

RTO™ School of Prayer
The Prayer of Repentance • Psalm 51

by Dave Mozdin

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To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him,
after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

¹Have mercy upon me, O God,

According to Your lovingkindness;

According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,

Blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

And cleanse me from my sin.

³For I acknowledge my transgressions,

And my sin *is* always before me.

⁴Against You, You only, have I sinned,

And done *this* evil in Your sight—

That You may be found just when You speak,

And blameless when You judge.

⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,

And in sin my mother conceived me.

⁶Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,

And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Make me hear joy and gladness,

That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

⁹Hide Your face from my sins,

And blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;
You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

¹⁸Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

In a previous School of Prayer lesson, we outlined a biblical framework for The Prayer of Confession. We cited this as an important part of a God-honoring Christ-exalting prayer relationship with our great and awesome Triune God.

By way of review, this is important because:

1.) We were created in the image of God to be in relationship with God, who has always existed in a fellowship relationship as the Trinity, Father, Son Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1, 26-28). Our relationship with God is to be intimate.

2.) Sin breaks our relationship with God (Genesis 3:11-12, 22-24).

3.) Confession of sin restores our relationship with God (1 John 1:9) "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It also gives glory to God, Joshua 7:19, "Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

If we don't hold a continual awareness of these three points and fail to confess our sins, our prayers to God will be useless. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2), and "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear (Psalm 66:18 NKJV).

What was also noted in that lesson was that in the light of the perspective of many churches today, confession of sin (or even the doctrine of sin) is rarely ever taught or mentioned. This is largely because it is considered "unpleasant" and negative, with the potential to drive people away from churches who are seeking to attract members and attendees according to worldly standards, to make the church "nice", upbeat, inoffensive, and appealing. Any true born-again believer knows that the true purpose of the church of Jesus Christ is to lift high His Name in worship and to be salt and light to witness the gospel to a dying world (to be *in* the world but not *of* it), to let the world know that there is hope for freedom from eternal condemnation in hell and for the glory and joy of heaven through Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone! And to do this in the light of sanctification (our previous School of Prayer lesson), being closer to God, farther from sin.

Closely related to the doctrine of sin and confession of sin (and avoided just as much in the worldly churches, maybe even more so!), in fact something that arguably is just as important for a vital relationship with God, and in true chronological order ought to be taught *before* confession is the doctrine of repentance.

According to Vine's Bible Dictionary, repentance, from the Greek word *metanoeo*, is defined as "to perceive afterwards", (*meta*, "after", implying "change", *noeo*, "to perceive", *nous*, "the mind", the seat of moral reflection"), . . . hence signifies "to change one's mind or purpose," always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17:3, 4, of "repentance from sin." Puritan writer Thomas Watson's definition: "Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed."

A great illustration of the need to repent and for repentance before confession is shown in the Bible in Luke 15:11-32, best known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and given by Christ. Many of us are familiar with this parable, but to refresh our minds, this is the story of a father and his two sons. The younger son is brash, self-confident, and brazenly asks his father for his own share of the inheritance, which is normally given after the father dies. Yet, amazingly, the father graciously gives the son the inheritance, and he proceeds to travel to a far country and squanders all of it on reckless living. A famine ensues shortly afterward, and he finds himself in dire need. He seeks help from one of the local citizens, who employs him to feed the pigs, the lowest form of work, one of great disrespect for a Jewish person of that time. To add injury to insult, this son is suffering from tremendous hunger and the food he is feeding to the pigs is not fit for human consumption. Even the pigs are eating better than he is! And as written in v. 16, “. . . and no one gave him anything.”

At this point, having lost everything, alone, isolated and suffering from the pangs of hunger, he has what is known as a catharsis, a precise realization, evaluation, and acknowledgement of his true horrible condition, of his need to change. Some of us would call this as a “Come to Jesus” moment. John MacArthur writes: “Here, I am convinced, is where true repentance always begins: with an accurate assessment of one’s own condition. Everyone--from the profligate sinner who is a complete wastrel (such as this young man) to the most fastidious, patronizing Pharisee--needs to face the reality that the sinfulness we have inherited from Adam has made us spiritual paupers. No sinner has the means to atone for his or her own sin or the ability to overcome the power of sin that holds us. Our sin has put us in a desperate situation.”

In v. 17, he says “But when he came to himself . . .” Some translations say, “But when he came to his senses . . .” This is the point where everything changes. He knows he needs to go in a different, positive direction regardless of the cost. His repentance has begun. He continues in the remainder of v.17, “he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’ ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” Notice he has already begun his plan of repentance *before* he goes to his father to confess his sin. In v. 20 he returns to his father, confesses his sin, and the father joyfully welcomes him back and restores him to the family with a celebration. The older son’s negative reaction, despising his brother, his father and the father’s grace is evidence of the lack of repentance in his own life.

This parable is a picture of repentance and confession as the gateway to salvation. Some of the other passages throughout the Bible that confirm this are: 1 Kings 8:47, 49: ⁴⁷“yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, ‘We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,’” ⁴⁹“then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause ⁵⁰and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you”. Christ, at the end of His earthly ministry, just before He ascends up to heaven, tells His disciples, and us by extension, “. . . that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His Name to all nations . . .” Luke 4:47.

Additional important points to consider about repentance:

- A.) **God commands it.** Acts 17:30: “The times of ignorance God has overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent”.
- B.) **It is a primary reason for Christ’s call to us.** Luke 5:32, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”
- C.) **Failure to repent will result in spiritual death and condemnation.** In Luke 13:4-5, while discussing the fate of Galileans who were murdered by Pilate in the temple and the eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, Christ said ⁴“do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”
- D.) **It is desired by God for all.** 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
- E.) **It is welcomed with joy by God and by the heavenly kingdom.** This is illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. In the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin of which both were found, Christ says (Luke 15:7, 10) ²“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” And ¹⁰“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”
- F.) **It is commanded at the start of the preaching of the kingdom of heaven and is the first element necessary for salvation.** Both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) began their ministry by saying “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

G.) Like sanctification, repentance is a process that will take place for the rest of the believer's

life. In our discussion on sanctification, we said that it is a process of moving closer to Christ and farther from sin. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, and are no longer slaves to sin, Romans 6:17-18: ¹⁷”But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” But we are still sinners and will be until our final glorification after our earthly death or when Christ returns, whichever comes first. As Paul writes in Romans 7:22-23: ²²”For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”

As we are transformed in our sanctification “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18), we still are sinners, need to be convicted of sin, acknowledge it, repent (turn from it), seek God’s forgiveness, and seek His help along with the help of fellow believers in our life to work out repentance from that sin.

This brings us to the featured passage, Psalm 51. This Psalm was written by David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. While the Parable of the Prodigal Son is an excellent New Testament illustration of man’s need to repent and then to seek God’s forgiveness, Psalm 51 is a comparative Old Testament illustration, and goes into greater detail about the heart of a believer concerning repentance and forgiveness. The background and setting for this passage can be found in 2 Samuel 11-12, which tells of David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba, wife of the Hittite warrior Uriah, the resulting pregnancy, the “set up” murder of Uriah, and the cover up. A short time later, The Lord sends Nathan to David to confront him about these sins he has blatantly committed.

After listening to Nathan’s rebuke and description of the consequences and punishments (they were severe and long lasting, although by God’s grace he was spared of the ultimate penalty for adultery and murder at that time-death, Lev 20:10, 24:17), David acknowledges his sin, “I have sinned against the Lord”, 2 Samuel 12:13, then writes Psalm 51 (and later Psalm 32) as a part of his repentance.

It would be most beneficial and edifying to unpack this psalm verse by verse, however, due to time and space limitations, we will do this in seven sections.

1.) A Passionate Petition for mercy and forgiveness. (vv.1-2) Right out of the gate, David knows there's no other way for his need for repentance and forgiveness to be supplied other than by God's mercy. Pastor Rex Andrews writes: "The Amazing God who is Himself utterly Lowly, offers a haven of PURITY to the soul that will seek it as Mercy, and as Mercy alone." As it is written in v. 1 (NKJV), "according to the *multitude* of your *tender* mercies..." (Emphasis added). Pastor Andrews continues: "This cry for heart-purity arises from a sense of discovery of utter helplessness and inability to cleanse or justify SELF." "There is no void or loss so terrible, and so utter and so desolate, as the Consciousness of the ABSENCE of God, when one has known His PRESENCE." David is clearly aware of this, which is why he asks for a complete cleansing, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity...." (v.2).

2.) A confession and acknowledgement of the sin nature within him and its pervasiveness. (vv.3-5). David says, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." He describes his sin three different ways, iniquity (v.2), defined as (Vine's) "lawlessness or wickedness", acting apart from God's law. A second description is transgressions (v.3), defined as (Vine's) "to go aside", "to go beyond" God's law. A third is sin (v.3), from the Greek word "hamartia", defined (Vine's) as a missing of the mark. It is also defined as moral obliquity (from the word oblique), a turning aside, a slanting away from moral conduct or sound thinking. He recognizes that while his sin has adversely affected Bathsheba, Uriah, David's own family, the military leadership, the people of his kingdom, the greatest offense is against God Himself. "Against You and You only have I sinned."

Please note that in v. 6, David says "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart." Here David is declaring that in place of the sin, transgression and iniquity in his heart, God desires truth in that inward part. He also knows and declares that it is God who teaches him wisdom in that place where He desires truth. This echoes James 1:5-6a, ⁵"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith,". These verses are given in context of the beginning of James 1, which deals with handling trials, of which temptation to sin can certainly be a reaction to trials. What a wonderful promise! If we lack wisdom, which we as sinners often do, we can simply ask God in faith, and He will answer and teach us wisdom in the scared heart. (He constantly answers this request for me, as I realize I constantly lack wisdom).

3.) A prayer for cleansing (vv.7, 9), "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow". Hyssop, according to *gotquestions.org*, is "an herb

in the mint family with cleansing, medicinal, and flavoring properties, was prolific in the Middle East and was used in a variety of ways.” In the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, hyssop was used in ritual cleansing and purifying. The first mention of it is in Exodus 12, where Moses announces the instructions the Lord has given him for the day of the first Passover. ²²”Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood (of the Passover Lamb) that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin.... ²³For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.” This was symbolic of what was to come in Christ, who is the Lamb of God slain, whose blood is applied to us so the destroyer, eternal death, will not strike us.

Hyssop is also featured as part of the cleansing rituals in Leviticus 14 for signifying the cleansing of healed lepers and a house that has been cleaned from disease. A reference to Moses using hyssop to ritually cleanse and purify God’s people is seen in Hebrews 9:19. All this to say David would have known about this from knowing the history of Israel and knowing and obeying God’s word, which is probably why he probably uses this illustration. He also uses the illustration of being washed whiter than snow, v. 7, which makes us recall Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 1: 16, 18) ¹⁶”Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,” ¹⁸”Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” This is a good testimony to the Lord’s interest in our repentance. A final part of David’s prayer for cleansing is v. 9, “Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”

- 4.) **A prayer for restoration with God (vv. 10-12).** After the prayer for cleansing, David continues with a plea to be restored to his former right standing with God before he committed these atrocious sins. He begins with the heart of the matter, the heart itself, the person’s seat of all intellect, feeling, emotion, speech, and action. He wants to start over, praying for the creation of a clean heart, something only the power of God can provide. He goes on to ask for renewal, a right spirit within him, to help him sustain his repentance and that he will not return to these sins. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit worked differently in believers, and could be withdrawn by God as done to Saul in 1 Samuel 16:14, and David could have known that, which is why David prays for God to not remove the Holy Spirit from him in v. 11. For us believers in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is with us always after our moment of conversion (John 14 :16)

and acts as a guide to convict us of sin (John 16:8), and to teach us how to continually repent as Jesus said (John 14:26), “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

Another part of his prayer for restoration is for the joy of his salvation to be restored v. 12.

Many, if not all of us remember the joy we experienced at the first moment of our salvation, and know, if we are truly convicted of sin, that sin crushes that joy and we long to have it returned.

This is followed by confirmation of his need to be upheld by the spirit, in this case a *willing* spirit.

- 5.) **A promise of reparation vv. 13.** In v. 13, David makes a beautiful statement of repentance in action, a reparation, a payback that will have a reverberating effect upon God’s kingdom, “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.” In this case, it is one of the best ways to repent, to help others to not commit the same sins, thus averting more damage and helping to advance God’s kingdom instead. It’s reminiscent of the person giving a testimony who says, “Don’t do what I did”, then offering counsel as to how to avoid the offense. In my own personal testimony, I have lived out this verse, as God gave me victory over the stronghold sins of drugs, alcohol, and sexual sin. Like the Prodigal Son, I came to my senses as to how much I had harmed others, and especially how much I offended our loving gracious God, who gave His Son for us. I have spent many hours over 20+ years biblically helping men in this way and am grateful to God that sinners have returned to Him. It has also been a hedge in helping me to not return to those sins myself. (Proverbs 26:11).
- 6.) **A prayer for restoration to the community of believers, vv. 14-17.** Knowing that God’s penalty for his sins of adultery and murder is death, he prays to be delivered from that penalty, from blood guiltiness, that God would spare the blood of his own life (v.14). He asks this deliverance from the God of his salvation, the only One who could grant this. Then he will respond with a loud public testimony of God’s righteousness, also asking for God to open his mouth to declare His praise. He also confirms that any sacrifice he brings to God’s altar would be worthless unless he first offers the sacrifice of a right spirit, a broken spirit and a right heart, a broken and contrite heart. (vv.16-17).
- 7.) **A supplication for God to bless the nation as the David and the nation are rightly reconciled to Him. (vv. 18-19).** Now that David is being restored to God, he entreats God to extend His favor to the nation. Biblical historians and commentators believe that at the time David wrote this psalm, the walls of Jerusalem were not yet complete, and David had hoped that God’s punishment for his sins would not impede or stop the progress of building the walls. The

conclusion in v. 19 is, I believe, best summed up by the Benson Commentary: “When thou hast granted my humble requests, expressed in the former verses; when thou hast renewed, and pardoned, and comforted me, and restored thy favour unto thy people and this city; *shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness* — Which I and my people, being justified and reconciled to thee, shall offer with sincere and penitent hearts.” In other words, now that David has repented, confessed, and been forgiven, he prays that his actions would set a tone for the rest of the nation. (If you are grieved by all the sin running wild in our world today and want to see people repent, it always gives glory to God to begin with yourself, i.e., “clean your own side if the street.”).

- 8.) **Conclusion.** Repentance precedes confession and forgiveness. Remember the prodigal son, come to your senses, go to God your Father, who will grant repentance to those who ask. (Acts 5:31, 11:18). If you have not yet had a prodigal son moment where you have gone to God to confess you are a sinner and need His help through faith in Jesus Christ His Son, who died for you and can save you from eternal damnation in hell and bring you to the joys of eternal heaven, please do so NOW! God guarantees tomorrow to no one, by then it may be too late. Confess to God, ask forgiveness, seek forgiveness from and restitution for the offended party/parties if possible. Pray this Psalm out loud, on your knees when you know you need to repent and confess. Teach transgressors God’s ways as David did, so they will return to God (v.13). Know that repentance is a continual ongoing lifelong process as you battle against sin. Know that God and heaven rejoice over the one who repents. Amen. Alleluia.

For a copy of a transcript or questions, please contact dmozdin.dfp@gmail.com

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