Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm about to say a bad word: *sin*. I don't know what you thought I was going to say, but it probably wasn't that. But sin is often treated like a bad word. It shouldn't be said, because the word 'sin' is judgmental, biased, unloving, far too critical and has been used to put down so many people over time. People say it's better to use words that aren't as harsh: *a mistake, a lapse in judgement, a slip-up,* or a *miscalculation*. Why use those instead? Because those words shift the blame from you. We all make mistake, our judgement isn't always perfect, and we slip up occasionally.

But no matter what you call it, what does sin bring into your life? Guilt. Princeton did a study with two groups. One group was made to feel guilty, and the other was the control group. When asked to estimate their weight, the control group was pretty accurate, but the guilty group significantly overestimated what they weighed. Guilt is heavy. And the crushing weight of guilt is felt. That weight follows you everywhere. It influences the way you think, the things you do, and the words you speak. It robs you. It robs you of your peace, your joy, and your confidence before God.

King David knew something about guilt, and in Psalm 51, he lays himself bare before God and confesses his Sin. And he discovers that despite all his sins, God has forgiveness even for him. And through his words, we discover a song to sing when we, like David, are weighed down with guilt.

If you don't know the story of David and Bathsheba, then it'll be hard to truly understand why David felt this way. Obviously, David was the king, which meant he had a ton of power. And one night, he's on his rooftop and sees a woman named Bathsheba bathing. He decides "I want her," so he sends his men to go fetch her. She comes to the palace, they spend the night together, and soon after, she tells him that she's pregnant. He's panicking, knowing he messed up, but he hatches a plan. He recalls Bathsheba's husband from battle and tells him to go home, wanting it to look like that while Uriah was home, he got his wife pregnant.

But Uriah refuses. He says to David, "Why should I do that when the rest of my soldier buddies are out fighting?" So out of respect for them, he wouldn't go home. Now, David realizes he's in a real pickle. He needs to make this problem go away, so he writes to the general of his army and tells him, "put Uriah where the fighting is the fiercest, and then retreat without him, so he dies." His general listens, and Uriah dies in battle. Problem solved? Crisis averted? David thinks so.

Time passes. Bathsheba gives birth to a son. David is probably thinking he got away with it, until he gets a visitor. A prophet named Nathan shows up and tells David a story. The story is about two men. One a poor man with only one lamb, and the other a rich man with a bunch of livestock. The rich man gets a visitor and not wanting to kill one of his own animals, take the one lamb from the poor guy to feed his guest. Nathan finishes his story and asks David, "what should be done to this rich man who stole the poor man's lamb?"

And David, oblivious to the fact that this story is about him, is enraged and says that the rich man must die.

Then, Nathan pulls the floor out from under David. He says "you are the man." You are the man that you said should die. Imagine the wave of guilt that smacked David in the face. He thought he had hidden his sins from everyone, and perhaps he had, but he couldn't hide it from God. And the consequence of David's sin? The son he had with Bathsheba would die. Imagine the guilt of killing a man, causing the death of a baby, and defiling a woman. David's guilt is so heavy, that when his son dies, the guards are scared to tell him. For a week, he laid on the floor and refused to eat.

That's where David's head is at when he's writing this Psalm. He knew very well that his sin had caused his mess. And so he turns to God, begging for mercy, even though he knew he didn't deserve it. And as you read through the first couple verses, it seems like David is just piling up different synonyms for sin. But he's doing it for a reason. Each of the words he uses paints a vivid picture of sin.

The first picture is rebellion. Like I mentioned at the beginning, people like to treat sin like accidental mistakes that don't define us. But when you think of sin as a rebellion, you realize it's no accident. Rebels don't unknowingly join a rebellion. They're committed to the cause. Every sin is an act of rebellion and defiance against God. Rebellion says, "I always know better. God's expectations for me are outdated, restrictive, or just plain no fun, so I'm going to do what I want. Just think, we have a God who created us, who cares for us, who is the only one who truly loved us and what did we do? We rebelled against him. And it hurts to know that's who we were.

The second picture that David uses is being bent out of shape. Think of a warped 2 x 4. It may be warped only on one side, yet, it's completely useless. Our sins are not isolated incidents. They're a part of our very nature. And David makes it clear that this has been the case since the second we were conceived. And because of that twisted sinful nature, even good things are bent out of shape. Love is bent into lust. Rest into laziness. Possessions into greed. Concern into anxiety. By nature we're like that warped 2 x 4, bent out of shape with no way to straighten ourselves out.

The last picture David uses for sin is missing the mark. If you watch college football, you've probably seen the Dr. Pepper halftime challenge. The whole goal is to throw a football into the side of a huge Dr. Pepper can as many times as you can in a minute. It always shocks me how bad people are at that. It's not for lack of trying, but they keep missing over and over. Sin is like that. It's not only the bad things we do, but it's failing to do the things that God has demanded us to do. Sin is our failure to live up to the standards that God has set.

The words that David uses tell us a story about sin. You can call sin a mistake, a slip-up a lapse in judgement, but your conscience doesn't give a rip what you call it. Because deep down, we know we've rebelled. We know our hearts are bent out of shape, and we know that we continually fall short of what God demands. We all have at least one specific

sin that is always coming to mind. And when you think about that sin, it brings guilt. Heavy, relentless guilt. It's the kind of guilt that robs you of peace and joy, the kind that keeps you awake at night, the kind that makes you kick yourself for ever doing something so dumb. And when people are guilty, they often wonder if they'll ever have joy again. Guilt casts a shadow over everything that we do, until eventually, it feels like we've been swallowed in darkness.

But it's in the darkness that the light shines the brightest. On the darkest day in David's life life, on the day he found out his son would die, the prophet Nathan said this to him, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die." And when David is writing this psalm, he knows with certainty that his sins have been forgiven. And just like with sin, David uses three vivid words for forgiveness.

The first word is translated in our Bibles as "blot out." But in the Hebrew, it's more than just blot out. It means to obliterate. It's to destroy something so thoroughly that it ceases to exist. It easy to feel like God just looks past our sins, but that isn't possible. God can't overlook sin. No, he has destroyed sin and has forgotten about it. The same word is used in Isaiah 43 where God says, "I, even I, am he who obliterates your transgressions, for my own sake, and remember them no more." God doesn't even remember your sin. It's gone.

David's second word for forgiveness is doing the laundry. And it's not a simple rinse cycle. It's a completely soiled garment that requires hours and hours of scrubbing. And with this word, David recognizes that sin isn't just a small stain. It's a completely dirty garment. And he places that dirty garment into the hands of God to wash away what he cannot make clean.

The last picture is the cleansing of a leper. Lepers were social outcasts because they had a communicable disease that could not be healed. You were an outcast of God with no chance of healing. But God did a miracle. He healed you. He made you pure and brought you back into his family.

That's how vividly David talks about forgiveness. But why? Why would God even want to forgive our sins when we repeatedly let him down? It's because when you truly repent, God has to forgive your sins. Not because we're so good, not because he overlooks our sins. It's because God has made a covenant with us– and he's always good on his end. This is God's deal with us – he would give you eternal life, as long as we were perfect. Well, you or I haven't done that. But on your end of the covenant stands the perfect son of God, who covers over all your sins with his blood.

For David's sin, according to Israelite law, he should've been killed. If you murdered someone, you had to die. The price for his sins should have been his own blood, but instead, a lamb was offered at the temple for his forgiveness. According to God's laws, you and I should be damned. We should go to hell. We broke every law God gave us, and for that, the punishment should be death eternally. But instead, a lamb takes our place. He lived a perfect life, only for his blood to be shed on a cross. Jesus was the sacrifice that God

demanded for your forgiveness. 1 John 2 says, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." The blood of Jesus forgives every last one of your sins, dissolves your guilt, gives you a new heart that's fired up to serve, and sends you out to go tell everyone you can find about the radical forgiveness that God has brought to you through Jesus.

The Holy Spirit has created a new heart in you, and that heart is not saddled by guilt. David says "restore to me the joy of your salvation." And that's what God has done, he's given you every reason to rejoice. Often, the best evangelists are new converts to Christainity. It's because they have great joy that this gift now belongs to them. But guess what? Just because you've been a Christian for a long time doesn't mean you can't have that joy. And no matter how long you've been a Christian, when you have joy in your heart, it's contagious. When you go out and meet people who don't yet know their Savior, share that joy. Share your story. I know that each of you has a unique story of how God saved you from who you used to be. And the same mercy that God had on you is for the whole world.

Okay, you've got joy in your forgiveness, so never feel guilty again. I'm not ignorant to think it's that easy. The sinful nature doesn't disappear when we come to faith. And because that's reality, we must constantly come to God in repentance, laying ourselves bare, and both asking and knowing that God will forgive those sins. God will always hear our true repentance, but he has also provided a Christian family that you can confess your sin to. It's awkward at first, but it's a beautiful thing. Confession and absolution is a lost art, but for thousands of years, Christian confessed their sins to one another or their pastor, and they could tell each other that by the power vested in them by Jesus Christ himself, their sins were gone. I'm going to encourage you to find a confessor, someone who will tell you that those sins are gone. Just to hear those words from the lips of another person assures you of what God has already declared: You are a forgiven child of God.

Sin is a bad word. It's a bad word because it's a bad thing. But even though our sins are many, his mercy is more. When you feel guilty as all get out, read Psalm 51. Don't run away from God with your guilt. Run at him. That's what David did. And what did David find? God's mercy was bigger than adultery, bigger than murder, and bigger than all the darkness that followed. The same is true for you. Your sin, my sin, they're great. But your Savior Jesus is even greater.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Amen.