



SACRED CITY

ash wednesday

A Curriculum for Missional Communities



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Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent. By the fourth century, the Western church had determined that the Lenten period of fasting and renewal should correspond to Christ's forty-day fast (Matt. 4:2), and, by counting forty days back from Easter (excluding Sundays, which remain "feast days"), arrived at the Wednesday seven weeks before Easter.

The aim of Ash Wednesday worship is threefold:

1. To meditate on our mortality, sinfulness, and need of a savior.
2. To renew our commitment to daily repentance in the Lenten season and in all of life.
3. To remember with confidence and gratitude that Christ has conquered death and sin.

That means that Ash Wednesday is all about the gospel. It is a witness to the power and beauty of our union with Christ and to the daily dying and rising with Christ that this entails. The imposition of ashes (using the ashes to place a cross on a worshipper's forehead) is often a central part of the worship service. Ashes have a long history in biblical and church traditions. In Scripture, ashes or dust symbolizes frailty or death (Gen. 18:27), sadness or mourning (Esther 4:3), judgment (Lam. 3:16), and repentance (Jonah 3:6). All of these images are caught up in the church's use of ashes as a symbol for Lent. In Christ's death we see God's judgment on evil; in our response we express sorrow and repentance for our sins; and in our rededication we show that we are purified and renewed.

Tonight will be a special celebration of Ash Wednesday.

Read 2 Samuel 11 together out loud (ESV)

Ask your MC to tell you the story back as best as they can remember in chronological order.

Here are some questions to stir conversation. Remember, this is a discussion, not a quiz! (Have your MC give examples or evidence from the reading with their answers.)



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What are some things that you notice about David in this story?

- *He wasn't where he was supposed to be. He was looking at someone he wasn't supposed to be looking at. He did something he shouldn't have done, and then he desperately tried to cover up his sins. He thought he had gotten away with all of his transgressions.*

If this was all you knew of David, what would you think of him?

- *Lazy (was supposed to be out on the battlefield), peeping tom, sensual, selfish, murderer, tyrant, typical politician, unbeliever.*

What kind of man was Uriah?

- *Honorable, above reproach.*

How did God feel about David's sins?

- *He was displeased with David.*

But how was David feeling about his sins?

- *He seemed unaffected. He thought he had gotten away with them.*

Do you ever have a flippant attitude towards your sins that nobody else notices? Why do you think that is the case?

How do you think God feels about those sins?

Now read 2 Samuel 12:1-14 together out loud.

What did the Prophet Nathan say to David? How did he confront David in his sin?

- *He told a story, got him emotionally invested, almost tricked him into repentance.*

What was God's response to David? (vv. 7-12)

- *God had given him so much but it still wasn't enough for David, he wanted more. Judgment was coming for his sins.*

How did David respond to God and Nathan? (v. 13)

In spite of David's repentance, what were the repercussions of his sin?

- *Uriah was dead. David was going to be shamed publicly, and his son would die.*



How do you think David was feeling about his sin now?

We actually don't have to guess as to how David is feeling after being confronted in his sin because David actually tells us himself. After this confrontation with Nathan, David wrote Psalm 51, which is a window into his soul. In this Psalm, we don't see any blame shifting, excuse making, or dodging of responsibility. David thoroughly, openly, and honestly owns his sin.

Read Psalm 51 together slowly, making observations as you read.

Here is something to help you lead this time with your MC:

bridging psalm 51

By Greg Joines

The Psalmist

In the Psalm, we see David in his darkest moment, realizing his sin and his sinful condition, but instead of leading to despair, it brings David to an intimate place of experiencing God's salvation. For David, pleading and confession resulted in nothing less than assurance and worship. In this Psalm we see many different aspects of confession and ultimately how Jesus answers David's confession.

Within David we see the following:

- Crying out to God (v.1-2); this pleading is for God's undeserved grace.
- He sees how sin has absolutely tainted him, comparing himself to a soiled garment (v. 2)
- Acknowledgement of his sin and how his history is permeated with sin (vv.3-5)
- He affirms that his sin is nothing less than treason (v. 4)
- These confessions reveal something about his heart, his sin wasn't an accident but a reflection of his sinful condition (v. 5)
- Commentator Derek Kidner observes, "[This realization] is the climax of the facts he is facing: that his sins are his own (the fivefold my in verses 1-3), and inexcusable (v. 4); worst of all, they are the very element he lives in (v. 5)."¹

This self-realization doesn't end in despair, but instead magnifies David's understanding of the depth of salvation and redemption:

- Declaring God's Character (v.6)
- He understands that he can't make himself clean and declares his dependence on God for forgiveness and cleansing (v. 7). Compare with God's promise of



redemption in Isaiah: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; (Is. 1.18)

- Talks about the miracle of being given a new heart (v. 10)
- He pleads with God to experience His presence and understands it as the greatest source of joy (vv. 11-12)
- He declares that this joyous faith has no choice than to be an infectious one, he can't help but tell of God's salvation (v. 13)
- He understands the worshipful responses that result from this redemption (v. 14-17)

Jesus as David's Forgiveness

It was ultimately Jesus that David was worshiping. The forgiveness and cleansing that he longed for was fulfilled in Jesus. It wasn't just David's sin that Jesus atoned for, but ours as well. Colossians 2:14 states that "canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he [Jesus] set aside, nailing it to the cross." Every sin that we have committed, commit, or will commit is nailed to the cross 2,000 years ago. But the Christian life is one of realizing our condition, a constant repentance for the sins we commit, and a clinging to Jesus and the cross.

Is this how you typically repent?

- David seems to be really confident that even though his sin was awful, and "against God, and God only" he still appeals to God's steadfast love, and abundant mercy for cleansing.

When someone points out your sin, and calls you out on something, is this how you respond? With heartfelt repentance, owning your sin without any excuses, and throwing yourself on the mercy of Jesus?

- Ask your community to speak the truth to you!

This is the type of repentance that only the Holy Spirit can produce and only the Gospel can give us the security to be this open and honest with no fear of being rejected by God. Let's ask the Spirit to produce this type of repentance in us during this Lenten season.

Write down each person in your MC's name on small pieces of paper and have each person draw a name. Commit to praying every day for that person during Lent. Close the MC, by praying for one another and placing ashes on each other's forehead in the sign of the cross.