

Thankful for Mercy

Psalm 51

It is great to be back at Oakwood! Thank you for being so welcoming to our fellow EFCA pastors over the last four Sundays - I hope you were encouraged by the fact that ***we are Evangelical and we are Free!*** And thank you giving me the freedom to visit the other Churches. Here are my primary takeaways from our little experiment:

Evangelical & Free Takeaways:

1. Knowing nearby EFCA Pastors
2. Better understanding the EFCA Movement
3. Increasing prayer for one another
4. Learning from each other
5. Enhancing potential for future partnership

Takeaways:

1. I have been blessed to spend time with these brothers in the Lord - now ***you know a little better some of the men*** Dave and I are privileged to hang out and pray with several times a year in Lakeland.
2. I hope our ***view of the Free Church has been elevated*** - not only in our five core convictions but in the awareness that Oakwood is a part of a broader Gospel movement!
3. Our goal as pastors was to work on a project together so we would ***pray more for each other***. That has certainly happened among the five of us and our hope is that our churches will now pray more regularly for each other as well.
4. By experiencing welcome, fellowship and worship at other churches we were able to ***cross-pollinate some of our best ideas*** - you'll see some changes coming early in the new year and some of those were influenced by these church visits.
5. And among many other blessings, by being more connected as five EFCA churches we have ***more potential to work together in the future*** - in prayer, maybe a joint worship or fellowship gathering, training events or cooperative missions efforts. There is no telling where this will lead us but this we know - ***we are BETTER TOGETHER!***

It was a fun project - now Kristin and I are very glad to be back HOME at Oakwood! We've missed you guys! Let's pause now and pray!

Ok. For the next five Sundays we will be studying **five different Psalms**. The first two, I hope, will help ***enhance our gratitude*** moving into the holidays. The next three are Royal Psalms that will showcase ***the glory of Jesus*** in the prophetic expectation of the Jewish people as they prayed and trusted and waited for their Messiah King to come.

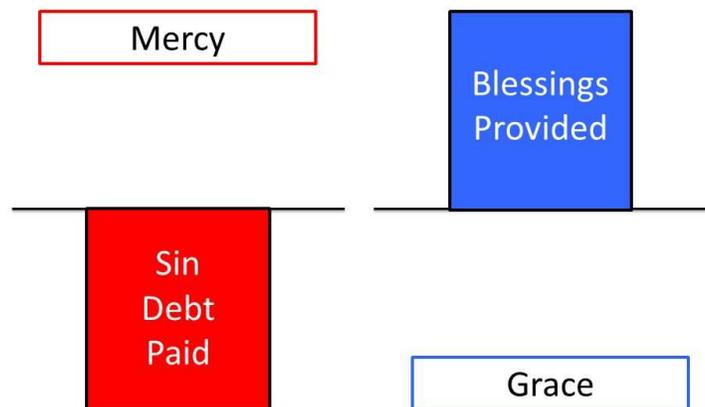
Today we will ***walk through Psalm 51***, as we've just heard it read. This is a convicting Psalm - a cry for mercy. I pray that God will use it to remind us of how much mercy from God we all desperately need and the infinite mercy He has given us in Christ! The better we understand the vast dichotomy between what we deserve and what God has given us in Christ the more GRATEFUL we will be. Listen again to our verse of the month:

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Are we THANKFUL? This is God’s will for us! Sometimes we agonize over knowing God’s will - but this is loud and clear. Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks in ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. “This is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

If we are not thankful it is because we do not really understand the Gospel. We don’t fully understand what we deserve from God and the unbelievable blessing of what He has given us in Christ. We can sum this up in two words: mercy and grace.

- **Mercy** – not getting the punishment we deserve
- **Grace** – getting blessings we don’t deserve



We deserve to pay for our sin ourselves – which would mean eternal suffering under the just wrath of God. We don’t deserve to have a relationship with God or to enjoy any of His blessings in this life or in heaven. “The wages of sin is death,” so perfect justice would be to be struck dead immediately when we sin. **Every breath we take is a gift of God’s mercy.**

A friend of mine, when he gets stressed out or upset has disciplined himself to **take a gratitude walk**. He literally gets up, leaves his office and walks around the block recounting to Himself and the Lord a list of things he is thankful for. Let’s consider today and next Sunday to be a couple of gratitude walks for us as a church. So take a deep breath and join me in Psalm 51 as we begin our gratitude walk together. ***“Have mercy on me, O God.”***

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

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”

Psalm 51:1

This Psalm is a cry for mercy. The subtitle of the Psalm is a part of inspired Scripture and gives us important context. “To the choirmaster” reminds us that even this Psalm was intended to be sung as part of Israel’s ongoing worship of the Lord. “A Psalm of David” tells us King David is the one who wrote it, “when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

This was David’s rock bottom. The greatest King of Israel who wrote the majority of the Psalms, who slayed the giant Goliath as a teenager, who had led the nation to victory after victory in battle had his greatest moral failing toward the end of his life. He committed adultery with the wife of one of his best friends and then conspired to have his friend murdered. These were not

petty indiscretions – they were flagrant, despicable sins. And David did not admit them right away.

Nathan the prophet had to confront him personally and only then did David realize the extent of his sin. The result, when conviction flooded over David, was this Psalm – this prayer – this cry for mercy. “Have mercy on me, O God!”

We may sit here and think – good thing for David to pray this prayer – he was an adulterer and murderer who betrayed his best friend! I haven’t done any of those major sins, so **how does this relate to me?** I’m glad you asked. This prayer applies to every one of us.

- You may not have committed adultery, but if you’ve ever looked at a man or woman and desired him or her for yourself Jesus says you have already committed adultery in your heart.
- You may not have murdered anyone but Jesus says if you are angry with your brother or curse your brother you are in danger of the fires of hell.

Brothers and sisters, we may keep ourselves pretty sanitized on the surface – we are church people after all – but **inside we are all the same**. We are all proud, selfish, idolatrous, rebellious sinners in desperate need of MERCY. So let’s see in David’s failure the reality that we have all failed. ***And let’s find in David’s prayer the hope for the forgiveness and restoration we all need.***

Psalm 51 shows us four steps to a grateful life. Step one is to cry out for mercy.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

1. Cry Out for Mercy

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and **cleanse me from my sin.**”
Psalm 51:1

It is clear in Scripture that mercy is always available from God – but you have to ask for it in order to receive it. God is gracious and merciful in His very nature and He wants everyone to experience that love and compassion but He will not force it on anyone, nor will He ignore a proud refusal to admit our sin.

In order to cry out for mercy ***we must first admit that we need it.*** This is the first step toward experiencing the life-changing power of the Gospel – acknowledging that you need God’s mercy. YOU are a sinner in need of saving. You are no better than anyone else and certainly not good enough to be in a right relationship with God.

Change begins when we stop denying, defending and deflecting responsibility.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

1. Cry Out for Mercy

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and **cleanse me from my sin.**”
Psalm 51:1

- Change begins when we stop denying, defending and deflecting responsibility

Anyone who has been through **a recovery process** will tell you that the first step is admitting your denial. I have just started a 12 step process - not for any glaring problem, don't panic. I just wanted to learn more about recovery and I had heard lots of good things about Celebrate Recovery in particular. So a few guys and I started working through the steps.

Naturally **we all deny our sin**. We find all kinds of creative ways to defend ourselves and deflect the blame to others. Hear me - you will NEVER change... you will NEVER grow until you begin to see the depth of your own denial. This is the power of PRIDE and it is deeply woven into the human heart which is why your heart, like mine, is desperately sick.

Hear this word from God in Psalm 51 - "Have mercy on me, O God" should be our heart cry - every one of us - every single day. We all need the mercy of God to blot out our transgressions, to wash away our iniquities and cleanse us from our sin. If you persist in denying your sin problem, defending yourself and deflecting the blame to others you will not change.

Look at where David finds hope for change:

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

1. Cry Out for Mercy

*"Have mercy on me, O God, **according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.**" Psalm 51:1*

- Hope for change is found in God alone

It is God's loving and merciful character that gives us hope to receive mercy. It is His kindness that leads us to repentance. There is an insert in your worship program today with quotes from the book, *The Calvary Road*. Look at that for a minute.

*"The blood does not cleanse excuses, but always cleanses sin, confessed as sin...We are not likely to be broken except at the cross of Jesus. The willingness of Jesus to be broken for us is the all-compelling motive in our being broken too." *The Calvary Road*, Roy Hession*

This handout can help you get past your excuses and blame-shifting. Step one is to admit you have a problem and the problem is YOU. Jesus' blood does not cleanse excuses - only sins. We must be broken before God to begin to change - and it is Jesus' willingness to be broken for us that moves us to be broken ourselves.

Cry out for mercy - according to the steadfast love of God!

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

1. Cry Out for Mercy

*"Have mercy on me, O God, **according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.**" Psalm 51:1*

- Hope for change is found in God alone

The Lord's mercy is abundant, overflowing, never-ending. Come to Him to receive mercy and you will begin to be filled up with gratitude! The goal today, as a friend recently pointed out, is **not for us to feel GUILTY but for us to be GRATEFUL**. Guilt - conviction for our sin - should be a temporary state that leads us to cry out for mercy. We should not LIVE in Guilt. Our feelings of guilt should move us to cry out for mercy and as we experience that mercy the guilt will be replaced with gratitude, joy and peace!

Step two, however, is to realize the consequences of our sin.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

2. Realize the Consequences of your Sin

*"For **I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.**" Psalm 51:3*

- **Guilt** - Knowing you have done something wrong

There are three primary consequences for sin - guilt, shame and broken relationship with God. Guilt is what we see in verse 3 - "I know my transgressions." Guilt is when you **know** you have done something wrong. We've all felt this many times, though we may be experts at denying it.

"My sin is ever before me." You know, deep down, when **you have crossed a line**. That's what a transgression is - the older word was "trespass." God placed a line on the ground, a fence in the field and you crossed it. You stepped "out of bounds."

- Truth is not gray - it is black and white. When you tell a lie you know you have crossed a line.
- Theft is very clear - when you take something that is not yours, you are guilty.
- Adultery is spelled out as a sin but so is COVETING. When you DESIRE another man's wife you have crossed a line and become guilty.
- Murder is obviously wrong, but so is an angry, hurtful word - that is a violation and you know you are guilty - you have DONE SOMETHING wrong.

Shame goes deeper than guilt.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

2. Realize the Consequences of your Sin

*"Let the bones that you have broken rejoice... **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.**" Psalm 51:8,10*

- **Shame** - Feeling that you Are something wrong

Shame is when **you feel that something INSIDE of you is wrong**. That YOU ARE bad. When you do enough bad things you begin to feel that you, yourself are bad, evil, dirty. That is shame. This is why David talks about his bones being broken. His insides were torn up by an internal conflict. And he knew what he needed as a clean heart - a new spirit INSIDE.

Guilt is personal, but ***shame can be shared.***

- If your husband embezzled \$100,000 and went to jail he was guilty of that crime, but you as the wife share in the shame of it.
- If your wife cheated on you with the neighbor she is guilty of adultery but you share in the shame of a broken marriage.
- If your teenage son gets arrested for drunk driving, he is guilty of a crime but the whole family shares in the shame of that arrest.

Do you see the consequences for your sin? Guilt is an objective state. You are either guilty or not. Shame is a deep internal feeling and it affects more than just you. The third consequence of sin is that your relationship with God is damaged - even broken.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

2. Realize the Consequences of your Sin

“Against you, you only, have I sinned... Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.” Psalm 51:4,11

- **Broken Relationship with God**

David sees this clearly. His sin was against his friend named Uriah and against a woman named Bathsheba. David was guilty of adultery and murder and treachery. But the shame of those acts spread throughout Jerusalem, throughout the army, throughout the whole region. Yet David could write, “Against YOU, you only, have I sinned.”

Ultimately all of our sins are against GOD alone. Bathsheba was God’s creation - His daughter. Uriah was God’s creation, His son. The Kingdom of Israel was God’s Kingdom, not David’s. Everything David had was given to him by God. David’s betrayal on the surface was a betrayal of Uriah, but really it was a betrayal of God alone.

And the result of sin against God is separation from God - to be cast out of His holy presence. David saw this happen with King Saul. The Spirit of God was literally taken from Saul due to Saul’s disobedience.

But that is the difference between Saul and David. David - when confronted with his sin - repented. He wrote Psalm 51. He was broken over his sin and realized the massive consequences of that sin. Saul was not broken over the sin - he only wanted RELIEF from the consequences. David’s was true repentance. Saul’s was false, shallow repentance.

Let’s follow David’s example and move on to step 3 - confess your sin.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

3. Confess your Sin

*“Blot out **my transgressions**, wash me thoroughly from **my iniquity**, and cleanse me from **my sin.**” Psalm 51:1-2*

- **Admit that your problem is your own sin**

Hear how personal this Psalm is - “MY transgressions... MY iniquity... MY sin.” Brother, sister, friend - your problem is not something or someone outside of you. ***Your problem is YOU - it is the sin in your own heart.*** Yes, you are certainly affected by the sins of others and by the

brokenness of this world, but those things are not your real, central problem. Your deep disease is sin and until you admit that, you will not be able to change and you will be a bitter person instead of a grateful, joyful person.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

3. Confess your Sin

"[I have] done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." Psalm 51:4

- Account for the cost of your sinful choices

To truly confess your sins, you must **account for the cost of them**. Step 4 in recovery is to take a "fearless moral inventory." You have to make a list of everything that has happened to you in your life and everything you have done - focusing on the things YOU DID, that you were responsible for.

David says, "I have done what is EVIL in your sight. He is agreeing with God - so that God will be justified in His words and judgment. **Do you agree with God** or are you still resisting, still living in denial? Remember, GOD is the One you have primarily offended.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

3. Confess your Sin

"Against you, you only, have I sinned." Psalm 51:4,

- Acknowledge that you have primarily offended God

Ultimately we are responsible to One Person. You don't answer to your parents. You don't answer to the President of the United States. You don't answer to your boss, your spouse, your kids. You answer to One and only One Person - and His name is Jesus. He is the appointed Judge of the living and the dead. He is the One before whom every knee will bow and to whom everyone will give an account. He is the One you have failed and He is the One to whom you will answer.

Are you ready for that conversation?

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

3. Confess your Sin

"Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation... You will not be pleased with a burned offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit..." Psalm 51:14,16-17

- Ask God to forgive you

David turned the corner from denial to faith by confessing his sin. He cried out "deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation." Have you taken this critical step? Have you asked God - the One you have offended - to forgive you?

Maybe you are still trying to fix things yourself. You are trying to fix yourself up through your personal efforts or your religious practices. God rules that out. It can never be enough. Verse 16 says, "You will not be pleased with a burnt offering." We cannot kill enough animals to make up

for our sins. You cannot work hard enough, be good enough, do enough acts of service, give enough money to charity to make up for your past or atone for your sins.

Stop trying to fix yourself and ASK. Come humbly to the Lord, the God of our salvation. And here is where the good news gets really good - you can receive cleansing in Christ TODAY. That is our step four. First, we cry out for mercy. Then we realize the consequences for our sins and confess them. Finally, we come before Jesus to receive the mercy we are begging for.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

“Cleanse me from my sin... Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow... Blot out all my iniquities...”

Psalm 51:2,7-8

- Jesus replaced your Guilt with His Righteousness

David prays, begging to be cleansed, washed, forgiven. Think of his adultery, murder and treachery as huge stains on his robes. He comes to the Lord - he steps into the light of God's blinding judgment and stops trying to hide his sin. Those stains are bright and bloody. He can't get away from the light of truth so he stops running, stops blaming and simply asks for mercy. David came to the only One who could truly wash Him clean.

Oh do you see how all of these prayers and requests are so perfectly fulfilled in Christ? The animal sacrifices in David's day were just a sign pointing ahead to the perfect sacrifice. David knew that no animal could pay for his sin. And yet David had hope that such a sacrifice would one day be provided and through that sacrifice he could be washed - he would be washed whiter than snow!

Brothers and sisters, this is what Jesus has done for us - he has replaced our guilt with His righteousness. Listen to 1 Corinthians 6:11.

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

*“And such were some of you. But **you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**” 1 Corinthians 6:11*

- Jesus replaced your Guilt with His Righteousness

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus! Hear this - “you were washed, you were SANCTIFIED.” That means you - as a believer in Jesus - you have been made holy. You have been declared righteous. Your guilt is gone and you stand before God forgiven and free from the penalty of sin. Jesus took your sin-stained life and gave you His life of perfect righteousness. “Dressed in His righteousness alone - faultless to stand before the throne.”

Jesus also took our shame!

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

“Hide your face from my iniquities... Restore to me the joy of your salvation... Build up the walls of Jerusalem.” Psalm 51:8,12,18

- Jesus replaced your Shame with His Glory

David was crushed emotionally and physically with the shame of his failing. He knew the problem went deeper than just what he had done and it went all the way to the core of who he was. His problem was HIM - it was inside him. He needed new joy. He needed his life rebuilt from the ground up. Hear Romans 8 -

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

*“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified **he also glorified.**”* Romans 8:29

- Jesus replaced your Shame with His Glory

All of your shame was placed upon Jesus - he took it from you, he bore it for you on the cross. And in exchange, Jesus has given you all of His glory - the glory He had with the Father from eternity past, the glory He enjoys right now at the Father's right hand - that glory is already INSIDE of you and it is what AWAITS you forever.

Jesus took your guilt and gave you righteousness, he took your shame and gave you glory - finally, Jesus took your wrath and filled you with His love!

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

*“You delight in truth in the inward being... **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me... Then I will teach transgressors your way... and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness... Then will you delight in right sacrifices.**”* Psalm 51:6,10,11,13-14,19

- Jesus replaced God's Wrath upon you with His Love within you

“Create in me a clean heart.” This is our deepest need - not to be a little bit improved but to be totally transformed. If your life is a house it doesn't just need a little remodel - a little paint here, a little shoring up there. It needs to be torn down and rebuilt on a new foundation.

And that is precisely what God does for us in Christ. He takes that old life and it dies with Jesus on the cross. A new person is born at the moment of saving faith - the old has gone, the new has come. You receive a new heart and the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you. Then, on that new foundation, the Holy Spirit begins to build a house.

“Then,” David says, “I will teach transgressors your way... and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.” We cannot reverse these steps. It's not that we start saying the right things and doing the right things and then we gradually change. No. It's that God changes us radically on the inside and then He makes us into something new.

You don't just need some new habits. You need a new heart. And that is precisely what God gives us in Christ. Apart from Christ God's wrath rests upon us. Listen to John 3:36

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." John 3:36

- Jesus replaced God's Wrath upon you with His Love within you

If you have not yet committed your life to Jesus then God's wrath remains on you. But at the moment that you cry out to Jesus for mercy He not only forgives your sin and takes your shame, he fills you with His love - He fills you with HIMSELF!

Here is the summary for today:

Four Steps to a Grateful Life

"Have mercy on me, O God." Psalm 51:1

1. Cry out for Mercy
2. Realize the Consequences of your Sin
3. Confess your Sin
4. Receive Cleansing in Christ

When we begin to realize the fullness of God's mercy to us in Christ it should fill us with gratitude. And what we see is that you can't separate mercy from grace. In His mercy God forgives our sins and washes us clean in Christ. He does not give us the punishment we deserve. But He never stops there - He goes right on to give us infinite blessings in Christ we could never deserve.

And this shouldn't surprise us - for **God IS merciful and gracious**, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. May we not live in guilt - but may we live, every day, in gratitude for the overflowing mercy and grace of Jesus!

Let's pray.