

# Wrestling With God 4) To Obtain a Clean Heart

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What was David thinking? How did he think it would be okay to do what he did? It stands recorded for us on the pages of Scripture and it's written on the heading to Psalm 51. He committed a terrible mistake. No, that word doesn't capture it all. If we want to describe what he did, we must label it for what it was. It wasn't just a mistake. It was evil, abhorrent. His hands were stained with guilt and he couldn't escape it. How did it get to be such a mess?

We can see how it all came down and are able to guess just what David was thinking. How would you like to have your private life and your record of sins recorded for everyone to see? David did. It started so small with him walking about idle on his rooftop after an evening nap. Instead of going off to help command and fight at the battlefield, he opted to enjoy some leisure at his palace. He wasn't out looking for trouble. But when he saw her, he should have known trouble was brewing. He peered and began to lust after her. Her name was Bathsheba, and she was the wife of one of his champion soldiers and close companions. She was exposed while bathing and David did the least honorable thing. Instead of just honorably turning away, he let his heart lust as he stared.

He couldn't just leave the matter after that. His heart wanted more, so he sent for her and had her brought to himself. Was she innocent or was she trying to seduce him? That doesn't matter. David was the king. David sent for her. David was supposed to be in control here. David used his kingly position and persuasion to have his way with Bathsheba and he committed adultery with his friend's wife. "But no one would know, right? The single affair would be over, and all would be covered. No harm done." At least it seems that's what he was thinking at first.

Then the news came. David received a private message, "I'm pregnant." Bathsheba had not been with her husband because he had been absent while fighting a war. But she was now pregnant by David. He would have to come out openly and admit he is an adulterer. But nobody would have to know if they thought the baby belonged to the woman's husband. The whole mess would be over, and all would be covered. At least that's what David was thinking.

David called Uriah from the battlefields and tried his best to convince his faithful soldier to go home and to be with his wife, Bathsheba. But faithful Uriah couldn't go home while his comrades were off fighting a war. David tried his best to get Uriah drunk and get him to just go home. Then everyone would assume the baby belonged to Uriah. That's what David was hoping. Then it would all be covered. He was wrestling the mess of sin and losing badly.

When he couldn't get Uriah to go home, he sent him back into the battle. Special instructions were in his hands for the commander to place Uriah in the most dangerous place. The army was supposed to advance into the most dangerous position and then have everyone else withdraw so that Uriah might die. After that David's little affair would be all hidden because there would be no jealous husband in the picture. Uriah faithfully carried this sealed message to his commander, faithfully fought on the front lines, and died. Everything was now covered. David received the news of Uriah's death and finally could breathe a sigh of relief. The whole mess was over. At least that's what David thought.

What was he thinking? "Lust? No, I'm the king. I'm special. It's not bad if I do it." What about the affair? "It's okay if it is consensual, right? Besides, God loves me. I can do this, and he'll understand." What about the cover up? "It's not really that bad a sin if nobody knows about it. I'm not hurting anyone." But then his selfish heart not only betrayed a loyal friend, it killed him. "Nobody needs to know. It's for the good of the nation. We don't want people to lose confidence in the virtue of their king."

What was David thinking? He was hoping to deal with his sin in the same way everyone is tempted to deal with it. He was starting to see sin as something you can just cover up. He wasn't seeing it as evil in God's eyes and as something needing divine justice. Isn't it the same thing that you and I are tempted to think regarding our faults? "It's just a small sin. It's not really that bad if I give in a little to temptation. I can control the situation." But like David, we can't control sin. It controls us. It takes hold of our hearts.

David let sin start small and grow in his heart. What entry-level sin takes hold of your heart and leads to further sin? Is it lust which leads to so many other evils? Do you reason, "I'm not hurting anyone" as you let your eyes gaze and your heart wander? Or is it laziness in which your idleness becomes an avenue for wasting your time and forming destructive habits? Is it greed which fills your stomach or fills your wallet? It soon fills your heart with evil as you begin to think, "It's not hurting anyone if I just am a little dishonest, I deserve more." Or you might think, "I don't have to work too hard at my job; my employer has plenty of money to spare." Do you struggle to hold your tongue and lash out at others thinking, "they deserved it?" Do you hurt others with your words? Do you let a little argument become a rage fest?

When that sin does happen in your life what do you do next? Do you wrestle with it and try to downplay it? What happened for David after his tirade of evil reminds us that God will not overlook sin and no one is a special exception to the rule. David was thinking he could get away with sin. He was thinking he could just cover up his own tracks and look holy and that was good enough. The prophet Nathan was sent to him to expose his sin.

David might have fooled most of his subjects and friends. But he hadn't fooled everyone. God sees every sin. David was suddenly made aware that he could not hide. He could not cover his sin. The wrestling match was up. David, the sinner was on the losing side and guilty. He was now pinned. And we see just what he was thinking in Psalm 51.

What was David thinking? We see it. David writes in the Psalm just what he is thinking when confronted with his sin. He recognizes he hasn't just made a mistake. He has done what is evil in God's sight. David was covered in sin. "I admit my rebellious acts. My sin is always before me." As much as he wanted to make it all just disappear, he couldn't. His acts of evil hung over his head. Adultery promised pleasure, but the pains and guilt weighed on David. He couldn't shake the guilt off or shrug it away. When you and I stray into sin we can't just pretend it never happened. It will hang over our heads. Others might not always see it. But you will.

"Against you, you only I have sinned and done what is evil in your sight." David recognized that sin is always directed at the Lord. The person who is unfaithful to their spouse sins against God who gave them that spouse. The person who chases after greed is spurning the gifts God has already given them. The person who mutilates their body by overeating or destructive behavior harms the body God gave them. The person who tramples over others with words harms their neighbor who God wants to build up. When we think that our sins are not hurting anybody, we fool ourselves. They not only hurt us; they are an offense against our God.

And since they are against our God, he gets to determine how bad sin really is. Like David we might think our own sin isn't that bad. But make no mistake, sin isn't just "a mistake" or "bad habit" or an "addiction." It is evil and horrid -contrary to the good will of a holy God, an act of rebellion. That's what God says, and we must confess, "I have done what is evil."

Evil deserves justice. David could not downplay the severity of what he now deserved from God. God would not simply overlook David's sin and make an exception because David was king. We might try to downplay our sin by saying "It's not that bad." Or we might argue "Okay, I did something wrong. I offended God. But he's overreacting if he wants to condemn me for my sin." David had to acknowledge that God is the judge. "You are justified when you sentence, blameless when you judge." If God tells us whoever looks at a woman lustfully is guilty of adultery, he is just to condemn the adulterer. If God says anyone who fails to love their neighbor has failed to love him, he is just to condemn us for our failures to love. If God says anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, he is just to punish us for hatred along with David, the murderer. His punishment for sin is always just and always deserved.

David knew that his attempts to cover up sin were a failure from the start. He never stood a chance at obtaining a clean heart. He had always been a sinner. "Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me." And so are we! We can't read David's Psalm and say, "He was a special case. He was a particularly awful sinner." All of us have the same heart from birth, the heart of our father, Adam. All of us walk about with a load of guilt covering our hearts and hands. All of us stand before God and can try to wrestle out of our predicament and try to cover up our sin. But all attempts will fail.

In the end God will stand before all the world. And you will stand in the judgment. And just as David's record of sin was recorded in Scripture and exposed for all the world to see, your sins will be exposed for all in God's record. You can wait until judgment day when he says, "You are the man. You deserve my condemnation."

Or you can take the route David took when confronted with his sin. "*Be gracious to me, God, according to your mercy. Erase my acts of rebellion according to the greatness of your compassion. Scrub me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.*" He could not cover up his heart. He could not obtain a clean heart. So, he turns to the God of mercy.

*"Be gracious..., cleanse..., scrub me clean."* It almost looks like he's now wrestling with God. Twelve times he tells God what to do. "*Remove my sin, wash me, let me hear joy, let me celebrate, hide your face from my sin, erase my guilty deeds, create in me a pure heart, renew in me an unwavering spirit, don't cast me from your presence, don't take away your Holy Spirit, restore to me the joy, give me a willing spirit.*"

Now what is David thinking? That God will just dismiss his case and cleanse him? According to his mercy he does for those who repent and trust in him. That mercy is found as he removes our sin and places it on Jesus. That mercy and forgiveness is obtained as he washes us with the water of baptism and places his name on us. That mercy is ours as he lets us hear joy and celebrate the good news "this son of mine was lost, but now is found, was dead but is alive again. We have to celebrate." He hides his face from our sin as he turns his face away from Jesus when he bore our sin on the cross. He erased our guilty deeds when he declared us justified through faith in Jesus. Our record is clean.

Only then when the wrestling match is over and won by Christ is cleansing found. God is declared the victor and you along with him. He then gives us a pure heart, an unwavering spirit, and his presence as he sends his Holy Spirit. We are restored in the joy of forgiveness and have a new self, a willing spirit that desires to serve him.

Is there a sin you've had to wrestle with? See it for what it is: evil. See yourself in the same position as David, needing mercy. David was thinking what every child of God must as they wrestle with the Word, "Deal with me, Lord, as a sinner. I am guilty. You are just. I cannot cover or cleanse myself. I can only confess and look to Christ."