

## A Song for Every Season (Part 10 of 10)

Have Mercy on Me, O God!

Psalm 51

Mark Vroegop

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*1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy 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, 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. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

*7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that 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 right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

*13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. 15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

*18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem; 19 then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Today we come to the end of our journey through ten different Psalms that have shown us a song for every season. It has been so helpful to see the way that the Bible echoes what is going on inside of our hearts, and how it has been even more helpful in directing our thinking in the varied seasons of life that we experience.

Over this summer, we've learned the following:

- That there are two ways in life – Psalm 1
- To marvel at the mind-blowing mercy and majesty of God – Psalm 8

- That praise for the past leads to trust in the crucible – Psalm 9
- To taste and see the Lord’s goodness - Psalm 34
- That God calls us to trust and obey – Psalm 78
- That Jesus is a sufficient Savior – Psalm 23
- To wrestle with divine silence – Psalm 83
- To lament through untamable grief – Psalm 12
- To worship while in the tension between pain and providence – Psalm 13

It has been quite a journey – one that I have found personally helpful - and one that reminded me why I love the Psalms so much. I hope that this series has really helped you to see that 1) God really cares for you and 2) His word is very relevant to where we live. The Psalms are full of God’s mercy in every season of life.

### **A Song for David’s Darkest Day**

I left today’s text – Psalm 51 – for the final sermon because it is one of the most important Psalms. It is a heart-felt cry for mercy during what surely is the darkest moment in David’s life. Its theme is as common as the other subjects that we’ve addressed so far. Psalm 51 is a Psalm for when you blow it, fail, and have sinned.

In order to understand the message of the Psalm, you need to know what prompted its writing. Just before verse one, in the description of the Psalm, we read – *“A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”* That is a very short summary of a disturbing story recorded for us in 2 Samuel 11-12. Let me give you an overview.

In the middle of David’s life and reign, he had become successful. Jerusalem was well-fortified, the army was well-trained, more battles were being won than lost, and the nation was, for the most part, at peace. In other words, after a long journey, David reached the top of his game. But it was from this summit of success that David – like so many – fell.

2 Samuel 11 tells us that for some reason David stayed behind in Jerusalem as his troops went off to war. Some suggest that he had begun to develop an entitlement mentality. Others think that he has become a bit apathetic. Maybe David began to reflect a statement that a friend of mine used to say: “It is hard to remain common when you walk with kings.”

As David remained in Jerusalem, he walked out on the terrace of his palace (which was the highest building in the city), and he happen to observe a woman bathing (11:2). Rather than turning away from this accidental encounter, David allowed his lustful curiosity linger and he asked his servants who the woman was. Their answer must have been a subtle warning: “She is the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” Despite what he knew was the right thing to do, David requested her presence at the palace, and they committed adultery. David thought he’d gotten away with it.

Sometime later, Bathsheba sent word to David that she was pregnant with his child. And now David had a huge problem that required a cover-up. Therefore, he requested that Uriah,

Bathsheba's husband, be given a leave of absence from the battle and return home to Jerusalem. David hoped that Uriah will go home sleep with his wife and think that this child was actually his. However, much to David's dismay, Uriah refused to go home. He slept instead with the servants. And even after David got him drunk at a party, he still refused to go to home. (Don't miss the fact that a drunk Uriah has more character than a sober David!). Since "Plan A" had failed, David resorted to "Plan B" which was to have Uriah killed and then to quickly marry Bathsheba. The plan worked perfectly. Uriah died in a fierce battle after being set-up by his fellow soldiers. After Bathsheba mourned her husband, David took her as his wife. And David thought that he had gotten away with it.

But God saw the whole thing, and he sent Nathan the prophet to confront the King. Now Nathan had to be delicate and yet direct so he confronted David by means of a story about an injustice done to a poor man by a rich man. The rich man, even though he had many blessings, took away the poor man's only lamb to feed it a friend who had come for a visit. David was outraged, and he swore to Nathan that the man who did this must die. And then in a moment that I hope to be able to see some day on the instant replay in heaven, Nathan said "You are the man!" David had surely **not** gotten away with it.

David was broken over his sin. He acknowledged it to Nathan (12:13), and he accepted the consequences of his actions (see 2 Sam. 12:15-23).

This is the context of Psalm 51. David is guilty of pride, lust, adultery, deceit, and murder. The crimes and the cover-up are despicable, and the consequences were severe. In this dark hour of David's life, he pours his heart out to God, and what we have in Psalm 51 is a very helpful description of what is happening in his heart.

### **What Repentance Looks Like**

This Psalm gives us one of the best descriptions of what true sorrow over sin looks like, and it helps us by showing the breadth of the effect of real repentance. There is hope here that we all need because we are all sinners. Every one of us grievously violate God's law and his heart. This Psalm is not just for major blow-outs like David's; it is a model for repentance over any sin issue.

There are four elements or steps that we can observe in this Psalm: brokenness, confession, renewal and restoration.

#### **Brokenness: Seeing Your Sin for What it Really is (vv 1-2)**

The tone of the entire Psalm is reflected in the very first thing for which he asks: **mercy**. The word means to bend or stoop to an inferior, and it implies that the one who is requesting mercy doesn't deserve it. In other words, you don't ask for mercy from someone who is subservient to you. "Mercy" is a request from a person who knows that they do not deserve what they are asking for. David is requesting that God stoop or bend to him. He has come to an end of himself – his sin has cost him dearly – and what he needs now, more than anything, is help. He needs mercy.

Notice that his appeal for mercy is based upon God's **steadfast love** and his **abundant mercy**. This is God's covenant (hesed) love, a word that is used to describe God's continual faithfulness in spite of the faithlessness of his people. It is used over 240 times in the Old Testament, and it is a very popular term in the Psalms.<sup>1</sup> Hesed is God's faithfulness, his graciousness, his compassion, his long-suffering, his heart or his love for his people. Hesed is the basis of God's relationship with his people. He loves his people before and despite their love for him. David appeals for mercy, not based upon his own worth, but solely upon the steadfast love and faithfulness of God. Sin has destroyed so many things, and David returns to the basics. He needs mercy according to the love of God. His only hope is for God to be merciful despite what he deserves.

David's brokenness causes him to see the greatness of his need. He needs forgiveness, and he needs it in huge doses. Therefore, he uses three words for what he needs God to do: "**blot out**" – the wiping away of dirt or filth, "**wash me thoroughly**" – a deep and total cleaning, and "**cleanse**" – a washing for the purpose of spiritual cleanliness. He also uses three different words to describe his sin: transgressions, iniquity, and sin. The point here is that he sees the scope and the depth of his sin. He sees the enormity of his need. He is broken.

I cannot over-emphasize to you how critical this first aspect is. Without brokenness, there is no real repentance. Brokenness means that you see things clearly again and you are appalled at what you see. Sin has a way a deluding, deceiving us (Hebrews 3:13), and deadening. It causes you to think that you have every right to do the things that you are doing even though you are destroying your life and the people closest to you. Sin tells you that "you deserve this", "you've earned this", "you need this", and "you can't live without this." And it causes you to do things that a reasonable, normal, sensible person would never do.

It is a great mercy when God shocks us out of our self-deception. And the effect is brokenness – a spiritual condition where you see God, yourself, your sin, your consequences, and your real need crystal clear. In brokenness the fog of your self-deception lifts and you are so horrified with what you see that you cry out, "Have mercy on me, O God!" You see your sin for what it really is.

### **Confession: Acknowledging the Depth of Your Sin (vv 3-6)**

The second thing that we see in this great Psalm is the clarity with which David speaks about his sin. It is not just that he sees his sin for what is – his eyes have been opened; now he speaks about his sin with directness and candor.

Notice how David expresses his sorrow in verses 3-6:

- v 3 – He "knows" his transgressions. The word implies intimate knowledge. He gets it; he feels it. He admits and agrees with God.
- v 3 – His sin is "ever before" him. He sees the depth of what he has done.

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<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine, "checed" - Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

- v 4 – He sees his sin in light of who God is – “against you...have I sinned.” David surely knows that he has sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah and many others. But in true brokenness and confession, a person sees God as the ultimate offended party.
- v 5 – David knows that his sin is not just what he has done, the problem is who he is. Everything he did was a reflection of a real part of his soul, a part that he longed to keep hidden but now has been exposed.
- v 6 – He sees how far he is from what God desires. He knows that God longs for truth in the inwards parts, and he longs for God to teach him what that looks like again

The word “confess” in the New Testament is the Greek word *homologeō* (see John 1:20, 1 John 1:9) which comes from two words: *homo* - same and *logeō* – word. To confess means to say the same thing that God would say about your sin. The effect is that you’ve come to agree with God about your sin. You see it for what it really is. No excuses. No justifications. No rationalizations.

The meaning is more than just naming your sin (e.g., “I committed adultery”); it means that you see your sin for what it really is. True confession means that a person is overwhelmed with the depth of their sin, especially as it relates to their relationship with God. In confession, sin is recognized more than a mistake; it is treason against a holy God.

### **Renewal: Longing for What Only God Can Do (vv 7-12)**

When sin is seen for what it really is and when its depth is fully acknowledged, then and **only then** can change begin to take place. It is important to note that God loves us with an unconditional love, but his renewal is conditional upon brokenness and confession. 1 John 1:9 says, “**If** we confess our sins he faithful and just to forgive us.”

Renewal cannot happen when we are still trying to do things on our own. Hope comes when a person sees that their self-destruction has been self-inflicted, and that they need help outside of themselves.

David lists a series of spiritual things that he needs to happen, and all of them must be done by God. He can only ask, hope, and trust:

- v 7 – He longs for cleansing from his sin. Purging with hyssop is what was done to some who had contact with a dead body so that they could be clean again (Num 19:16-19), and the ceremony was completed with the statement “you are clean.”
- v 8 – He longs for joy to return. There appears to be two meanings here: 1) His sin has cut him off from the things that have brought joy and gladness. He sin has exiled him from the community, perhaps even his family. He aches for the joy of life before he sinned. 2) He longs for the internal joy of a guilt free life to return – “let the bones you have broken...”
- v 9 – He longs for God to permanently wipe away his sin. He wants a restoration of his spiritual relationship with the Lord.
- v 10 – He needs inward change. This is problem that we cannot fix, and it is the key to our spiritual future. David asks for God to “create” a clean heart. He is asking here for

something that he doesn't have. He pleads for a right spirit – a new motivation in his life. David knows that we need change from the inside out and that only God can do it.

- v 11 – He asks for God's preserving help. David has seen what happens when someone crosses the line and God lets them go their own way. That happened with Saul, and he is terrified (rightly so) of that happening to him. So he pleads with God for no hardening of his soul.
- v 12 – He needs new desires that fit with salvation. David wants more than happiness here. He's asking for a new way of looking at life – living through the lens of God's grace. He's asking for God to make him a willing participant. He's asking for God to transform him from a rebellious traitor to an enthusiastic follower.

Over the years I have counseled many people who were really sorry for what they've done, really regretted the consequences, and they said that they wanted to change. Unfortunately, not everyone did. But the people who did really change were marked by renewal. It wasn't just that one part of them changed; everything did. And this was because there was a new person inside the same body. And the person sees everything different – things like clothes hangers.

I once had a counselee who had broken his marriage vows multiple times. He had said he was sorry, tried to change, but it never lasted. But finally he really broke, and do you know how we knew? He began seeing his self-centeredness in every area of his life. His wife called me and told me, "It's unbelievable! My husband was looking in our closet, and he realized that he has taken all the nice hangers. He wrote me a note and asked my forgiveness for being selfish with the coat hangers." She laughed and cried at the same time. Renewal does that. It changes everything.

Renewal means that God takes a person and makes them new. This is what happens in conversion, and it's why Jesus described it in John 3 to a man named Nicodemus as being "born again." And that is the first step. You see, it may be that your sin and its consequences are only symptoms of a much bigger problem. The issue may not just be one particular sin issue; it may be the total trajectory of your life. It may be that today for the first time you really see yourself for who you are, and it may be that you sense an enormous level of conviction – not just over your sin but over who you are. If you see that clearly, please know that it is God! He's opening your eyes, he's wooing your heart. It may be that the reason you are here is so that you can start on a new path – not just turning from one sin but from the total path of your life.

Receiving Jesus means that you run to him to do what only he can do: renew you from the inside out.

### **Restoration: When God Gives You a New Life(vv 13-19)**

The final element is restoration where God remakes and reforms you into something completely new. The sin and the shame of the past are gone, and God gives you a new life. There is nothing greater than this reality.

However, let me give a word of caution here. I have seen way too many people want to move too quickly into restoration. I've seen people repent only to try and become a counselor to others with the same problem. And I have found that sometimes the same pride that fueled the sin can fuel your desire to help others. So go slow. Restoration takes time.

Notice the restoration for which David longs:

- v 13 – He yearns for the day when his life will be a means of advancing God's kingdom not detracting from it.
- v 14 – He desires to be free from the shame of what he has done.
- v 15 – He longs for the ability to worship freely again.
- v 16-17 – He loves the thought of being able to come into God's house with a truly pleasing sacrifice – a broken and contrite heart. No doubt he probably is thinking about the number of times that he came to worship as a fraud.

The Psalm ends with two additional verses that were likely added later as this Psalm came to be used in a broader context for the entire community of believers. It is likely that large groups of people used this Psalm as their model for how to respond to God when the entire assembly had sinned against God. Therefore, the restoration that is in view at the end is summary of what happens when a group of people who have seen their sin and repented before God.

Brokenness, confession, renewal and restoration – these are the elements of what true repentance is all about. This is the miracle that God is able to do. He is able to wake you up to the reality of your sin. He is able to show you what your sin is really like. He has the power to change you from the inside out, and he can restore what has been destroyed by the ravaging effects of sin.

### **How Long Since You've Sung This Song?**

My final question on this final sermon on the Psalms is this: How long has it been since you've sung the song of repentance? How long has it been since you've really seen the treason of the things that you do? Is God putting something on your heart today that needs to be confessed? Is he breaking you over a part of your life that is hidden or something that you think you are getting away with?

How long has it been since you've acknowledged your desperate need of God? How long has it been since you've marveled at the forgiveness available to you in Jesus?

We are going to end this service and this series by singing today. And as we sing about the precious forgiveness that we have in Jesus, I'd like to extend an invitation to you. You may be here and the best thing in the world for you to do – a bit of a risky step – would be to publicly identify your need for God's mercy. A broken person doesn't care that others know that he or she has a need. Therefore, while we sing I'm inviting you to come and kneel up front as way of saying to God, "Have mercy on me, O God."

You might be coming because you've got something huge going on. You might come because you want to go deeper in your repentance. You might come as a husband and wife, as a family, with a friend. The point is for you to join David in this longing for a new heart.

Regardless of the circumstances or the situation, my prayer is that the front of the sanctuary will be filled with people who share a common cry: "God, have mercy on me!"

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