

## Bible Survey OT – 15.4.51 – Psalm 51 - David's Prayer

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### Prayer Template based on David's Prayer of Repentance – Psalm 51

**A) Introduction:** Read the story from 2 Samuel chapters 11-12 for the background story of this Psalm. David is understood to have written this poetic prayer after Nathan the prophet's pronouncement of David's guilt because of his affair with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and the subsequent murder of Uriah to hide David's guilt.

1. David had his friend Uriah deliberately killed in battle to hide David's guilt after he had an affair with Bathsheba and was found to be pregnant. Uriah was included as one of David's thirty-seven "Mighty Men" (2 Samuel 23:39), all of whom had sworn their allegiance to king David. After David had Uriah killed, he took Bathsheba for his wife. David's duplicity could not be hidden from God, who sent the prophet Nathan to make a pronouncement over David. The text says that David's heart felt great remorse, and in the aftermath David expressed his deep emotional pain in this Psalm. God was moved by David's confession and had Nathan return to the king to announce David's restoration.
2. This is one of the Psalms with a known narrative story that is included in Scripture, another is Psalm 63; look at the "Introduction to the Psalms" for a list of such Poem & Story Relationships in Scripture. Typical of these Poem & Story relationship, is that the story is written by a third person narrator, while the Poem was written by the first person participant.
3. Professor Brian Morgan taught about the poem/story relationship:
  - a. The Poem [Psalm] stills us. Because the psalm is in language of emotion it has the effect of a pause on a climb up a mountain, which allows the reader to stop to take in the vista, and allow God to speak to you. The poem allows us to extract the personal expression of the eternal truth that is embedded in the story.
  - b. By contrast, the story draws us into a bigger world beyond ourselves. The story draws us into the bigger view that life is a journey, and these events are part of that journey. The poem allows us to see and feel what the poet saw and felt as he paused and took in the vista. Feelings are brought forth and exposed, we understand what is going on in the soul of the poet as memory and metaphor merge.
  - c. Thus, the poem and the story combine to give a more complex view of what is really going on in the text.

**B) STRUCTURE – Preaching/Teaching Outline:**

1. 51:1-3 – David's Appeal:
  - a. The basis of David's appeal is his confidence in God's Grace.
  - b. David is no longer the confident Monarch of the nation; he is the chastised

servant of God. He responds in humility and accepts responsibility for his actions.

- c. David is motivated by his pressing need for restoration.
2. 51:4-5 – David's Confession:
  - a. The clarity and breath of his confession is stunning, as he uses every Hebrew word for sin. David is not mincing words; he is utterly broken by his failure.
  - b. The depth of his confession is also stunning, he realizes sin was present from his birth. This is not a rationalizing that "God made me this way" but rather a realization of how far he is from God's standard of purity.
3. 51:6-13 – David's Prayer of Restoration:
  - a. Cleanse me – 51:6-7
    - i. His need for cleansing and purification – Is accentuated by his use of "Hyssop" – Exodus 12:22 hyssop was employed to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the door frame of the Hebrew homes. Leviticus 14:6-7 hyssop was used for personal purification.
    - ii. His goal of cleansing – to be rendered "whiter than snow" a metaphor removing the blood stain of his guilt.
    - iii. His hope after cleansing – to move into a restored relationship with God with the added request that God would "teach him" as a father would teach a son.
  - b. Heal me – 51:8-9
    - i. Urgency expressed by the metaphors:
      1. I can't hear joy and gladness – he is consumed with pain and suffering.
      2. Let the bones You break rejoice – David knows God is not a sadist, if broken bones result David is confident it was necessary for his own well-being.
    - ii. Radical nature of healing request – to blot out all my "iniquities" redefines the theology of David's era (Genesis 6:7; Exodus 32:33; Psalms 69:28).
  - c. Recreate me (make me anew) – 51:10-11:
    - i. Seen against the backdrop of Saul's life of personal failure, fear and madness, and ultimately being rejected by God; David wants a do-over.
    - ii. To Create – is the most powerful verb used about God in Scripture. The do-over of David is nothing compared to the obvious wonders of creation that God brought forth from a formless void.
    - iii. This forms the basis of the transformative hope of New Testament redemption in Christ.

d. Restore me – 51:12-13:

- i. The joy of salvation is David's most pressing need.
- ii. The result of restoration is a transformed life of action that will be transformative to others.

4. David's gratitude – 51:14-17 – for a new orientation from the results of cleanse me, heal me, recreate me, restore me – leads David to vs 17 and a stunning observation of what God desires from His people and David's new orientation to Him.
5. Exile Addendum – 51:18-19 – this makes it clear that David's view into God's heart was so far ahead of its time, that later generations could not go theologically where David went. Vs 17 is a stunning prophecy of what Messiah would accomplish nearly a 1,000 years later.
6. Conclusion – work through the "Redemptive Insights" of section F of this article beginning on page 9 through the end.

C) EXEGESIS – The Poem and its meaning – here is a verse by verse summation of what is going on in the Psalm:

Ps 51:1 "Have mercy on me [be gracious], O God, according to your unfailing love [loyal love]; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions."

- David asks for what he knows he doesn't deserve... mercy and grace. The Old Covenant "Law of Moses" is a Quid-pro-Quo" or "this for that" judgment upon your actions. David was prophetically moved to ask for the Grace Jesus would bring nearly a thousand years later.
- David knows he's guilty under the Law, but he hopes for compassion because he knows God's heart, which is characterized by God's *Hessed* or loyal love.
- To request that his transgressions be "blotted out" or erased, David was asking for redemption based upon God's compassion, something expressed in the Old Covenant but more typical of Jesus (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; Luke 15:20).
- "Hessed" is something that God extends for all of humanity but especially for His people.

Ps 51:2 "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

- "Iniquity" refers the spiritual and emotional damage that is the consequence left behind by sin, which David accepts responsibility for. This is the relational backwash or wreckage resulting from the action.
- David is now Spiritually and emotionally unclean, which is causing him pain and discomfort and no physical bath can wash this away... only Grace can heal him.

Ps 51:3 "For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me."

- "Transgressions" speak to specific acts of wrong doing; while "sin" speaks to personal character corruption that has resulted. This character corruption would keep David from coming into the Presence of God before the Ark, and

would result in the removal of God's Spirit which he had observed happening to Saul when he had sinned.

- As a result of the Fall, our character [inner nature or "inner-being"] is in rebellion against God's perfect order. The prayer for redemption is seeking God's Grace to forgive the transgression, as well as to redeem and correct the character deficiency that is sin.
- "Always before me" means he is being tormented by his guilt. David was known as a man of high principles and ethical character in regard to the Law, and now because of his moral and ethical failure his reputation and stature has been compromised and his people know it.
- It is not merely freedom from the worldly consequences of guilt he seeks, but relief from the spiritual, emotional, and relational damage he has caused as a result of his transgression and sin nature. There are consequences for the wrongs we commit that radiate out from us, and especially harm those who are closest to us, and in the Old Covenant separate the sinner from God.

Ps 51:4 **"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."**

- David's first failure was in compromising his relationship with God, this is first and foremost in David's confession because he knows God's standards of righteousness.
- He acknowledges God's righteous rule and evaluation, and he makes no excuses for his failure. He accepts responsibility and throws himself completely at the mercy of the heavenly court.

Ps 51:5 **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."**

- Theologically this relates to "original sin" that each human being has inherited from our spiritual and physical parents... Adam and Eve because of their Fall in the Garden committed the original sin. All descendants of Adam and Eve [all humanity] are thereby sin-cursed.
- But by David acknowledging his original sin, he is not excusing himself. He had made the choices that took him into this predicament. He is guilty before God and before his peers.

Ps 51:6 **"Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place."**

- Notice the order of the assessment here – "surely I" (51:5) followed by "surely You" (51:6) as well as the emphasis on the inner reality involved. This is intensely personal... it is between David and God.
- David acknowledges prophetically the sin-debt of fallen humanity. Sin was always within him, and looking for the moments of weakness to be expressed.
- The tendency to sin is great... it is restrained by the Law but though the Law teaches God's ways it doesn't empower one internally to live a godly life. There is no Spirit power provided by the Law to live a virtuous life; the Law can only condemn when you have failed.
- Even though he knew better, his internal appetite and desire gave rise to his external physical weakness and sin was freed and ran amok... and now he is

stuck with its consequences.

- In all such sin and moral/ethical failures, the inner failure always precedes the outer failure.

Ps 51:7 “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”

- Cleanse [wash] with hyssop and made clean are allusions to Passover and the Leviticus leprosy remedy... it is a priestly function to use hyssop to sprinkle blood or water for ritual cleansing from defilement.
- Being made whiter than snow speaks to the opposite of Miriam's leprosy in Numbers 12:10 who was healed by Moses' prayer in Numbers 12:13. However, this is a new understanding of grace that was likely occurring during the prayer. It is often true that when we pour our hearts out to God in such fashion, that the Spirit brings insight [new application of known truth] and revelation [new truth not previously known].
- David knows that the Law as expressed in Deuteronomy is not going to get him where he needs to go, as the Law has the standard that either condemns or justifies, but doesn't provide the grace for forgiveness in cases of deliberate and intentional wrong doing.
- He needs a new and fresh expression of grace... a new solution to sin.

Ps 51:8 “Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.”

- His remorse is so great it is overwhelming... he wants to be happy again.
- “Crushed bones rejoicing” speaks to his internal agony of guilt before God... the moment of external pleasure is followed by continued internal distress.
- David had faith and trusted that God can heal him, though he didn't know how it would be worked out.

Ps 51:9 “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.”

- This is New Covenant Theology emerging nearly 1,000 years before the Advent of Jesus.
  - As David faces his failure, he asks God to turn His face from it, not from him. In the Old Covenant this was not possible, but David is throwing himself at God's mercy counting on God's love for him being greater than God's anger.
  - In the past 'blotting out' referred to removal of one's name spiritually from God's Book of Life; and socially-politically in the ancient world by the removal of any reference to the person whether written form or in sculpture or architecture forms. Not infrequently when Pharaoh wanted to expunge someone from the historical record, he would have any carved images and cartouches removed from public structures to in essence destroy the existence of someone who had fallen out of favor.
- David is asking God to do likewise with his sin and also all the ramifications of it... basically to treat it as if it never happened.

Ps 51:10 “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

- “Create” and “renew” are the operant words of this thought... ‘Create’ is the Hebrew word *berah* and it means an absolute new creation... reminiscent of

the Genesis creation account. "Renew" is to repair what is wrong, to fix what has been broken, and to restore it to wholeness.

- David is not looking for the "partial fix" or even a "do-over" instead he is asking God to make him become a "new creation" of Grace – a "re-creation." This is what Jesus promises will happen for His disciples.

Ps 51:11 "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me."

- Both being cast away or losing the presence of the Spirit were the result of Old Testament theology, where egregious sin necessarily cast you from God's presence – as Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden of Eden.
- Both being cast out and having the Spirit removed are now impossible in New Testament theology.

Ps 51:12 "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

- Essentially David is saying I want to be young again with my lost youthful innocence renewed.
- He doesn't like the person he has become and wants to go back, or better yet to become someone radically new and different.

Ps 51:13 "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you."

- This is a vow that David is making... a way of keeping the experience fresh so he doesn't forget rather the encounter with God, rather than trying to earn grace through positive action.
- David is asking that his character be restored from the inside out, David's recreated character and inner life will necessarily be a testimony to those who he interacts with.
- This is not unlike the Christlikeness that develops in Jesus' disciples, Spiritual fruit form in the character of the inner person, and you do what is right because that is who you are. The actions are the result of redeemed character.

Ps 51:14 "Deliver me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness."

- Deliverance is reminiscent of being freed from Egyptian captivity. Although the Old Covenant is a works based justification-system, this request anticipates the New Covenant which is transformational, he knows God is capable of doing amazing things including the Passover and the parting of the Red Sea. He is asking for such a deliverance miracle in his inner life.
- David confesses his specific guilt and crime – murder & bloodguilt... inexcusable in OT theology. He stands before God condemned with absolutely no excuse, only hope.

Ps 51:15 "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise."

- David is seeking a fresh experience with God – one that will sweep him up into a new and hopeful future.
- David has forfeited all his rights under the Law, he is now looking for a transformative experience that will foundationally change him.

Ps 51:16 "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings."

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- This is New Covenant theology revealed as a consequence of this experience.
- David realizes it's the condition of a person's heart that God desires and delights in, and that God receives as an acceptable offering.

Ps 51:17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

- The whole idea of the sacrificial system was to break the person's heart over the magnitude of their sin.
- The offering God accepts is the living human heart [cr: living sacrifice – Romans 12:1], not an animal carcass.
- David prophetically foresees the New Covenant of grace his ancestor Messiah would usher in.

D) Ancient PostScript – these last two verses at the end were added much later, probably sometime during the Babylonian Exile:

Ps 51:18 In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.

Ps 51:19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

- These 2 lines are completely out of place with the theme and substance of this psalm, and does not occur in the earliest texts.
- It is believed that these lines were added during the exile as the Jews were looking forward to the consummation of Jeremiah's prophecy and the repatriation of the Nation in Jerusalem.
- The OT Jewish scholars were immersed in the Law, and were unable to go into the grace David foresaw. Though imperfect, David was at a higher elevation on the Mountain of God, and he saw a different perspective of where God was going with Grace, and he prophetically spoke of the transformation that would be possible because of Messiah's ministry.
- When the exiles returned to Jerusalem they returned to their Old Covenant Theology supported by sacrificial animal practices.
- The Synagogue was developed during the exile to keep the knowledge of God alive and fresh, and allow ongoing worship in absence of the Temple. This practice was continued when they returned to the land, as God's people were dispersed in the region, the Synagogue became the hub of local worship much like the local Christian church in our era.

E) Theological Implications:

1. David did many amazing things, but he also made some serious mistakes. It brings us pause to consider how God called David a man after God's own heart? How can anyone err so badly and fall so far away, and still be welcomed back?
  - a. When God is talking to David's son, Solomon, he says; "Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness...then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever as I promised

David your father." (I Kings 9:4-5)

- b. When God was reprimanding King Jeroboam, he said; "...and yet you have not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart; to do only what was right in My eyes." (I Kings 14:8)
  - c. God obviously saw something in David He liked, his honesty and general integrity were commended by God, much like Abraham's faith was commended by God.
2. David was obviously a flawed and imperfect man:
- a. When David's son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar, David did nothing about it. The unsettled turmoil within his family ultimately led to his oldest son Absalom (Amnom's half-brother) who killed him.
    - i. One rationale for David's passivity was that he felt he lost the right to speak into his children's life due to his serious failure with Bathsheba. Absalom would later stage a coup attempt to usurp the throne of Israel from his father.
    - ii. Psalm 63 deals with the aftermath of David's passivity. Obviously there are familial consequences for our moral and ethical failures, but despite the dysfunctional drama, God loved and respected David.
  - b. David abused his power to take a woman named Bathsheba while her husband was at war on the King's behalf, and then have him killed to hide his sin.
    - i. The dirty little secret here is what was Bathsheba doing bathing naked on a roof below a place she most likely knew David would hang out? People didn't ordinarily bathe on their roof in those days, especially below the rampart where David was known to walk by. Bathing was done in a discrete manner in secluded interior chambers. Today, we might call this entrapment... it stands to reason that she knew what she was doing and what the consequences might be. It also stands to reason that David's action to sin with Bathsheba was not premeditated, and more likely what we would call "an act of passion in the moment," not that this is an adequate excuse. One would believe that had David resisted the temptation and had done the right thing, that things would have turned out differently in his family. Those closest to us tend to pay a higher price for our inequities.
    - ii. When she was found to be with his child, David arranged for her husband Uriah to be returned to "cover" David's sin. Not by accident, David asks God to "cover" his guilt. Uriah's integrity not to sleep with his wife while on summoned leave to the king, logically necessitated David's duplicity as one sin led to another in a descending spiral,

concluding with the order that Uriah be killed in battle to cover up the matter.

- iii. David however, makes no excuse for his actions when confronted by the prophet Nathan, he accepts his guilt and throws himself on God's mercy. Result of all this – there were consequences in the family even though God forgave David. Because of his sin, David lost his voice in speaking into the life of his wayward son, and became an ineffective father. It's hard to say to your kids "do as I say and not as I do" when they know you as an adulterer and a murderer.
  - c. These two examples again beg the question, "How then can David be a man after God's own heart?" It seems apparent that David not only knew God's heart, but was drawn to God like a moth to a flame. David's love of God kept him close relationally with God. It also says something about God – that He doesn't expect us to be perfect, but God does expect us to be responsive to Him even in the midst of our sin.
3. God's ways are not our ways... He looks at the heart not outward appearances:
- a. When God was directing Samuel the prophet to anoint a new king over Israel after he had rejected Saul, he told Samuel; "For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (I Samuel 16:7)
  - b. In spite his sin and personal failings, God loved David's heart. I believe that it is equally true that David deeply loved God as evidenced in Psalm 51:11 "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." He had witnessed how Saul lost God's Presence, and David desperately didn't want to receive Saul's judgment.
  - c. In Scripture we have a glimpse into what God so treasured about David when we read Psalm 51. It is found in the raw emotional prayer of personal repentance. This psalm is truly one of the great prayers of the Bible.
  - d. After David's sin, the Lord sent him Nathan the prophet to confront him. (See II Samuel 12). Instead of denial or excuses, David comes clean; "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). But if that was all we were told about the incident we would have no idea about the depth of the repentance that David felt. Fortunately, we have Psalm 51 which is a soul poured out before the Lord with great transparency and brokenness of spirit. This is another example of the relationship between the poem and the story we're been talking about.
- F) Redemptive insights:
1. Psalm 51 is marked by these true characteristics of repentance:
    - a. When God brings conviction, respond immediately.

- i. **First with remorse – Godly sorrow for having failed God by our sin.**
  - ii. **Second by repentance – the decision to not do this again, Godly sorrow leads to the desire to act in a worthy manner.**
  - iii. **Third with restitution – David could not bring Uriah back, but he made things right with Bathsheba by marrying her.**
  - iv. **Forth – to seek reconciliation with God and with those who innocently suffered as a consequence of our failure. God is always interested in reconciliation, and we can play a part in helping bring this about.**
- b. **Appeal to the mercy of God – God always desires reconciliation and restoration; there is no sin He will not forgive a truly penitent heart – Ps 51:17.**
  - c. **Honesty about myself and my need – Ps 51:4 – am I really sorry that I offended God? Or I am just sorry that I got caught? Plenty of people cheat and otherwise sin in a variety of ways, but if our first response to conviction is that we failed God, dealing with our personal and public consequences becomes much easier. This of course, presumes you have a Biblical standard by which you judge yourself. All too many adopt a secular standard that says “No harm, no foul” or “it’s only wrong if you get caught.” This is being dishonest with God and yourself, and is displeasing to God.**
  - d. **Don’t compare yourself to other people, stand in the light of God’s expectations for you and invite His healing and transformation. This is key... it’s not about what someone else has done or got away with, it is about what does God expect from me?**
  - e. **Understanding the severity of sinning against God – it is not about having been found out, it is about being capable of doing something that is utterly reprehensible to God. Such sin gives the faith a blemish in the world around us. Especially when someone who knows better, does what they know is wrong.**
  - f. **Offer no excuses or justification – there is no adequate excuse... I must simply accept my responsibility and hope for grace.**
  - g. **When God brings conviction, it should inspire a desire for personal reform, it is not enough merely to agree with God, it should move us to action. God is always about reconciliation and restoration. To this end, there is a “forgiveness process” that includes 5 steps [the “CR4 Redemptive Cycle”]:**
    - i. **Conviction – is a gift of the Spirit that we must agree with.**
    - ii. **Remorse – is my 1<sup>st</sup> reaction as I feel badly about what I’ve done.**
    - iii. **Repentance – is my 2<sup>nd</sup> reaction which requires a ‘turning away’ from the offending behavior or practices, and do things differently in the future.**

- iv. Restoration [also Restitution] – is my 3<sup>rd</sup> response where the expectation of restoration and the resumption of intimacy and love are genuinely desired, and I seek to make things right with the person I've wronged with appropriate remediation.
- v. Reconciliation – is a gift of the Spirit that brings me back into relational wholeness with the person I've wrong.
- h. For more on this important topic see the following article available of the AD website - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/2-spiritual-formation/Spiritual%20Disciplines/SF%201.11%20Prayer%20Practicum%209%20-%20Forgiveness%20Study.pdf>
- i. We must recognize that forgiveness is not deserved or earned, but is a gift received by grace alone.
  - i. There are some who we have wronged who long to hear our heartfelt sorrow; and similarly those who have wronged us that we would love to hear their apology.
  - ii. When no apology comes or is possible, we can choose to just let it go. This is a deliberate act to place the wrong behind me so it no longer eats away at me. God honors our prayer for release against such wounding's.
  - iii. This doesn't mean we forgive and forget – there are some people who because of their own woundedness, have become dysfunctional and even toxic to us. Setting aside the wrong does not mean we should put ourselves back into a vulnerable position with problematic people.
- 2. God grants us the freedom to be honest about sin – 1<sup>st</sup> with Him, then with others:
  - a. Have you ever noticed that those who have truly repented and received complete forgiveness are usually open and forthright about their past sin? The transforming power and grace of Jesus Christ touches the life of the penitent faithful, and they are free to tell their story without hesitation, and usually without excuse.
  - b. Those who have experienced the 5-stage [CR4] forgiveness redemptive cycle are transformed by Grace. The enemy at this point has lost his hold on you, though he will try to discourage you with perennial reminders of your failings. When these come... and they will... rejoice that God has accepted you in spite of your failures and press intentionally into God's grace... knowing you've done what you can from your perspective to make things right.
  - c. When people listen to stories of God's grace experienced in people's life, they often feel that their own situation is not hopeless and their own sin not unforgivable. When they see joy on the face of the former sinner and they

want that same joy. God is there to offer it.

- d. The Biblical example of authority under the Law is the antithesis of the Roman Empire's approach to rule:
  - i. Roman leadership would break the back of those who refused their rule, tolerating no compromise. They would ruthlessly crush and make an example of those who resisted. Capitulation was the only response tolerated.
  - ii. God's approach is completely different, it is to break the heart which ignites the CR4 process and brings the hope of reconciliation. When conviction comes we should rejoice, and respond.

### G) Personal Application:

1. As you read and re-read Psalm 51, what do you find there that you can identify with the most? Is there conviction in your own heart about a hidden sin that you need to repent of with the same heart David had? Do you find you haven't been completely honest with God? Are you willing to accept the deep cleansing David desired? Do you need to have the joy of God's salvation restored to you? Do you desire to have your testimony of God's grace touch the lives of others?
2. David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 is one of the great prayers of the Bible. After you read it, it isn't so hard anymore to understand why David was a man after God's own heart. The really cool thing is that you and I can hold that same title; we can be men and women after God's own heart.