

Is It Possible To Be Forgiven?

Introduction: 1) The wrong person + the wrong place + the wrong time = the wrong thing happening. 2) No one understood this truth better than King David, a man “after God’s own heart” (1 Sam.13:14). 1) He committed adultery with Bathsheba, 2) murdered her husband Uriah and 3) lied to his people about the whole shameful affair. (cf. 2 Samuel 11). It appears David hid his sin for almost a year. However, God sent His prophet Nathan to confront David about this “Jerusalem Cover-up.” And in 2 Sam. 12:7 some of the most familiar words in the Bible fly from the prophet’s mouth at David, “You are the man.” Though undeserved, David found loving-kindness and forgiveness, and out of deep gratitude, he penned the greatest song of confession ever written: Psalm 51. In 6 decisive movements Psalm 51 provides the path to forgiveness, cleansing and restoration.

I. **Ask God to cleanse you.** **51:1-2**

David will utilize a personal pronoun some 34 times, while also referencing God in various ways some 30 times.

1) **Request His tender mercies.** **51:1**

- Have mercy – an imperative in the form of an urgent request. Be gracious, show favor, do not give me what I deserve.
- Loving-kindness (*hesed*) – deal with me according to your covenant faithfulness not mine, your loyal love not my disloyalty, your gracious goodness not my ugly badness.
- multitude of tender mercies – (NASV, “greatness of your compassion”)

2) **Receive His thorough forgiveness.** **51:1-2**

David’s 3-fold appeal to God’s gracious nature is now matched by a 3-fold description of sin and a 3-fold description of forgiveness.

- Transgressions – rebellious action that is intentional and willful. David in his sin willfully rebelled against the commandments of God, specifically and defiantly breaking 5 of them. (Ex. 20:13, Ex. 20:14, Ex. 20:15, Ex. 20:16, Ex. 20:17).
- Iniquity – to bend or twist, hence to pervert; or to go astray or depart from the right path.
- Sin – to miss the mark, the goal, the right way.

Now note the 3 words for forgiveness.

→ Blot out – remove or wipe clean my slate.

→ Wash me – sin is a stain that needs to be laundered.

→ Cleanse me – is a temple term for religious, ritual cleansing. Some see a connection with the cleansing of a leper.

II. Ask God to convict you. **51:3-6**

Verses 3-6 contain David's confession. Here he will make clear a crucial theological truth: we are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

1) We need conviction of sin. **51:3-5**

Note that David again utilizes the same words for sin we saw in vs. 1-2. To that trio he adds the word "evil" in v. 4.

v. 3 "I acknowledge (*NASV, NIV* "know") my transgressions" The I is emphatic.

Acknowledge is the Hebrew *yada* which can denote intimate, personal knowledge. David is saying I, myself deeply and intimately am constantly in full knowledge of my sin.

v. 4 "Against You, You only, have I sinned." Ultimately all sin is ultimately against God.

David readily acknowledges the rightness of God's judgment on his sin, whatever the verdict might be. In essence he says what you say about sin is true and how you judge sin is right.

v. 5 David now gets to the root, the source, of our sin problem. Bottom-line: I came into this world a sinner, with a nature and will bent toward sin. I did not come into this world positive or neutral in my nature. Adam's sin marked me, and I have lived with it all my life.

2) We need instruction in truth. **51:6**

David recognizes that what God desires is "truth in the inward parts", and that he would "know wisdom," be taught God's wisdom in the secret or hidden part of a man. God's plan and purpose for David from the womb is that he would embrace God's truth and knowledge.

III. Ask God to refresh you. **51:7-9**

Confident that God is a God of mercy, loving-kindness and tender mercies (v.1), he now pleads with the Lord for a complete and full forgiveness. His petition follows a 3-fold path.

1) **Let God wash you.** 51:7

- Interestingly the root of the word “purge” is the Hebrew word for sin. David ask the Lord to “un-sin” or “de-sin” me. Hyssop was a small leafy shrub that was used as a brush to sprinkle and splatter blood or water in rituals of purification in the temple. Lepers, in particular, would come before a priest and go through such a ceremony.
- He asks that God would “wash” him, and in doing so make him “whiter than snow.” This washing would result in a full and complete cleansing. Every spot and stain of sin would be washed away, resulting in a soul as white as snow.

2) **Let God gladden you.** 51:8

- With forgiveness comes gladness.
- David uses a powerful image to convey the joy of forgiveness. The bones God broke in conviction and discipline will now rejoice in their healing and restoration. Isaiah 53:4 reminds us that in His death, the Lord Jesus, “bore our sicknesses and carried our pains.”

3) **Let God clear you.** 51:9

David asks the God would hide His face from his sins (v. 2,4,5) and blot out (v.1) his iniquities. (v. 2, 5). David compares forgiveness to turning away and not seeing or noticing his sin. Perhaps Paul had this in mind when he wrote in Col. 2:14.

IV. **Ask God to restore you.** 51:10-12

David has confessed his sin. Now he wants to forsake his sin. He wants renewal and restoration.

1) **You need a clean heart.** 51:10

“Create” is the word “*bara*.” It denotes and describes something only God does. David asks from the Lord a new, clean heart, a “pure heart” (*NIV*). David also requests that “God renew a steadfast spirit” in him. Alan Ross says, David “wants renewed in him a steadfast sort of attitude... he wants to be reliable and steadfast in the choices that he makes.”

2) **You need the Holy Spirit.** 51:11

The positive requests of vss. 10 and 12 bracket the negative petition of v. 11.

However, in the 2nd line of the verse there is a statement that troubles us: “do not take your Holy Spirit away from me.” What are we to make of this troubling statement?

First, Old Testament believers like New Testament believers were regenerated and born again by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Jesus in John 14:16-17 helps us see a new work of the Spirit that began at Pentecost. Whereas He was with believers prior to Acts 2, now He “will be in you” and forever.

Third, aside from the saving activity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, and His ministry by which believers are sanctified and enabled to live holy lives, the Holy Spirit was poured out on select individuals to empower and enable them to perform important tasks in the covenant community of Israel.

For example:

- (1) Craftsmen who worked on the tabernacle/temple (Exod. 31:1-6)
- (2) Civil administrators (such as Moses and the 70 elders in Num. 11:16-17, 25-26)
- (3) Military commanders (such as Joshua; Num. 27:18)
- (4) Judges (appointed and empowered to rule over Israel as in Judges 3:10; 6:34)
- (5) Samson (Judges 14:5-6, 19; 15:14; 16:20)
- (6) Prophets (1 Chron. 12:18; Micah 3:8)
- (7) Kings over Israel (Saul in 1 Sam.10:1, 6, 10; 16:14; and David in 1 Sam. 16:12-13)

There was a ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, unrelated to personal salvation or character, designed solely to empower and enable and equip someone for a task to which God had appointed him. Such is what David has in mind in Psalm 51:11. His prayer is that God would not withdraw His enabling Spirit as He did with Saul in 2 Sam. 16:14.

3) You need the joy of your salvation. 51:12

- As those kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5), we cannot lose our salvation.

However, we can lose the joy of our salvation because of unconfessed sin in our lives. David had lost the joy of his salvation and desperately wanted it back.

This joy would be accompanied by a willing spirit sustained or upheld by God.

- A willing spirit to obey God is the avenue to the joy of one's salvation. Joy and willing obedience go together.

V. Ask God to break you. 51:13-17

Having experienced the forgiveness of God and the return of joy in his salvation, David looks forward to a renewed walk with God.

1) It prepares you to teach. 51:13

I will teach them Your word and the promise of Your forgiveness and the power of Your cleansing. David pledges to do the work of an evangelist, if you like, of a soul-winner. What he has experienced in grace he must share with others.

2) It prepares you to praise. 51:14-15

David was the murderer of Uriah, perhaps not directly but ultimately none the less. Only the God of salvation could acquit him of such a charge. Trusting once again in God's full forgiveness, David responds with praise.

- "My tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness."
- " My mouth shall show forth your praise."

Full forgiveness leads to public praise! Broken in spirit, a new song of praise is born in the soul.

3) It prepares you to worship. 51:16-17

God's gracious forgiveness has changed David's perspective on what real worship truly is. It is an issue of the heart pure and simple. In and of themselves alone, God does not desire mere sacrifice nor does He delight in burnt offerings alone. Verse 17 makes a startling declaration. There is a damaged and broken sacrifice God will accept and sinners may bring. It is "a broken and contrite heart." God broke David's bones in v. 8 that He might break his heart and spirit in v. 17.

VI. Ask God to bless you. 51:18-19

These final verses echo previous themes in the psalm, and the figurative language provides a fitting commentary to the connection that existed between Israel's King and his people.

1) Let the Lord build you. 51:18

David did not sin in a vacuum. He in essence asks the Lord to overcome what his sin had done not only to himself, but also his people. Lord please build up what I in my sin have torn down.

2) **Let the Lord guide you.** 51:19

What the Lord builds He accepts. What the Lord redeems He receives.

Restoring what sin had destroyed, what sin had ruined, God now welcomes:

- the sacrifices of the heart.
- the sacrifices of the hands.
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Conclusion:

“Just as I am and waiting not

To rid my soul of one dark blot.

To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,

O Lamb of God, I come! I Come!”