

518 How Can I Change My Life? God's Answers to Life's Questions

Today we're going to look at a man who despised the person he had become. Perhaps you've had that experience. It's easy for people to get caught up in selfishness and sin. They think they can live as they please without any consequences. But the time comes when the sin itself enslaves a person, and he becomes someone he never intended to be and cannot respect. The apostle Paul once cried, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Perhaps you too have felt that way.

The psalmist David was a man after God's own heart, a giant slayer, a victorious king, and one who loved God. One spring, however, when kings go out to battle, David stayed home in his palace. Walking around on his roof one evening, David saw a woman bathing. She was very beautiful. First David inquired about her and found out she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his "mighty men." Next David sent for her. Then David slept with her. When she cleaned up, she went home. Shortly after that, however, she sent word to David that she had conceived his child and was pregnant.

David brought Uriah home, hoping to cover up his sin; but Uriah, being a true soldier, never slept with his wife Bathsheba. David got Uriah drunk, hoping to get him to go home to his wife; but Uriah stayed with his soldiers. David then sent word to Joab to put Uriah in the heat of the battle and abandon him so that he would be killed. Joab did so, Uriah died. After a period of mourning David took Bathsheba and made her his wife. 2 Samuel 11:27 says, "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD." David had sinned against God, against Bathsheba, and against Uriah.

David describes his guilt in Psalm 38:3-10: There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; There is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me. My wounds grow foul *and* fester Because of my folly. I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long. For my loins are filled with burning, And there is no soundness in my flesh. I am enumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before You; And my sighing is not hidden from You. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me.

This passage describes a man hurting deep inside over the sin in his life. I have a book in my library on how people deal with guilt. It describes 26 ways people try to overcome guilt. Surprisingly, the book says that not one of them works. Humans are full of schemes and forget that schemes usually deceive the schemer. People get trapped in their own devices. David wanted to change, to find a solution to his guilt. We find out how he did that in Psalm 51. No one overcomes guilt by hiding it or denying it. One has to own up to sin and make the kind of changes in his life that help him to become the kind of person he can live with and respect.

Psalm 51:1-4 says, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge." David knew the stain of sin. More than anything he wanted to be free of that filthy feeling sin causes. He couldn't get his mind off of it. He knew God was right to judge him. It is an important day in a person's life, when he/she takes responsibility for sin. God cannot work in our lives as long as we deny our sins.

Psalm 51:6 says, "Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom." It

amazes me how often people will deceive themselves, calling their sins mistakes, inappropriate actions, a sickness, or a stage their going through. Paul said in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Romans 6:23 reminds us that the wages of sin is death. That hasn't changed in all these centuries.

David said in Psalm 51:16-17, "For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." What God desires from us is not some offering to make up for our sin but a change in our hearts. Sin breaks God's heart, and it should break ours. We have broken his commandments, sinned against Him. What He desires from us is that we realize what we have done and show contrition, show that we are genuinely sorry, ashamed, and penitent for our actions.

A contrite person will genuinely regret having sinned and hurt God. He will mourn his sin. More than that, when one understands the ugliness of sin, one then begins to despise it just as God despises it. Paul said in Romans 12:9, "Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good." God wants us to hate sin, because it is evil—it hurts people, hurts God, and hurts the sinner. When we hate sin, we can't go back to that again, do that again, give in to that temptation. Solomon said in Prov. 8:13, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way, And the perverted mouth, I hate."

When you love God, you will hate sin and hate what sin does to the souls of those you love. While Christians hate what sin does, like God they still love the sinner. The father of the prodigal knew that sin caused his son to waste his money on drinking and prostitutes. He hated that sin, but he loved his son. Any good father would spend his time praying for his lost son, wishing that he would come to his senses and change his heart and life. That's how God looks at us, what love and longing. He wants us to change our hearts and lives. Jesus tells of the prodigal son in Luke 15:17-24,

"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. [Repentance means a change of heart and a change in behavior. He didn't just talk a change; he went home.]

And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

The Father rejoices with the angels when a sinner repents. God loves each of us as his children and wants us to love and live with him. He will bless us when we come home to Him.

When a person repents, he will not only hate the sin but will also hunger for righteousness. He wants to be restored to a loving relationship with God and to be clean from any stain of sin. David in Psalm 51:7-9 say from his heart, "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities." Hyssop was a plant the Israelite priests used to sprinkle the people when they were ceremonially unclean. David desperately wanted to be free from sin.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." When a person loves God, because he knows what God has done for him, he is

truly hungry for righteousness. Righteousness means being in a "right" relationship with God. God will not condemn the righteous, but He will condemn the wicked. Peter reveals God's desire for us in 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Jesus was willing to bear your sins so that you could live to righteousness.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Love for Jesus means I want to please Him, live as He teaches, serve Him with my life, and avoid any offense. David sang in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me." He wanted a whole new and changed heart, one that did not give in to sin as he did with Bathsheba. He wanted to be clean.

Sin will harden your heart. The Hebrew writer cautions in Hebrews 3:12-13, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." A clean heart draws close to God and stays away from sin. A heart that gives in to sin soon gets hardened. It no longer has love for God, because it can't keep sinning and maintain a relationship with God. You have to choose: a clean heart with God or a sinful life that shuts God out.

David said in Psalm 51:11-12, "Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit." David clearly wanted to go back to that relationship he had with God before he sinned. He did not want to lose the joy of his salvation or lose the Holy Spirit, who gave him the ability to write psalms and prophesy. That joy comes from knowing that our sins are forgiven and we can remain with God forever. Joy comes from knowing that God is with us and for us and will bless us throughout eternity. Joy comes from a thankful heart for all that God has done for us.

A thankful, joyful heart can hardly keep its mouth closed. It wants to tell everyone of the love and the blessing of God. David said in Psalm 51:12-15, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; *Then* my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise." Love will overflow from a heart that knows how good God has been. It wants everyone to know and to find the same joy and blessing.

Ezekiel told the people of his time in Ezekiel 18:31, "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?" We can have a new heart and spirit when we open our eyes to the tragic nature of sin and begin to hate it. We'll have a new heart when our focus is on being right with God and living to please Him. We don't have to die in sin. Because of the blood of Jesus we can live to righteousness. Don't let another day go by with the stain of sin in your life. Make a new heart for yourselves.

I don't know who first came up with this statement but I certainly love it: "I am not all I want to be; I am not all I am gonna be; I am not all I ought to be; but, thank God, I am not what I used to be." We all have a past we have to live with, things in our lives we regret. Sin makes us feel small in our own eyes. That's why the gospel is such good news. The gospel is God's power to save our souls and to change our lives. When we listen to it, heed it, and apply it to our lives, God will give us a new heart and a new perspective—one filled with joy and peace. We don't have to live in guilt and fear because of the gospel!!

Let the story of Jesus, dying on the cross for your sins melt your hardened heart. Let his love for you soften you until you yield to Him. It's the stubborn, hard heart that finds life so difficult. It's the humble, penitent heart that yields to God that finds peace and contentment. David said in Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." There are times when we need to look long at the cross and realize what the Lord did to forgive us from our sins and to give us hope. A new heart begins with ridding ourselves of selfishness and focusing on the Lord. Repentance is a wonderful gift, because it allows us to change our hearts, to get rid of the anger and guilt and replace it with love and devotion to God. David learned that his life would never improve as long as he harbored sin. It was when David confessed sin and repented of it that he began to find peace in his soul. God's ways work. They bring peace and forgiveness, which takes away the sting of sin. When God forgives a sin, He no longer holds it against us. We all need a clean heart! The way we gain one today is through Jesus Christ. Believe in Him, repent of your sins, confess His name, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.

Phil Sanders

God's Answers to Life's Questions

Concord Road Church of Christ

8221 Concord Rd., Brentwood, TN 37027

1-877-226-5747

phil@God-answers.org www.God-answers.org