

Evaluation must address sin with assurance that God is merciful

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Reflections on Psalm 51

David composed the psalm after the prophet Nathan had confronted him with his adulterous behavior with Bathsheba. It begins by reminding us that we are completely dependent upon God's mercy for dealing with sin. Sin is an inextricable part of our being; from the time we are born until the time that we die (v.1-5). God requires sincerity and truth from us, but without his mercy and constant love we are not capable of either being sincere or truthful (v.6-9).

This psalm also reminds us that gifts from God are not for our personal benefit; they are to be used to lead others into God's presence (v.10-13). God is not interested in our religious sacrifices. God only wants a humble, repentant, obedient spirit (v.16-17).

One function of evaluation is to facilitate change that really matters, based on an examination of the way things really are. This will involve encouraging people to confess to their sin in appropriate ways (not necessarily to the evaluator). Analysis and interpretation of evaluation findings becomes much more meaningful when the participants have confessed to God and received God's assurance of God's love for them.

Caution: God is the judge of those who commit sin, not others. The evaluator who encourages confession in the evaluation process must guard against condemnation by the evaluator or others.

Early in an evaluation, interviewing may involve "playing hide and seek" as people discuss the situation being evaluated. A skilled evaluator can detect evasive comments, or attempts to hide some aspects of the situation from the evaluator. The evaluator should seek to clarify and illuminate those areas, not for the sake of the evaluation, but for the sake of the participants. The evaluator should encourage people to be open to learning about their situation, even if it is uncomfortable. This only happens in a meaningful way if the evaluator is open to feeling uncomfortable as he or she learns things about the situation.

Stakeholders in an evaluation have different perspectives on what has happened. These perspectives should be explored, not to determine who is right and who is wrong, but to assist mutual understanding. This principle is based on the fact that God created every person to be

unique. Each person has some tiny piece of God's character embedded within, which others can see only as mutual understanding emerges.

However, this does not mean that all information is relative. There are gray areas to be sure, but there are also black and white areas. These black and white areas are discovered in an evaluation through prayerful study of scripture as evidence is examined.

One objective of TE is to facilitate restoration where there is brokenness. Acknowledgement of brokenness, as painful as it is, must take place before restoration can occur. Justice and mercy, mediated by God's grace, are intertwined in this process. Only the evaluator who has personally experienced this creative tension can expect to facilitate it through his or her evaluation work.

The evaluator who allows this psalm to inform the evaluation work will be more effective in facilitating Christ-centered evaluation of development.