

# Psalm 51

**This is an ultra-important Psalm for us to study and meditate on every time we sin.**

The humble attitude of David in this Psalm is a major reason why David was “*a man after my own heart who will do My will*” [Acts 13:22].

**This Psalm was prompted after David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband in an attempt to cover it up, was focussed on by Nathan the prophet sent by God to David.**

This account of David’s sin and repentance is told in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12.

**The power of God’s Word brought to David by Nathan is nowhere more strikingly evident than in this transformation of David.**

**Psalms 51:1-2** [New King James] *“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.”*

**Notice there was no “buts” or excuses offered by David for what he had done, he knew that God had watched every action he had taken and knew the motives behind them, [Psalms 139:1-16].**

**Psalms 51:3-4** [New King James] *“For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against 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.”*

**It is interesting to notice the different words for sin that David used in these four verses, it shows the progression of his mind as the realisation of exactly what he had done, in public, against the Creator God.**

*“Transgressions”* [verse 1] – Hebrew “*pasha*” meaning to **offend or revolt** against lawful authority.

*“Iniquity”* [verse 2] – Hebrew “*avon*” meaning **perverseness**, from root word meaning bent or crooked, wrung out of right course in life.

*“Sin”* [verse 2] – Hebrew “*châta*” meaning to **miss the mark**, to stumble and fall.

*“Transgressions”* [verse 3] – Hebrew “*pasha*” meaning **total revolt, moral and religious**.

*“Sin”* [verse 3] – Hebrew “*chattâth*” an offence or **crime that deserves punishment**.

*“Sinned”* [verse 4] – Hebrew “*châta*” meaning to **fall, directly in the sight of the Creator God he professed to honour and serve**.

*“Evil”* [verse 4] – Hebrew “*ra*” meaning **wicked or injurious, breaking up all that is good or desirable**.

**Eventually David realised just how destructive his sin had been, he had committed treason [against God he had committed this evil act.]**

**Notice the immense contrast expressed in this verse to 2 Samuel chapter 11 where David’s thoughts were only “*how do I cover my sin?*” to this repented attitude of “*how could I treat the Creator God in the way I did?*”**

**Psalms 51:5** [New King James] *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”*

To understand this statement we have to go back to a time before the first children of Adam and Eve were born, [**Genesis 3:1-19**].

**Adam and Eve were in a state of rebellion against God before Cain and Abel were born.**

This is the Old Testament statement of the doctrine of original sin, it is **not** pleaded as an excuse but called as a witness to the depth and extent of human need as a sinner.

**This new perspective of David’s sin, as self-assertion against God, [verse 4] opens up new understanding, self-knowledge.**

**This crime that David had committed was no freak event, it was within character of the warped creature he had always been and the faulty stock he sprung from.**

**Isaiah 6:5** [New King James] *“So I said: ‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’”*

**Isaiah when faced with the glory and holiness of the Creator God saw his and the people’s corruption when he caught sight of his own.**

David was **not** speaking against his mother in particular, nor against the process of conception. Nor is David excusing himself.

This statement in verse 5 is the climax of the facts he was facing that his sins were his own [the fivefold “my” in **verses 1-3**] and in excusable [**verse 4**] worst of all they were in the very element he was living in, [**verse 5**].

**Psalms 51:6-9** [New King James] *“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”*

**The seeking of restoration of the relationship that David had before this sin begins.**

**First David recognises the gulf between what God desires and what David had just confessed.**

Note though that God’s wishes are future intentions that David desires.

**David desired the truth, for God to teach it to him, [John 16:13] this is why he asked for God not to take the Holy Spirit from him, [verse 11].**

David asked for Godly wisdom, [**James 1:5; James 3:17**] again this comes from the active indwelling of the Holy Spirit [**1 Corinthians 12:8**] as a spiritual gift.

David was not deploring the absence of truth and wisdom, but a desire of future parts of his new character.

**The “purge me with hyssop” alludes to the cleansing of a leper who was an outcast of society, [Leviticus 14:2-7].**

**The “wash me” alludes to the ritual for cleansing those who had come into contact with a dead body, [Numbers 19:16-19].**

In each case it ended with the forthright pronouncement “*and he shall be clean,*” a promise that David takes up in the first person.

**David knew from the context of these rituals the special word “*purge*” was the nearest equivalent to “*de-sin*” [Leviticus 14:49; Numbers 19:19].**

David pictures the final sequence in the ritual, the washing of the clothes and body, realised that with God there is **no** half-measures, [Isaiah 1:18].

**Verse 9** which is an echo of **verse 1** completes the first part of this Psalm, in which the emphasis has been mostly on guilt and cleansing and the joy that such a cleansing brings, [verse 8].

**The focus now moves into the subject of salvation and change.**

**Psalms 51:10-13** [New King James] “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.*”

**The word “*create*” indicates that David is asking for nothing less than a miracle, for it is a term used only for what the Creator God can do.**

**The self-knowledge seen in verses 3-5 might have led to despair, instead it brought him to a closer, even more dependent, relationship with the Creator God.**

**Romans 7:18-25** [New King James] “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*”

**Paul understood that the focus on and dependency on Jesus Christ was the only way we can win over our sinful nature.**

**The likely background to this fear of losing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was the example of King Saul that David had seen personally, [1 Samuel 16:14].**

**The request for the retention of the Holy Spirit was not for self-preservation, but for a practical purpose of being a living example of exactly what the Creator God wishes to see in every human being.**

**Galatians 5:22-25** [New King James] “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*”

These “*fruits*” are the very characteristics of the Creator God, that He desires to see reflected in our lives for others to see and emulate, [Matthew 5:14-16].

While the prayer in **verse 10** for steadfastness was obviously fitting after so great a fall into sin, **the earnest plea for a generous or willing Spirit may seem less relevant, [verse 12].**

**Yet on reflection this desire to do God's will in a generous, enthusiast and willing way is God's own antidote for temptation to sin, [Psalms 40:8]** a positive delight which David and any other child of the Creator God can lose when God had given them peace and prosperity.

We need to note that there is a close connection between experiencing God's forgiveness and restoration of a close relationship and a burning desire to give that knowledge to others, [**Luke 22:38**].

**Psalms 51:14-15** [New King James] *"Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise."*

The enormity of his sin continues to horrify David, he has none of the glibness of Isaiah's contemporaries, who were oblivious of the blood on their praying hands, [**Isaiah 1:15**].

Nowhere in this Psalm is David concerned with escaping the material consequences of his sins, it is the guilt of them that burdens him.

The deliverance David desires is to enable him to praise God's righteousness before other human beings.

*"Open my lips"* is the cry of a person whose conscience has shamed them into silence.

David longs to worship freely and gratefully again and believes that by the grace of God he will.

Seen in its true setting, this heartfelt, humble plea leads the worshipper in one step from confession to the brink of praise.

**Psalms 51:16-17** [New King James] *"For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, these, O God, You will not despise."*

God is *"not"* rejecting any sacrifices we make for Him, but saying that the best gifts will be given with a contrite attitude of mind.

Hebrew word translated *"contrite"* is *"dâkâh"* meaning afflicted and humbled attitude of mind.

In all of this Psalm, we see that the Creator God is looking for the heart [or mind] that knows how little it deserves, and how much it owes Him.

We can **never** please the Creator God with outward actions, no matter how good they look [religious rituals] or are [loving concern for other human beings] if our inward attitude of mind is **not** right.

Are we truly sorry for our sins?

Do we genuinely intend to stop sinning?

God is pleased with this kind of humility.

**Psalms 51:18-19** [New King James] *"Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar."*

Conceivably David could have added these words to this Psalm himself, picturing Zion's spiritual plight in physical terms. But it is far more likely that the generations between the captivity of Judah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem made David's penitence their own, adding these verses to make their prayer specific, [**Nehemiah 12:43-47**].

A people's prayer in the days of Zerubbabel.

We even, in this generation, can pray for the time when Jerusalem will be restored as the city from which the law and the blessings of the returning Jesus Christ will flow, [**Revelation 14:1-5; Revelation 21:9-27; Revelation 22:1-15**].