

Repentance & Restoration

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me if you have a Bible or follow along with me on the screen. We're reading Psalm 51. We're continuing in our series through the Psalms. As we've said, the Psalms are a collection of songs and prayers written over several hundred years, collected by several different people that were gradually collected into the songbook or the prayer book of the ancient Israelites. We've seen many different kinds of Psalms written out of different life situations, Psalms of lament, people calling out to God in trouble and turmoil, Psalms of trust, people holding on to God's promises in the midst of shaky times, Psalms of praise, people looking around at the world and looking at the works of God and giving Him the thanks and praise that He is due. Today, we're looking at a Psalm of repentance. In other words, turning to God in the midst of our sin and failure. So let me read Psalm 51 for us today. Psalm 51, to the choir master, a Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone into Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God.

According to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me 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. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth and the inward being and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness with the bones that you have broken.

Rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise, for you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure. Build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings, in whole burnt offerings. Then bowls will be offered on your altar.

Father, let's pray. Father, thank you for this psalm, this prayer written by David so long ago and preserved for us today. We pray that by your spirit that this too would become our prayer, that this prayer would help us to draw near to you and to know and be assured of your grace. In Jesus' name, amen. So how do you respond when you have messed up? When you fail to live up to your own standards, when you've wronged or harmed other people, when you have sinned against your creator?

[3 : 39] That's what this psalm is about. It was written in the aftermath of David's worst moral failure. The story is recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. David the king was at home in the palace while his army was off at war. Late one afternoon, he saw a beautiful woman named Bathsheba, and despite being told that her husband was a soldier fighting for the king on the front lines, David summoned her to come with him.

When he learned a little while later that he had made her pregnant, David tried various schemes to cover up what had happened, and when those didn't work, he arranged for her husband to be conveniently killed in battle. Adultery, deception, murder. It was a horrible mess. All of David's own making.

And for quite some time, perhaps a few months, David did not face up or fess up to what he had done. He ignored his servants' polite hints of disapproval. He married Bathsheba and prepared to go on with his life. Until one day, David's friend, the prophet Nathan, did a courageous thing. He came over and tactfully but boldly rebuked and confronted David with the reality of what he had done.

Sometime after that conversation, David wrote this psalm. Now, you may or may not have had a catastrophic moral failure that, like David's, David's failure had consequences for himself, for his family, for his kingdom, for the rest of his life.

But this psalm helps us to turn to God when we've messed up, when we've failed, when we've fallen short, when we've fallen short. And what I want us to see this morning is this psalm leads us on a three-part journey of repentance, from pleading to longing to praising. So we're going to look at those three themes as we go through the psalm, pleading, longing, and praising. First theme that we see in verses 1 through 5 is David pleading for grace and facing his guilt. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. David begins by appealing to God's character, to God's grace.

[6 : 28] That word translated mercy in verse 1. It's a word that means showing favor to the undeserving. And he appeals to God's steadfast love. That word in the Old Testament that refers to God's unchanging commitment, his unfailing promise, his unwavering choice to love and to stay with his people.

And third, he appeals to God's abundant mercy. If God's steadfast love refers to God's committed love, God's abundant mercy refers to God's emotional love, his yearning for us, his compassion, his deeply felt affection for us. David begins by appealing to God's gracious character. And then he pleads for God to act. He uses three verbs. He says, blot out my transgressions. That's a word that means erase them from the chalkboard or strike them out from the list or wipe them away like you wipe dirt out of a dish. Then he says, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. That was a word that was used for doing laundry. And it's actually a word that means tread on or step on because sometimes to do laundry back then they'd put all the dirty clothes in a pail of water or a tub of water and they'd step on them, right? To get the deeply ingrained dirt out, to cleanse them. That third word, cleanse me from my sin, that word appears a lot in Leviticus where various objects or people were, where the stains were removed, where whatever was separating them from God was cleansed away so they could come into the presence of God again. So David begins by pleading for grace, pleading for forgiveness, pleading for to be received once into the presence of God once again. And then in verses three to five, he faces his guilt. He says, for I know my transgressions, my sin is ever before me. It's as if he's looking at all that he has done and he's not turning his face away or trying to distract himself or avoiding it. He's not blaming somebody else or minimizing what he did. He's not living in denial about it. He's facing it head on. He's facing the height and the depth of his guilt. Verse four, he faces the height of his guilt. He says, against you, only you have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

Now that statement doesn't minimize the wrong and harm that David did to Bathsheba, to her husband Uriah, and to the whole nation of Israel by betraying their trust. The point of verse four is not that our sins don't affect other people. It's that sin is a problem, not just because another person says it is, but ultimately because God says it is. Because you see, if the main problem was that David sinned against Bathsheba, then what if Bathsheba had eagerly consented? What if Bathsheba in the end said, well, I don't think it's all that serious? I'd rather be with you than with Uriah?

Would that have made David's, would that have made it less wrong? Would that have removed the offense? Or if the main problem was that David offended against the social norms of ancient Israel? Well, a lot of ancient cultures would have said the king's authority is absolute and needs to be maintained at all costs. This situation is perhaps unfortunate, but ultimately justifiable.

You see, if sin is ultimately or primarily an offense against other individuals or against social norms, we end up very quickly on a slippery slope. Because individuals' feelings and social norms can vary and change very quickly. But the Bible says that sin is an offense ultimately against a holy and unchanging God. We can't just manage the consequences of our sin on a human level. We must reckon with our sin and guilt before the Almighty God Himself. And so verse 4, David faces the height of his guilt. And then in verse 5, he faces the depth of his guilt. He says, behold, I was

brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. Now this is another verse that can be easily misunderstood.

[10:48] David's not blaming his mom. And he's not saying anything bad about the circumstances of his birth or the process of conceiving a child. Over and over, the Bible says children are a gift from the Lord.

But the Bible also says that in this fallen world, no human being, not even the littlest, weakest, or most vulnerable, is entirely free of moral corruption. There never was a time when we were completely pure and innocent. Even when we came into the world. You see, David's recognizing that his sin, his moral corruption, is deeply ingrained in his character. It wasn't just a phase. This wasn't just some midlife crisis that David went through and made a stupid decision in the middle of an otherwise upright life. His failure wasn't just a freak accident. David's acknowledging, my character has been twisted and warped ever since I came into the world. My words and actions have proceeded out of the evil in my own heart. Deep down, I am a sinner.

He's facing his guilt. The height and the depth. Now, before we go on, let's apply this first point in two practical ways. First, when we sin, let's begin where David does, by pleading with God for grace on the basis of his character. You know, sometimes we might think that the first thing David needs to do is face his sin and failure in all its ugliness, and then he'll be motivated to turn to God. But here the order is actually reversed. The first thing he does is plead for grace.

And that actually gives him the courage that he wouldn't otherwise have to face his guilt. The height and the depth. You see, apart from some sense of God's grace and mercy that is available to us, we will not be able to face our sin and guilt in its height and in its depth without simply despairing. You see, pleading for grace actually enables us to face our guilt without being completely crushed by it. But second, have we faced our sin and our guilt before God?

[13:18] You know, maybe you've done something that has affected another person or other people. Perhaps you've done wrong to your parents or to your children or to a spouse or to a friend. And maybe you're trying to figure out, how do I fix that or how do I repair a damaged relationship?

But have you dealt with your sin, not just in its horizontal dimensions as it affects other people, but in its vertical dimension before God? Have you reckoned with how your sin is an offense against the Lord of glory, against your very own maker?

Have you asked forgiveness not just from other people, but have you asked forgiveness from God himself? You see, when we deal with our sin before God, then we will see more clearly what we ought to do to make things right with our neighbor.

It's the right place to start by dealing with our sin before God. So that's the first movement of repentance we see in this psalm, David pleading for grace. The second movement that we see in verses 6 through 12 is longing for renewal. Behold, David says in verse 6, you delight in truth in the inward being. That's a statement of God's purpose, right? God's desire that we become people of integrity, people of truth and faithfulness, just like God himself is. And then in this section, we hear David longing for God to carry out that good purpose in him personally and deeply, inwardly.

Look down at verses 7 and 8 for a moment. In most English translations, these verses are translated as requests. Purge me, wash me, let me hear, let my bones rejoice. It sounds very much like pleading, right? More pleading, just like verses 1 and 2. But the Hebrew verb tense is actually different.

[15:19] In verses 1 and 2, it's the imperative, which is what you'd normally use to make a request. But here, from the second half of verse 6 through the end of verse 8, it's what's called the imperfect tense. Now, the imperfect tense can express a wish or request, but normally it expresses a future action or a not yet completed action. And I think it's actually best to translate it that way here.

All the verbs from the second half of verse 6 to the end of verse 8 are all in the same imperfect tense. So if you translate it that way, here's what you get.

You will teach me wisdom in the secret heart. You will purge me with hyssop and I will be clean. You will wash me and I will be whiter than snow. You will make me hear joy and gladness. The bones that you have broken will rejoice. You see, I think David isn't just pleading here. He's going one step further. He's holding on to God's promise and God's good purpose and he's longing for God to work that out within him. And he's actually expressing confidence that God can and God will. You will cleanse me and I'll be clean. You can do it through and through. These are hopeful affirmations of God's transforming and inwardly renewing power. And brothers and sisters, we too can take hold of and God's good purpose and long for him to work that out within us. Romans 8 29

says God's eternal purpose for everyone who trusts in Jesus is that we become conformed to the image of his son. And that's a word that means sort of reflecting the beautiful image of Jesus. Reflecting his glory, shining with his beauty. The point is this, no matter how far you have fallen, no matter how many times you have fallen, if you are looking to Jesus, God is not finished with you yet. That's a promise we can hold onto, that motivates us to long for God to carry out his renewing and transforming work within us. That's what leads David to say in verse 10, create in me a clean heart. You know, David's not just sitting back and saying, okay God, well I guess you'll do whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it.

Do it if you want to do it. No, that's not a biblical attitude. No, David's longing for God to renew him in the here and now, deeply and personally. You see, he's not only praying in this psalm for forgiveness and release from his guilt, he's praying for renewal, for freedom from the enslaving power and from the corrupting influence of sin. That word create throughout the Old Testament is only used to refer to God's action. It's never used to refer to anything that a human being does. So when David says, create in me a clean heart, he's saying, God, do what only you can do. And that word create isn't just a one-time action. It's an ongoing, renewing work. God continuing to renew him from the inside out, create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me.

[18 : 55] That word create means to shape or fashion or build or form. And David's saying, God, keep on shaping me, keep on fashioning me, keep on forming me.

Don't cast me away, verse 11, he prays, from your presence. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. You know, before David became king, he had served under a man named King Saul.

And for a time, the spirit of the Lord had come upon Saul and empowered him to defeat Israel's enemies and to rule over Israel. But Saul's heart had never really been in the right place with God. And so there was a time when Saul directly disobeyed God's command. In fact, there were multiple times where Saul directly disobeyed God's command. And there were multiple times when Saul was confronted by the prophet Samuel, like David was confronted by the prophet Nathan. But Saul only made superficial apologies along with excuses. And he hardened his heart against the Lord more and more.

And in fact, at one point in 1 Samuel, it says the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. And David saw that because Saul actually started attacking David when that happened. David saw the, the, the Saul's life sort of going down and down and down and down.

[20 : 23] And so what David is praying here is, Lord, have mercy on me. Don't let me end up like Saul did. The way I saw his life go down. You know, if you read through 1 and 2 Samuel, the two main characters, apart from Samuel, are Saul and David, the first two kings of Israel. And the difference between Saul and David is not that Saul sinned and David didn't. No, they both had significant failures. They both sinned greatly against the Lord. But the difference that you will see is how they responded when they were confronted with their sin. David repented, not perfectly, but sincerely. And God restored David.

Not completely. There were still consequences. The end of 2 Samuel is a little messy. But David repented and God restored him while Saul did not.

You know, I wonder if you are afraid that because of your sins and failures, that God will one day, or perhaps that God has already cast you away and taken away his spirit from you.

Pray, verse 11. And know that God hears and answers the prayer of a humble and contrite heart. God did not take his spirit away from David despite the seriousness of David's sin and failure.

It was a mess. A horrible mess. And it was all David's fault. But God didn't take away his spirit from David.

[22 : 13] And he will not take his spirit away from anyone who truly turns to him. Jesus said the same thing. Jesus made the same promise. He said, anyone who comes to me, I will never cast away.

So, brothers and sisters, we can hold on to that promise. You know, in fact, if you are praying verses 10 through 12 or something like verses 10 through 12, if you're asking God, renew me and cleanse my heart, that means his spirit is still at work within you.

Because if his spirit was not at work within you at all, then you would not be praying such a prayer. So, be encouraged by these verses. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

And David prays, uphold me with a willing spirit. He doesn't even notice he's not even just praying for cleansing. He's praying for joy. He's praying that his spirit would have eagerness and generosity

and a desire to carry out God's will once again.

Amen. So, we've seen David pleading for grace. We've seen him longing for renewal.

[23 : 19] And finally, in the third section, we see him praising. Praising God's name. The first two sections of the psalm have focused on David and the Lord.

If you notice, nobody else is in the picture in these first two sections of the psalm. And when we've sinned against the Lord, that's the right place to start. Because sometimes when we mess up, we can immediately distract ourselves with secondary concerns.

Like, oh Lord, I've messed up and there's all these bad consequences coming my way. Lord, save me from these bad consequences. These painful things that I don't want to experience.

That might come my way as a result of what I've done. Or, Lord, other people are going to hear about what I've done. And my reputation will be damaged. Or, somebody's going to be mad at me and never want to speak to me again.

Now, those are all legitimate concerns to deal with at one point or another. But those are secondary to, are we in a right place before God? Praying this psalm helps us put first things first.

[24 : 26] To focus on getting right with God at the heart level. Because that's what matters more than anything else. Now, of course, if we've wronged somebody else, we also need to consider what steps we need to take towards making things right with them.

That's part of genuinely turning to God. Is genuinely loving our neighbor by wanting to repair the damage that has been done. That's not the focus of this psalm.

But other biblical passages give us some good guidance about how to carry that out. And how to go about that. But starting in this third section, the focus is not only on David and the Lord.

The focus broadens. And you see that even in verse 13. David says, And that word return in verse 13 is the same word translated restore in verse 12.

In verse 12, David says, And in verse 13, David says, You see, the one who God has restored will then restore others.

[25 : 35] And God has done this throughout the history of his people, right? In fact, David's prayer in verse 13 is being answered right now. As we read this psalm, And as God by his Holy Spirit works in our hearts to help even people like us draw near to him.

And know his grace and his forgiveness and his cleansing power. And come to praise him. I mean, isn't that amazing how God brought out of David's most miserable failure, this beautiful song that has helped generations of people to draw near to God in the midst of their own sin and failure.

Isn't that amazing how God can redeem the worst things? Our own worst failures and sins. And Jesus does this in the New Testament, right?

Jesus says to Peter, On the night before he was crucified, Jesus says, Tonight, Peter, you're going to deny me three times. But when you've turned back again, strengthen your brothers.

The Apostle Paul says a similar thing. 1 Timothy 1.15, He says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. But I receive mercy for this reason.

[26 : 50] That in me, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience. As an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. And if God built his church through apostles like Peter and Paul, God can build his church today through people like you and me.

Who have been restored by his grace. And who proclaim his ways to the world. Verse 13, David's proclaiming God's ways publicly.

And then verse 14 through 17, David's publicly praising God. He says, Open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. Now there was a time where David was not declaring God's praise.

It was probably a few months or so after David had sinned with Bathsheba. But before he acknowledged his sin to the Lord. And David describes this time in another psalm, Psalm 32.

He says, When I kept silent, that is when I wasn't fessing up to my sin. When I wasn't acknowledging what I had done before you. My bones wasted away.

[28 : 01] I was groaning all day long. Your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. In other words, the overwhelming guilt and shame of his sin was pressing down upon him.

And he was living in silent and unrepentant shame. But now, instead of living in the prison of silent shame, David has been released and he's joyfully declaring God's praise.

Because he's experienced God's grace and mercy and forgiveness. And God renew, beginning to renew him from the inside out. And now he can stand and praise God's name.

And his praise comes from the heart. He says, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Genuine praise begins with a heart that has been broken over sin.

And restored by God's grace. That's where true worship begins. Not with a certain kind of music. Or not with outward forms.

[29 : 18] But with a changed heart. Jesus said, Those who have been forgiven much, Love God much. Now the last two verses of this psalm Broaden our focus even more.

Right? We've seen David proclaiming God's ways. And sinners being restored to God. Praising God in the midst of the congregation. But then in verses 18 and 19, We see a picture of God restoring the whole city.

You see, David ruled in Jerusalem. And so when God was dealing with David and restoring David, It was going to have effects. And it was even a picture of how God could restore the whole people. See, these last two verses point us to a communal dimension Of God's restoration. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure.

Build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then will you delight in right sacrifices. Now, when you read verse 19, If you look closely, Verse 19 seems to contradict verse 16.

[30 : 28] Because what does verse 16 say? Verse 16 says, You won't delight in sacrifice, And you won't be pleased with a burnt offering. But then verse 19 says, Then you will delight in right sacrifices, In burnt offerings, In whole burnt offerings.

So you might read those verses and say, Wait a minute. Which one is it? Does God want sacrifices? Or does he not want sacrifices? It seems to be saying opposite things.

Well, the point of verses 16 and 17 Is that more than anything else in the world, God wants our hearts. God honors those who come before him With broken and humble hearts.

And that matters more to God Than any outward expressions or forms of worship. That's what sacrifices were in the Old Testament.

Right? They were sort of the public thing. It was a feast. These kinds of sacrifices. You know, right now, I think verse 16 and 17 Is a very important truth For the church of God Throughout the world to remember.

[31 : 36] Right? Because in most places, Our outward expressions And forms of worship Have been significantly disrupted. Right? We used to have a full sanctuary. Right? We could hear everybody singing Loudly.

And that was great. Right? And we're missing that now. Right? We're not sitting down To big meals in the fellowship Like we used to. Right? Some of you are watching This worship service at home On a screen.

Some of you are sitting here You know, We're trying to talk in face masks And communicate with limitations. All of these things Are less than ideal. Right?

Necessary for a time But less than ideal. And this winter Some things may become More challenging. But here's the point. This uncomfortable And disruptive season Will not be wasted If it leads us To come before the Lord With broken and contrite And humble hearts.

Because that's more important Than any of those Outward forms of worship That we're missing Or wanting Or longing for. If God uses this season To break our hearts Before him To bring us To turn to him With all of our hearts It will not be wasted.

[32 : 50] That's the heart Of true worship. It's not a big meal It's not a big choir It's not a big band On stage It's not a big building With a certain number Of people It's broken And repentant hearts Turning to the God Who has rescued And forgiven us And who keeps on Renewing us Day by day.

And there's nothing That's stopping God From doing that right now. But having said that Verse 18 and 19 Remind us That we can also pray That God in his mercy Brings this uncomfortable And disruptive season To a speedy end And that God's church Here in New Haven And all around the world Can once again Gather without disruption And celebrate Without restriction.

Right? That's a picture Of verse 18 and 19 His large gatherings Lavish celebrations Verse 17 reminds us God wants our hearts More than anything else And sometimes God will take away Other things Just like he did During the Babylonian exile To get our attention To call us to repentance To call us To the simplicity Of coming before him With a broken And contrite heart But if our hearts Are in the right place God delights In large gatherings In lavish celebrations And we can And even as we seek To make the most Of a challenging season For however long It may endure

We can look forward To those things Once again When the proper time comes We can look forward To celebrating And rejoicing And all the fanfare Of a great big worship service That is a picture Of heaven to come So brothers and sisters This psalm invites us Individually And communally To walk in the way Of repentance Pleading for God's grace Longing for his renewal And praising His glorious name Let's pray Father thank you For this psalm This word to us We pray that it would Draw our hearts And even throughout this week Continue to draw our hearts Into the way of repentance Lord that we would plead For your grace And mercy And face our guilt For what it is And that we would Know your forgiveness Through the cross Of Jesus Christ We thank you That through him He is the atoning Sacrifice for our sins He is the one Who by his spirit Renews us day by day And Lord Would you renew us Not only individually But also communally Lord may we experience That restoring power And that That change Those The joy in praising you For how you work In each one of us And among us We pray this in Jesus name Amen