

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

7: Forgive us our sins

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Over the next two sessions we are thinking about sin and forgiveness. These are not easy subjects to explore but do take us to the very heart of our faith. Forgiveness is at the very heart of the prayer because forgiveness was at the centre of Jesus's life and death. Forgiveness is not about ignoring wrongdoing but about restoring good, wholesome and flourishing relationships.

An ice-breaker for the group:

- What is your favourite food treat? And do you ever feel naughty indulging in it?

And now some (pretty heavy!) questions in twos before sharing with the whole group:

- What do you think a sin is and what damage does it do?
- What do you think God thinks about sin?

Many of us find it very hard to forgive ourselves or to believe that God forgives us. In this session we are going to think about one man's journey through sin, judgment, forgiveness and healing. This man was King David, who, despite this terrible episode, was considered the greatest of Israel's kings. Although he lived over 3000 years ago, his sin and journey to forgiveness still has powerful resonance today. We are going to begin with a long passage which tells the story of his terrible sin. The questions at the end may help as you reflect on the passage.

2 Samuel 11

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?' Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.' Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.' As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place

where he knew there were valiant warriors. The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite was killed as well. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting...

So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, 'The men gained an advantage over us, and came out against us in the field; but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall; some of the king's servants are dead; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' David said to the messenger, 'Thus you shall say to Joab, "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another; press your attack on the city, and overthrow it." And encourage him.'

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole?
- What are your thoughts and feelings towards King David?
- What does it make you think about sin and its consequences?

The next passage follows on from the previous story and is a very powerful and compelling part of the whole tragic episode.

The questions that follow may help you to explore it and reflect upon it.

2 Samuel 12.1-10, 13-15a

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the

wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.' Then Nathan went to his house.

- How do you respond to this passage?
- What do you think about Nathan and what he does?
 - How hard is it to challenge someone about their sinful actions, especially if they are a powerful person?
 - What do you think of Nathan's tactics as he challenges David?
- How do/would we feel about challenging others if we perceive their actions to be sinful and damaging?
- What does this passage tell us about God's response to sin?

In the book of Samuel, we read of David's desperate prayer to God to spare the life of his child - but the child dies. During this time David must have wrestled with his own guilt and shame and his own deep desire for forgiveness. It is very possible that Psalm 51 is King David's account of what he experienced through this long period of mourning, repentance and reflection. As we now read and reflect on this amazing psalm together we think about the consequences of sin, what God requires of David and the hope and new life that forgiveness brings. Once again, the questions at the end may help to guide your discussion.

Psalm 51:1-17

To the Choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

- What are your impressions of this psalm as a whole?
- What thoughts do you have about David's repentance and what he longs for? What does he want God to do for him?
- What do you think the last verse means? What do you think it meant for David? What do you think it might mean for us?
- *The fact that the psalm has been written indicates that King David experienced forgiveness, albeit through a journey that profoundly changed him. Are we able to accept we are forgiven and what does that feel like for us?*

Closing Prayers