

# RESPONDING TO GOD

## WEEK 4: PSALM 51

Over the next 2 weeks, we explore two **Psalms of the Disordered World**, looking at the effects of sin and brokenness on our world and our relationships. In Psalm 8, we read that while God is sovereign over creation, God crowns humanity with glory and honour. We are delegated both the authority and responsibility of stewarding creation. But good leadership and stewardship don't just 'happen'. We need to constantly and humbly acknowledge the reign of God. We need to intentionally reflect the image of God in our roles. By contrast, in 1 Sam 8, the leaders of Israel told Samuel that they wanted a king to lead them. God reminded Samuel that their request was effectively, a rejection of the reign and rule of God over the nation. Samuel warned them that kings tend to abuse and misuse their power. Nonetheless, God gave them a human king.

**ICEBREAKER:** It's easy to mentally compare 'sins' on a scale of 'minor' through to 'unforgiveable', especially about things like money, sex and power. How would you rank the following acts and omissions: Failing to turn up to lead your team; spending time viewing pornographic material; raping a person you've just met; using gestures of goodwill as a means to manipulate others; plying an employee or mate with alcohol with intent to 'loosen them up'; giving instructions to an employee to act illegally or recklessly; acting in such a way that employees are put at high risk of harm/ death; failing to mitigate workplace risks of harm/ death.

**PRAY:** Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. (Ps 36:5-6) Thank and praise God for who he is.

### READ: Psalm 51

- This is a Psalm of penitence and repentance. David acknowledges three things about the character of God (v1) that he had forgotten. How would you explain each of these, in other words?

This Psalm is titled as "A Psalm of David. When the Prophet Nathan came to him after he committed adultery with Bathsheba." While some commentators believe that this title was added many years later, Jewish and Christian tradition obliges us to read this Psalm, alongside 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Andrew Sloane highlights that, with the reign of David, God's own divine rule was tied to that of the human king. David was supposedly "a man after God's own heart". (1 Sam 13:14) How could it go so wrong?

It was Spring in Israel, the roads had dried out and the army regrouped for battle. But, instead of leading the army as was his duty, King David lazed at home. A combination of idleness, opportunism and a sense of entitlement converted to an illicit liaison with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his lead soldiers (Uriah). He'd seen her from the heights of his palace roof and sent his boys around to collect her. She had no say, so had to do David's bidding and sleep with him. He then sent her home. When David had originally seen her, she'd been washing to purify herself, seven days after her period, so it's hardly surprising that she fell pregnant. When David found this out, he recognised he needed to 'cover up' the paternity issue. David ordered Uriah home from the battle field, to spend some time with his wife. Uriah was a Hittite, so was probably a foreign mercenary from Syria. But Uriah refused to obey on the basis of commitment to his unit and military protocol: soldiers on active service remained celibate. David plied Uriah with alcohol; this didn't change Uriah's mind. David was desperate. To finally silence Uriah, David sent orders to (commander) Joab to place Uriah on special assignment: on his own, on the front line. Uriah – as well as other soldiers – were slaughtered in a - tactically stupid - assault on the city of Rabbah.

Our 'icebreaker' included similar acts as in 2 Sam 11. Among other things, David exhibited poor leadership, abuse of power, manipulative/ bullying behaviour to subordinates and a failure to act rightly/ with integrity.

- Think of a situation (e.g. workplace, university, etc.) where a leader/ lecturer inappropriately used their power. How did it make you feel? How did it impact morale and order in that situation?
- How do David's actions contrast with behaviours and attitudes we discussed re Psalm 8 and 15?

In 2 Sam 12, God intervened, through the Prophet Nathan. Nathan told a story about a rich man who stole and killed the one and only ewe lamb of a poor man, for his dinner. David is incensed by the rich man's actions – until Nathan pointed out that this is exactly what David has done. God was well aware of David's actions.

- READ: 2 Sam 12:7-10. What attitudes and actions did Nathan confront in David?
- David's sin impacted a lot of people and a number of people died, including a young baby. How do you feel about David's plea to God in Ps 51:4, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." And, looking at Psalm 51 as a whole: Was David's prayer sufficiently repentant? Or was he still blind to the gravity of what he'd done – and the impacts on other people?

In 2 Sam 12: 11-14, Nathan told David that his sin would have short and long-term repercussions and consequences. The baby conceived and born of adultery/ rape, would become sick and die. Ultimately, "As David "took" Uriah's wife, so the Lord will "take" David's wives. As the Lord "gave" Saul's property and wives and Israel's kingdom to David, so he will now "give" David's wives to someone else, to "one who is close to you"- - ironically, an expression earlier used of David himself in similar circumstances. The "one who is close" to David turns out to be his own son Absalom."<sup>1</sup>

- In 2 Sam 12:16, we're told "David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground." In what way can living with the consequences of sin, help us to respond appropriately to God? What do they remind us about the God, justice and judgement?

David confessed to three different acts which displease God. (Ps 51:1-2) VanGemeren explains them for us: "Transgression" is an act of rebellion and disloyalty; "sin" is an act that misses--often intentionally--God's expressed and revealed will; and "iniquity" is a crooked or wrong act, often associated with a conscious and intentional intent to do wrong.<sup>2</sup>

- When you read through Psalm 51, what phrases tell us that:
  - David felt defiled by his own sin/ felt 'dirty';
  - David felt guilty because of his sin and was physically affected by his sin and guilt;
  - David felt that his relationship with God was damaged and observing rituals was inadequate;
  - David felt that his power to lead was/ potentially would be taken from him;
  - David felt that his sin had/ would impact on the wellbeing of the city and nation;

Two Australian writers have made the following observations:

"the story of Bathsheba is a story of control and domination. ... Bathsheba's story is not the stereotypical one of poverty, alcohol and screaming, but of riches, celebrity, power and deeply calculated violence – far more insidious. She is summoned by the King, and, and she is kidnapped from her life as she has known it."<sup>3</sup>

"There is no hint that Bathsheba consented, or even that she had the power to consent or refuse either the royal summons or the seduction. The imbalance of power between the king of Israel and Bathsheba was stacked against her. In the past, what happened between David and Bathsheba has been referred to as adultery, but with today's understanding we call what happened to Bathsheba as rape. It was a terrible abuse of power on King David's part."<sup>4</sup>

- Two 'Australians of the Year', Rosie Batty and Lt Gen David Morrison, have spear-headed a national discussion about domestic violence. The *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* has highlighted abuses of power and authority (even in churches) towards children and vulnerable persons. How is abuse of power (eg as spouses, parents, employers, ...) a sin against God?

**PRAY:** for each other in the roles you hold, especially where you lead those who are younger and more vulnerable. Acknowledge sins of abuse – either to you – or by you; acknowledge the impacts these have had on you and those around you. Pray for God to work healing in your life and those around you.

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<sup>1</sup> Youngblood, Ronald F. "5. Nathan's rebuke (12:1-25)" In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition: Old Testament*. 457. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1994.

<sup>2</sup> VanGemeren, Willem A. "Psalm 32: The Blessing of Forgiveness and Wise Living" In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition: Old Testament*. 833. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1994.

<sup>3</sup> <https://tanvariches.wordpress.com/2015/07/29/bathshebas-other-david-the-marginalization-of-women-and-christ-as-answer/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://newlife.id.au/equality-and-gender-issues/a-sympathetic-look-at-bathsheba/>