

Psalm 51

June 12, 2022



SCRIPTURE

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is ^[b] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.
- ¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

COMMENTARY

This psalm has a clearly defined historical setting, which was David's confession of his sins (his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah) after being confronted by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 11–12). David's main plea is one of



forgiveness (vv. 1-2). He relied completely on God's mercy, which is evident in the terms gracious ... faithful love, and abundant compassion. In David's case, his sins were severe enough that sacrifice was not acceptable (v. 16). The statement against You... alone does not mean that others were not involved in the effects of the sin, but that even in sinning against others the ultimate affront was against God Himself.

David knew God wanted to change him from within, not merely externally (v. 6). When David's heart was right, righteous actions would follow (Matt. 12:34). David also affirmed that the Lord wanted to teach David wisdom deep within. Biblical wisdom is God's gift (Prov. 2:6), and David's turning to God in reverent fear was the beginning of a life change for him (Prov. 9:10). David asked God to purify him thoroughly. Clean signifies both ceremonial and moral cleanness. God would have to do a lot of cleaning to make David whiter than snow; yet, David longed for exactly that.

David longed to hear joy and gladness again in his heart, but his sinful condition prevented it (v. 8). Only God's cleansing could bring it again. Nathan the prophet's indictment had pierced David's soul, and the ache of David's sin had caused him much pain. He felt really beaten down, helpless under sin's load; and God was his only hope. Turn your face away (v. 9) literally means "hide your face." God often had warned His people He would turn or hide His face from them when He judged them (Isa. 54:8; Mic. 3:4). Here, David asked the Lord to look at his sins no longer. Forgiveness includes the idea that God no longer would hold David's sin against him (Ps. 32:1). The renewal of one's heart and spirit (v. 10) are common images representing not only forgiveness (vv. 1-2,7-9) but also a change that enables a person to live in obedience to Yahweh's commands.

David knew his sin merited the worst sort of punishment (v. 11), but David did not want such treatment from God. He also asked God not to take His Holy Spirit away. David did not want God to set him aside and no longer use him as He had done with Saul, Israel's first king (1 Sam. 16:14). David needed the Lord to restore the joy (v. 10) of David's salvation to him. He needed God to remove his sin to make room for joy again. David also asked for a willing spirit—one that would help him follow God closely again. He knew that without such inner conviction, he quickly could return to a life of sin.

David's words sound astounding; he actually believed God still could use him effectively in His service. He would teach others about God's perfect ways, and they could be restored just as God had restored David. David's sins were great and the consequences staggering; yet David trusted in the forgiving, cleansing, renewing grace of God. Publicly praising God and teaching others about Him was part of the response of God's deliverance in a person's life.

God desires a broken spirit (or heart) rather than acts of sacrifice (vv. 16-17). Build the walls (v. 18) refers to strengthening Zion, which is where Yahweh dwelt among His people (65:1). Righteous sacrifices refers to those offered with the proper motives. Outward actions don't matter if the inward heart attitude isn't right.



MAIN POINT

When we are broken over the severity of our sin we are positioned to experience the greatness of God's grace.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How would you define sin? What is the difference between being tempted and sinning?

What are the best blessings of living the way God wants us to?

What are the general consequences of sinning and choosing to live another way?

Whether we recognize it or not, all of us have been affected at the deepest level imaginable by sin. When we encounter the true depth of our sin, we experience a sense of brokenness over the severity of these effects. But, as we see in David's life, God's forgiveness and grace have the power to break our patterns of sin and restore us to a right relationship with Him. When we are broken over the severity of our sin, we are positioned to experience the greatness of God's grace.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Take a few minutes to look over 2 Samuel 11:1-27, the background to Psalm 51. What different ways did David sin in the Bathsheba affair?

Who was affected by David's sin, both directly and indirectly?

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 51:1-5.

How did God feel about what David had done?

Why is our sin always ultimately against God?

What is the main thing David is asking for in verses 1-5?

How would you describe his attitude?



What different characteristics of God does David affirm?

What does forgiveness mean?

Why do some people struggle with asking forgiveness from those they have wronged, or from God Himself?

The Bible assures us God is willing to forgive us and to cleanse us from every sin (1 John 1:9). Sometimes people avoid asking God's forgiveness because of their pride. They do not want to admit they have a deep spiritual need only God can meet. Each one of us has sinned and fallen short of God's design for us (Rom. 3:23). We need to take responsibility for our sins and confess them to God. When we do, we'll find Him ready to forgive us.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 51:6-9.

What is David's general prayer in these verses?

How do David's specific requests reflect his view of sin and of God?

What changes when we acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness?

Sin ruins people's lives every day. David knew this all too well as he pondered the depths of his moral failure. Yet David clung to the hope of God's forgiveness and cleansing. We need to claim the same vital truth—God's grace can cover the worst of sins.

- HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 51:10-12.

In these verses, David prays for spiritual renewal. Why is renewal important after forgiveness?

How do David's requests in these verses contribute to spiritual renewal?

What is our role in renewal? What is God's role?

Have you had a time when you lost the joy of your salvation? If so, what helped you find joy again? If you haven't found joy again, what do you think you need from God?

The joy of fellowship with God is one of God's greatest gifts. Loss of that fellowship is the greatest tragedy. For David, God's salvation meant deliverance and freedom from the inner consequences of sin. Sin had bound and burdened him, taking away energy and hope. When God restored the joy of his salvation, it meant that He had set His child free to be who He created him to be.



- HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 51:13-19.

What promises does David make to God in these verses? How are each of those promises connected to God's grace and mercy in David's life? Are these things part of your relationship with God? Where is there room for improvement?

What kinds of sacrifices does the Lord desire in verses 16-17? In verse 19? What would these sacrifices look like in your life?

When is a broken spirit or contrite heart enough? When are acts of sacrifice due?

God desires to restore sinners completely. Indeed, He will restore us when we turn to Him in genuine repentance and confession. He loves to see the "broken and humble heart" (Ps. 51:17) and will bring His grace quickly. The sacrifice that God desires is the sacrifice of our selfish wills and self-importance. Humble acceptance of God-given renewal and re-creation is necessary. God accepts and forgives those who come to Him openly and humbly in dependence on His grace.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Read Romans 3:23-26 aloud. What did Jesus accomplish on our behalf? What is the result?

Why is courage required to identify and confess a sin to God? How can you get that courage?

How do past sins impact a person's value and ability to serve God?

Are you letting your past sins hinder your effectiveness for God? If so, what do you need to do to move forward?

How should we treat others as a result of the freedom and forgiveness God has shared with us?

PRAYER

Read Psalm 51 aloud once more as your group silently reflects on the Scripture. Then close with prayer, inviting God to help your group members recognize His willingness to forgive and their need to ask His forgiveness.



LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group members to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we celebrate Father's Day:

June 19, 2022 --- Genesis 22

