

Psalm 51 • Coming to God when we fail

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Open your Bibles, please to the Book of Psalms, and we are in the 51st chapter, Psalm 51. This is probably one of the better known Psalms because of its content. It is the prayer that David prayed after he was confronted with his sin of committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and actually planning the death of Uriah in battle so as to cover up his sin.

And I thought that in order for us to really get a good sense of this prayer, it would really be good for us to get the backstory. Keep your finger right where it is, okay? And turn over to 2 Samuel for just a minute. I want to get a little bit of the backstory with you.

2 Samuel chapter 11. 2 Samuel chapter 11, turn over there please. I just, I want to read this because I think it will help give us the emphasis that we need to understand David's prayer. 2 Samuel chapter 11, beginning at verse 1, it says:

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. (We're not told why.)

² It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. ³ And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” ⁴ So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵ And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant.”

⁶ So David sent word to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going.

⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ¹⁰ When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" ¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing."

¹² Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. ¹⁵ In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." ¹⁶ And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. ¹⁷ And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. ¹⁸ Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. ¹⁹ And he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, ²⁰ then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall?' ²¹ Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'"

²² So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. ²³ The messenger said to David, "The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. ²⁴ Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." ²⁵ David said to the messenger, "Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him."

²⁶ When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. ²⁷ And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”

Keep reading with me (2 Samuel 12).

“¹ And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor ² The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³ but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.” ⁵ Then David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, ⁶ and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”

⁷ Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. ⁸ And I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. ⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ ¹¹ Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.’” ¹³ David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan said to David, “The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house. And the Lord afflicted the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and he became sick.”

Turn over with me now, please, to Psalm 51. I want to read through this Psalm. We'll go through the whole thing and then we'll pray and see what the Lord has for us. Verse 1,

*“Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*

*² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!*

*³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

*⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.*

*⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

*⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

*⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.*

*⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

*¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.*

*¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*

*¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

*¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.*

*¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.*

¹⁵ *O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*
¹⁶ *For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.*
¹⁷ *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*
¹⁸ *Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;*
¹⁹ *then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.” (ESV)*

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we have looked at the background of David's prayer here in Psalm 51, and as we've read this Psalm, we open now our hearts to You, Father God, that You would speak to us through Your Holy Spirit and that You would minister wisdom and understanding from this passage, that we would gain a heart of understanding. We pray that You would fill us with insight and that You would help us to apply Your Word to our lives.

We thank You, Father, for being here. We thank You for Your willingness to speak to us and to bring grace and insight. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

I want to go through David's prayer here because I think it's significant. I think the whole thing is significant, and I think that it speaks very plainly and very clearly of so many things related to our personal walk with Jesus Christ, particularly when we have found ourselves in a place of sin, when we have walked in disobedience, and when we have recognized how bad it has been.

David begins by saying, *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love..."* And he even goes on to say in that same verse, *"...according to your abundant (or overflowing) mercy (he prays and says, please) blot out my transgressions."* And I find it very important, significant, and interesting that David would begin by calling upon the Lord for mercy because we need to remind ourselves once in a while what mercy means.

We hear about it a lot, we read about it a lot in the Bible, but do we really remember what mercy is? And do we remember how God responds in mercy? Let me start with the definition on the screen of mercy,

Mer·cy (noun)

1. compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm.

And you'll remember that it is compassion or, in this case, forgiveness shown towards someone who is within one's power to punish or harm.

In other words, mercy is when you know you're guilty, and yet you cry out to the Lord. You're asking for God to look beyond your guilt and to respond with compassion and forgiveness, all right? Whenever you cry out to God for mercy, you know that you deserve to be punished. You have recognized your sin, and you're calling out and asking the Lord to be gracious nonetheless, and that's what David is doing in the very first verse of this prayer.

This is interesting because I am assuming that this prayer was prayed after his conversation with Nathan the prophet, and Nathan had communicated to him, God has taken away your sin; you're not going to die. But he did go on to say, there will be consequences. There will be issues. In fact, great evil will rise up even from within your own family, right? And so David is calling out, crying aloud for the mercy of the Lord. And he was convinced that mercy was something that God would give. Otherwise, why would he cry for it?

And that's something that we, as Christians, many times forget. I think David understood that God's heart is a heart of mercy. We forget that when we've sinned, we become completely self-condemned. We usually just throw ourselves into sin at that time. We figure out, well, whatever. I might as well just go for it now, instead of crying out to God for mercy. It's because we don't really understand that the heart of the Lord is what it is.

Let me show you a passage from Micah, Chapter 7, that is very important to our understanding. Because Micah writes,

Micah 7:18 (NIV)

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever (and I want you to really notice this last statement) but delight to show mercy.

Micah had it. He understood it. And this is what David knew. And that's why he called out to the Lord and plead for mercy because he knew God is a God of mercy, and He delights to show it. And it's time that we, as Christians, learn that too. And I'm not saying we should learn it as a license to sin or to make us easy about our sin in any way, shape, or form, but so that the enemy doesn't win.

The enemy of our souls knows and understands just how to push our buttons when we have failed miserably. And rather than call upon the mercy of God, the enemy knows to bring disappointment, to bring discouragement. And if he can do those things, he's got you. And he can paralyze you from any movement whatsoever toward the Lord.

And yet, when you understand fundamentally that our God is a God of mercy and he delights to show it, it changes your approach to the Lord even in those times when you failed. It doesn't make your failure any less painful or any less difficult to deal with, but it makes it easy to come to God because you know that He is a God of mercy and that He delights to show mercy. As Micah said, "*Who is a God (who is a God) like you, who pardons sin...*" It's incredible.

David's prayer continues; look at verse 2. He says, "*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*" This is part of David's prayer, and it's not the only time that he does it. But he begins to call upon the Lord for cleansing, and he's literally asking God to make him clean. David wasn't asking for physical cleaning, obviously. He wasn't asking for ceremonial cleaning; he was asking for spiritual, moral cleansing before the Lord. And the reason he was doing that is because he was acutely aware of how filthy he was.

And sometimes, we become aware of just how filthy we can be. Sometimes, we can even shock ourselves with what we're capable of doing. Then there are times when the Lord allows us to see it. Not just our sin; He allows us to see the depth of our sin. He allows us to see just how far we've gone, how far we've slipped away, how far we've fallen. And He allows us to understand the gravity of our actions. It's at a time like that when we begin to cry out to the Lord and say, God, cleanse me, wash me. I need to be cleansed.

This whole idea of knowing the depth of your sin is called basically the revelation of sin, and it's something that God gives if we're willing to receive it—a revelation of our sin. I say if you're willing to receive it because not

everybody wants to, because it's nothing fun to look at. It's like looking in the mirror and seeing something very ugly, very corrupted, very tragic. And I guarantee you it will cause you to cry out to the Lord.

I find that when I'm talking with a person, they have been given a revelation of their sin. I find that they're easy to talk to in the sense that they're not kicking and fighting, but we talk about the Lord, we talk about the cross, we talk about what He did for us on the cross, and they're just all too willing to embrace it and open their hearts to it. They're very anxious to learn more about God's forgiveness.

But when I'm talking to people who have not had a revelation of sin, there's not a whole lot I can say. If I try to convict them of their sin, then I'm stepping into the role of the Holy Spirit. Only God can convict people of sin, right? I'll never forget a number of years ago, I had a couple in my office a long time ago, back when I had an office here. We were talking, and they came in for some counseling. They wanted what—I was led to believe was marriage counseling. And we got into the conversation, and it wasn't very long before I learned that they weren't, in fact, married and were living together. They wanted help with their relationship, which is like, driving on four flat tires and wondering why your car isn't running very well.

And so, as we were—I was hoping as we carried on our conversation, they were going to say to me at some particular point, yeah, I know that we shouldn't be living together. I know that's wrong, but we really don't know what to do about it. Then I could start to talk to them about where they're at. We could talk about confession, repentance, and getting it right. But they never brought it up. In fact, I finally got to the point where I got so tired of waiting that I finally asked them. I said, well, is there any area where you guys think that maybe you're not really walking with the Lord like you should? They looked at each other, no, no, I think we're good. I mean, at that point, like I say, I don't have a great deal to pass along because there has not been a revelation of sin, right?

What am I going to do? Throw the law at them? Thou shalt not—sort of a—the law kills. We talked, and I basically told them, I kind of went on to say, well I can't really help you because you've already shot yourselves in the feet and then you're wondering why you can't walk together. You can't, you can't, can't do that. But it was a very awkward and clumsy conversation from that point forward.

This whole idea of a revelation of sin is so incredibly important because that is the work that is done by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that is the work that He comes to do. Let me show you John 16:28 on the screen here. It says,

John 16:8 (ESV)

And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

And when [the Holy Spirit] comes (this is Jesus speaking) , he will convict the world concerning sin (and concerning) and righteousness and judgment:

And that is the work that the Holy Spirit had done to David. And that is why David cried out to the Lord and said, please, Lord, make me clean. I am filthy, and I need your cleansing.

Look what he goes on to say in verse 3, he says, *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."* Do you see? That's more of just this same expression that I have had a revelation of sin. He says, *"...I know my transgressions..."* And, by the way, the word, transgressions— do you guys know what that means? That means he committed those sins with full knowledge. That's what the word transgressions means: I knew it, I knew it was wrong. I did it anyway. I knew better, and I did it.

Aren't you disappointed sometimes when in your own life, you do things that you shouldn't? God has told you, warned you in His word, and then you go right out and do that same dumb thing. And it's, and this is exactly what David is doing as he comes to the Lord. He says, I know my transgressions. I know where I transgressed. I know where the line was, and I know that I walked over it. I know it. In fact, my sin, he says, *"...is ever before me."* It was a willful act on my part. It was a willful act of rebellion.

Now, David's next statement in verse 4 might seem a little confusing, but he says, *"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."*

David basically says, God, I've sinned against you and you only. And that's a really interesting statement in light of the fact that we read the story and you think to yourself, now, wait a minute. First of all, David, you're the king of Israel. Israel is God's chosen people, and you're the king. And the king was far more than just a political ruler at that time. This man was chosen by God to lead

the people, anointed by Samuel himself, and he was called to be a spiritual leader every bit as much, and a moral leader, as much as a political leader, military leader, and so forth and so on.

And you begin to think to yourself, wait a minute, you betrayed, you betrayed all Israel, David. How in the world can you say, *"Against you, and you only have I sinned.."*?

Well, then you think to yourself: what about Uriah? Good grief! Not only did David take the man's wife and have his way with her, but then when he couldn't — when he wasn't successful in covering up his sin by liquoring Uriah up and sending him back home — hoping that because of the amount of alcohol he had in his bloodstream he'd throw off all resistance and finally go home and be with his wife so that he could cover up the pregnancy. When that didn't work, he sent the man to war with his own death sentence in his hand. He carried the letter to Joab that said, put Uriah at the place where the fighting is the worst, and then pull back so that he dies. Man, I think, David, I think you sinned against Uriah too. And what about Bathsheba?

A woman in those days, if she got called by the king, there's no holding back; he's the king. We talk about the Supreme Court; he was the Supreme Court, at least politically speaking, in Israel. And if David picked a woman—and of course, this is the only time it happened—as far as this sort of a situation, another man's wife. But when the king says, I want her, his servants go and get her, whether they have any moral qualms about it or not. He's the king; you do what the king wants. And Bathsheba, she responded to the king; she was impregnated by the king. And you think to yourself, this woman didn't have much choice in the situation; surely David sinned against Bathsheba.

We come back to this comment, and we say, well, what is that all about? When David says to the Lord, it is against you and you only that I've sinned. What David is doing here, and please understand, he is not minimizing what he has done against Israel. He is not minimizing his sins against Uriah the Hittite, and he is not minimizing the advantage he took over Bathsheba.

He is simply acknowledging that God is the ultimate judge of all, and that at the end of all things, it is God and God only he will stand before related to this situation. He will not stand before Uriah the Hittite. He will not stand before all of Israel. He will not stand before Bathsheba. He will stand before God. And whatever he may have done or not done against others, the final judgment is God's, and he knew it. He knew that his actions were a betrayal of his

relationship with God and all that God had done in his life to put him in his position as king.

And one of the things I love about David: when he's finally confronted with his sin, you'll notice he makes no excuses here related to this. He doesn't call it a weakness; he doesn't say it was an accident. He offers no lame excuses about what happened. He doesn't offer any alibis or blame others. He calls it what it is: " ⁴...*my sin is ever before me* (not my mistake, not my indiscretion, my sin, my sin is ever before me)."

I want you to notice what he says in verse 5. It's very important. He says, "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" If somebody said that today—they might not use that exact language—but if somebody said that very same thing, you would wonder about his parentage. And you would wonder if perhaps he was a, he or she was a child of an adulterous affair or an extramarital affair or something like that.

But that's not what David is saying here. And he, by the way, he's not being hard on himself. This isn't David resorting to self-abasement or something like that. Neither is he saying in this verse that his mother was a sinful woman. He is declaring here, in very clear terms, the reality of the Adamic sin nature and the fact that it was transmitted to him at birth.

And so, he is making a theological statement here, actually. He is theologically defining for you and I something that the Apostle Paul takes time many, many years later to clarify for you and I in the book of Romans. And that is the fact that we have received sin through the transmission of our first Father. Go ahead and put it up there. Romans 5:12. It says:

Romans 5:12 (ESV)

...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned —

...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned —

And that is what David is saying when he speaks of his own birth: I was born into sin. Doesn't mean my mom didn't love me. Doesn't mean my mom and dad weren't married. Doesn't mean they didn't want me. It means that, like all of the descendants of Adam, I was born a sinner. I was born with a bent and a gravitational pull toward rebellion. And David isn't throwing that out as an

excuse to get him off the hook. He understands that he is completely culpable and he's acknowledging it before God.

Look at verse 6: *"Behold (he says), you delight in truth..."* Had David been living in truth? He'd been living for most of Bathsheba's pregnancy, denying this thing and covering it up. And yet now he cries out to the Lord, understanding how he'd been living that deceptive lifestyle.

He says, *"Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being* (and then, look at this), *and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart."* David acknowledges here that it's God—it's God who teaches wisdom, even though sometimes we cast that wisdom aside, don't we?

When I commit an area of sin, it's not out of ignorance. It's not because God hasn't taught me. It's not because God hasn't shown me. I can't look to the Lord and say, well, I didn't know that. I know full well. I've read through the Bible. I understand: God teaches wisdom through His word, and that wisdom comes to us, and we hear it, and we respond, and our heart rejoices in it until we have an opportunity to sin, and temptation enters into my life, and then suddenly I cast it aside.

How dumb is that—to take the wisdom of God and cast it aside—and yet that's what David is basically saying here. You teach wisdom; I know that, but boy, I sure didn't apply it here. I sure cast it away and just did my own thing. So what's his response?

Here's his prayer, verse 7, he says, *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."* Do you know what David is really saying here when he says, *"Purge me with hyssop..."*

He's saying, I am a spiritual leper. That's essentially what he's saying because, I don't know if you remember, but in the book of Leviticus, we're told that they were to take hyssop and use it for the cleansing of a leper. This is what the high priest was supposed to go through.

Let me show you this actually, I'll just show you very quickly quote from the Book of Leviticus. It says,

Leviticus 14:6-7a (ESV)

[The priest] shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease.

[The priest] shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop (there it is), and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease.

And David is making reference to this cleansing of the leper with hyssop. He says to the Lord, purge me with hyssop. I need a purging, I need a cleansing. David's expressing his spiritual condition.

Verse 8: *"Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice."* If you have a different Bible translation other than the one I'm reading here, your Bible may say, *"Let the bones that you have crushed rejoice."* And it's a good translation too, but David is crying out, let me hear joy again.

When you've gone through, or you're going through, that period of mourning—mourning of your sin—there's that point where it's like, God, just let me hear joy again. Let me hear something positive. I have just been in this time of darkness and mourning for so long.

Verse 9 says, *"Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities."* And then verse 10 is particularly important as he says, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."* And this is important for a couple of different reasons.

First of all, David has been asking to be cleansed, as you noticed here right along. Is he asking God to cleanse his heart? No, he's asking God to cleanse him from his sin, but not his heart; he needs a new one. And so he says here, *"Create in me a clean heart..."* He didn't say, cleanse my heart; he says, I need a new heart. I need a brand new heart.

What's interesting is that this word, create, is the very same word used in Genesis chapter 1 when we read, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1) And we know how God created the heavens and the earth. He created them brand new. He didn't take something and use ingredients and then create the heavens and the earth. He called them forth with His word, right? He created them out of nothing.

David is using this very same Greek word, create in me, (bara, is the Hebrew word): create in me a clean heart; create in me this brand new heart that I need. My old heart—and I think David understood this, and I think he's painfully aware of it now—the heart of man, what are we told in the scripture? Jeremiah: it's deceitfully wicked, right? It's beyond cure, right? It's beyond cure, we're told

in Jeremiah. What am I going to do when I realize that my heart is evil?
(Jeremiah 17:9)

Ask God to cleanse it, wash it up, put a little perfume on it, make it look nice; maybe we'll do a piercing here and there, and it'll— a few danglies— that's all we need. No, he said, I need a new heart. I need a brand new heart. Create in me a clean heart. It's very important that we read that there and understand it.

He also asked God for a right spirit. Did you catch that? "¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*" Instead of, right spirit, some translations say a, "*steadfast spirit.*" And that's actually a good translation too, because the Hebrew word means to be firm. He's saying, create in me a firm or a steadfast spirit. And what he's asking for is a strong constitution to stand against the temptations of sin.

We pray the same thing: we might use slightly different words when we're asking God to keep us from falling repeatedly into an area of sin. Lord, help me to stand against this onslaught of temptation. David simply said it this way: Renew a steadfast spirit within me that I can look at temptation in the face and say, no, I'm not going there.

Verse 11: "*Cast me not away from your presence...*" No doubt David is thinking about King Saul right now, because he watched King Saul go through a time of disobedience that ended up making him crazy, and the Lord did cast Saul away, in a sense, from His presence. But look what David goes on to say: "*...and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*" And that also happened to Saul; God removed His Holy Spirit from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14).

And you'll remember He replaced His Holy Spirit with a tormenting demonic spirit that only music—usually that David was playing—could calm him from; he would get so agitated and upset (1 Samuel 16:23). David's probably remembering how Saul slowly went out of his mind over that period of time, and he's crying out to the Lord.

And there's a lot of things in this prayer that you and I can take from a personal standpoint. But this one statement that David makes, "*...take not your Holy Spirit from me,*" this is one area where David's prayer does not translate into New Testament understanding. And here's why: as Christians, you see, we received the Holy Spirit differently than David did.

You got to remember something, people: David did not have the Holy Spirit living in him like you and I do. The indwelling presence of God's Spirit did not

happen until Resurrection evening, when Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, *"...Receive the Holy Spirit."* (John 20:21-22)

Now, let's not say the Holy Spirit wasn't active in their lives. Obviously, He was. Obviously, David is afraid of the Spirit being removed. But the Holy Spirit was not living in men at that time. He was living with and upon. And, in fact, those words are even used. And they're very important and very specific prepositions related to the Holy Spirit's relationship to people.

God's Holy Spirit was with them in the Old Testament. God's Holy Spirit would come upon them in the Old Testament, and He would empower them for service, or He would empower them to prophesy. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, an Old Testament prophet would say, and he would begin to speak the Word of the Lord.

He didn't ever say, the Spirit of the Lord is within me. That's unique to the New Testament. You say, well, why didn't the Holy Spirit come in to live inside of people in the Old Testament? Because the vessel had not been cleansed. Jesus had to die on the cross to cleanse the vessel by faith so that the Spirit could take up residence within.

And here's the difference between you and David: the Holy Spirit that is given to you and I, when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, is not removed due to sin. And that's good news for you and I. God's Holy Spirit does not get up and move when you and I sin. Otherwise, He would be moving in and moving out all the time. Right? In fact, I don't know that He would ever move in.

Our sin does not cause the Holy Spirit to vacate our lives. Okay? And the reason is because the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from sin. There is a perpetual forgiveness that completely refreshes itself always in our lives, even after we sin. It's an ongoing work of the Spirit, work of faith through the work that Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. And that is the good news for you and I. We don't pray this to the Lord: Don't take Your Holy Spirit from me. He's not going to do that related to our sin.

He says in verse 12, *"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."* Notice he says, God, I— earlier he said— I willfully sinned against You. I want to have a willing spirit. Lord, do this work in me. Restore to me joy and uphold me. In other words, strengthen me with a willing spirit. I want to be willing to do Your will and to walk in righteousness.

He says, ¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*" Isn't that an interesting thing for somebody to say who has just earlier in this very same prayer confessed his own transgression? He's already talking about teaching other transgressors, and you think to yourself, whoa, don't get ahead of yourself here, bud. You're still in a period of mourning. You're still crying out to the Lord. No. No. No. David is already looking beyond this situation to see how the Lord is going to use it in his life to help other people.

And this is what you and I miss so often: we forget that the things that we've been through give us a unique voice to speak into the hearts of other people who are going through similar sorts of situations. I'm not saying you have to go through exactly what somebody else is going through in order to relate to them; you don't. Sin is sin is sin. But sometimes, to be able to know what it is to have fallen so desperately to the temptations of sin and to become so dirtied in your own heart and in the eyes of the Lord, to have cried out to the Lord and then to have been restored—David is already looking forward to that time when I can take this situation and use it for good.

I do not want this to be the end of this story. I do not want it to be the story that says, David lived, David sinned, David cried out to God, and that's the end. I want the end to be, and David turned around and strengthened those who are going through that same sort of agony, and strengthened their hearts, and their minds, and their spirits, and said, God is a forgiving God, a merciful God, and you can turn to Him, and He will forgive. And we got to remember that, you guys.

When people come to me, and they're always—usually when somebody's talking about their sin—they're doing it in a very shamed sort of way. Well, Pastor Paul, boy, I tell you, some of the stuff I went through, and I'm just thinking to myself, man, you got something to say. You got something to say to people because, see, you're on the other side of it now. You're walking in the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of the Lord. Do you know how incredible that is? And now you've got something to say—you've got a piece to give—and you can look to that person and say, there's hope. There's hope in Jesus Christ. There's hope in my God. There's hope in the mercy of God.

Verse 14: *"Deliver me from bloodguiltiness (Oh, man. He says), O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness."* And this is one of those times again in this Psalm where the enormity of his sin just rises to the top again. Notice he doesn't just say, forgive me my sin. He says, forgive me from bloodguiltiness. Do you know what that means? That means I should be the one dying.

What David is saying here is, and this is the truth, you guys understand this? He committed a capital crime. Okay? And I'm not just talking about murder, yeah, sure. Adultery, too. Capital crimes both of them. He deserved to die, and he knew it. And so he's crying out, Lord, deliver me from bloodguiltiness. Wow.

"O Lord (he says in verse 15), open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering."

You know what David is saying here? You guys get it? There's no burnt offering for a capital offense. God never said, okay, now here's the deal: if you commit murder, grab two lambs, a goat, a ram, and a bull. No! The murderer will die. If you commit adultery, here's what I want you to do: you're going to have to take half of your flock. No! There's no sacrifice!

And that's what David is saying here. He's saying, oh Lord, you're not pleased. It's not a sacrifice you're looking for or I'd give it. I mean, believe me, David had plenty of animals at his discretion. If there was a sacrifice that was going to make this thing all better, wonderful, I'd give it. But he says, that's not what you want.

What does the Lord want? Verse 17. Very important that you and I see this here: *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart (he says that), O God, you will not despise."* And that's what God's looking for, that's why the Lord instituted the sacrificial system in the first place. That when they did sin, providing it was not a capital offense, that they would go through the sacrificial ceremonial system. And they would see all the blood—we talk about the sacrificial system, the sacrificial... We don't see it happening.

We don't see the animal dying. We don't see them draining the blood. We don't see them splattering the blood on the side of the altar. We don't smell the smoke rising. We don't see it all happening. We don't see the priest's blood-red hands from holding the blood and holding the animal and all the guts and the stuff that go along with it. It was gruesome, the sacrificial system was gruesome.

I'm glad that I was not born a Jewish priest back then; I just got to tell you, I'm not big on that stuff, but it was meant to elicit a sense of what David is talking about here. This is a big deal, this sin stuff. This is a big deal. It takes a death. It takes blood and guts and pain and gore. It's exactly what Jesus did for us, right? On the cross.

And what God is looking for when you and I sin is that we would understand the gravity of what we've done to such a point that our hearts are broken before God. And that's what he's looking for, real brokenness. Real brokenness. Because the person who is truly broken, I'm telling you, is ready for a change. When real brokenness takes place, the person who's been committing that sin is ready for a change, no matter what. I only want a change.

And then David ends this Psalm by saying in verse 18, *"Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; ¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar."*

And you think to yourself, that's an interesting couple of last verses. Why does he just end his prayer by praying for a blessing upon Zion and Jerusalem and building up the walls and stuff like that? It's like, that doesn't seem to fit. Oh yes, it does.

You've got to remember who David is. He's the king and David understands, and at a time like this, is very aware that there is a connection between his personal holiness and God's blessing upon the nation of Israel. He's the king. He represents the people in a very unique sort of way. And what he is basically saying here is character does count. And I know it. And I know what I've done.

I've cast a shadow on all of Israel through my sin. I have cast a shadow on all of Israel. And what David is doing is he's responding in the understanding of what it is to be a leader and the very profound effect that our leading can have on other people.

And every leader needs to understand that whether you're a leader in business, whether you're a leader in your home as a mother and father, whether you are a leader in the church, the body of Christ, wherever you may be a leader, to understand this is an important thing in our lives because we have to remember: there's, I can't compartmentalize my sin because my sin, it doesn't affect my family. It's just my sin. Oh yes, it does affect your family. You bet it affects them big time.

And David understood that it affected the whole nation. He ends this prayer, praying, interceding for the nation, Lord, may your blessing be upon this nation that I have cast a shadow over with my sin. May your blessing, may your good pleasure build up our walls. May you delight in us doing things right for once—a pretty powerful prayer, huh? I mean, pretty amazing prayer, a prayer of great sorrow, great humility, great brokenness.

We're going to stop there. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank You so much for the power of Your Word. Lord it moves our hearts and it reveals so much that we need to understand about our relationship with You.

Lord, we are reminded in a very clear way that You are a Holy God and were it not for the blood of Jesus Christ shed for us on the cross, we would all be lost because, Lord, as David said, we were born into this mess and we have confirmed it by our actions.

And what we deserve is not what we get, for we have found mercy and forgiveness from the God that we serve, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who delights to show mercy. Praise the Lord.

Thank You for your incredible goodness. Fill our hearts with it Jesus, teach us your ways that we may walk in your truth in Jesus' powerful and mighty name. We pray, amen.