

David's Prayer – Psalm 51

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

A) Introduction: Read the story from 2 Sam chapters 11-12 for the background. David is believed to have written this prayer after Nathan the prophet's pronouncement of guilt and before Nathan announced his restoration.

B) What the Text says:

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

- David asks for what he knows he doesn't deserve... mercy or grace.
- David hopes for it because he knows God's heart has characteristic *Hessed* or loyal love – it 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.

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

- "Always before me" means he is being tormented by his guilt.
- 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.

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.

- He acknowledges God's righteous rule and evaluation, and throws himself at the mercy of the heavenly court.

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

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" followed by "surely You" as well as the emphasis on the inner reality involved.
- David acknowledges prophetically the sin-debt of fallen humanity. Sin was always within him, and given the circumstances anyone can fall.
- 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.
- Even though he knew better, his internal appetite/desire gave rise to external weakness and sin was freed and ran amok... now he is dealing with its consequences.
- 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 cleanse from defilement.
- Being made whiter than snow speaks to the opposite of Miriam's leprosy... this is a new understanding of grace likely occurring during the prayer.

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- David knows that the Law [Deuteronomy] is not going to get him where he needs to go, as the Law condemns but doesn't provide the grace for deliberate and intentional sinning.
 - 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's faith trusted that God can heal him.
- Ps 51:9 Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.
- This is new theology emerging –
 - As David faces his failure, he asks God to turn His face from it. David is 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 from the Book of Life, and was often accompanied in the ancient world by the removal of any reference to the person whether written or in sculpture or architecture as when Pharaoh would have carved images and cartouches removed from public structures to expunge the existence of someone who had fallen out of favor.
 - David is asking God to do likewise with his sin and 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 restore.
 - David is not looking for the "partial fix" of a "do-over" instead he is asking for becoming a new creation of Grace – a "redo."
- Ps 51:11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- Both 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.
 - 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.
- 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.
- 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 than trying to earn grace.
- 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.

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- David confesses his specific guilt and crime – murder & bloodguilt... inexcusable in OT theology.

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.

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

- New 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 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], not an animal carcass.
- David prophetically foresees the New Covenant of grace his ancestor Messiah would usher in.

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 unable to go into the grace David foresaw. David though imperfect was at a higher elevation on the Mountain of God.
- When the exiles returned to Jerusalem they returned to their old theology and sacrificial practices. The Synagogue was employed in exile and this practice was continued when they returned.

C) Implications:

1. How is it that David was called a man after God's own heart?
 - 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)
2. David was obviously a flawed and imperfect man:

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- a. When David's son raped his daughter Tamar, he did nothing about it. The unsettled turmoil within his family ultimately led to his oldest son Absalom killing his brother and staging a coup attempt upon the throne of Israel.
 - b. David used his power to seduce a woman named Bathsheba while her husband was at war on the King's behalf.
 - c. When she was found to be with his child, David arranged for her husband Uriah to be returned to "cover" David's sin. Uriah's integrity 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.
 - d. Result of all this – David was an ineffective father, an adulterer and a murderer... how then can he be a man after God's own heart?
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." (1 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."
 - c. In Scripture we have a glimpse into that heart which God so treasured when we read Psalm 51, which is a prayer of repentance. That 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 2 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.

D) Redemptive insights:

1. Psalm 51 is marked by these true characteristics of repentance:
 - a. When God brings conviction, respond immediately in repentance... accept the Spirit's conviction.
 - b. Appeal to the mercy of God – God desires reconciliation and restoration.
 - c. Honesty about myself and my need – am I sorry that I offended God or I am sorry that I got caught?
 - d. Don't compare yourself to other people, stand in the light of God's expectations for you and invite His healing and transformation.

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- 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.
 - f. Offer no excuses or justification – there is no adequate excuse... I accept my responsibility and hope for grace.
 - g. Desire to reform – repentance requires a 'turning away' from the offending behavior or practices.
 - h. Desire to make restitution where possible... true repentance has a desire for remediation.
 - i. Recognition that forgiveness is not deserved or earned, but is by grace alone.
 - j. Expectation of restoration and the resumption of intimacy and love.
2. Freedom to be honest about sin
- 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 conviction-repentance-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.
 - c. When people listen to stories of God's great grace they often feel that their own case is not hopeless and their own sin not unforgivable. They see joy on the face of the former sinner and they want that same joy. God is there to offer it.
 - d. Historical example of authority under the Law not unlike the Roman's approach was to break the back of those who refused their rule, God's approach is to break the heart... when it comes we should rejoice.

E) 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. You and I can hold that same title; we can be men and women after God's own heart. Remorse and Repentance are the entryway.