

King David of Israel was a man with the same human weaknesses as the rest of us: His lust for Bathsheba led to his adultery with her, and he even sent her husband away to be killed. Finally, David was compelled to face up to his sin when he was confronted by the prophet Nathan. In his deep sorrow and repentance, David composed the memorable Fifty-first Psalm, "one of the greatest confessionals that has ever been written."^[5] This passage of Scripture shows us that, even in the face of great sin; God will hear our prayers of confession and penitence. David wrote:

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
Cleanse me with hyssop,
and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit,
to sustain me.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.
Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise. (Ps. 51:1-17)

In this unforgettable psalm of confession, David did not make excuses for his sins; he confessed them and sought forgiveness. Denial, rationalization, minimizing, blaming, and the numerous other defenses we use to avoid responsibility for our sins hinder us from seeking and, thus, receiving the forgiveness of our heavenly Father. Making excuses for our sins, faults, and shortcomings (seeking self-justification) only hardens our hearts and prevents us from penitently seeking the forgiveness of our loving Father. "The very fact of humble confession opens the door to forgiveness, for the man with the penitent heart can claim the promises of God."^[6]