Psalm 51 – Give Me a Clean Heart
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[Psa 51:1-19 NASB95] – 1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit. 13 [Then] I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; [Then] my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. 18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

- Have you ever apologized and still kept defending yourself? “I’m sorry, but you have to understand…” We can spend so much time explaining how we got there that we never actually say what we did.
- Psalm 51 begins where the explanations end. The heading takes us back to 2 Samuel 11–12. David took Bathsheba and arranged for Uriah to die. Then Nathan confronted him. David finally said, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13). Psalm 51 lets us hear what that confession sounds like when David brings it before God.
- This week many of us will thank God for what He’s given us. David gives us another reason to be grateful. God is merciful enough to hear us when we finally tell Him the truth.

What does real repentance look like when we’ve sinned and need God to restore us?

David shows us how to come clean, ask God to wash us, pray for a new heart, and open our mouths again.

I. **Come clean before God | [Psa 51:1-6 NASB95] – 1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.**
   a. David opens with an appeal to God’s lovingkindness and compassion. That’s where he gets the courage to speak plainly about his sin. In verse 4, “Against You, You only, I

have sinned" brings the ultimate offense into view. David had wronged real people, including Bathsheba and Uriah. In doing so, he had defied God Himself. Verse 6 takes the confession deeper. God desires truth in the innermost being.

b. God's multitude of mercy outnumbers our multitude of sins. "If our sins be in number as the hairs of our head, God's mercies are as the stars of heaven." (Symson, cited in Spurgeon)
c. Proverbs 28:13 connects receiving compassion with both confessing and forsaking sin. [Pro 28:13 NASB95] – 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes [them] will find compassion.
d. "The author is fully aware of his condition before God. He confesses 'I know' with an emphasis on 'I.' He knows himself intimately and sees how rebellious he has been." (VanGemeren)
e. Application: Pray a sentence that begins, "God, I sinned when I…" Finish it without blaming someone else. If you've harmed someone, take responsibility and make whatever repair you can. Respect their boundaries as you do.
f. Mercy gives you the courage to tell the whole truth.

II. Ask God to wash you | [Psa 51:7-9 NASB95] – 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. 9 Hide Your face from my sins And blot out all my iniquities.

a. David asks God to purge him with hyssop, wash him, and blot out his iniquities. Hyssop recalls Israel's purification rites. David wants God Himself to remove the defilement of sin. When he asks to hear joy and gladness again, he pictures even his crushed bones rejoicing. He longs for the relief that comes when God cleanses him.
b. "David didn't think for a moment that he could cleanse himself. He needed God to cleanse him, and to do it through the blood of the perfect sacrifice anticipated by animal sacrifices." (Guzik)
c. Purge: "It is based on the word for sin (chattath) and literally means 'de-sin' me. David wanted to have his sin completely purged away." (Boice)
d. 1 John 1:7–9 grounds our confidence in the blood of Jesus and God's faithfulness to forgive and cleanse those who confess. [1Jo 1:7-9 NASB95] – 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
e. Application: If you've confessed your sin and still feel its weight, pray through 1 John 1:9 this week. Let God's promise answer your shame. Follow through on any steps of repair you owe, even as you receive His forgiveness.
f. The sin you're afraid to name is the very sin Jesus can cleanse.

III. Ask for a new heart | [Psa 51:10-12 NASB95] – 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.

a. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." David asks for a work only God can do. A steadfast spirit will help him stand where he fell. A willing spirit will help him obey where he resisted. His plea about the Holy Spirit comes from Israel's anointed king. David had seen the Spirit depart from Saul (1 Samuel 16:13–14). The pastoral invitation here is to humble ourselves and ask the Holy Spirit to renew our desire and strengthen our obedience.

b. “The word that begins this section is the Hebrew verb bara, which is used in Genesis 1 for the creation of the heavens and the earth by God. Strictly used, this word describes what only God can do: create ex nihilo, out of nothing.” (Boice)
c. “The likely background to this fear of being a castaway was the example of Saul, from whom the Spirit of the Lord had departed (1 Samuel 16:14).” (Kidner)
d. Ezekiel 36:26–27 joins the promise of a new heart with the gift of God’s Spirit, who enables His people to walk in His ways. [Eze 36:26-27 NASB95] – 26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.
e. Application: Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where the pattern starts. Then take one concrete step this week. Cut off access to the temptation, bring the struggle into the light with a trusted believer, or change the routine that keeps leading you back to it.
f. Ask God to change what you want and strengthen what you choose.

IV. Open your mouth again | [Psa 51:13-19 NASB95] – 13 [Then] I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; [Then] my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. 18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

a. David looks ahead to teaching others God’s ways and singing of His righteousness. Even then, he prays, “O Lord, open my lips” (v. 15). God’s mercy is both the reason he sings and the reason he has something to say. Verses 16–19 hold brokenness and worship together. God receives the contrite heart, and the psalm closes with a prayer for Zion and a vision of worship offered rightly.
b. Luke 22:31–32 shows Jesus anticipating Peter’s return after his failure and calling him to strengthen his brothers. [Luk 22:31-32 NASB95] – 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded [permission] to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."
c. Application: Give God thanks for a specific mercy as you worship today. As you walk out repentance, use what you’ve learned about God’s mercy to encourage someone else to return to Him.
d. When God gives you back your song, sing about His mercy.

- **When we bring our sin into the light, God’s mercy can wash us clean, renew our hearts, and give us back our song.**
- Look at what God does in this prayer. David comes in with sins he can finally name, asks for a heart only God can create, and ends up praying for the whole city. Mercy has widened his prayers. The man who needed God to open his lips now wants other people to find their way back to God.
- If the Holy Spirit is putting His finger on something this morning, you can respond right where you are. You can tell God the truth. You can ask Jesus to cleanse you. And you can ask the Holy Spirit to give you a willing heart for the next step of obedience.