

VICTORY OVER SHAME

Psalm 51

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/victory-over-shame/>

It was a warm, sunny Sunday afternoon in July a couple of years ago. My wife and mother-in-law were driving in the downtown area of Jefferson City. I was in the middle of answering a question which Louise, my mother-in-law, had asked about the downtown area. Suddenly I looked in my rearview mirror and red lights were flashing. Not one, but two police cars pulled in behind me as I pulled over in front of the courthouse.

The officer asked if I knew what I had done. I replied no. I had run right through a flashing red traffic light. Now please remember when and where this occurred. A Sunday afternoon, within a block of our church, in front of First United Methodist Church, on Monroe Street. Here I sat with two police cars behind me, lights flashing for all of Cole County to see. Youth are arriving for youth choir rehearsal, parents are dropping them off, looking our way. My first thought was, "They're going to tell Rod and he will hold this over me. I'll be forever in his debt. I'll have to bring him coffee and mow his lawn."

In the months following that brush with the law, I have thought a great deal about disobedience, shame and forgiveness. Our text today was written by King David after his tragic sins. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged to have her husband killed in battle. And then lied to cover up everything. There really is no comparison between running a red light while going 20 mph and what David did, in terms of consequences and ripping lives apart. But some of the principles are the same.

FIRST, WE DO DUMB THINGS (it's called sin, poor choices, disobedience). How dumb was my mistake? I forgot to tell you: the light I ran was right in front of the police station! Have you ever asked your child, "Why did you do that?" Answer: "I don't know." "What were you thinking?" The answer? They weren't!

Someone once asked Ernest Hemingway how someone goes bankrupt. He replied, "Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly." That's the way with sin. David gradually yielded by letting his mind go where it shouldn't dwell. And then, suddenly. In vv. 1-2, David uses three words for disobedience: transgression (crossing a boundary); iniquity (twisting something good and making it evil); sin (missing the target). We do dumb things.

SECOND, SIN HAS CONSEQUENCES. I got stopped by the police. David, like so many of us, thought the rules were for others. David, you were so stupid, as if you could disobey and there would be no pay day. There always is. It's the law of the harvest (Galatians 6:7).

THIRD, SIN BRINGS SHAME; PEOPLE SEE US. There is just no feeling like sitting there, helpless, police lights flashing, while the world stops and stares. King David was a public figure and his

entire world was watching his failure. Isn't that the way we feel about our moral failures and mistakes? Whether or not people are really staring at us, it feels like they are.

FOURTH, THERE IS MERCY. The good news about my traffic violation (and I know you care deeply about the outcome) is that I got off with a warning. No ticket. There was mercy. But I think I got off in part because I owned it. I did NOT say, "I thought flashing red meant 'stopping optional.'" The sun was in my eyes; it's the city's fault; other people do it; it's my car and I'll do what I want. No. I confessed!

In v. 4, David confesses, "I have sinned." In the Hebrew, this is emphatic, translated as, "I, yes I, have sinned."

I have a two-part homework assignment for you. First, this week, let's tell ourselves the truth. That is repentance and confession. Jewish scholar Louis Newman says that repentance is all about choosing truth over deception. He discusses the paradox of trying to run from our sin which only makes us more in bondage because trying to hide our sin will dictate our next move and the move after that. The irony is that its only when we run toward our sin that we ever get free from it [interview with Krista Tippett, podcast "On Being"]. We will soon be celebrating Independence Day. What greater freedom is there than to be free from sin's power and shame?

Here's the second part of your homework. This week, let's move from shame-based living to grace-based living. In his prayer, David uses words like abundant mercy and multiplied tenderness. And phrases like deep cleaning (v. 7). And if David, living 1,000 years before Christ, could claim deep inner cleansing, how much more can we, who know Jesus Christ?

And perhaps best of all, he talks about renewal (vv. 10-12). When's the last time your spiritual life had that new car smell? Fresh. Alive. Jesus Christ gives us victory over sin and shame.