



Psalm 51

David's penitential psalm

Devotional to be used in a group or individually

Psalm 51 is the most famous of the seven penitential psalms. This cry to God for mercy and forgiveness comes after the prophet Nathan confronts David regarding his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. It is only when confronted by Nathan that David acknowledges his guilt.

Read Psalm 51 and 2 Samuel 12:1-25

Even though the story of David and Bathsheba may be familiar to you, read the 2 Samuel passage to recall the events leading up to the writing of Psalm 51.

Nathan was very skillful in breaking down David's defenses. Nathan came to David with a message from God at just the right time.

1. 2 Samuel 12:1-14 How do you think David might have responded if Nathan had confronted him directly instead of using a parable? Why?
2. Describe David's feelings in verse 5 and the sentence that he thought should be carried out; then compare how David must have felt after Nathan's statement in verse 7.
3. Describe David's response. (2 Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 51:3)

True repentance is rare. What we practice, more often, is pseudo-repentance. We hold back part of the truth, defend ourselves, and focus the blame on others. There is not a broken heart. There is not changed behavior. But in true repentance, you may cry, you may laugh out loud....But you won't be defensive or angry or proud or bitter. A contrite heart makes no demands and has no expectations. Broken and humble people are simply grateful to be alive.

Charles Swindoll, *David, a Man of Passion and Destiny* (Dallas: Word, 1997), 207.

4. Despite the many consequences, there is still mercy from God. What is it, according to 2 Samuel 12:13b?

Skye Jethani stated that in Psalm 51, David is at the end of pretending to be something he was not. This psalm allows us to see David when he is most honest and vulnerable—open and bare before the Lord. In his vulnerability we find a deeper level of relationship that God desires with us, truth in our inward being. This requires us to be truthful about our sin without hiding.

Very few of us know anything about conviction of sin. We know the experience of being disturbed because we have done wrong things. But conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit blots out every relationship on earth and makes us aware of only one—"Against You, You only, have I sinned." Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*.

5. What might be holding you back from honesty before God about your sin?

Psalm 51:1-12

6. On what grounds does David hope for mercy?
7. David describes his offence with 3 different Hebrew words: transgression (crossing of a boundary), iniquity (depravity of nature), and sin (the missing of a mark). How does this demonstrate David understands his need for God's mercy?
8. What are the three verbs David uses in 1b-2 in regards to his sin?

David not only pleads for the removal of his sin but also recognizes his need for purity or cleansing to become 'whiter than snow' (v. 7). Hyssop is a branch that was dipped in the blood of the sacrifice and used for sprinkling. Israelites understood the powerful ritual that is first mentioned at the Passover in Exodus 12:21b-22a. This was a foreshadowing of Christ, our Passover Lamb. It is only through His blood that we can be cleansed from the stain of sin.

9. Do you believe that God has the power to cleanse you from every sin, no matter how bad? Will you claim the promise of God that you can be whiter than snow?

Prayer Time

Confess any sin that weighs on your heart. Write it down and ask God's Spirit to "renew a right spirit within me." Then take a match to that piece of paper and burn it.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10