

Ash Wednesday

(this week's devotionals come from Psalm 51)

Wednesday – *¹ 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.*

David wrote this Psalm after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and after he arranged to have Bathsheba's husband Uriah murdered to cover up his sin. It is tempting to look at David and say, "Well, at least I've never been *that* bad!" But we all sin—we all look right at something we know God doesn't want us to do and do it anyway. We all rebel against God.

Warren Wiersbe, in his *Bible Commentary of the Old Testament* (pg 935), defines some of the words in this passage: *By committing adultery and murder, David had crossed over the line God had drawn in His law ("transgression"); he had missed the mark God had set for him ("sin") and had yielded to his twisted sinful nature ("iniquity"). "Blot out" refers to a debt that must be paid, and "cleanse" refers to defilement caused by touching something unclean or from disease. "Wash" refers to the cleansing of dirty clothing. In the Jewish society of that day, to wash and change clothes marked a new beginning in life, and David made such a new start.*

We are told in 1 John 1:9 that if we confess our sin, God will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. There may be consequences we need to deal with—we may need to repair a relationship, or pay someone back if we broke or stole something. But God promises to forgive us and cleanse us. Do we believe that?

As we begin Lent, what sins do you need to confess to God? What have you tried to keep secret? What have you excused by saying, "that's just the way I am" rather than admitting? What sins have you denied doing? Where have you minimized sin, saying "it's not that bad," comparing yourself to others? Make a list here—you don't have to show it to anyone, but begin confessing to God, and ask Him to cleanse you of sin. Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any consequences you must face. Do you need to apologize to someone? Do you need to repay someone?

Notes:

Thursday – ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

Sometimes we don't get caught up in minimizing, denying, or excusing, but instead we are convinced our sin is unforgiveable. "No one has sinned as badly as I have, and there is no way God can ever forgive me." We walk around for years or even decades with guilt and shame, thinking God does not love us and there is no point in even talking to Him.

A seminary professor told a story in our pastoral care class about ministering to a woman who had committed adultery. After a lot of prayer and discussion and counseling, the woman and her husband restored their relationship. But despite the fact her husband had assured her that he forgave her, she struggled to feel worthy of him. She also felt unworthy of God's love.

We are reminded in Romans 8:38-39 that *nothing* can separate us from God's love. When it comes to repenting of our sins, we must ask for forgiveness but also receive our forgiveness. Is there anything you have repeatedly confessed to God, but no matter what, you just never felt forgiven and cleansed? This is the work of the enemy. John 10:10 tells us that the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. But Christ came that we may have abundant life. Tell God you accept His forgiveness. Thank Him for his mercy. And live as a forgiven person.

Notes:

Friday – ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

David asked that his joy be restored. I have read this psalm many times and glossed over that phrase. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

Lack of joy is a consequence of not accepting our forgiveness. In the illustration yesterday, I mentioned a woman who had committed adultery. My seminary professor said that when the woman had met with her to tell her this story, she (the professor) got the impression it had happened recently. The details were fresh in this woman's mind, she frequently brought up that she didn't know if her husband would forgive her, or if God could forgive her. She said she felt ashamed every day.

As it turns out, the sin had happened over thirty years ago. Her husband had repeatedly assured her of his forgiveness, and multiple pastors had assured her of God's forgiveness. But she could not accept it. Because of this, my professor said, the woman had very little joy in her life. Even when she entered a room, she did so tentatively, unsure if people would like or accept her. Very few people even knew about her sin, so it was not rational to assume people knew what she had done and were judging her.

But shame is not rational. Shame is from the enemy. The enemy wants us to rehash what we did over and over. God wants us to feel remorse for our sin, to take responsibility for it, to repent of it, and to deal with any consequences our sin might have caused. But He does not ask us to continually beat ourselves up over it. He promises to wash our sins away and give us a clean slate.

Notes:

Saturday – ¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased. ¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In our last devotional for this week, let's look at the way God wants us to come to Him for forgiveness.

In the Old Testament, people were told at times to bring burnt offerings for sins. When he says that God does not delight in sacrifice, King David is not speaking against the Jewish system put into place. He is talking about the heart.

Have you ever received an apology from someone who clearly was doing it only because they were forced to? How many parents have said, "Now apologize to your brother/sister," only for the child to give the sibling an eye roll and a sarcastic, "Sorry."

Even when people did offer burnt offerings for sin, they were to do so with a humble heart. They were supposed to come repenting for their sins. What God wants from us is a broken heart—not the broken heart we think of when someone hurts us badly—but a heart broken over our sin. A heart truly sorry for what we've done.

Let this Lent be an extended time of repentance. Continue to ask God to bring your sins to the surface so you can repent. You may have already thought of the more obvious ones, the ones that may still be bringing you guilt and shame. But ask God to help you look at your words, your actions, even your intentions toward people, and see where you may need to repent.

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