

God's Strength in our weakness: Failure and forgiveness

discussion guide



based on **Psalm 51** (Linked to sermon of 04/07/21)
which can be accessed at www.stjamesbythepark.org/talks

This was part of a series: God's strength in weakness

Intro: One of the most important characters in the Old Testament and an ancestor of Jesus was King David. We often speak of him in connection with his devotion to God, his courage against Goliath and his uninhibited praise and worship through his dance and psalms. All these are amazing examples to us in our Christian lives but the Bible does not gloss over his failures either and we have much to learn from these too. An adulterer, murderer and liar, King David may not seem like much of an example and yet it is his whole hearted repentance and God's grace and forgiveness that lead David into a richer and deeper life with God. There is much to learn from this too.

How does this passage speak to our desire to be a God-dependent, grace-filled, Bible-based, mission-focused, authentic community?

Up (Go deeper with God):

Even when life is not going well or we feel we have let God down, we can make "a sacrifice of praise". Spend some time reading Psalm 146, reminding your soul to praise the Lord (v.1) and giving thanks for God's love, forgiveness and protection.

Before reading Psalm 51, you might like to refresh your memory about what led to this psalm. Either read through 2 Samuel 11 and 12 together or watch this short video which summarises the story of David and Bathsheba and Nathan's prophetic condemnation https://youtu.be/Eho1_fkjiOA

1. What sins does David commit? (don't just think of the obvious ones, there are more subtle issues at play too)
2. How do you think David justified to himself what he had done?
3. It takes Nathan's picture of a rich man stealing a poor man's lamb to awaken David's conscience. So often we are quick to judge others' actions and not see the same fault in ourselves. Can you think of times when you have been guilty of this?
4. What were the consequences of David's sin? (2 Samuel 12:11-14) Are there always consequences to sin? Can you think of some examples?

Now read Psalm 51 and think through some of the following as well as your own responses to the psalm:

1. On what does David depend in verse 1?
2. David uses the imagery of washing and cleansing in relation to sin in verse 2, 7 and 10. How appropriate is this in relation to forgiveness of sins? What other imagery can you think of in how it feels when we are forgiven by God?
3. In verses 3-4 David acknowledges and confesses his sin. How important do you think this is? Can we be forgiven if we do not confess our sins?
4. Why do you think David says in verse 4 that he has sinned against God alone? What about Bathsheba and Uriah? What place is there in forgiveness for confessing our sin to others?
5. David could have been crushed by his sin and failure, yet Psalm 51 shows a man who sees a life with God beyond failure. Why do you think this is?
6. What "good" does David see coming out of failure (verse 13-14)?
7. Animal sacrifice was part and parcel of forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament but what does David recognise in this psalm (verse 16-19)?

In (Grow closer to each other):

It is easy for us to judge others for their sins and failures, yet to be blissfully unaware of our own. David recognises that outward acts of sin come from a wrong spirit (verse 10-12), a theme which Jesus' brother James picks up in James 1:14-16. Spend some time quietly asking God to reveal any wrong attitudes or motives, confess them to God and ask for forgiveness. You could do this silently, in small groups or as a whole group, if you feel comfortable. Perhaps some of these things need confessing to others (James 5:16). Ask God for grace and courage to do this as He leads.

Finally use Psalm 51:10-12 as a prayer together, asking God to fill you anew with the Holy Spirit, without whom we have no hope of living a life worthy of our calling.

Out (Reach further with the good news):

Non-believers often view Christians as judgemental goody-two-shoes and sometimes we can come across like this. Spend a little time thinking about non-believers you know how you can share something of God's love and mercy with them. Spend some time lifting them to the Lord in prayer.