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**A Biblical Focus On Prayer - Part 6**  
***A Prayer of Confession***

By Tal Davis

On December 7, 1941, Japanese Zero bombers attacked the American Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Most Americans are well aware of that "date that will live in infamy," as President Franklin D. Roosevelt called it. What few Americans know are the names of the Japanese pilots who flew the deadly mission. One was Commander Mitsuo Fuchida. He was the leader of the first wave strike, and the man who issued the attack order of "*Tora, Tora, Tora!*" ("Tiger"). After the war, Fuchida was bitter in defeat. However, one day he read the Christian testimony of Jacob Deshazer, an abused American POW. Fuchida was so moved by DeShazer's forgiving attitude that he renounced Buddhism, studied the Bible, asked God's forgiveness, and became a Christian. Later, he and DeShazer became good friends. Until his death in 1976, Fuchida boldly told his story of redemption in Christ. It is a testimony to the power of God's forgiving love.

Another man who experienced God's mercy was King David. In this Part 6 of our seven installment study of prayer, we will study how David, the man "after God's own heart," also found forgiveness from a terrible sin he committed. We will analyze the magnificent psalm he wrote to express the depth of his contrition and repentance.

First, we continue our examination of Jesus' Model Prayer in Matthew 6. Sin is the cause of the great barrier that exists between mankind and Holy God. Jesus came to draw sinners to Himself to receive forgiveness. In this installment we learn how David, like Mitsuo Fuchida, found the only

solution to mankind's dilemma, and what Jesus says is necessary to keep and maintain a right relationship with God. Even believers can fall into the trap of violating God's will and disrupting their relationship with Him. The principles described in this article are essential for our spiritual well-being and growth.

In this article series we have seen how Jesus taught His disciples a prototype prayer we call the Lord's Prayer, or Model Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13). As indicated in previous parts, the first half of that prayer is a confirmation of the Fatherhood of God (vs. 9a), the holiness of His name (vs. 9b), His divine kingdom (vs. 10a) and His sovereign rule over heaven and earth ("*Your will be done*" - vs. 11a). In the second half Jesus focuses on teaching His disciples how to pray for themselves and their needs. He begins by demonstrating how to pray for their daily sustenance ("*our daily bread*" - vs. 11b). In the section for this installment, Jesus emphasizes the need for daily confession and repentance of sin. He also shows the need to ask God's protection from temptation and the attacks of the devil (vss. 12-13). To read Parts 1-5 go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/?s=prayer&id=29>.

King David's great prayer of confession is preserved in Psalm 51. One of seven penitential (repentance) psalms, it the most revered of all that category of psalms. Its preface says it is written for the "music leader," meaning it was probably sung often by choirs in Israelite worship services long after David's time. It is ascribed to David who wrote it after the prophet Nathan confronted him concerning his adultery with Bathsheba. As we will see, David tried to hide his transgression but only magnified it more. However,

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like many sinners before and after him, he forgot that they can hide from people but they cannot hide from God! David's humiliating public exposure and shame led him to write this profound hymn of personal confession, contrition, and forgiveness.

These scriptures are relevant for us all who need to reflect on our own spiritual failures. However, they do not have to end in despair, but rather in hope.

### When we sin we can ask for forgiveness and protection from future temptation.

*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* Matthew 6:12-13 CSB

Jesus continues His prayer instruction in His Model Prayer. He turns from material concerns to the more weighty matters of establishing and maintaining spiritual health. He starts with the prerequisite for initiating a relationship with God: acknowledgement of one's sinfulness and seeking forgiveness. He says to pray, "*And forgive (aphiemi) us our debts...*" (*opheilem*). This phrase is like a transaction of literally forgiving or pardoning the financial obligations of someone who cannot possibly repay them. In this context, "*debts*" is a euphemism for sins or transgressions.

Sins, of course, are those acts and thoughts people commit against God. It is the most serious of all human problems. It creates an impenetrable barrier between God and persons. People can also sin against other persons in some sense. Nonetheless, *all* sins are directed essentially against God Himself. Since God alone is absolutely holy, He cannot tolerate sin.

Human nature is sinful, and people become enslaved to sin. They do not even realize or care that they are hopelessly enthralled. In time, sin blurs the distinction between right and wrong and produces spiritual blindness. If unchecked, sin inevitably leads to personal ruin and societal depravity. Some people are offended if they are called sinners and are made to feel guilty. From the Bible's perspective, the reason they feel guilty is because they are guilty! Of course, sin's greatest consequence is death, both physical and spiritual (Rom. 6:23).

"Forgiveness," in the biblical view, has both divine and human elements. The divine aspect, as addressed in verse 12a, is the gracious act of God by which a believer is made righteous before Him and is put in right relationship with Him. The forgiven person is transported from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is always through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross and His miraculous resurrection.

The human element brings us to the next phrase in Jesus' Model Prayer. He says, "*as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (vs. 12b). Instead of harboring grudges or seeking revenge, this is the right attitude of godly people toward those who have wronged them. Forgiveness restores personal relationships and fellowship especially among Christians. Jesus clearly teaches that a condition for receiving God's forgiveness is the willingness to forgive others. In fact, immediately after He closes the prayer the Lord tells His followers, "*For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses*" (Matt. 6: 14-15).

That's pretty strong language. Jesus illustrated this principle in His parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:12-35). In that story Jesus tells of a king who calls in all his servants to settle up their credit. One servant owned ten

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thousand talents (about ten million dollars!) but did not have the money to pay. He begged for more time, but the compassionate king forgave him the debt. Soon after, the same servant demanded payment from another who owed him only one hundred denarii (or about a hundred days' wages).

When the king learned of the servant's lack of mercy, he angrily scolded him, "*You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?*" The king threw him into prison. Then Jesus warned, "*So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart*" (Matt. 18:32-35).

The clear application of the Model Prayer and this parable is that those of us who have been forgiven of our dire transgressions against God have no right to hold anything against another person. Jesus paid the price for our sins with His life. If we understand the high cost of God's forgiveness then how can we not forgive what others may do to us?

The Lord then finishes the prayer with another petition. He says to implore the Father, "*And do not bring us into temptation*" (*peirasmos* - i.e.: "testing," "enticing," "trying"). This does not mean, "do not allow us to be tempted" (we will be). It also does not imply that God is the one who tempts us. God does not do that (see James 1:13). Jesus is asking the Father, "Don't let us give in to temptation." We sometimes do yield to temptation but only because we forget what the Apostle Paul says, "*No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide a*

*way out so that you may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Jesus restates that phrase in a different way, going straight to source of the problem, "*but deliver us from the evil one.*" The "evil one" is the devil or Satan, the one behind the human revolt against God. He first appears in Scripture in Genesis when, disguised as a serpent, he tempted Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), "*the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world*" (Rev. 12:9). The New Testament accepts and teaches the fact of a personal Satan and his wicked agents (demons). In the last installment we learned that Jesus referred to him as the "*ruler (or prince) of this world,*" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). As Christians we can defend ourselves by rebuking him, drawing close to God (James 4:7), and putting on "*the full armor of God*" (Eph. 6:11-17).

**So we must confess our sin and ask God's forgiveness.**

*1 Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love; according to your abundant compassion, blot out my rebellion. 2 Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I am conscious of my rebellion, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you - you alone - I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge. 5 Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me. 6 Surely you desire integrity in the inner self, and you teach me wisdom deep within. 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Psalm 51:1-7 CSB*

The story of Psalm 51 begins in 2 Samuel 11-12:15. It was spring, and King David should have been out with his soldiers in battle. Instead,

lounging around his palace, he saw Bathsheba bathing. She was the wife of Uriah ("Fire of Yahweh"), a Hittite serving in Israel's army. The king seduced her, and when she became pregnant he devised a plan to cover up his adultery. He sent for Uriah to come home for a while, expecting the warrior to go home to Bathsheba. Everyone would think she was carrying Uriah's child.

However, the king's ploy went awry. When Uriah came home, he refused to stay in his house with his wife as long as his comrades endured harsh conditions at the front. David became desperate. He ordered Joab, his commanding officer, to put Uriah at the head of the attack where he would be among the most vulnerable to enemy archers. Joab obeyed, and sure enough Uriah was among the casualties of the charge on Rabbah. Ironically, Uriah, who was not even an Israelite, at this point was more honorable than was Israel's king.

David thought he had escaped detection. But it did not end there for the king. God informed the prophet Nathan of David's treachery. In one of the Bible's most dramatic moments, Nathan confronted David by telling a parable of a rich man who stole a poor man's lamb. "*You are that man!*" he told the king. The king's sin, the subsequent defacto murder of Uriah, and his exposure, led to David's spiritual crisis of Psalm 51. David's sin had far-reaching consequences for his family and Israel. Nonetheless, David did the right thing and confessed.

David's confession starts with an appeal to the Lord for mercy and compassion. This is really the only prayer available for such a vile sinner (note the various terms he uses to describe sin indicating its seriousness). He appeals to God's "*faithful love*" (*hesed* - see Part 1) as the basis for his request. He humbly begs God to "*Blot out my rebellion*" (vs. 2). "*Blot out*" (*mche*) metaphorically means to totally obliterate His memory of David's sins, like erasing words from a book.

He follows this with another metaphor of water saying, "*completely wash away my guilt.*" The picture is of someone washing away filth from a garment. He also says, "*cleanse me from my sin.*" It is only God's divine declaration that can cleanse one from spiritual pollution. It is like the cleansing of someone from leprosy. In David's mind, his sin is just as ugly.

The depth of David's guilt is shown in verse 3. He confesses that he is conscious of his rebellion at all times. His sense of guilt is not just superficial, but extends to his inner being resulting in excruciating pain and sorrow from which he cannot escape (cf. vs. 8). It is this discernment of the dreadfulness of his transgression that leads to his humble confession.

The king also recognizes that all sin ultimately is against God Himself (vs. 4). God has established the boundaries of right and wrong. God did not need witnesses. When David stepped outside that demarcation, he knew he had "*done evil in Your sight.*" David acknowledges that all sin separates one from God and must be confessed directly to Him. David knows that only God is a completely righteous and holy judge who is worthy to make a verdict and pass sentence. As we know, the righteous verdict is "guilty as charged," and the righteous sentence is death (Rom. 5:12-14, 21; 6:21-23).

Franz Kafka was an early 20th century Austrian author whose stories featured bizarre and twisted plots. They were so unusual that the term "Kafkaesque" is now used to describe any surrealistic writing. His best known novel is *The Trial*. It is the tale of a bank officer (referred to only as "K.") who is arrested on an undisclosed charge. The plot involves K.'s frustrating journey through a bureaucratic judicial labyrinth. However, he never learns what he is charged with, and his case is never settled (I won't spoil the ending). Unlike Kafka's character, David could not plead ignorance of his crime. He was clearly charged by God with adultery and conspiracy to commit murder. There was no use trying to make excuses or bargain for a lesser sentence. A sinner's only recourse is to confess and throw himself on the mercy of heaven's court, as did David.

But David comprehends that the problem lies deeper than just this one instance of turpitude. He says, "*Indeed (Behold! NASB), I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me*" (vs. 5). He is not saying that his conception was a sin by his parents. Rather, David understands what the New Testament explains more readily, that sin is the very nature of fallen humanity. This is the doctrine we call "original sin,"

that is, the inevitable propensity of all humans to sin (Rom 1:18 - 3:20; 5:12-18; 1 John 1:8-10). Thus he is confessing with even greater intensity his guilt before God.

David's ordeal taught him that God desires total heartfelt honesty in His sight (vs. 6). This is the essence of real wisdom: to fear and humble oneself before Him (Job 28:28). He acknowledges that only the Lord Himself can forgive his sin. David asks God figuratively to "*purify me with hyssop*" (vs. 7). This was probably a reference to Marjoram, a small bushy plant with white flowers that was commonly used in purification rites. The results will be that his heart will be "whiter (purer) than snow."

Some Christian traditions believe that sinners must confess their wrong doings to a clergyman to receive forgiveness. The Bible clearly teaches, however, that we have the privilege to go directly to God. When we confess our sins, repent, and put our faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning death on the cross, our hearts are made "*whiter than snow.*" Then, like David, we can have joy and gladness (vss. 8-9).

### **When we confess our sins we can seek and receive restoration and renewal.**

*10 God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit.* Psalm 51:10-12 CSB

In December 1967, a team of surgeons in Cape Town, South African, led by Dr. Christiaan Barnard, performed the world's first heart transplant. The heart of a 25-year-old woman who had died in an auto accident was transferred into the chest of Louis Washkansky, a 55-year-old man dying of heart damage. The patient survived for 18 days. Nonetheless, the data obtained from that and many subsequent cardiac transplants has made that procedure a highly successful way to treat advanced heart diseased patients. Today, more than 5000 cardiac transplants occur each year around the world, although it is estimated that up to 50,000 people are candidates for transplantation.

As wonderful as life-saving heart transplants and those of other organs may be, they are in every case only temporary, and in a sense only superficial. They cannot cure mankind's greatest disease, sin. Up to this point David has thoroughly recognized his problem of sin and his helplessness in solving it. He knew the only way his sin could be permanently healed would be for God Himself to do the healing. He asked God to "*blot out*" his sins, wash away his guilt, cleanse him, purify him with hyssop, and turn His face away (vs. 9). But David knew what was ultimately required was radical surgery, a sort of spiritual heart transplant. He saw that his sin was so fatal that only a miracle of God's grace could restore his spiritual life.

David's heart probably physically ached constantly because of his shame and grief. But, the heart he refers to here (vs. 10) is not the pound of flesh in his chest. It is that most inner being of who he really was as a person. So he prayed for God to create in him "*a clean heart.*" Only that would renew in him a "*steadfast (right) spirit within.*" David is asking for a new spiritual consciousness unclouded by sin and guilt. That must come from an act of God grounded in His grace.

In the Old Testament God's Spirit rested in special ways on kings and prophets for specific tasks. David was anointed by Samuel years before to succeed the failed King Saul. "*So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on David from that day forward ... Now the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul*" (1 Samuel 16:13-14). David prays the Lord will not reject him or take His Holy Spirit away from him. David fears that if he is not made right with God, He will banish him from His presence and remove His Holy Spirit as He had done with Saul.

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), about ten days following Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit descended on the waiting disciples and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. That historic event revealed several important facts about the Spirit that Christians should know. For one, the Holy Spirit now indwells all Christians at their conversion (Acts 2:1-8). No longer would He empower kings and prophets only, but all who trusted in Christ as Lord. When people receive Christ, the Holy Spirit actually indwells them. As the Apostle Paul quizzed the

Corinthians, "*Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?*" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Indeed, it is the Spirit who causes a sinner to be "born again." As Jesus told Nicodemus, "*Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit*" (John 3:5-8). This salvation experience (justification) is sometimes called the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" and is a once and for all event in the life of the believer.

That being said, Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not the same as being continually "*filled with the Spirit*" (Eph. 5:18). Being filled with the Holy Spirit empowers Christians for living the Christian life, growing in faith, and doing ministry in Jesus' name (sanctification). It requires a day-to-day renewal of one's relationship with Christ – which often requires confession of sin (1 John 1:9). There are no short-cuts to spirituality. Some Christians think spirituality involves certain unusual experiences. Experiences, however, are transient and easily counterfeited. Only by living in the Spirit can believers have victory over sin, understand spiritual truths (1 Cor. 2:14), or exercise spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Rom. 12).

Jesus told His disciples to pray for forgiveness and to forgive others. That comes by humble admission that we are sinners. King David learned that lesson the hard way. He committed two vile sins, adultery and murder. Yet, he realized God still loved him and would forgive him if was honest with Him and with himself.

We may not be adulterers or killers, but we all have moments in life when we succumb to temptation. In those instances, our response should be to confess our sin to God. Remember, all sin is ultimately against Him. But, if necessary, we should also make amends to those people we have hurt. By following these principles we can experience what David prayed for: "*Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit*" (Psalm 51:12). It happened for Mitsuo Fuchida, it happened for David, and it can happen for you and me.

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