said, I cannot sin against my master who treated me so well, as well as, God. So all sin is a sin before God. So you have to see your sin as God sees it. Not only you have to own your sin, you have to look at your sin as if God is looking at it. Then you will get a different perspective. Because if you look at your sin and see the way you think what is right, we will all escape, but if you look at it how God looks at it, it is completely different. So here confession is you have to see your sin as God sees your sin. You have to make it and you cannot make excuses. This is true confession.

People don't actually start of, wake up one day and say I think I want to do evil. Adolph Hitler said, all the trouble in Germany, at that time economic trouble are caused by Jews and they are causing the collapse of the German society. The second thing he told them is that the Jews are planning to persecute us. Jews were a minority in Germany at that time. That's how sin comes about and you make excuses.

Ratko Mladic committed genocide against the Bosnian Muslims. His answer was,

*Muslim fighters in Srebrenica had killed Serb civilians earlier in the war. Abuse of Serbs by the Ottoman Empire, which occupied the former Yugoslavia for centuries.*

So according to him, the great-great-great-great.....grandfathers years and years ago did something horrible and that's why I kill them. People are always taking

excuses. Their repentance is false, and we rationalize our sin and try to get away from it.

Bijana Plavsic was one of the major politicians in Serbia in those days. She is a good friend of the war criminal Arkan, who killed hundreds and hundreds of Muslims. That actually got her into jail in the end and she actually served 11 years and was recently released from Swedish jail. She said, I said sorry which reduced my sentence to only 11 years.

This is not true repentance. True repentance is not only confessing our guilt and acknowledging it, it is exchanging idols. True repentance looks at God, false repentance looks at ourselves. False repentance is about how bad we feel, you can feel guilty but still love the sin. Now true repentance is not about how bad our deeds are, but it is about God. False repentance is about us, I got caught, I feel bad, I feel guilty, I feel unworthy. True repentance is about God, how did I betray God, how did I break the relationship, how have we let him down. Now true repentance therefore is to exchange idols. Our idol was ourselves but when you really repent, you change idol, I don't want myself anymore, I want God, I am looking at God's side. It is an exchange of idol. Only when you could exchange of idol, can you actually come to a place in your life where you got true repentance.

#### Circumstances are a Trigger for the Sin:

The trigger for sin in David's case was his personal idolatry of himself. His desires, his sexual desires as king, he probably thought, you know very tough job being king, I must have some benefits. So basically, the woman didn't cause him to sin, the woman was the occasion of the sin. If it wasn't Bathsheba, it would be someone else, which is a fact. They are triggers, but the actual cause of the sin is idolatry of the heart. I must have that sexual pleasure, this is my last chance before I die, I must have some pleasure or something. So that is the issue.

It is the same thing if you look at the Grand Mufti of Australia. He was complaining about Australian woman. They never wear the hijab. This is what he said, *"If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside ... without cover, and the cats come to eat it ... whose fault is it, the cats' or the uncovered meat's?"*

The circumstance will be the trigger of the sin, but not the cause. The cause is idolatry in our hearts. So, when you actually look in your own life. When you are sinning, when we actually come and meditate before God, we have to look at which is the idol and which is the circumstance that triggers. **Behind every scene there is a circumstance and behind every circumstance there must be an idol that's why we compromise.**

Unless you find that idol, you cannot beat the sin. If you take things at the surface level, you can't fix it. You can't fix the behavior, you know, why because underlying the behavior is the idol. You have got to identify the idol. So, if you are actually

struggling with a sin at home, find out what is the underlying idol that actually gives rise to this particular sin and the circumstances that give rise to it.

### **Most of us can behave well:**

The best behavior people in the world were the pharisees. They live much moral than us, but Jesus called them

Matthew 23:27-28 (ESV) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

They are the best specimens of Israeli society, the pharisees but yet inside rotting bones and outside looks great. So therefore, you could be morally correct, morally upright but inside full of sin. So true repentance is new worship, turning to love God more than you love all other idols. True repentance is exchanging idol.

### **Confession of Moral Impotence:**

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

We are all morally incapable of righteousness. From birth, we are born in ugly, horrible circumstances and we actually have original sin. So right from the beginning, we cannot save ourselves.

## **C. ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS AND RESTORATION**

You petition God for cleansing.

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

Traditionally, the hyssop was used in Exodus. They used the hyssop to dip it in blood and they would put it on the doorway, so the angel of death came by, they would see the blood and walk away. Other places where it is used is also used it to sprinkle lepers and then they will be as white as snow as it were. It was also used to cleanse person on contact with dead body. So, there is some sort of idea of purge me with hyssop, means cleanse me from my sin.

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

So he is asking God to change his person from inside, not just take away the sin, but change me so that I will be transformed and this is going to be a gradual process.

9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Petition for transformation. A change of heart otherwise there will be sin again. So he is asking God to change his person from inside. Not just take away the sin, change me from inside so that I will be transformed and this is going to be a gradual process.

11 Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

I want to be back with you Lord, so that I can wake up in the morning and can just worship you, I can just feel your joy course through my body. That's what he wants. Repentance is not only just confessing your sin, changing your idols but the result of all that is being able to worship God again.

### A recommitment to worship and service

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

Teach sinners about what God is like- forgiveness, of love, loyal love, abundant mercy. How to find forgiveness.

14 Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

He is asking God to open his mouth. Worship is an act of God. God comes in and opens your mouth and to sing in such a way that honours him, that he will be happy with. So that is what you want. You want God to open your mouth and my mouth will then declare your praise.

16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

It is hypocritical worship that he doesn't want. He doesn't want you to bring an offering and your heart is not there. What God wants is a perfect unblemished sacrifice but actually what he really wants is a broken and humble and contrite heart, which means you can actually worship God in repentance. It means not only you bring the sheep, now you bring a broken heart and using that broken heart, you

actually worship God. Lament is the confused cry of all who struggle to live in a fallen world where God's perceived absence is the real heart of our battle.

David is lamenting and he is struggling and he is having his heartbroken. We have a very serious problem in Christianity today which also includes us, we have a one-dimensional Christianity. It starts off right even in Alpha where we tell people that we don't know what to do with ugliness in life. Real life is ugly. When you become a Christian, often it doesn't get better, it gets worse. There are a lots of ups and downs and difficulties, so we don't really know what to do with ugliness. Lamenting or crying is weakness. If you lament and cry, people will look at you and try to neglect you. Because Christianity has to be triumphalist. If you fail, people will think that you are not a Christian.

Because you cannot deal with the ambiguity, you can't deal with ugliness, you can't deal with life. So, we have a one-dimensional Christianity. That's why some people misinterpret God's word. Scripture tells you that life is messy and difficult and painful. So therefore, we can bring a gift without actually surrendering. So, we have a one-dimensional Christianity where we don't really repent and we just worship God, feel great and leave. That's only one dimension of it. We gloss over our sin.

We live in a country and society where life is one dimensional, we expect all our politicians to give us goodies. We as Christians cannot do that.

When we don't lament, *unresolved hurts and pain and confusion that has been shallowly dealt with or ignored and we have focused on only one aspect of the faith the triumphalist part that ignores the reality of life and of God and at the end we pay the price*

If you suppress the pain and the doubt and the sadness, you will pay the price one day. Michael Card is a famous musician who is very talented and he actually writes lament songs. He says,

*Biblical lament is not complaint that goes nowhere. It's the people of God planting seeds of hope in the soil of exasperation and despair, expecting that the Lord will come through in the end.*

That's very beautiful. When you actually sing lament songs, you are planting seeds of doubt or despair and sorrow and regret but still trusting God and confidence and so one day God will come through and God will heal, God will restore, God will give you confidence. Our idea of maturing in faith is that we go high and high, that's what we think it is, but in real life the psalms are laments. If the psalms are laments then failure, tragedy, sorrow are expected part of life of faith. If we lament, we are not of course, we are at the broad tradition of people wrestling with God. So when your graph goes up and down and you are feeling very far away that's actually part



in parcel of life. It is lament, but it doesn't fit with the one-dimensional idea of Christianity, because we already wiped that part out.

Lisa Gungor is a very famous award-winning Christian singer. She writes,

*"God was the centre of everything," she says. "The centre of our marriage. God is the reason we got married. We sang worship songs to each other in a little practice room, and that's how we fell for each other—songs about God. It was all Christian romance.*

Then later on she writes,

*Doubt was the opposition of faith. And so [if you doubt], you're seen as a bad person. So, I felt like I was a bad person for questioning. That made this perspective shift really difficult and painful. We ended up getting kicked out of the 'Church' for some of the beliefs that we had."*

So, you are in a church that already had got one dimensional idea of Christianity and if you express any doubt and disappointment and pain, it doesn't fit with our narrative. So therefore, they were kicked out. We all struggle in our marriages, we all struggle in life.

Lament has the potential to change your heart. Sometimes we don't grow because we don't lament.

It compels a search, strips the heart of pretense, and forces us to wrestle with God. It opens our eyes to see God's profound hatred of sin and his equally profound love for his people. Lament leads to awe that God has turned his wrath against his son and not those who most deserve his condemnation.

When you come and push against God, suddenly you will realize that you are not so strong after all. If you don't push against God, then you will think that you are the king. Lament is when you push against God and you know how terribly sinful you are and then you actually are awestruck by the fact that he hates sin and he loves us. Now this is very difficult to reconcile. On one hand, he loves us with the kind of fiery love, on the other hand he hate sin so much and we are the ones who committed sin and the two facts bring together very difficult to reconcile. It is when you wrestle with these two aspects of God then we actually find change. We cannot change and transform our hearts if we have a one-dimensional Christianity.

### **What is the difference between lamenting and grumbling?**

Lamenting is basically expression. Grumbling is the conclusion already made. They are both same. A lamenter and a grumbler both are in anguish, both have anger, both are confused.

The only difference between this, the lamenter is asking and searching the heart of God. He is moving towards God. The grumbler same *modus operandi* but the questions are barely concealed acquisitions about God. The lamenter will say, why, the grumbler will say, unfair.

## Why we lament?

We lament because we are preparing ourselves for the season of pain. Lament actually struggles with the period in your life where the leaf doesn't wither but your faith is still alive, but you have no fruit. Things not going well. That's exactly what it means. So basically, when we lament, we prepare ourselves for our season of pain, we keep our hearts tender, it gives us permission to be honest and honesty is the beginning of comfort. If you are not honest with your feelings of being letdown by God, then basically you are not going to have the comfort. So basically, we need to prepare ourselves for season of pain. When you actually sing a lament song here, the people who are actually here singing the lament song will be feeling the pain. Those of us who are not having the same situation there will have remembered our pain in the past and those who have got absolutely no pain, be careful you will have pain in the future. So therefore, lament is important. When we lament, we share, we identify in a suffering of others. Pain separates us. So therefore, you actually feel separated.

You got anger, pain, confusion and actually this deepens your loneliness. You can go further and further away.

When we actually lament, it unites us. When we sing a song, we must have time where we have songs of lament, because lament unites us. When we sing, some of us will be suffering, some of us won't be suffering but when we sing together the lament makes us aware that we are not alone. If you are not alone then you have the courage to be honestly looking at the pain and struggle to know God. It give us less excuse to withdraw, because we are all singing together. We are all expressing the pain together as a common shared experience which God wants us to do, because it plants the soil of pain and then it brings up hope when God leads us out of the valley.

There is a whole dimension in church life which we never actually experience. So we are living a great threat life. We need to be able to go to someone who is suffering and to basically lament with them that you cry to, they cry to, it is a shared experience, it is a lovely experience, it is an upbuilding experience because one day God will bring you through this, suffering the pain is not denying anymore. So lament is very-very important.

Nehemiah heard of the sins of the exile in Jerusalem. They were sinning and he was very upset and this is Nehemiah's prayer. He says,

Nehemiah 1:5-7 (ESV) And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. 7 We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.

This is corporate solidarity. When you are praying, you are expressing the pain together. Old Testament scholar John Goldingay says,

*"The sufferer's agony, discouragement, opposition, and protests become the mediator's. We pray 'as' them, as if we have become them." We lament, that is, on behalf of the ones who suffer.*

It is a shared experience. We weep with those who weep. Not only that we have biblical injunction. Ephesians 5, you are filled with the spirit, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual song. Half the psalms are lament. If we are filled with the spirit, you will lament.

It also protects from pride. It stops us from being self-reliant. We must be acquainted with grief. Isaiah says

Isaiah 53:3-5 "He was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief..."

Jesus cried a lot and yet our kind of Christianity has got no tears. There is something wrong with us.

James 4:8-10 (ESV) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

I use to read that and I always thought that it doesn't apply to me. Actually, if you look at it, I am double minded, I am a sinner, I need to purify my heart, we need to be wretched, we need to mourn, we need to weep. That's therapeutic and that's right. That's the dimension of life that we need to explore.

## The Structure of Lament:

How do you actually lament when you go home?

### **Address**

We cry to an omnipotent God, a good and merciful God, a just God, a God who grants us access to himself and invites us into personal relationship with him. He wants you to cry at his lap and he wants to wrap his arms around you and he wants you to cry.

### **Complaint**

Names a circumstance that is painful, wrong, or unjust—that does not align with God’s character. Emotions: sorrow, remorse, weariness, anger, disappointment, or doubt.

### **Request**

“God *do* something!” We rarely ask for what we really need. We learn that nothing less than the restored Presence of God will ever satisfy.

### **Express trust**

Expression of trust, with all its praise and joy, is *part* of a psalm of lament.

Every psalm of lament, complain, complain and complain and at the end, yet I will trust you. It always ends that way, does it. We don’t express mourning as if we got no hope, we always express with a hope. One day, I will overcome it.

### **God’s response to Repentance**

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

It is the response of true repentance that will result in the building up of God’s people and acceptance of true worship

The law restrains the sin but it can never transform the heart. Whatever you do, whether you are on death penalty, whether it is 30 years in lieu of death or 50 years in lieu of death, it cannot transform the heart. It can restrain evil, but it cannot transform the heart. The only way it can transform the heart is the love of God. When you see Christ hanging on the cross and you see he hung on the cross for you

and why he hung on the cross, you start to hate the sin that brought him to the cross and that is the beginning of repentance and that's why you repent because he loves you and he hates the sin that separate you from him. That's why if you are a Christian with Jesus Christ on the cross, you are able to live a repented life, don't go and have an attitude towards repentance, do it because it is a beautiful experience because you are being honest with God. If you are really honest with God, all of us are horrible sinners.

A lot of us who are in leadership never confess our sin or talk about our weaknesses because we are trying to keep a one-dimensional Christianity there and as a result of our leadership everybody is one-dimensional also. That's the problem because we are living a lie. I hope that will change, because when we come to the cross we are there not because how good we are, we are here because of how beautiful he is and how horrific our sins are because our sins have brought him to the cross. That's the only way we can change, going back to the cross each time.