

# In the Shadow of His Wings



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 19:4, 2 Samuel 11, 12, Pss. 17:8, 32:1, 36:7, 51:2, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7.*

**Memory Text:** “Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (*Psalms 63:7, NKJV*).

“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air” (*Prov. 30:18, 19, NKJV*).

The eagle is a living jet fighter. Armed with a hooked beak and razor's-edge talons, it is loaded like a jet fighter too. The eagle is wind and wing, bone, sinew, and blood. The eagle is scavenger, fisher, and thief. The eagle hurls itself from clouds toward water with the speed of a cyclonic storm. The eagle hobbles on balled-up claws in its nest to keep from dicing up its young. The eagle is majesty, power, and grace. The eagle is all these metaphors, yet greater than their sum. Small wonder, then, that the Bible writer failed to understand the fierce beauty of the eagle's flight.

David himself turned to a similar image in his psalms about being sheltered under the wings of God. This week we will meditate with David through his psalms on how God shelters us and covers our sin. But first we will look at the events that inspired his need for these coverings. Then we will seek to understand why we, too, need to be sheltered under those same wings.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 14.*

## The Naked Truth

Eagles can soar to an altitude of 10,000 feet, higher than most birds. Like the eagle, David soared high. The shepherd-king reached heights of greatness few monarchs ever attain. He was clothed in the spoils of military victory and covered with honor and glory. But David forgot that his kingly robes were a gift from God. They could not hide a man's sins—even a king's—from God's sight.

David's garments, in a spiritual sense, were priestly as well as kingly; he was the head of Israel's theocracy too. The bitter sins that stained these garments inspired Psalms 32 and 51. To appreciate fully the imagery in these psalms as a covering for sin and the imagery in other psalms of God's wings as a divine covering, we need to look at how the narrative events of David's life inspired them. How ironic and tragic that in a study devoted to the spiritual lessons of garments, the sad story of David's fall begins in a literal lack of them.

At the pinnacle of greatness, David faces his fiercest battle. The war isn't waged on the bloody fields of Rabbah but over the six inches of mental turf that lies behind David's frontal lobe. Satan chooses his "weapon" well. What Goliath with his monstrous lance failed to do to David, a bathing woman, seen from the king's rooftop, does. Obviously, David forgets the lesson of his sling: how easily a "giant" is felled by one small stone or, in this case, one small glance.

**One small stone and down falls a giant. One small glance and down falls a king. David did many things to "cover" his sin of adultery and avoid exposure. What were they? 2 Samuel 11. Why do our attempts to cover sin, to avoid detection or punishment, lead only to committing greater sins and to the threat of still greater exposure? How do the narrative details of David's story enforce this point?**

One forbidden glance sets in motion events that end in murder and near civil war. David's story is one of concealment after concealment in order to avoid consequences. The awful reality of sin is that committing one sin without confessing and forsaking it, leads to committing another more heinous sin in order to hide the previous offense. David committed adultery and murder under the cloak of kingly power. But God's eye sees beneath the outer garments and lays bare the heart.

**It has been said, "If adversity has slain its thousands, prosperity has slain its ten thousands." With David's life in mind, to what dangers does prosperity expose the soul? Why does adversity often draw us closer to God? How can we avoid prosperity's pitfalls?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Psalms 63:7*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Use the metaphor of God’s wings to describe God’s protective and merciful power.

**Feel:** Sense the depth of our vulnerability and impurity and our great need to find shelter in the shadow of God’s wings.

**Do:** Confess our sins, repent, and seek God’s healing restoration through His provisions of grace.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Shadow of His Wings**

**A** What are the various ways in which we need covering and protection under God’s wings?

**B** What strong visual and kinetic images of birds and their habits enrich this metaphor and extend our understanding of God?

**II. Feel: Our Vulnerability**

**A** In order to appreciate God’s wings fully, what do we need to realize about our great need? What happens when we refuse to acknowledge our sins?

**B** How did David feel that his sin affected his relationship to God? How did he describe his experience in the Psalms?

**C** How did he describe his feelings about God’s restorative actions on his behalf?

**III. Do: Steps to Confession**

**A** What steps do we need to take in order to confess humbly our sins, repent, and allow God to cleanse and restore us to the joy of a relationship with Him?

**B** How can we express our longing for God’s forgiveness, as David did?

► **Summary:** When we humbly confess our sins, turn from them, and seek God’s restoring grace, we are hidden under God’s wings, safe and whole.

## Nathan Bares All

For a whole year, David hides his sin under a veil of deceit. It looks as though the king has gotten away with murder. Sin hardens David's heart to stone. But God sends Nathan to break it.

**Read** Nathan's parable and its interpretation in 2 Samuel 12:1–12, keeping in mind that Jesus also resorted to parables. What are the advantages of using them? What was it about David's condition that made clothing the truth in a story a more effective, even necessary, way of reaching him?

Only a few verses long, Nathan's parable holds precious lessons for reaching the sin-hardened heart. First, Nathan does not come to David as an accuser; instead, he humbly and tactfully solicits David's help. David's heart may be hardened by sin, but his sense of justice is not completely deadened. Second, by clothing the truth in a parable, Nathan breaches David's defenses. Third, Nathan's method of presentation invites David to listen without feeling judged. The result? David condemns himself.

**Nathan's** verdict, "Thou art the man," rips through the veil of self-deceit in which David shrouded himself. David's response, "I have sinned against the Lord" is met with "the Lord also has put away your sin" (*vs. 13, NKJV*). Why was the Lord able to put away, or cover, David's sin? See 1 John 1:9.

David's sin is covered, but the child conceived in sin must die. For David, this tragedy must have been more bitter than his own death. He removes his kingly robes and puts on the garments of humility and mourning. He prostrates himself openly before God in repentance, pleading for his child's life. How ironic that, a year earlier, under the cover of darkness, David prostrated himself in lust secretly with Bathsheba on that fatal eve his dying child was conceived.

David reacts to the child's death in a manner that baffles his advisors. He rises. He bathes. He changes his clothes. He, the anointed of God, anoints himself anew and worships God. These actions demonstrate how those who have mourned for their sins must allow God to restore them: first, God raises the grieving sinner and bears him to Himself. Next, He washes away the guilt of our sin and clothes us in His righteousness. He anoints us with His Spirit so that we may worship Him.

David's fall into sin begins and ends with a bath. This final washing, however, is not a prelude to sin but a sign of a clean heart.

**What hope are we given by David's bathing, garment change, and anointing? Why can we who have been washed clean by Jesus have full assurance that we may come worship Him?**

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Repentance of our sins is a vital part of restoring our relationship with God and accepting the covering He offers “under His wings.”

**Just for Teachers:** Use care and sensitivity while prompting class members to recall a potentially negative life experience in the opening activity below. In leading the class, you should always focus on God’s forgiveness and restoration.

**Opening Activity:** Ask students to recall a time in their lives when a relationship was threatened by a misunderstanding. Ask them to remember how they felt when they realized that their action had risked the losing of trust in the relationship, and when they realized they needed to apologize. How did their feelings change after the apology was made and the relationship was restored, or at least had begun to be restored?

Because of sin, our relationship with God—our Creator—is similarly and seriously ruptured. How much more should we seek to confess and repent of our sin before God? Psalm 32 records David’s experience of repentance and how his relationship with God progressed from “groaning” (*vs. 3, NIV*) to “rejoicing” (*vs. 11, NIV*). David’s experience charts a course for us to follow.

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

## Bible Commentary

**Just for Teachers:** This section provides a focused review of the story of David’s sin, repentance, and forgiveness.

### I. Confrontational Storytelling (*Review 2 Samuel 12:1–12 with your class.*)

Things had been going well for David. Better than well. After his years as a fugitive, he was now installed as the popular and powerful king in Jerusalem. God had blessed him, protected him, and fulfilled His promises to him. He was lionized by the people. His exploits were legendary, the stuff of songs, on the lips of women and children alike in the streets of

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## Blessed Is He Whose Sin Is Covered . . .

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (*Ps. 32:1*).

For a whole year after his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, David refuses to confess his sin, even to himself. But as Psalm 32 tells us, he suffers severe agony of mind and body as a result of his silence.

**Read** Psalm 32:3–5. In what ways does David use poetic imagery and symbolic language to describe what happens to him when he refuses to confess his sin? According to verse 5, what does David do to end his suffering?

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David covers his sin of adultery with lies and bloodshed, but the weight of his own guilt crushes him. As Psalm 32 shows, though, David casts himself in true humility and repentance on the sure mercy of God. In his cry for forgiveness, David does a number of things that are instructive for all who seek God’s covering of forgiveness: (1) David makes no excuse for his sin; (2) he makes no attempt to justify himself; (3) he does not find fault with God’s law for condemning him; (4) he blames only himself for his sin; and (5) he genuinely hates the sin that separated him from God and turns from it. And God covers it.

**David** conceals his sin (*Ps. 32:3, 4*); God covers it (*vss. 1, 2*). What is the difference between our concealing and God’s covering? Before the righteousness of Christ can cover sin, what must be done to it?

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God does not overlook sin. But sin is covered, meaning its guilt is no longer to be imputed, or brought against, the sinner when it is repented of. Confession alone is incomplete without repentance. We must not only be sorry for our sin, we must turn away from it in God’s power. God can forgive and cover all sin. His grace not only forgives sin but accepts the repentant sinner as though he or she never sinned! That is the power of Jesus, our Substitute, upon whom God lays the sin. In this way, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner.

**How readily do you acknowledge before God your own sin and wrongdoing? If you do not, are you deceiving God or only yourself in the end? Dwell on the implications of your answer.**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

Jerusalem. His enemies feared and admired him. He was wealthy from the spoils of war, and men were willing to lay down their lives for him at a moment's notice. But David had a dark secret. We do not know whether it was known only to a few of David's closest advisors or if it was the gossip all over the city, but David could barely bring himself to acknowledge his wrongdoing and tried to tell himself he could get away with it. After all, he was the most powerful man in the nation. His position would protect him, wouldn't it?

Enter Nathan the prophet. Personal friend of the king for many years, he visits David, draws him in with a well-told story that confronts him with his sin and causes him to pronounce judgment on himself in a moment of self-damning irony. David is shattered, his credibility is destroyed, and, paradoxically, in the midst of this destruction, he is on the way to being forgiven and restored.


**Consider This:** What went wrong? Why do you think David fell so dramatically?

■ *How do you think David might have reacted if Nathan had simply confronted him without telling the story? Why do you think Nathan chose to handle the situation the way he did?*

## II. A Song of Repentance (Review 2 Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 51 with your class.)

David responds to Nathan's rebuke with a stark confession: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13, NIV). It is a neat summary of Psalm 51. Yes, David sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, David's family, others who had been drawn into his plot, and the whole nation. But the primary relationship that had been broken and needed to be restored was with God. Healing of this relationship will be the basis for healing, where possible, the damage in other lives.

David was the political and spiritual leader of his nation. Most of us can only begin to imagine what it must have taken for him to accept the rebuke, to acknowledge his sin, and to humbly seek God's forgiveness. Politically, he risked his hold on power. Spiritually, he risked his credibility. And personally, he had to surrender his pride. Of course, all of these things were already at risk because of what he had done, but by accepting the prophet's message he was trusting the mercy and forgiveness of God to work through the colossal mess he had made.

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## Whiter Than Snow

Psalm 51, like Psalm 32, is a penitential psalm, written after David confesses his sin. Just as Psalm 32 alludes to garments in order to illuminate the concept of God's covering for sin, Psalm 51 also alludes to the imagery of garments as a sin covering. But here the emphasis is on the washing and whitening agents used to clean garments and on their spiritual significance. In other words, in this psalm, David metaphorically does his "dirty laundry."

**In Psalm 51:2, David asks God to wash him thoroughly. What does this washing involve? How do the images of "purge me with hyssop" and "whiter than snow" (vs. 7) help us to understand the nature of this cleansing?**

The word that David uses here for washing is used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the washing of a garment (*see Gen. 49:11, Exod. 19:10*). *Purge* suggests the idea of making atonement for sin. Hyssop, a gray-green marjoram plant, was used as a spice and had medicinal properties. Thus, it was both a nutritive and a healing agent. Hyssop, as David knew well, had a long history in Israel. It was used in the original Passover ritual (*Exod. 12:22*), in the day of cleansing a leper or a house (*Lev. 14:6, 49*), and in the offering of the red heifer for the purification of men and items made unclean through contact with the dead. Moses used hyssop at the ratification of the covenant (*Heb. 9:19, 20*). See "Hyssop" in *The SDA Bible Dictionary*.

All these uses signify that hyssop was a powerful cleansing agent. David's use of hyssop shows he understood that only the remedy with the greatest purifying power could cleanse him from sin's defilement. And that remedy is the atoning blood of our Savior.

**In Psalm 51:10, David prays for God to create in him a clean heart. What does having a "clean heart" mean?**

God does not merely cleanse the heart from iniquity; He creates in His forgiven child a new heart. A new heart is a new mind. Paul exhorts us, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (*Rom. 12:2*) "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ" (*Titus 3:5, 6, NKJV*). Prayer for forgiveness always should be united with prayer for heart renewal and holy living. David desires to be clothed in an entirely new mental and moral nature. He prays to be steadfast in obedience and not to be deprived of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**Consider This:** Which do you think carried the greater risk for David—to acknowledge his sin publicly or to continue to seek to cover it up? Why?

■ *Do you think it right that David acknowledges only his sin “against the Lord”? Why or why not? What about the other people who were hurt by what he had done wrong? Based on the narrative, what kind of reparations need to be made to those we hurt?*

### III. Covered by His Wings *(Review 2 Samuel 12:13–25 and Psalm 63:7 with your class.)*

David ended his dramatic audience with Nathan with assurance that the Lord had taken away his sin (*see 2 Sam. 12:13*). It is an incredible note of certainty that we can all share, even in the midst of the consequences of our sin. The impact of David’s sin continued to play out in his family over the next few chapters in 2 Samuel, with the death of his infant son, the rape of his daughter Tamar, the murder of his son Amnon, and his son Absalom’s revolt against the throne.

Somehow, David lived through this aftermath, undoubtedly with regrets but also with the assurance that despite all the horror that had happened and that was yet to come, he was forgiven. He could rejoice, as he describes at the end of Psalm 32, and rejoice under the cover “of His wings,” as he described it in Psalm 63:7.

**Consider This:** Why did God punish David and his family by permitting his child to die?

■ *How can we know the certainty of God’s forgiveness in our lives today, even when our circumstances may not give the appearance that we are forgiven and restored?*

## ► STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The story of David’s sin and forgiveness raises some deep questions about the nature of forgiveness in general and of God’s forgiveness in particular. By prompting class members to think about forgiveness in their own lives, perhaps we can gain insight into how God forgives and how we might be able to practice forgiveness in our own lives.

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## In the Sanctuary of His Wings

**“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings”** (*Ps. 61:4, NKJV*).

Some eagles have wingspans of up to nine feet under which they can shelter and protect their hatchlings. God’s mercy, like the wings of the eagle, shelters those who forsake their sins, no matter how deep they may have fallen. But unlike the guilt of our sin, which is blotted out, the consequences or results of sin often may not be removed. David experienced the bitter reality of this truth, fourfold, in the deaths of three of his sons and in the rape of his daughter Tamar by her own half-brother Amnon.

Sure, his sin had been forgiven, and he could have peace in that sense. But in another sense, pain and suffering were to be his lot, all from a sin that had been forgiven.

May we all take heed!

**What** did David seek in the shadow of God’s wings? From what do they offer us covering from? *Pss. 17:8, 36:7, 57:1.*

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David probably composed Psalm 61 while in exile during the time Absalom usurped the throne. It declares trust in the covering mercy of God, possibly referring to the mercy seat in God’s sanctuary. Here rests the ark of God’s covenant with His people, with its covering cherubim, whose overarching wings shelter the law—the written transcript of God’s character of love. David may have been expressing a desire to dwell, through faith, with God in His sanctuary, his soul garbed in the transforming light of that love.

**Perhaps even now, although you’ve dedicated your life anew to God, you are suffering the consequences of sin: estrangement, exile, physical ailment, or emotional pain. What hope of healing does the shelter of God’s wings offer?**

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*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED**Application Questions:**

- ❶ When should we be prepared to risk friendship by saying something difficult but important to a friend the way that Nathan did?
- ❷ When you have been hurt, how hard is it to forgive the person who hurt you? Is it possible to fully restore the relationship to what it was before you were hurt? What else can be done to restore that relationship?
- ❸ If God had really forgiven David, why did so many things still go wrong in his family and reign after this point? Shouldn't God's forgiveness make things right? Discuss your answer.
- ❹ If our sin is truly covered, why does it continue to impact so many lives?

**► STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The suggested activity should be conducted with sensitivity to the experience and circumstances of class members. Be careful to respect people's privacy and appreciate that some of the activity might not be easy for some class members. The intention is to demonstrate the practical realities of repentance and forgiveness. Class members should appreciate that these are important components of our relationships with one another and even more so in the context of our relationship with God.

**Individual Activity:** Provide paper and pens or pencils and invite class members to write a letter to someone to whom they feel they should apologize. Some class members might not be prepared to deliver or post the letter but may still find the process of writing the letter to be useful and encouraging. If class members do wish to deliver their letters of apology, some may want to share responses received with the class in coming weeks.

When these letters have been composed, class members could spend additional time writing a similar letter to God, perhaps using Psalm 51 as a model, remembering that David's first concern was that he had sinned against God.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “David’s Sin and Repentance,” pp. 717–726, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Bible Biographies,” p. 157, in *Education*.

“David’s repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened, inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. David did not in despair give over the struggle. In the promises of God to repentant sinners he saw the evidence of his pardon and acceptance. . . .

“Though David had fallen, the Lord lifted him up. He was now more fully in harmony with God and in sympathy with his fellow men than before he fell. . . .

“Whoever under the reproof of God will humble the soul with confession and repentance, as did David, may be sure that there is hope for him. Whoever will in faith accept God’s promises, will find pardon. The Lord will never cast away one truly repentant soul. He has given this promise: ‘Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me.’ Isaiah 27:5. ‘Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will *abundantly* pardon.’ Isaiah 55:7.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 725, 726, author’s emphasis.

## Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the futility of self-devised coverings compared with what Jesus willingly provides. What *does* He provide, and why is it the only covering for sin that can heal and save?
- ❷ Try writing one of your own psalms about God’s mercy and love. Like David, write it from your own personal experience. Bring it to class and share what you have written.
- ❸ Laundry detergent advertisements for bleaching agents promise to whiten and soften clothes. To bleach out a stain without softening it could be too harsh for fabric. To soften fabric without attending to the stain leaves it dirty. Why, then, do we need both the whitening power of God’s justice and the softening power of His mercy to cleanse the soul’s garment?
- ❹ Forgiven sin can make us miserable, but we mustn’t forget that it is *forgiven*. How can we learn that living with the consequences of our sin doesn’t mean that our sin hasn’t been forgiven?