

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE

Forgiven

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE FORGIVEN

And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drink from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed

you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.'" So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." –2 Samuel 11:27-12:14

As a seminary student, I visited Washington Square Park in Chicago where I heard a man on a soap box speaking. With a vile and filthy mouth, he was criticizing the Bible and blaspheming God with the most abusive language. His main thesis was the sin of David, and he relished talking about it in the dirtiest and most suggestive way. Then he said, *"That's the kind of God you have in the Bible—a God that would take a man like David and say he was 'a man after God's own heart'!"*

May I say to you, this man didn't know it, but he was doing exactly what God said would happen. When He punished David, God said, "... You have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme" The Holy Spirit could have taken this chapter out of the record of David's life, and we wouldn't know about it today. But here it is in the Word of God, because God won't cover it up.

Once after preaching on the life of David, a man said in a huff, “The idea of your attempting to defend David! And God saying, ‘He’s a man after my own heart!’” He turned to walk out, but I called him back. I said, “Listen here, brother, in view of the fact that God did forgive and accept David, there is hope for you and there’s hope for me.” Because He is a God who forgave David, if you please, we know He is a God who will forgive us.

It’s true that a black mark stains David’s life like a blackberry in a bowl of cream. It looms large when we read it. This sin in David’s life may cause us to miss the greatness of the man. You can take a penny and so hold it up to the sky that it blots out the sun; the same is true here.

It’s not my intention to play down David’s sin. The Word of God does not soft-peddle nor whitewash it. His sin is dark as night, low as the underside of Satan and the bottomless pit, and as deep as hell. The sin is awful—there’s no use saying otherwise.

But this sin was the *exception* in David’s life, not the *pattern* of his life.

The King of Babylon did it every day and got by with it. The Pharaoh of Egypt did it and got by with it. Cleopatra did it and got by with it. But you can be sure of one thing, my friend, David did not get by with it.

So the question must be asked, “How could David be a man after God’s own heart?” May I say that he was *not* a man after God’s own heart in reference to this sin. Friends, we ought to be fair with God and read His Word accurately. Although the Word of God records the sin, it certainly doesn’t say that God approved of it. God hated David’s sin: “But the thing that David had done displeased the **LORD**.”

But aren't you glad God doesn't get rid of a person even when he does what David did? It must mean there's still hope for you and me. God didn't throw overboard a man like David for this sin. But it did displease the Lord and, believe me, David was taken to the woodshed. God didn't allow him to get by with it.

Just look at the scandal that came into David's family: his own daughter ruined, one son murdered and another son becomes a murderer, the little child by Bathsheba dies, and one son leads a rebellion against David in his old age. Do you read anywhere that David whimpered? Do you read anywhere that David said, *"I think the Lord is punishing me too much? I don't see why God is letting all this happen to me?"* David never said that. If you read his Psalms, you'll find out he was a man whose heart was saying all the time, *"I do not care what happens to me, but I want nothing to come between my soul and Almighty God. I want all of the debris of my life moved out so the sunlight of His presence can break in upon my soul."* I believe that no man ever longed after God as this man David did.

Now after David committed this sin, the throne on which he sat became red hot with guilt. He became like the Shakespearean king Macbeth, who broke under his guilt. Even Lady Macbeth turned mad under that awful guilt of murder. In her sleep she continually acted like she was washing her bloody hands, saying, "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

David was under terrible turmoil in his heart and in his life even as he sat on the throne. He wrote in Psalm 32:3, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old." Because of this sin he became an old man overnight. His counselors, servants, and soldiers whispered, *"What's happened to him? Look how old he's getting."* And as David sat on the throne, he studied the faces of his servants and his advisors and wondered if they knew what he had done. All the while David was seething within. "When I kept silent, my bones grew old." Oh, the tension and pressure that weighed on him.

A man with short dark hair and a beard is sitting on a large, dark rock by the ocean. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and dark pants, and is looking down with a thoughtful or somber expression. The background shows the ocean waves crashing against the rocks, with a warm, golden sunset sky. The overall mood is contemplative and reflective.

WHEN THERE'S
UNCONFESSSED SIN
IN YOUR LIFE,
THE JOY IS LOST.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

One day Nathan the prophet came into David's throne room. He was David's friend, and they had good history together. He was the one David told when he wanted to build God a house. God also sent Nathan to David to give him God's covenant. And David, in turn, named one of his sons after Nathan. (If you want to see the ancestral bloodline that really leads to Jesus Christ, go to Luke 3. In that line you'll find out David had another son by the name of Nathan and that Mary, the mother of Jesus, came from that line.) So Nathan was a real friend, closer to David than anyone else.

So when Nathan came into David's presence, David looked him over, trying to determine if his best friend knew his secret. Nathan didn't let on but said, *"I have a little story I'd like to tell you."* And David said, *"I'd like to hear a good story to get my mind off of things."*

Then Nathan told the story—and it was a good one. It was about a rich man who had a lot of sheep. Next door to him lived a poor man who had only one little ewe lamb. One day a guest came to visit, and this rich man with thousands of sheep went over and took his poor neighbor's pet lamb, killed it, and roasted it for his own dinner that night.

When Nathan got to that part of the story, David rose up in his throne, clenched his fists, and forgot about everything else. Isn't it interesting how we can always see the faults of other people? He said, *"The man in my kingdom who has done this shall surely die! Who is he, Nathan?"* Now I submit to you that Nathan is the bravest man of all the followers of David, because he pointed his finger right at him and said to David, "You are the man!"

Obviously, David was trying to cover up what he'd done. But he was God's man, and God's man can never cover up for long. God said in effect, *"I'm going to take you to the woodshed."* Listen to Him:

Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. –2 Samuel 12:10

Friends, you remember that blaspheming, soapbox orator I told you about? Why didn't he tell the truth? Why didn't he read the Word of God so he could be accurate? Because the sins of God's people had turned him off. God says, "*You despised Me! This thing you've done is wrong, and you're not getting by with it!*"

Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun." –2 Samuel 12:11

Now note what happened next: David confessed his sin. Friends, David knew he was on his way to the woodshed and he's not complaining.

So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die." –2 Samuel 12:13-14

Now notice the greatness of this man David in this particular incident. He could have denied he'd done it. The fact is that all he needed to do was lift the scepter in his hand and Nathan could have been taken out and executed immediately. Nathan knew that. He did not know how David would react to all of this—because David had kept it secret. But David now confesses his sin out in the open. God's man admits his guilt.

David's complete confession is recorded in Psalm 51. It's one of the most wonderful confessions you can find. I want to bring this up to date, because I see no value in considering these things unless they walk in shoe leather for you and me.

FOUR CONSEQUENCES WHEN A BELIEVER SINS

Four things can happen to a Christian when he sins. And may I say this to you: If you are a child of God and you sin, one of these things *must* happen, because God says it will happen.

#1 ... WE LOSE THE JOY OF OUR SALVATION

The first thing that happens when a Christian sins is that you lose the joy of your salvation. After David confessed his sin, that is what he asks God to restore to him:

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. –Psalm 51:12

When David sinned, he didn't lose his salvation—but he did lose its *joy*. When we sin, we're miserable. You see, a real child of God can't have fullness of joy if you have unconfessed sin in your life (1 John 1:4, Ephesians 4:30). That's the reason Paul warns the Ephesians not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Your salvation is secure; He has sealed you for the day of redemption, but you

can grieve Him so much that He can't work in your life. As a result, your life becomes static and stale and meaningless and joyless and powerless. That happens to the child of God when we sin and do nothing about the sin in our lives.

So today, as a believer, you are either living with a grieved Holy Spirit or you are allowing Him to work.

When there's unconfessed sin in your life, the joy is lost.

David was close to God when he was a shepherd boy out yonder in nature, and when he went out to face that giant, Goliath, he could testify: "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). But that same man, after he committed an awful sin and kept silent about it, was without doubt the saddest and sorriest man that you will ever see: power gone, joy gone, everything gone. That's the first thing that happens when a child of God sins—he will lose his joy.

#2 ... WE FACE JUDGMENT— EITHER OUR OWN OR GOD'S

The second thing is that either we must judge ourselves or God will judge us. Listen to David:

Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. —Psalm 51:4

David recognized this and took his whipping. Then when his own son, Absalom, rebelled against him, drove him out of Jerusalem, and was leading a revolution against him, poor David didn't even lift his hand to those who were against him. Instead, he said to his followers, "*Don't say anything or do anything to these who are against me, because God has permitted this to happen to me. I know God is punishing me.*"

A woman is lying on her back in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. She is wearing a white tank top and a dark blue bag is resting on her chest. Her hands are resting on the bag. She has a ring on her left hand and a small earring. The background is a soft-focus field of grass.

WHEN YOU ARE *His Child*

EVEN IF YOU FALL,

He'll never throw you out.

IT'S WONDERFUL TO HAVE A

Savior like that.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

May I say to you that either we judge ourselves or God judges us today. Because when a Christian sins, you actually have God's permission to deal with your own sin:

For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. –1 Corinthians 11:31-32

Paul says that if a Christian has unconfessed sin in his life and he won't judge it himself, then God will move in and judge that sin. Sometimes it seems God's judgements are slow. I do not know why, but sometimes when a child of God sins and refuses to deal with it, God doesn't do anything about it right away. God has His own reason for that. But oftentimes, God will judge that Christian right on the spot, because He says, *"I have to judge the lost world, because they're sinning. But I don't want you to be judged with the world. Therefore, I'll judge you here and now for the thing you are doing."*

#3 ... WE RISK BEING REMOVED FROM THE SCENE

The third thing that can happen to a child of God when he sins is he may commit the "sin leading to death":

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. –1 John 5:16

This is physical, not spiritual, death. I don't know what sin this is that leads to death. Perhaps God doesn't tell us is because it's different for each of us. For Ananias and Sapphira, it happened to be lying to the Holy Spirit. That is not true today in most cases, because there are those who definitely lie to the Holy Spirit and nothing happens to them. But if I knew today what the sin leading to death was in my life, you can be sure of one thing—I'd avoid that one.

But there is a sin leading to death that a child of God can commit. And sometimes God has to say, “*Come home, My child. I can’t let you keep on committing that sin.*” God puts you out of operation, or maybe He removes you from the place of service. God does that today, my beloved. I could name at least 25 people I’ve definitely seen God remove. It’s like the law of gravitation in that it always works.

#4 ... WE CAN CONFESS AND BE FORGIVEN

Then, my beloved, we come to what every child of God should do when we sin:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. –1 John 1:9

Does that mean that if we live under grace today that God won’t take us to the woodshed? I think sometimes He does. But if we will confess, He says, and will judge ourselves, we will not be judged. He says that the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

Friend, the important thing for a child of God is to be sure you acknowledge your sin. The words “if we confess” is in the Greek *homologemen*, meaning “to say the same thing”—that’s confession. It means to come over and stand with God and agree with Him.

When you and I sin, we so often go to the Lord and have fourteen excuses lined up for why we sinned. That’s not confession. When we go to God and apologize and excuse ourselves, we do not confess our sin.

When you and I confess, we are to come over on God’s side. Say, “*Lord, you say I am a sinner. I agree with you.*” Confession is to call it what God calls it. If God says it’s black, so we are not to say it’s gray. Admit it’s black. Agree with God. And when we agree with Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin.

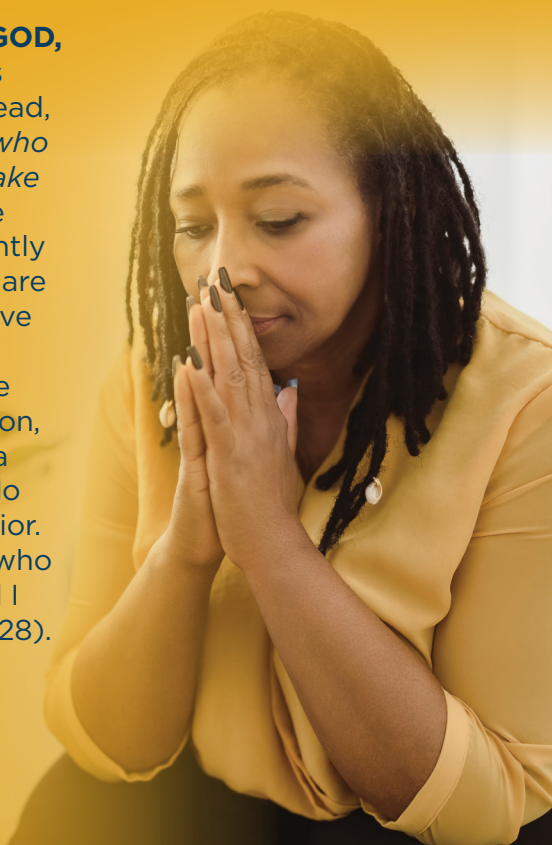
Not only that, but He cleanses us. That means the prodigal son doesn't make a trip the next day back to the pigpen. God cleanses us from all unrighteousness—*if* we confess.

Trust Him. He's wonderful. When you are His child, even if you fall, He'll never throw you out. It's wonderful to have a Savior like that.

MY TURN

DR. MCGEE CONCLUDED HIS MESSAGE ABOUT FORGIVENESS WITH THESE THREE CHALLENGES. WHICH ONE DO YOU NEED?


- **IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN**, hear this. When David sinned, God gave him another chance. God gave Jacob another chance. God gave Simon Peter another chance. And God will give you another chance, but you sure better agree with Him. Get over on His side and stand with Him. It's better there, I promise.
- **IF YOU'RE A MISERABLE CHRISTIAN**—unhappy, disturbed, living without joy—may I say that you have grieved the Holy Spirit. He's trying to get you to go to God. Like David did, just *tell* Him. Read Psalm 51 and ask the Lord, "*Wash me ... cleanse me.*" There's a way back. Christian, God says He will restore your joy and that He wants your joy to be *full*.
- **IF YOU'VE NEVER TRUSTED GOD**, He's not asking you to confess anything. He's asking you instead, "*What will you do with Jesus who died for you on the cross, to take away all your sin?*" You see, He deals with His children differently than He deals with those who are not His children. And if you have not accepted Him or received Him as your Savior, that's all He wants you to do. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die because you are a sinner, and all He asks you to do is to receive Christ as your Savior. He says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). That's His invitation to you.



A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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THE MOST
IMPORTANT
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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets with titles and descriptions, and 'Download' buttons next to each item. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

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with *J. Vernon McGee*

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Box 7100, Pasadena, California 91109-7100
P.O. Box 25325, London, Ontario, Canada N6C 6B1



1-800 65-BIBLE (24253)



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