

October 6, 2024

“Prayers of Repentance and Confession”
Lesson 1

Psalms 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17

Intro

Psalm 51 is categorized as a lament psalm, a type which focuses on the psalmist’s remorse, confession of sin, and request for forgiveness. Other Psalms of this type include Psalm 6, 32, and 38.

This Psalm was composed by King David after he had an affair with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed. David thought he was getting away with this, but God had Nathan the prophet tell David a parable about a poor man with one beloved lamb and a rich man with many flocks of lambs. In the parable, the rich man took the poor man’s lamb, killed it, and prepared it as a meal. The rich man’s unjust treatment of the poor man infuriated David. Nathan then revealed that the parable was about David and his sins. Upon hearing Nathan’s words, David confessed his wrongdoing and said, “I have sinned against the Lord (2 Sam. 12:13).

Read Psalm 51:1-17

1. vs. 1: The phrase “unfailing love” in the NIV is translated as several other words in other versions

Other words used are “mercy”, “kindness”, and “covenant of love”

All these ideas describe God’s faithfulness to His people

David is asking God to be merciful to Him, to “blot out” his sins

Something blotted out from a ledger of items means it’s removed entirely

In Is. 43:25, God says He will blot out and not remember the sins of His people

Transgressions are actions that willfully break God’s law

David admitted that he broke God’s law by his actions

David also knew that God has “great compassion” towards His people

Because of this compassion, David asks God to blot out his sins

2. vs. 2: This verse is another example of *parallelism* in Hebrew poetry

In parallelism, a line of poetry uses two different phrases/words having the same meaning

The repetition is used to emphasize the writer’s point

In vs. 1-2, we see the parallel words *blot out*, *wash away*, and *cleanse*

Washing something means that it is dirty and needs to be cleansed

David’s use of this idea shows that he knows his sin has “stained” him

Only God can remove the stain of sin

We first need to be cleansed of our sins

Then we are called to live lives which are pure and holy, free from sin

This can only happen by seeking to live according to God’s Word and asking for forgiveness when we fail

3. vs. 3: David acknowledges his sins / transgressions

This confession must happen first before forgiveness of those sins can occur

Awareness of sin leads to conviction, which is needed for true repentance and mercy

David’s admission was the first step to receiving forgiveness from God

4. vs. 4: It is true that our sins can and many times do hurt others
However, all sin is really against God—a failure to follow His commands
David here confesses that his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah are really against God
He admits that his actions were evil, and that God saw those actions
Because all sin is directed against God, His judgement against it is *justified*
Confessing this truth shows that David is prepared to accept the consequences
5. vs. 10: David here states a request that is one of the more well-known verses in Scripture
He asks God to give him a clean heart, and to renew a “steadfast spirit” in him
This recognizes that only God can clean a heart from sin
Nothing that people can do can clean their hearts where sin is present
We are incapable of living completely righteously on our own
Only after we have a clean heart can we follow God in obedience and love
6. vs. 11: Under the OT covenant, obedience to God was a condition for Him to dwell with the people
Those who did not keep the covenant would be removed from the community
This also would mean they would be removed from God’s presence
David’s requests here shows he fears losing God’s presence in his life
- This verse is one of three in the OT that use the title “Holy Spirit”
The others are Isaiah 63:10-11 and Psalm 106:33
These verses are early hints about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the NT
Though sin, we risk deadening our attentiveness to the Spirit in our lives
David received “the Spirit of the Lord” when he was anointed by Samuel
David’s concern about having the Spirit removed connect to this anointing
Saul’s sinning caused God to remove His Spirit from Saul
David seems to be afraid that the same thing could happen to him as well
7. vs. 12: David’s sin caused a separation between him and God
David needs God to restore the relationship, which God will do upon David’s confession
He makes a second request which is just as important
He asks God to give him a “willing spirit”
He wants to want God as much as God wants him to want God
8. vs. 15: David’s prayer turns here from confession and repentance to praise
In vs. 13 (not in our study text), he tells God what he will do with this restored life
He says he will “teach transgressors Your ways so that sinners will turn back to God”
His repentance leads him to use his life as an example to others for their correction
Praise is the proper response to God’s love and mercy
David expresses his commitment to worship God in response to receiving mercy
9. vs. 16-17: Through the Law of Moses, God established a system of sacrifices
David, “a man after God’s own heart”, knows there is more needed than sacrifices
He knows that God wants a change of heart more than sacrifices without any change
God wants an “internal sacrifice”, which indicates a change in heart and in actions
Awareness of sin leads to a “broken spirit and contrite heart”

This verse indicates that religious practices without a change of heart are meaningless
The change of heart must result in following and obeying God's commands

Application: Psalm 51 gives us a model of acknowledgement, confession, repentance, and praise. We must acknowledge our sins, confess them to God and repent of them (indicate our grief and sorrow for having done them). By doing these, we indicate to God our desire, our intention, to change our ways to follow His ways more closely. Because of our confidence in His promises (see 1 John 1:9), we praise Him for His mercy toward us, shown by His forgiveness. By following this model, believers can experience the joy of living in relationship with God.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your love and mercy. We want, we desire, to be in a close relationship with You. We confess that we have not loved You as we ought, or as You deserve. We repent of our sinful actions and ask for Your forgiveness. We praise You because You have promised to cleanse us from our sins, and give us a joyful, right relationship with You. Thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen.