

Prayers of Repentance and Confession

Mia ended the call on her cell with an eye roll. Her friend Dionne was in a tired and irritable mood, and the mood had come through loud and clear.

Dionne had invited Mia to a women's conference and "tea" luncheon that was the next day. Women were encouraged to wear their best hat, and Mia didn't own one. She didn't think she looked good in hats, but she had spent an afternoon shopping for one anyway. She found a black fascinator hat with flowers and feathers on top and mesh around the front and thought it made her look pretty good.

While Mia used her GPS, the church's street name was throwing her off, so she had called Dionne to ask about it. What she got was the attitude of, "I don't feel like talking to you right now, because I'm tired." Dionne had just arrived home from work and said it had been a grueling work week. Still, she had been rude, and Mia was using it for ammunition not to go to the conference.

However, she listened to a broadcast sermon later that evening that changed her mind. Mia realized that she was being moody and needed to support her friend.

During her morning devotion time, Mia repented. In her prayer, she asked God to give her a right spirit, heart, and attitude.

Four hours later, she was in her SUV with her hat on and GPS set to the church's address.

- 1.** *Why do we need God's cleansing?*
- 2.** *What does it mean to hate our own sin?*
- 3.** *Why can we not repent for anyone else?*

David Pleads for Forgiveness

Psalm 51:1–4 KJV

1 Have mercy upon me,
O God, according to thy
lovingkindness: according
unto the multitude of thy
tender mercies blot out my
transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from
mine iniquity, and cleanse
me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my
transgressions: and my sin is
ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only,
have I sinned, and done this
evil in thy sight: that thou
mightest be justified when
thou speakest, and be clear
when thou judgest.

Psalm 51:1–4 NIV

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing
love;
according to your great
compassion

blot out my transgressions.

²Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before
me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I
sinned
and done what is evil in your
sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you
judge.

The superscription of this psalm identifies it as being written after David's adultery with Bathsheba and his sending her husband, Uriah, to certain death. When confronted by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12:1–12), David saw that he had offended God with his many sins.

From the beginning of this psalm, David was a broken man. He opened his confession to God bluntly, without any attempt to justify himself. Instead, he acknowledged his dire need for God's mercy and forgiveness. He would not be restored because of anything he had done to "make up" for his sin, but because of God's character. He threw himself on God's mercy, hoping that he would be restored "according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion" (v. 1). Only God was capable and willing to "blot out [David's] transgressions" and forgive him fully.

David followed his confession with a direct request:

“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (v. 2). Again, David understood that only God could completely restore him, cleanse him, and remove his sin entirely. He acknowledged and grieved over his sin, and over its effects upon him personally: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (v. 3). In addition to fully recognizing his great offense before God, David’s sin and guilt had become an unbearable weight as well. David had been at least somewhat aware of the extent of his sin and had tried to push it down and ignore it, yet it had “always [been] before [him].” Now, after Nathan’s confrontation, there was nowhere left to hide.

Thus, David now expressed the full extent of his affront to God: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (v. 4). Now obviously, David had also sinned against Uriah—Bathsheba’s husband—by conspiring to kill him (2 Sam. 11:15). But ultimately, David’s offense was first and foremost against the God who had given life to both him and to Uriah. God had seen it all and had now called David to account. Therefore, David had no defense; he would accept whatever God decided to do with him:

“You are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (v. 4).

4. *What was David’s state of mind as he wrote Psalm 51?*

5. *What did David ask of God in verse 2? Why?*

6. *Against whom did David sin? How did this affect his plea before God?*

The Joy of Salvation

Psalm 51:10–12, 15–17 KJV
 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10–12, 15–17 NIV
¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation give and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹⁵Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

In verse 10, David's focus shifted from repentance and forgiveness to restoration—of both his heart and his standing before God. Only God could forgive David's sin and guilt, and David had fully acknowledged this truth. Now, he also acknowledged that only God could "renew" him—give him a brand-new heart and a brand-new spirit (Ezek. 36:26). He pleaded, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10). Only then would he be able to again live in a way that pleased God, and be able to keep steadfastly living it. And again, David acknowledged that the decision to grant this new heart and spirit was all up to God: "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (v. 11).

Nonetheless, David banked on God's mercy. He expressed the hope of his heart and how he would respond to that mercy: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me"

(v. 12). David trusted that God, in His goodness, would not only restore him but sustain him, keep him from falling back into sin, and even once again use him to “teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you” (v. 13). He awaited the day when his confidence in God would be completed in him; on that day, God would also “Open my lips . . . [that] my mouth will declare your praise” (v. 15). Freedom from sin would also give David the freedom to once more worship God without restraint as he had done in the past.

Again, David acknowledged that there was no act of penitence or sacrifice that would bring about God’s forgiveness: “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings” (v. 16). Verses 16 and 17 may sound as though David had rejected the sacrificial system. But that cannot be, since God had ordained that form of worship. Instead, David expressed his understanding that sacrifices are useless—and even offensive to God—if unaccompanied by repentance.

There was one thing, however, that he could offer to God: “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit.” He placed his confidence that this sacrifice would be enough, and that God would honor it: “a broken and contrite heart, you, God, will not despise” (v. 17). A broken heart was an open heart—and thus one God could use.

While David suffered many consequences for his sins with Bathsheba, God still used him as king and allowed David’s second child with Bathsheba, Solomon, to build the greatest temple and kingdom ancient Israel would ever see.

7. *How did the focus of David’s prayer shift in verse 10?*

8. *What did David hope God would give him? How did David say he would respond?*

9. *What sacrifice did David believe God would accept?*

A Clean Heart

This week's Scripture is not only about David and his sin, or us and our temptations, choices, and actions. The real hero in this story is God. Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, the prophet Ezekiel recorded God's encouragement for His people: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek. 36:25-27).

In Psalm 51, David described how he experienced each part of God's interactive promise. He asked God to wash him and cleanse him from his sin (v. 2). In faith, David asked God for a clean heart and a renewed spirit (v. 10). He gave God his contrite and broken heart and spirit (v. 17) in exchange for restored joy in and praise for God's salvation (vv. 12, 15). David knew his only hope of living a life that pleased God was to receive cleansing forgiveness and a new heart to follow God and walk in His ways.

We can take the same steps David did to experience forgiveness and God's mercy and faithfulness to sustain us in our willingness to walk in God's presence. The book of Hebrews quotes God's promise in Jeremiah 31:34, "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more," then adds, "And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary" (Heb. 10:17-18).

10. *What are some "ordinary" sins that could be just as dangerous?*

11. *How does our sin affect us?*

12. *Why is it important to consider the consequences of our choices and actions?*

13. *What does God require of us to receive forgiveness and cleansing that heals our heart and spirit?*

Ask God for a Clean Heart

David's powerful prayer guides us through acknowledging and facing our sin and need for God's mercy and forgiveness. His words help us assume a posture of dependence, hope, and praise for God's faithfulness and lovingkindness as we bring our own sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart.

► *Write a prayer of commitment or recommitment or personal journal response as God's Spirit leads you to turn away from sin and toward Him for cleansing and renewal. Think about these questions as you write, "What does it mean to come before God with a sacrifice of a broken spirit? In what areas has God shown you the need for a broken and repentant heart? How does a heartfelt prayer of repentance lead to joy?"*

KEY VERSE

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10 KJV

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. —Psalm 51:10 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of October 7 through October 13

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 13:10–17—Set Free from Bondage.
- Tue.** Daniel 3:8–18—Our God Is Able to Deliver.
- Wed.** Daniel 3:19–27—Our God Is Unstoppable.
- Thu.** Matthew 8:5–17—A Cry for Help in Distress.
- Fri.** Mark 10:46–52—Have Mercy on Me!
- Sat.** Psalm 107:23–32—God Delivers Us from Our Distress.
- Sun.** Psalm 22:1–11, 19–22—Deliver My Soul, O God.