

Humble and Hungry

Week 3: A New Direction

Psalm 51

There was a little boy who desperately wanted a new bike. And he'd heard in Sunday School that if you ask God for something, He listens, so he decided to pray. That night, he knelt beside his bed and prayed, "Dear God, if you give me a new bike, I promise to be good for a whole day." The next morning, he woke up and ran downstairs, but there was no bike.

So, he adjusted his strategy. That night, he prayed, "Okay, God, if you give me a new bike, I'll be good for a whole week." Next day, still, no bike. Frustrated, but determined, he tried again that night, "Lord, I'll be good for an entire month if you give me a bike." But still, no bike. So, he just gave up.

But when Christmas came around, the little boy had an idea. After decorating the house, he grabbed Mary from the nativity scene in the living room. He wrapped her in a blanket and hid her under his bed. That night, he knelt down and prayed, "Jesus, if you ever want to see your mom again, you better give me that bike!"

There are not many wrong ways to pray, but I'd say that's definitely one of them!

We're in week 3 of our series called Humble and Hungry and for the next several weeks, we're getting really practical about prayer. What is it? How do we do it? How do we **not** do it! We want to help all of us develop prayer habits that are well informed and will better connect us to the heart of our Heavenly Father.

And during this series, we want to resources you with some tools you can use, so each week, we'll be handing out cards like this...*(Instructions for baskets, keyring, pens and card. Miss a week, **like all of us last Sunday**, table in the lobby.)*

Today, we're looking at how to pray for a new direction in our life. And to set us up, I just want to remind us about the heart of the Gospel. The good news about what God has done, and is doing, in our life through Jesus. I've used this tool before, but this is the story of God told in **3 Circles...**(Images 1-8, show at my pace, leave Image 8 up.)

In a nutshell, this is the good news about what God has done, and is doing, in our life through Jesus. And I want to hone in on one aspect this morning, and it's this part right here...**(Image 9)**...repent.

Now, I know that word carries a lot of baggage, but it's a concept that is central to the Gospel. Not only that, it's an action that is foundational to living the Christian life. **Repentance is turning from sin and to God.** It's one of the first acts of faith we take when we come to Jesus. We confess that we have gone our own way, done our own thing, and we are turning from that, from our sin and brokenness, and we are turning to God.

That's repentance. But, it's not just a one-and-done action we take when we put our faith in Jesus. We don't say, "Well, I repented. Glad that's over with and I never have to do it again!" Our initial repentance actually begins a life of repentance. The Apostle Paul says we are crucified with Christ. We were buried with him in our baptism and raised to new life. But that doesn't mean our old way of living is immediately dead and gone.

We often continue in those old habits and patterns in which we used to live. Namely, all of us have this pesky habit of taking God off the throne of our lives and putting ourselves back on it. We want to be in control. We want to do things our way instead of His.

- Jesus tells us to forgive as we've been forgiven, but we'd rather hold grudges and make sure the other person knows just how much they hurt us.
- Jesus says the last will be first and the greatest among us will be the servant of all, but we often only think of ourselves and process everything by how it affects us.
- Jesus tells us to love our enemies, but we find it so much more enjoyable to blast them on social media or cut out of our lives anyone who doesn't agree with us.

If you wonder if I'm talking about you in any of these, I'm not. I'm talking about me. But I'm guessing you can relate to some of the ways I continue to move away from God's design and wallow in my brokenness. Twenty-seven years of following Jesus and I find myself needing to repent today as much as I did on that hot August night in 1998.

And when it comes to prayer and our ongoing need for repentance, I think there's an interesting relationship between the two. You don't just pray **for** repentance, as if it's something that happens **to** you. You can pray for a heart that is willing to repent. You can pray for forgiveness for what you need to turn from. But repentance itself isn't just a prayer, it's an action. Prayer becomes one of the ways we practice repentance.

I want to break this down a little by looking at what is considered a masterclass in practicing repentance through prayer. I'm going to read Psalm 51 and go over the 4 parts of a prayer of repentance on the card. And then we're going to spend a little time putting it all into practice together.

Let's look at our passage:

- Psalm 51 Introduction (Explain)
- Psalm 51:1-17

This is such a powerful example of repentance. I've taught on this Psalm several times and I still find new stuff in it. But I want to highlight four things David says that I think model for us

how to practice repentance in prayer. And we'll go through them pretty quickly, but you'll have them on the card you'll pick up later.

First, **Be honest with God about your sin. No excuses or justifications.** David took full responsibility for his sin. He didn't sugar coat it or minimize it. He owned it. When we practice repentance through prayer, we have to be just as honest with God about our junk as he was.

And it's not like He doesn't know. God knew what David had done and why he did it, just like He already knows how you've turned from Him, and yet He still loves you. He still desires you. Paul says in Romans 2 that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance. That invites us to turn back to Him knowing He will not turn us away. Like David said in verse 17, *"a broken and contrite heart, you will not despise."*

Second, **Ask God to change your heart and transform your desires.** David didn't just ask for forgiveness, he begged God to change him from the inside out. In verse 10, he prayed, *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."* He knew that without God's work in him, he would fall right back into sin.

When we repent, we're not just asking God to wipe our slate clean, we're asking Him to reshape our hearts so that we don't keep running back to the same things that pull us away from Him. Repentance isn't just about turning from something, it's about turning to the Lord and asking him to reshape your heart and desires so they align with His.

Third, **Thank God for His love and let His grace renew you.** One of my favorite parts about Psalm 51 is that David knows he doesn't have to beg God to love him again. He never stopped being loved. Instead, David appeals to God's mercy. He says, *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love"* (Psalm 51:1). He knows that even after his worst failure, God's love hasn't changed, and that kind of grace changed him.

When we repent, we don't have to grovel before God, hoping He'll take us back. He already loves us. His grace is already available. So instead of beating yourself up over past mistakes, just spend time in prayer thanking God for His love. Let His grace refresh your soul.

Finally, **Commit to living differently in response to God's loving kindness.** David's repentance in Psalm 51 wasn't just about feeling sorry for what he'd done. It led to transformation. He didn't just want to be forgiven, he wanted to be different because of the grace he'd received. And so, at the end of the Psalm he talks about teaching people the ways of God. Praising Him. Living a life that worships God and follows His ways.

David understood something that I often get backwards. **We don't respond in order to receive grace. We receive grace and then we respond to it.** In other words, David wasn't like, "Okay God, I promise I'll be good for a whole month if you give me grace." That's not

grace. It's merit. But David knew he'd already received that grace and so he commits to living differently in response to it. His renewed heart led to renewed action, not because he felt like he needed to earn God's love, but because of the way he had already experienced it.

When we repent, God isn't asking for perfection. But His grace and mercy that we receive should lead to real change in our lives as we become more in love with Him than we are the things that draw us away from Him.

And so now, the uncomfortable question we need to ask ourselves is this: **What do I need to repent of?** What do I need to **turn from** in order to **turn to** God? We all have those things in our life. What is it for you?

- Pride – Thinking more about yourself than others. Refusing to admit when you're wrong. Getting defensive when someone corrects you, even if it's someone who loves you.
- Greed – An unhealthy obsession with money, success, possessions.
- Bitterness – Holding on to a past hurt and refusing to forgive.
- Anger – You have a disposition of anger that keeps others on edge around you.
- Gossip – Do you talk about others in a way that tears them down? Makes other people think less of them.
- Addiction – Substance abuse, pornography.
- Judging others – Looking down on people instead of extending grace.

I could go on, but you get the point. We all have something in our life we need to turn from in order to turn to God. What is it for you? Go ahead and take out that piece of paper you have. We're going to practice that first step of repentance, **Be honest with God about your sin. No excuses or justifications.**

We all have something, big or small. Spend some times with the Lord, asking Him to reveal what it is in your life that He's inviting you to turn from. Write it down and then drop it off. Pick up a communion cup and card. Spend time praying through numbers 2-4 and, as you do, partake in communion to remind yourself that Jesus has already paid the price for your sin, so you don't have to. And He's inviting you to find new life, real life, in Him.

(Reflection and Prayer Time)

I wanted to add something to the bottom of the card to remind us that this isn't a one-and-done kind of thing. I wanted to just say, "Rinse and repeat," but I was afraid bald guys like

Quentin might not get the reference, so it just says, “Repeat often, knowing you will always receive mercy and find grace in your time of needs” And it points to this verse in Hebrews 4, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Repentance isn’t about guilt, it’s about grace. It’s not about trying harder, it’s about turning to the One who can truly change us. David knew that, and today, you have that same invitation.

No matter what you’ve done, no matter how far you’ve strayed, God’s mercy is waiting for you. You don’t have to clean yourself up before coming to Him. You don’t have to have it all figured out. You just have to approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, knowing you will find all the mercy and grace you need in Him.

Maybe today, for the first time, you need to put your trust in Jesus. You need to stop running, stop trying to fix yourself, and simply surrender to Him. He took your sin to the cross. He died in your place. And He rose again to give you new life.

If you’re ready to turn from sin and trust Him today, He is ready to receive you.

Or maybe you’re already following Jesus, but you’ve been carrying something you need to bring before Him today. You don’t have to hide. You don’t have to be afraid. His throne is a throne of mercy and grace. So come to Him with honesty, with a surrendered heart, and with confidence that His mercy is more than enough for you.