

BROKEN BONES

DEALING WITH REMORSE

A Commentary on Psalm 51

John H King

תִּשְׁמַעְנִי שִׂשׁוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה
תִּגְלַנָּה עֲצָמוֹת דָּפְיֹת:

ἀκουτιεῖς με ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ
εὐφροσύνην ἀγαλλιάσονται ὅσῃ
τεταπεινωμένα

auditum mihi facies gaudium et laetitiam ut exultent
ossa quae confregisti

Let me hear joy and gladness, That the bones
which you have broken may rejoice.

Psalm 51:8

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into
dancing: Psalm 30:11

BROKEN BONES: DEALING WITH REMORSE

John King

My rebellion ... haunts me day and night.

NLT Psalm 51:3

*Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord,
for my bones are in agony. Psalm 6:2*

Copyright © 2022 John King

ISBN: 978-1-71670-149-8

Second printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States of America

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

I have included in parenthesis references to quoted Scriptures instead of footnoting them for easy referral. Translations not specified are NKJV.

Dedicated to myself as a reminder that God's
forgiveness is real.

Preface

Over the years in pastoring I, like so many other clergy, have had opportunity to listen to the painful accounts of those who had strayed too close to temptation's precipice and careened into the valley of despair. Tortured by undying memories of what should never have been, discovering the hard way how much misery a conscience could inflict upon a soul gone astray, and self-deceived by an unproven resolve to never do it again, they search out a benevolent man or woman of God whose brutal honesty could nonetheless be administered with an emotional hug. Wondering now how to find their way back they come to us for the uncompromising message of God's forgiveness and the secret how to never walk that close to the cliff's edge again.

This is Psalm 51 and because the entire text is vital to share, we cannot pretend ignorance of any of it or rationalize that somehow this was David's thing but has nothing to do with us. We cannot pretend this Psalm is merely an academic exercise in forgiveness theology as if we can then close the book without the slightest sense of remorse over what we have done that we knew was not God pleasing. Maybe we while married didn't have an affair but the secret to spiritual recovery is the same. Maybe we are coming alive inside to the spiritual reality that is in Christ, a reality we never knew existed while we spend perhaps years of living a lax moral existence of which we now regret—as they say—bitterly.

The church has always thought to provide the creed that allows for actions which offended an ignored

conscience. Orthodoxy has their confessional—and I don't disparage this—and evangelicals preach a forensic righteousness wherein we are only declared righteous (imputed like Abraham's faith) long in advance of the work God must perform upon the soul that will make it real.

A Word About Conviction

A hurt conscience can be silenced only by the Spirit of God. He is, in the very act of bringing real sin to our attention, our God-sent comforter. {John 14: 16; 16:8 }. And comfort is what we seek. He will be our guide out of the valley of despair [John 16:13].

Conscience is not conviction. Conscience is what we make of our past even if our recollections are not reliable, skewed. Conviction is what the Spirit of God makes of our past and some actions, words, and thoughts need to be confessed for what they are ...sin. Godly sorrow, Paul identified it as, which leads to repentance [2 Corinthians 7:10] in turn rescues us from a life-time of self-inflicted pain and remorse. Psalm 51 tells the story.

Personal Note

It is difficult for me to use myself as an example because such talk might leave a disgusting impression of me which I cannot think will help favor my message in a good way and make it worth listening to. But suffice it to say, none of us have escaped the tempter's cunning—we included (something not needing said).

I remember, when a very attractive young lady, one of my students, signed up for all my classes and later took to wanting to eat lunch with me in the school cafeteria. At the

time, my wife and I were not talking to each other in ways we needed to talk to each other and this beautiful girl was a pleasant modicum of divergence which I let continue until I realized how dangerous it could be. There was no sinful act or even thoughts beyond enjoying the idea someone swooned at my every word while my beloved—yes, beloved—wife found me emotionally absent. Years later I wrote about this in an autobiographical work to our three sons, who initially feared to think where I was going with this story. But in my recollections it was a temptation. Perhaps, you would see it differently.

A Note About an Index

I want to pass on an index. I think this Psalm is not to be “picked over” like leftover turkey. It is the main meal and we must eat all on our plate.

A Note About Words

You will have to deal with the meanings of a few Hebrew words if you read on, but it is worth the education. It is probably because the Hebrew language was bequeathed the Church in this unrecognized “block” form (Aramaic lettering) that even seminarians and those training for the pastorate are glad when they can pass some elementary course in the language and move past it. (Not the best idea.) If you see reason to study this Psalm further, you can rely on web sites containing translations as well as a few very useful concordances to compare the use of words and let the Spirit alert your heart when you are “on to something.” As one brother writes me when introducing something he wants me to read: enjoy!

Broken Bones

Psalm 6:2 Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

Psalm 22:17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.

Psalm 31:10 My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

Psalm 38:3 Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin.

Psalm 42:10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Psalm 51:8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

2 Samuel 11-12

11 And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

2 And it came to pass in an evening tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

3 And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?

4 And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

5 And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

6 And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David.

14 And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

16 And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were.

17 And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

12 And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2 The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3 But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4 And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

6 And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

7 And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Part I - Justification..... | 1 |
| Verse One - The Director of Music..... | 7 |
| Verse Two - A Musical Refrain..... | 22 |
| Verse Three - Fuller's Soap..... | 35 |
| Verse Four - Painful Remorse..... | 47 |
| Verse Five - God Alone..... | 54 |
| Verse Six - Born in Sin..... | 60 |
| Verse Seven - Hyssop..... | 70 |
| Part II - Renewal..... | 75 |
| Verse Eight - Crushed Bones..... | 76 |
| Verse Nine - Hidden Sins..... | 83 |
| Verse Ten - A Fixed Heart..... | 86 |
| Verse Eleven - A Confirmation..... | 92 |
| Verse Twelve - Restoration..... | 97 |
| Part III - The Teacher..... | 100 |
| Verse Thirteen - Love Lifted Me..... | 102 |
| Verse Fourteen - Rescue Me from Me..... | 106 |
| Verse Fifteen - Boasting in The Lord..... | 108 |
| Verse Sixteen - Ritual or Righteousness..... | 111 |
| Verse Seventeen - The Brokenhearted..... | 116 |
| Verse Eighteen - Pray for Jerusalem..... | 121 |
| Verse Nineteen - Sacrifices..... | 124 |
| Healing Bones..... | 128 |

Part I - Justification

Justification

There are many portions of scripture that reveal a certain innate genius, a certain insightfulness, that might be hard to ascribe to anyone other than God. For one, a divine signature is revealed in Psalm 51 in David's seeking God's forgiveness. What looks today like good theology after scholars have poured over the text, studied the languages, and consulted scientific minds, is the astute wisdom of the ages, a divine wisdom, penned in remarkable verse by a man, who was learning as he prayed. David, unlike Judah in captivity, discovered God's mercy in prayer. *"We have refused to seek mercy from the Lord our God,"* Daniel wrote, *"by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth"* [Daniel 9:13].

The dynamic of David's experience must parallel ours. The young theologian argued, *"The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness"* [1 Samuel 26:23]. But this did not take into account the provision of God's forgiveness not so much as a "reward" as a gift.¹ At some point in his career David maintained, *"I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight"* [Psalm 18:23-24]. Well,

1. The Hebrew reads "God returns to each one according to their righteousness." Certainly Calvary challenges this Jewish theology.

Part I - Justification

times change and things happen. And Psalm 51 is now a part of God's Holy Word. Study it all, its theological content as well as its practical and inspiring cure for a hurting conscience, a tormenting guilt, an emotionally crippling shame, or the misery of living below who we really are in our hearts toward the God we do love.

David must have wanted God to do what he knew not because after Uriah's death his theology must have made less sense to him. And there was the pain of guilt and he was unlearned in what to do or what to say. God is the only One Who can do the impossible in getting the stain of blood off his hands and his mind. His heart was broken, contrite, which he would discover was a good thing but otherwise this experience was not the sweet and peace filled converse with his God he was used to. David must learn and God was in the mood to teach him because David's heart was worth it. God's Davids are pearls of great price worth God selling all to buy. "*When he found one of great value,*" Matthew recalled the parable, "*he went away and sold everything he had and bought it*" [Matthew 13:46].

Repentance

First things first. David must come to repentance over his affaire de cœur,² his candle lite evening with a forbidden smile, when he cuckolded a good man and then had him murdered. Now David is being summoned by Nathan, the prophet, into the presence of the God he has deeply grieved. It is the anxious apprehension of a child whose parents just found out they swung a baseball bat in the house and shattered a fish tank (true story), and now, dad has summoned them!

Even repentance is a strange idea because it is God's idea and understanding it means understanding the

2. a love affair

Part I - Justification

heart of God toward us.³ We think of penitence, but it is more. "... if ... you seek the Lord your God," Moses taught, "you will find him..." But there is more, another condition attached to it all that makes things murky at best: "if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul." [Deuteronomy 4:29] All my heart and soul? And how do I do this!?

Repentance in David's language is nothing more than *returning* to the God he left. Finding his way back, however, after he had become so terminally lost, will involve God. Like the good Shepherd He is, God must seek David out first. Now we understand Nathan's role in all of this. Our "Nathan" is the Holy Spirit [John 16:8]. This also explains David's misery. (Misery when sinning is a *good* thing—a "God" thing for believers!) Paul observed that Godly sorrow leads to repentance [2 Corinthians 7:10] which he concluded "is not to be regretted." The dictionary⁴ informs us, "...by litotes,"⁵ "salvation [because of repentance is] affording supreme joy" [Romans 11:29].⁶

David's salvation was God's faithful persistence to allow a pained conscience to be David's companion through days and nights (some think a year went by probably based in part upon the length of Bathsheba's gestation) until he came to the mourner's bench for mercy. We tend to seek God when we are directionless, staggering about, spiritually, because of guilt.

3. Christianity alone owns these words (repentance and forgiveness), which represent a biblical concept *not* honored in secular psychology nor in other religions. We should cherish our Christian heritage in repenting and forgiving any time it is required of us.

4. Joseph Thayer. *Greek-English Lexicon*. (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1996) page 32.

5. ironic understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary

6. For the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.

Part I - Justification

It was so essential to keep David from giving up on prayer. But *“We have not searched for Him [God].”* Vincent J. Donovan, missionary to the Masai of Central East Africa learned,⁷ *“He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God.”* Among the lessons found in David’s prayer of repentance is a new found appreciation for God’s mercy because David—all of us—must learn that God seeks us out before we can come to grips with the evil we perpetrate. The Shepherd goes after His sheep [Luke 15:4].⁸

The Patience of Job God.

The Lord’s work in us is in reality a process and the secret to overcoming temptation⁹ may take numerous prayer sessions for us to learn. This is not to suggest there might have been more Bathsheba’s in David’s life but it does recognize that within the heart of—yes, even—believers is the remnant of a human condition¹⁰ which we

7. Vincent J. Donovan. *Christianity Rediscovered* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2003), page 61ff.

8. We are told that a sheep can be a few yards or meters outside the fold on the wrong side of the fence and still without a shepherd be unable to find their way back. cp. Isaiah 53:6 clarifies that through Christ death, we are by Him brought back into the fold.

9. Theologically, Romans 8 records a 7 step process to living a victorious Christian life. But even here, I am still learning!

10. I tend to think of the “flesh” as the animalistic side of “fallen” human nature. Much of this is hormone driven but is crooked and perverse [Phil. 2:15] outside Christ. This is a part of our humanity that makes a great servant but a poor master. Philippians 4:5 “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand.”

Part I - Justification

call the “old man”¹¹ or the “carnal” nature¹² and which the tempter can appeal to.¹³

Sanctification or being holy as He is holy¹⁴ has been recognized in most Christian theologies as a process, because it is a life blamelessly lived (committing no sin) or living out (our behavior) what God has worked in at salvation.¹⁵ It is not likely that David came to full victory over sin in the time it took for us to read just 19 verses (at least that has not been my experience). These verses are a record of a greater process, of a man seeking God’s mercy—not for forgiveness only—but for restoration. David probably longed for the innocence of his youth when he composed hymns to sing and the sheep grazed peacefully nearby. But that youth was the very immaturity God must help him move past to form an undying, uncompromising, commitment to God’s will. What he sought to be in his youthful dreams, David now in manhood must seek to be, but this can only come about here experiencing these verses in Psalm 51.

David was a “*man after God’s own heart*” [Acts 13:22]. Yes! But until his relationship with God matured into an unfaltering, steady, commitment to the Lord His heart sought after, David would be back here again, seeking a peaceful audience with the God who—out of love—summoned him. Charles Spurgeon commented,

11. Colossians 3:9 “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;”

12. 1 Corinthians 3:1 “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ.”

13. James 1:14 “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

14. 1 Peter 1:15

15. Philippians 2:12-13 “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

Part I - Justification

“When the divine message had aroused his dormant conscience and made him see the greatness of his guilt, he wrote this Psalm.”¹⁶

16. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*, (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA::1984) vol I. page 933..

The Director of Music

Verse One

The Director of Music

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

The Blessing of Conviction

Charles Spurgeon called Psalm 51 “*well adapted for an assembly of the poor in spirit.*”¹ David might not have sensed it initially but Nathan’s intervention was a God-sent, a work of the guiding-convicting-teaching ministry of the Spirit [John 16:8].

Psalm 51 must be set to music and sung in the assembly of the saints as a thanksgiving hymn celebrating God’s grace and it is Christ’s followers who know this best. Psalm 51 is God from beginning to end bringing David to a self-awareness that denies excuses or blaming others for his own spiritual failings. Any time the Spirit convicts or the Father chastises, true believers know this is a blessing. We are His children and not “illegitimate.”²

Charles Spurgeon reminded us, “[David] *was a man of strong passions, a soldier, and an Oriental monarch having despotic power.*”³ A king of his time would have had no compunction had they saw Bathsheba in all her artistic beauty *in puris naturalibus*.

1. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 933..

2. Hebrews 12:8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

3. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 933..

The Director of Music

It was, perhaps, a year or so in coming before Nathan had to knock on the king's door but eventually David must get past all the rationalized self-justification and humbly recognize that his sin was not the privilege of kings. He needed to stop blaming his mother, too, but thank her for giving him life. Once David looked upon his birth as a miracle of creation [Psalm 22:9]⁴ and not, as now, of the result of an act of misguided pruriency on the part of his parents [Psalm 51:5].⁵ (Men have been blaming "the woman you gave me" [Genesis 3:12] from day one.) This, too, must stop!

All the while David's heart panted after God,⁶ a truth that was suppressed beneath, perhaps, months of complaining and projecting blame, trying in vain to wash the blood off a troubled conscience. Paradoxically, in David's mournful state, his heart still sought God. Our hearts will not rest until they once again know the mercy and peace of God!

Isaac Watts wrote:⁷

When I am banish'd from thy house
I mourn in secret, Lord:
"When shall I come and pay my vows,
And hear thy holy word?"

...

He shines and I am all delight,
He hides and all is pain;
When will he fix me in his sight,

4. But You *are* He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust *while* on My mother's breasts.

5. in sin my mother conceived me

6. Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God.

7. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. p 792 on Psalm 41:2.

The Director of Music

And ne'er depart again?

Psalm 51 is David's testimony of a journey in forgiveness and reconciliation with God—a lesson we, too, will learn, if not already. This is, therefore, our Psalm, my Psalm, a Psalm about a gracious God who will not allow His children to drift through life but a God who guides them past the rapids and the rocks and shoals into deeper waters of spiritual truth and a deepened relationship with Him.

I began to share in the preface about a lovely young lady back in my "teaching" days who was an enjoyable digression from the many arguments I and my dear bride (of only 4 years) were having. Those days were filled with anxiety and insecurity and very little intimacy—all of which suggested we were living in separate experiences and I was too young to see it. When probably many men would have considered this student I speak of as an "option," it never crossed my mind. I wanted to be reconciled to my bride ...and we are now 54 plus years along. Why share this tale? I credit God's grace with negotiating the turbulent waters of a young marriage for her and me. I don't give myself credit for being some spiritual giant; for, I wasn't— clearly. When it comes to temptation and on those sad occasions when it bubbles over into sin, the Spirit of God is there to step into action, to interfere if we don't want Him yet to intervene, to get involved to walk us through the valley of the shadow of death (for, that's what it is!) and restore our relations to Him, His church and—where necessary—those most important persons in our life whose love is a sine qua non.

On Temptations

Temptation represents the devil's craft, Satan's ability, by appealing to our own desires and passions to

The Director of Music

lure us into expressing our humanity in some way disapproved by God. The Lord's will in the matter should never be in doubt. Inviting Eve to consider forbidden fruit as a legitimate source of knowledge worked for Satan since Eve had already eyed the tree's beauty and appeal. But God said, "No!"

Was it possible that David had no knowledge of the tenth commandment not to covet another man's wife [Exodus 20:17]? The word "covet" speaks of making her the object of desire and it is not possible to misunderstand God's point. This is one of the Ten Commandments, the famous, Decalogue. What about Exodus 20:13, the sixth commandment, Don't kill anyone? We can attempt to excuse him, as already noted, (being the king) or try to understand "killing" as an honorable death in battle, but the commandment speaks of "murder" not being slain in battle,⁸ which is a different word for ending a life.

Temptations envision no future. They are impulses of heart throbbing passion that know only *now*, this moment. It comes as a fearless and free thought, a short detour off the path of regular life, we imagine that we will only recall—if at all—as a sweet digression. But we have been deceived; for, in time every temptation indulged costs, and the collector is the negative impact such profligacy has on our relationships.

Guilt has a half-life of one day. Over the years in counseling I have had persons wanting to see me because they had an affair or were unable to shake free from a temptation that repeatedly filled them with painful guilt. But a couple of days or a week or a month later they would be wanting my time again to deal with these same temptations, with these same feelings. We were back where we started. That's a symptom of yielding to

8. Hebrew is rich using 10 different terms for shedding blood.

The Director of Music

temptation. It is a momentary feeling of pleasure followed by guilt. The devil never tempts us with a look ahead. He has no future and wants us to have none either.

Sin has consequences, as King David learned, who wrote 7 penitential Psalms.⁹ 2 Samuel 12:13-14 records the immediate effect of his adultery in the death of his first son conceived that fateful night of sin and born to Bathsheba.

Remorse—though we may not know it—is an intimate friend who knows us all too well. But in our imagination it is a foe persecuting the memory with interpretations of a past we thought long ago suppressed, forgotten. Somehow remorse finds the past and resurrects it. Remorse finds us at a false rest, a false peace, to relive in our mind's eye what becomes a painful recollection. Remorse, is a friend,¹⁰ that encourages us to confront our sins and to bring us to a peace. It is misunderstood as a punishment the soul seems to exact upon the self, deserved and unrelenting until or unless we find a way to forgive and be forgiven.

I share the testimony of a young college student who worked at a lumberyard where he did not want to work. He set fire to the establishment (I never did understand his reasoning) but he used gasoline and when it ignited—boom!—it threw him onto the loading dock. He was a Christian—surprise!—and before he hit the ground God spoke to his heart and told him, "you're going to make this right!" Many years later under conviction he sought out the owner of the lumberyard to tell his story and beg forgiveness. The owner was an old man now and he spoke kindly to the younger man and forgave him outright. [True story.] I share this story because it exemplifies the power of

9. The penitential Psalms: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143

10. Proverbs 27:6 *Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.*

The Director of Music

conviction, of a hurting conscience. When we listened to it, it loosens the chains of self-deception and frees us. The burden of living a lie is lifted off our emotional shoulders.

David's Indiscretion

We all know now what David did. It has become common gossip, an inspired gossip, which David, himself, shared with the choir director for public notice. He might have wanted to hide such a past indiscretion (such a polite word for *sin* which David wisely never used). But part of David's healing—or a return to real peace—required his confession, and since he was the king, his offense was never to remain private. So let's set this testimony of God's mercy to verse and proclaim it in Temple worship!

This is not to say that David didn't want to keep his dalliance with Bathsheba secret. He did! Who wouldn't! But God through Nathan knew otherwise if David wanted to lighten such a heavy load of deception. Living a lie is never easy. Eventually, we expose the truth.

Shamed

Was David ashamed? There are different types of shame in Scripture. One type of shame is a *sense of honor* that hinders us from doing an unworthy act. Shame in this way is an *'innate moral repugnance to doing something unworthy.'*¹¹ This shame is probably the repulsion that keeps some from enjoying porn sites or engaging in loose and vulgar talk, or telling a dirty joke.

Another word is translated *modesty*.¹² *"I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency..."* Paul

11. Richard Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. Pg. 68. Trench adds, 'Αἰδώς is self-motivated and implies reverence for the good as good.'

12. αἰδοῦς

The Director of Music

admonishes.¹³ Decency is shamefacedness. All a woman need do is check herself in the mirror before walking out to meet her public and let her innate sense of modesty instruct her. Clearly these did not influence David at this time.

Shame is also, and primarily, the resulting feeling of being defamed by some action we tried to keep secret but which risks exposure to public scrutiny. Word gets out; there is no more prized form of gossip than calling all one's friends to pray for Brother. Smith and Sister Jones. Shame follows being found out. And David was!

David and Bathsheba committed to that dinner with forbidden passions excited or to that meeting incognito with a throbbing desire to do what they knew they shouldn't. There were those forbidden embraces that swooned away any consciousness of wrong and magnetic kisses from which they could not seem to pull free. .. until Nathan revealed all.

We do something for which we are ashamed. We didn't have what it took to say 'No' before getting engaged in acts that can destroy our reputation and damage our relationships, and the first two types of shame are friends that can remind us.¹⁴ But if the thought does not bring disgrace, God may use someone else to help bring us to a true repentance. Guilt is also present, but it is the thought of being discovered that shame provides that will make us call it off from happening again. ...and if we are discovered? The truth sets free...

Paul is passionate about renouncing "*secret and shameful ways*; ... *On the contrary*," he affirmed, "*by setting*

13. 1 Timothy 2:9

14. The word αἰσχύνη is shame "to which a reputation is attached. It is not self-motivating. cp ibid.

The Director of Music

*forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."*¹⁵

When the T.V. Preacher was caught in an affair and he wept before his television audience and his church congregation, his tears were probably genuine. He was found out and now the healing can begin. Shame lingers long enough to allow us to fight our addictions. We are more prone, then, to seek help from the temptation that has been doing us in.

Lastly, but almost as a footnote in our understanding of this all important feeling, there is even a biblical idea of "*learning through shame*"¹⁶, and it is this shame¹⁷ that Paul wished to arouse¹⁸ in God's people.

So why not let God help us with all of this? So, there is a Nathan, a Nathan whose advise is nothing new—we knew all along confession was and is good for the soul—but somehow hearing it from our Nathan gives us that emotional push to do the right thing. (Who knew that we would need each other in such a time!)

15. 2 Corinthians 4:2 NEW INT.

16. Job 20:3 I hear a rebuke that dishonors me, and my understanding inspires me to reply. NEW INT.

17. The word ἐντροπή "*hints at a change of conduct that results from wholesome shame.*" Richard Trench. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. Pg.69.

18. 1 Corinthians 6:5 I speak to your shame.... NEW INT.

2 Thessalonians 3:14 Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. NEW INT.

Titus 2:8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. NEW INT.

The Director of Music

Why a Psalm?

Assume we did not know the reason David wrote this song; what sin might we imagine David was writing about? This Psalm is not about adultery. Psalm 51 is about reconciliation with God. We know it is sin, any sin, that disrupts that closeness with our Lord and His mercy that restores that closeness. We also realize that His forgiveness and our repentance are at the center of David's prayer.

Uriah, Forgive Me!

Abimelech, the king of Gerar, was romantically attracted to Sarah, Abraham's wife and would have included her among his wives had God not stopped him. The Biblical record tells us, "... God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife" [Genesis 20:3]. Why did not God offer this same protection to David? With David, God required obedience. The Lord does offer grace to deal with temptation¹⁹ but our relationship with Him requires faithfulness on our part—something that should be obvious.

How rewarding it would be to correct the past. If God would resurrect Uriah or, what is easier to imagine, keep him safe and alive in war. Bathsheba does not have to conceive either, then, no one need know.

Maybe David's interest was not casual but intention to make her another of his wives. We'll never know but what we do know is that "*David had committed adultery with Bathsheba*" and this has become part of the official, scriptural, record which cannot be erased.

19. 1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,

The Director of Music

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful...²⁰

So he plotted the coverup. In it he wrote, "*Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die*" [2 Samuel 11:15]. Even if David wanted to seek Uriah's forgiveness, he couldn't. (Uriah is dead!) For a number of possible reasons seeking the forgiveness of someone we offended might be near impossible. If they are still alive, we might need a private eye to find them, having been separated by miles and years from the person we might have hurt. (What if the Christian I spoke of earlier, who set fire to a lumberyard, gave up the search for the owner of that yard, or what if the old man had moved away ...or died!)

Remorse has a Name: Nathan

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "*There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.*"²¹ (We began this work with the text from 2 Samuel 12:3-4.)

"But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

Bathsheba was poor Uriah's only lamb while David had a harem of wives, a sheep fold full of his own lambs.

20. 2 Samuel 11:2

21. 2 Samuel 12:1

The Director of Music

And David decided to prepare dinner (be intimate) with Uriah's, not with one of his own. (You get the analogy.)

We are more interested in David here than Nathan. Nathan's story of a man with a pet lamb reveals a divine genius. David sentences the offender to death—not knowing it was he! David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, *“As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die!”* [2 Samuel 12:5]. David just told God's prophet that, he, David, is worthy of death. As the king such a public pronouncement is irrevocable. But Nathan assures him, *“The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die”* [2 Samuel 12:13]

“You are the man!” Nathan blew the lid off! Conviction is always—as it must be—a punch in the gut. Nathan had something to say and David must sit there and listen! *“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul’”*²² [2 Samuel 12:7].

We need to learn to appreciate God's Nathans whom He sends: to remind us of unrepentant sin; to help us reconcile with God and with our past; to assist us in laying down the heavy burden we carry, the lie we are living, the turbulence within no one but God sees. It is time to speak *“peace be still”* to the storm. It is time to know we are forgiven.

The Inscription

There is a rich and subtle meaning in the introduction of this Psalm;²³ *“When Nathan, the prophet, went in unto David as David went in unto Bathsheba.”* There

22. 2 Samuel 12:7

23. In the Hebrew verse two; the first three verses in the Hebrew Bible are introductory. The text (or exposition) begins at verse four (which is verse one in the NIV. קָבוּא אֱלִיוֹ נָתַן הַנְּבִיא כְּאֲשֶׁר-נָפָא אֶל-בֵּית-שֶׁבַע.

The Director of Music

is an unadorned briskness in the report, as if, David's inconsiderate and reckless display of monarchical arrogance was met now by God's own. As David broke in upon the peace of another man's marriage, God, through Nathan, would expose the coverup David thought he got away with. To be abrupt, it was as if, Nathan, interrupted their love-making and pulled the very sheets off his bed of adultery and now he, David, is being summoned before the real and eternal Throne. God is saying, "David, let's talk!"

I am reminded of a line in the movie, *The Diary of Anne Frank* in which her family frightened and in hiding from the German authorities (during the holocaust) were after two years finally discovered. Anne's father remarked, "For the past two years we have lived in fear; now we can live in hope." Think about it, David! For how many months did you carry this lie, this murder of a good friend, claiming your marriage to his wife²⁴ (his widow) as legitimate. Lies are exposable.²⁵ Now you can live in the hope of forgiveness. *"The Psalm,"* C. F. Keil reminds us, *"shows us how David struggles to gain an inward and conscious certainty of the forgiveness of sin, which was announced to him by Nathan (2 Samuel 12:13)."*²⁶

David will soon be conversing with God about matters he'd rather not raise. Why can't God just forgive and let it go at that?! That's not the divine way. David would learn that mercy and forgiveness still required faithfulness on his part and God's love will not allow His

24. In the genealogy of Matthew 1:6 Bathsheba is still referred to as Uriah's wife.

25. Numbers 32:23 But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out.

26. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 134.

The Director of Music

servants (children) to slide by as if He didn't care. At the same time God's very act of discipline is confirmation of His enduring and eternal love for him ... and all of us.²⁷ *"Then I will punish [visit]²⁸ their transgression with the rod [the shepherd's staff],²⁹ And their iniquity with stripes.³⁰ God promises David, "...My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail"* [Psalm 89:32-33].

In our Psalm 51 David does not call God, his Lord, Our Lord's sacred name "Jehovah" is not recorded here. David only refers to God as Elohim, God. This sounds somewhat distant as if David was looking at the floor all the while God was speaking to his heart. (Maybe David did know "shame.") I am thinking: because he, David, is aware that as God's servant, he was rebellious. David labeled his own sins (he spoke of many)³¹ *transgressions, rebelliousness*. The fundamental truth here that God would reveal to David Jesus would later explain, *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"* [Luke 6:46]

27. Hebrews 12:6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

28. How beautiful the language is in its simplicity. God simply shows up as He did when it was rumored that the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, were invested with an irreconcilable evil and Lot was living there. God does make pastoral calls....

29. Consider the message of Psalm 23

30. Of 78 uses of the Hebrew word, 65 times it is translated "plague." There is severity here. God is serious and dedicated to our correction!

31. Not merely because many other sins were developed out of it, as his guilt of blood in the case of Uriah, the scandal put into the mouths of the enemies of Jahwah, his self delusion, which lasted almost a whole year; but also because each solitary sin, the more it is perceived in his fundamental character... all the more does it appear as a manifold and entangled skein of sins..." [C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 134.]

The Director of Music

The Psalm

If I were teaching an advanced course in the Classical Hebrew, the language of our Old Testament (The Jews call it “The Bible”), I would ask the students to translate Psalm 51. The language is not the poetic verbiage we have come to expect in poetic script. Psalm 51 is straight forward and simple words but selected by an inspired pen. The four words used for *sin* selected from among seven (I know of) are filled with meaning, spiritual and psychological—and they are correctly placed in David’s confession, in the narrative of his heart, that speaks not only to David’s adultery but all sin.

Scholars like to see this as a message of the Cross, a salvation call for the sinner to come to Christ for forgiveness. It most certainly is! But it is also written to Christians who need to find their way back to the Cross and reclaim what they may have left there, experiencing the forgiveness of Calvary.

A closer look at the words of David’s prayer—words David knew well—is a revelation of God’s great heart and His desire toward His people. A cry for forgiveness is often accompanied with a remorse that reminds us how often we are prone to slip backward into sin, but may it never be because we mistakenly assume God’s heart of mercy is exhausted with us.

Beware, also, theological distancing. I refer to the ability to interpret David’s words academically but avoid any emotional contact or personal application of its inspiring message. Theological distancing is the art of extracting the theology from the text without owning its truth as a life-changing force, without discovering how the words apply to faith. Theological distancing is an intellectual exercise which might allow us to pass a written seminary exam but fail at faithfully living for Christ.

The Director of Music

When David repented of His night of pleasure, he renewed His friendship with a God Who never really left him. David was, even with his human frailty and occasional waywardness, *“a man after God’s own heart.”*³²

There is more to this Psalm than a record of remorse. This Psalm reveals the secret to enjoying a friendship with God. This Psalm is in essence the revival of the soul, a restoration of faithful beginnings in service to God, a clear confirmation of real faith.

The Psalms of David unfold before us the many lessons that only a man with a heart for God could learn. What he wrote was a brutally candid piece of poetic honesty unlike any other. (Psalm 18:23; 19:13; 30:11a; 31:10; 34:18, 20, are some examples that remind us of the 51st Psalm before us.)

*Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.*
19:13

*You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,*
30:11

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*
34:18

32. Acts 13:22 *God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’*

A Musical Refrain

Verse Two

A Musical Refrain

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

The heading of the Psalm is its theme. Here is a study in Old Testament theology. Herein lies the voice of repentance and a penitent cry for forgiveness. If we can understand what David prayed, we have the message of Calvary. If we say this and mean it, we are assured of our salvation.

*divine Attributes*¹

There are three divine attributes David discovered here that are worthy our appeal when we sin: God's mercy, God's unfailing love, and God's compassion. The Westminster Catechism² expands and explains further, "*There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, ...eternal, ... working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, ... forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just*

1. Psalm 51:3 מְשַׁעֵי תִּגְּנִי אֱלֹהִים בְּחַסְדְּךָ כִּי רַב רַחֲמֶיךָ מִתְּהָה פְּשָׁעָי The New International version footnotes this verse: "*In Hebrew texts 51:1-19 is numbered 51:3-21.*" Does this matter?

2. Accessed 4/21 <https://bpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/D-ConfessionOfFaith.pdf> The Westminster Confession of Faith is perhaps the most notable expression in creedal form of the truths of the Bible. It was the work of that assembly of divines which was called together by Parliament and met in London, at Westminster Abbey, during the years 1643 - 1648.

A Musical Refrain

and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty."

As of this writing I have been seriously considering making this Presbyterian document (which other Christian groups have also endorsed) a part of the yearly curriculum for a course I have been called on to teach. This statement is more than a theology. It is in principle offering us the profile of the God who sent Nathan to David and now sends the Holy Spirit to us when "*sin lies³ at the door*" [Genesis 4:7].

Even though the Psalmist must look ahead to the promise which was fulfilled in Christ, God was and remains unchanging (immutable). A. W. Tozer reminds us, "*When Jesus died on the cross the mercy of God did not become any greater. It could not become any greater, for it was already infinite. We get the odd notion that God is showing mercy because Jesus died. No--Jesus died because God is showing mercy. It was the mercy of God that gave us Calvary...*"⁴

And it is this same mercy, love, and compassion David experienced when God intervened to rescue His servant from himself. God's mercy, love, and compassion sought to deal decisively with David's rebelliousness and restore their relationship. These divine attributes are collectively the desire of a loving Savior determined to wipe away (blot out) and put an end to transgressions. In Peter's words, "*By these [Grace and peace] he [God] has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world....*" [2 Peter 1:4].

3. Hebrew: crouched as a lion in wait

4. A. W. Tozer *The Knowledge of the Holy*. (HarperCollins Publishing. New York, NY: , 1961) *The Attributes of God: A Journey Into the Father's Heart*

A Musical Refrain

The Simplicity of God

Distinguishing these three biblical terms is futile. There is no value in such an exercise because they are indistinguishable though separately definable because of what scholarship calls “The Simplicity of God.” And what is this? Simplicity states that “*All of his [God’s] attributes are in the background of all of his actions; He is at the same time or in the same action both loving, compassionate and merciful.*”⁵ The Psalmist affirms, “*He is gracious, compassionate, and righteous*” [Psalm 112:4]. The doctrine of simplicity says that God never displays certain attributes more than others. God simply *is* his attributes.

This theological position was raised to reconcile in our understanding how God could be merciful and, at the same time, judge the sinner. Justice and mercy (punishment and forgiveness) in some minds seemed incompatible. Before this, the Christian Church debated the Trinity wondering how divine unity could explain three “persons” in one God.

Perhaps, some have been arguing for a simpler faith but (and I apologize for getting philosophical, but think about it) God is eternal and infinite which means at no “time” is He contradicting what He does other times by doing what He is doing at that present time. Everything He does must last forever and it couldn’t if he contradicted Himself.⁶ And this means at no time could He lie Himself

5. Adonis Vidu. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, (Baker Publishing. Grand Rapids, MI: 2014) page 248.

6. *The doctrine of divine simplicity is not intended as an apophatic sublation of all talk of divine nature.* ... That is to say, we are not trying to minimize a conflict of interest between mercy and justice, or forgiveness and punishment, by arguing that justice is not justice, punishment is not really punishment.

““*It is precisely such capriciousness, on the one hand, or impotence, on the other, that the concept of simplicity expressly denies.*” -Adonis Vidu.

A Musical Refrain

or act contrary to how He acts at another time. [Numbers 23:19].

In an academic sense, we might come up with complimentary English terms that satisfy theological curiosity or we might set to poetic verse the lovely sounds of sins forgiven:

“Great God, thy nature hath no bound:

So let thy pardoning love be found.”⁷

But this is the prayer chamber and not the pulpit! We are not the teacher here but the student, and a rebellious one at that. We are not the Father but the wayward child and God has called us into His council chamber for a “talk.”

One more thing: Simplicity, to me, must include on God’s part a “no-holds-barred” approach to everything He does. This speaks to what the Catechism called “*infinite in being and perfection.*” In Scriptural language: “...*The LORD will be zealous*⁸ *for His land, And pity His people*” [Joel 2:18]. His mercy is nuanced by the spontaneous enthusiasm (zeal) of His love toward us. And if we are off worshipping another God, idolatry, His zeal takes on the appearance of jealousy. (Idolatry is expanded in the New Testament to include 6 categories of sin: Colossians 3:5)⁹

Atonement, Law, and Justice, (Baker Publishing. Grand Rapids, MI: 2014) page 29, 31

7. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 934.

8. Zeal and jealousy are one and the same word in both Greek and Hebrew. See Exodus 20:5; 34:14; 39:25.

9. fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, [these 6] which is [are all] idolatry. In Oriental literary style 6 things are often summed as a 7th.

A Musical Refrain

Mercy

First and foremost, God is merciful. God's "unfailing love and compassion are characteristics of this. If God were not a merciful God His love would be conditional and His compassion seasonal. But His mercy governs His every act (this is simplicity). How God acts (love) and feels (compassion) are expressions of a divine mercy, His uninhibited passion for His creation has always been and will always be merciful. *"Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness"* [Lamentations 3:22-23].

In heaven His mercy no longer needing to discuss our need of repentance will become pure Agape love [John 3:16]. There is a secret here every believer needs to learn that, first and foremost, we should approach His throne requesting His mercy. *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy...."* [Hebrews 4:16]. And we should do so with thanksgiving [Philippians 4:6].

For what else ought we pray? Nothing!! Mercy encompasses all God's effort on our behalf. He redeems us! He provides for all our needs. He heals us when in our weakened condition and seeming inability to overcome temptation. He provides strength by His grace to live victoriously [1 Corinthians 10:13].

David, too, learned this simple truth:

- Psalm 26:11 *"Redeem me and be merciful to me."*
- Psalm 30:10 *"Hear, O LORD, and have mercy on me; LORD, be my helper!"*
- Psalm 6:2 *"Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are*

A Musical Refrain

troubled." (We'll look more closely at this verse shortly.)

David's cry of mercy speaks more to God's longing after David than David's after God. This was, no doubt, not David's first lesson in the mercy of God. God's mercy or compassion is nothing less than His longing or yearning, His inclination,¹⁰ to forgive and to favor us with His blessings.

It is not uncommon to read words in Scripture that are only employed to describe the heart of God toward His people—and here the word *gracious* is one of them. The modifier, *gracious*, [Exodus 22:27: "*I am compassionate.*"] is only used as an attribute of God. Here is a footnote worthy our attention: There are 13 references in the Old Testament to *being merciful* (employing this word) and all of them refer *only* to our Lord!

Did we get the message? David did! So, the next time sin comes knocking and you forget to look first through the peep hole but open to it, don't give up on yourself. Never give up on yourself because God won't. I like to say that Hebrews 13:5 has *FIVE* never's in it because there is no double negative rule in their grammar book. So, I translated it: God said, "I will never, never, never, never, never leave you." Get it!¹¹

Sins...They Are Many

David was more like the woman that crashed Simon's private dinner party with the Savior to wash Jesus's feet with her tears. "*As she stood behind him at his feet*

10. Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page 337

11. Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

A Musical Refrain

weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them” [Luke 7:38]. David, like this woman, had much to be forgiven. Jesus’s response taught Simon that to the decree we are aware of our need of God’s forgiveness and mercy and we seek it, our heart’s response translates into acts of love toward Him. “I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love”¹² [Luke 7:47].

Unfailing Love - Kindness

We might argue that David’s reference to God’s *kindness* [translated here: unfailing love] is nothing special. This word correctly understood is the quality of mercy toward those in need.¹³ Even I can do this! God does not seem to hold a proprietary right to its use. It can be—and should be—a human virtue. But the term’s inspiration provides more.¹⁴

To understand God’s kindness, we must study His mercy. Because God is kind He deals not only with our sin but the pain of guilt and the misery that accompanies it. But David must repent first, not just express sorrow over being found out, not just attrition. “*Examine me, O LORD, and prove me;*” David finally understood that God indeed knows if he is really contrite and repentant, “*Try my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth*” [Psalm 26:2-3]. So, in terms of the

12. Luke 7:47

13. Proverbs 20:28 [YLT] “**Kindness** and truth keep a king, And he hath supported by kindness his throne.” The LXX for kindness reads ἐλεημοσύνη, the quality of mercy.

14. In one Qumran scroll, God’s kindness is on display: “*When I waver, God’s acts of [kindness] are my help forevermore. When I stumble through the fault of my flesh ...he looses my affliction .. And in His mercy lets me draw nigh.*”

A Musical Refrain

actual use of this word *kindness*, it “denotes an attitude of man [and] God which arises out of mutual relationship... a relationship of trust.”¹⁵

God’s *unfailing love* also speaks of God as a covenant God. His promises say the same. “(for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them” [Deuteronomy 4:31].

David, in asking for God’s “unfailing love” or “kindness” was appealing to the *relationship* that existed for years between them, the friendship nurtured in a prayer life that began—no doubt—on some quiet, moonlit hillside when David was in his teens and attending sheep. In plain talk: It is not just the pain of our misdeeds that should bring us to the Lord, but a desire for a lasting relationship with Him.¹⁶ “Surely goodness and mercy [unfailing love] shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever” [Psalm 23:6].

Compassion

When I think of the word *compassion* my thoughts go to Isaiah 49:15 for a number of reasons. Foremost is the use of the word here in context with motherhood. God compares his love for Israel—and us—as a mother’s love for her newborn. “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”

It should be no surprise to hear that one form of this word means “womb.” The Hebrews by using another form said to be “intensified” give the meaning, *compassion*.

15. Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1974) page 479.

16. All this in the definition of the word *kindness* used here in Hebrew.

A Musical Refrain

The connection between a mother's love for her young child and God's love for us is everywhere in evidence in the language and in the text.

David in Psalm 18:1 using a simple form of the word declared his love for the Lord. But everywhere else in the Old Testament the action word (verb) is intensified and references God's love for us.

The scripture then expands the idea to include the father: "*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him*" [Psalm 103:13]. It is no wonder that God's compassion and God's mercy merge in thought. If there is a difference it most likely suggests that mercy is compassion in action. Compassion is the passion behind God's love, the beat of His heart. "*The Lord is gracious [merciful] and ... full of compassion*" [Psalm 116:5].

So it stands to theological reason that the Lord is nauseous¹⁷ around those who see nothing wrong in their faithlessness¹⁸ but He gladly hears confessions: "*Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy*" [Proverbs 28:13]

David knew how to tug on the divine heartstrings. David, perhaps, remembered his mother's love realizing

17. cp. The Church of Laodicea, Revelation 3:16 *So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

18. cp Proverbs 6:16-19 where the word *abomination* carries a like force of divine revulsion. "*There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*"

A Musical Refrain

how intense God's heart longed after that closeness with him—if only he would confess his wrong and repent.¹⁹

Blot Out My Transgressions

O keep my life and peace within
If I must feel Thy chastening rod!
Yet kill me not, but **kill my sin**,
And let me know Thou art my God.²⁰

To see these divine attributes as a synonym only for forgiveness undervalues them. There is another term for forgiveness. They have a larger responsibility to *remove* the sin—to get us to stop! The commentator calls this “*the idea of entire removal.*”²¹ How would we imagine God would want anything less? But this is where the theology gets in the way. If we didn't sin, how would God show Himself merciful to us? “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?* [Romans 6:1]. Such an idea must assume that if we were without sin, God would have no way of relating to us. That our relationship with God is dependent on our sinning is absurdity squared! Again, mercy is a divine attribute. It is Who God is. It is an expression of His love, for which we were created. And He

19. Psalm 86:16 *Turn to me and have mercy on me; show your strength in behalf of your servant; save me, because I serve you just as my mother did.*

20. Richard Baxter on Psalm 6:1 referenced in C. H. Spurgeon, p66.

21. John Peter Lange, *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V. Page 324.

A Musical Refrain

will continue showing us it because He will continue revealing Himself to us throughout eternity.²²

In the poetic verse above my eye fell on the words “*kill my sin.*” Perhaps this is a simple prayer of forgiveness but the language appears more dynamic than that. Did David want in a spiritual sense to rewind the clock, to erase the act as well as the memory of his affair with Bathsheba? David elsewhere cries to the Lord, “*Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity*” [Psalm 51:9]. David must have known that no sin is inconsequential but he asked the Lord to erase the record of it in terms of their *relationship*. And if we think of it: this is true forgiveness. “*As far as the east is from the west,*” the promise of forgiveness affirms, “*so far has he removed our transgressions from us*” [Psalm 103:12].

Our sins forgiven are removed from God’s dealings with us as far as the setting sun is from the rising sun—which, if you think of it, is an infinite distance since the turning of the earth changes nothing. In a legal sense we can say with Paul, “*Therefore, there is now no condemnation [no judgment] for those who are in Christ Jesus,*” Or as the poet penned, “*kill me not, but kill my sin.*”

Recall that *transgressions* is another word for the sin of rebellion or unfaithfulness. A sin by its nature is unfaithfulness in relation to God.²³

David knew his own weakness in such matters. Erasing the record of his deed must be accompanied by a

22. Ephesians 2:7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His kindness* toward us in Christ Jesus.

23. It makes sense that David would explain later in his prayer, “*Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; ...*” [Psalm 51:4] (But I get ahead of myself pointing this out since David is not here ye.

A Musical Refrain

thorough cleansing. Repentance must be accompanied by a divine mercy that enables him to forgive himself and make this episode in his life part of that forgiven past. The Greeks understood repentance to mean a change of mind but we know from the record in our Old Testament that it is much more. Repentance is a life changing decision which believers have discovered requires God's help. God may need time in prayer with David—with us—to peel back layers of false pride, distorted images of who we are and where our priorities are. God might have to make us far more self-aware, open our eyes, to what really happened when we did what we did. This might become layers of the onion of someone we never thought we were peeled back one by one until the real person God is creating anew in love is free to show themselves and live again.

Mia Culpa

I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" [Isaiah 44:22]

Here's another footnote worthy the text that David is probably seeking God's mercy because of the pain he feels and has caused. And if so, that conversation with God is still on the docket. I suggest this from personal experience, that those first waves of guilt like an emotional tsunami break upon me threatening to carry away every good I ever did. Someone once told me that it takes 10 "that-a-boy's" to overcome just 1 mistake and some sins are so regrettably monstrous that perhaps 1,000 congratulatory acts would not be sufficient enough to save me from the hurt I feel and caused. Charles Spurgeon

A Musical Refrain

wrote, "*though now it seems engraven [sic] in the rock forever...*"²⁴

I know God is merciful and, for sure, I shall seek His mercy. This is just the first moments in prayer, the first verse of Psalm 51.

The Psalmist's language to this point has impressed upon me a reminder of how painful sin ultimately is—even though, while yielding to temptation, it all seems so natural and pleasurable.

24. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 934..

Fuller's Soap

Verse Three

Fuller's Soap

Wash away all my iniquity [guilt] and cleanse me from my sin [all sin].

Washing Clean

When David cried to the Lord to “wash” him, he used the word which refers to the “fuller’s” work, a professional cleaning. C. F. Keil points out this word includes “*rubbing and kneading up*”¹ as women in the wild-west in the nineteenth century America would have washed clothes using a scrub-board. Some scholars chalk this up to a poetic license used in place of the usual word to wash hands and feet (personal washing, which C. F. Keil calls a body rinse.²)

I want to disagree. Using the usual word for washing oneself (rinsing off dirt from hands and feet) Asaph admitted in a spiritual sense he could not get spiritually clean. To become righteous, we need God! “Surely *in vain* I have kept my heart pure and have *washed* my hands in innocence,” he confessed [Psalm 73:13]. Asaph knew, there are times when our own efforts at maintaining a righteous life are weak and incomplete. Rinsing off is not enough to remove the unrighteous acts committed.

Even Jesus referenced this motif in a discussion with Peter at their final meal together before His resurrection. It was at this time Judas Iscariot left to arrange a betrayal and Jesus prepared to wash Peter’s feet.

1. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 135.

2. Ibid.

Fuller's Soap

“Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me’” [John 13:8] to which Peter abruptly and repentantly responded, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” [John 13:9]. Jesus then replied, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you [not Judas Iscariot]” [John 13:10].

There is a sense in which David might have seen himself capable of self-discipline and self-control. At times, he, no doubt, felt he could handle life. He gave himself some credit for living a righteous life. He used the common word for self-washing, bathing (rinsing) and not laundering (rubbing or scrubbing) in this spiritual sense. *“I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, Lord,”* he boasted [Psalm 26:6].

But now here in Psalm 51 he cannot get the stain of his sin out of his heart and mind. Here David wants the divine fuller's soap, an industrial strength process, to cleanse him from the sin he committed. He needed to sense God's total and ultimate forgiveness. He needed to be able to reconcile his thoughts with the terrible thing he had done in stealing another man's wife away. The word here is charged with David's yearning for God's cleansing mercy.

Thoroughly

There is a word written here which does not find its way into some translations because the spelling is debated (though not its meaning). It carries the idea of *multiple times*. Some like to translate it: *thoroughly*.³ *“Wash me and wash me and wash me again, Lord! Scrub me clean!!”*

3. KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, RSV, and others.

Fuller's Soap

I sought a clearer understanding of this term from the Greek translation which translates it *much* or *too much*, *more than enough*, *an overflow*.⁴ The NIV (New International Version) uses the word *outnumbered* when counting God's thoughts toward us: "*How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you*" [Psalm 139:17-18].

If I may: David didn't question God's ability to cleanse the soul the first time through the spiritual wash. David kept crying out for another cleansing because his heart's longing was not satisfied yet. The depth of his remorse held him there asking God to take away the remembrance of his sin and the misery it produced. [It is possible to commit an act so terrible, we no longer retain an active memory of it?⁵]

There are burdens which are not washed away in the first tears. We still seek to be free from the hurt we caused to others and the pain we caused to ourselves. Again and again our hearts seek His mercy. Again and again and again we find no satisfaction in prayer. We stay in prayer or find ourselves coming back again and again echoing the same desire, asking to be washed clean. This is

4. Translated: *exceedingly*. cp. Psalm 123:4 [ESV] "*Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.*"

Used with a negative it means "never." In Psalm 62:2 we read "*Truly he [God] is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*"

5. The brain will sometimes hide particularly stressful, traumatic or fear-related memories. This can be protective in the short term, when the emotional pain of recalling the event is still profound. However, in the long term, suppressed memories can create serious emotional health concerns such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and dissociative disorders. - accessed 11/1/22 <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/medical-advances/how-the-brain-hides-traumatic-memories>

Fuller's Soap

most appropriate because here, we sense, is where we belong, at His feet, seeking His cleansing mercy and love.

The Choir's Refrain

Perhaps, in a musical sense, in the score, *thoroughly* speaks of the refrain, the chorus, repeated after each verse. I can imagine this verse being sung in harmony with each subsequent verse—an antiphonal refrain. But this is more than a musical arrangement. This is David's heart refusing to be silenced. David would use the remaining verses to detail and explain what he was asking of God and why. David is in trouble, not politically or in some public sense, but privately, his peace is gone and the accuser, the devil, is finding it much easier now to torment the king.

Iniquity

This word "iniquity" in the Hebrew carries a lot of misery, guilt and a sense of punishment along with the sinful act which caused it. David was hurting and he knew that he caused his own pain. It is believed by some scholars that in Psalm 31 David saw the rebellion and subsequent death of his son, Absalom, as a consequence of that first night with Bathsheba.

David prayed, "*Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress [KJV: trouble]; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction [guilt], and my bones grow weak*" [Psalm 31:9-10].

This book is all about "the bones." Dr. Lange explains, "The bones are the framework of the body.⁶ His

6. Psalm 6:2 Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.

Fuller's Soap

iniquity is regarded by the Psalmist as the real cause of all his trouble.”⁷

If this be true, and I think it likely, David might have often been emotionally brought back to that moment of temptation he thought was fleeting but which now affixed itself to his every thought. Much of David’s domestic, political, and diplomatic setbacks and woes would follow this one “indiscretion.” The dominoes have been falling. C. H. Spurgeon referred this to a “*dungeon of distress*.”⁸

“Lord,” David averred, “*I am in trouble! ... My life is consumed by anguish,*” he lamented, “*and my years by groaning*” [Psalm 6:3, 6].

The history of David’s progeny, consequently, is in part a narrative worthy a crime drama riddled with civil war, covert activity, murder and rape, but it must be told because it is the story of his guilt and the pain inflicted on a family and on a nation. David as well, found himself constantly at war with the neighboring nations.⁹ With God,

7. John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V. page 219.

8. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 550.

9. 2 Samuel 12:10-11. Does the punishment fit the crime!? Worse still was the debauchery a single night of passion and moral indiscretion gone public brought on the entire nation, “*This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight.*” NOTE: God takes full responsibility for allowing such consequences to David’s one night of passion. Atheism jumps on this account to point out how unfair the Judeo-Christian God appears in the text and by my saying God “allowed” instead of “caused” these consequences, they are accusing me of spinning it beyond the simple meaning of the words. The greater point is that there is a moral truth about the harm of promiscuity that modern times no longer sees important.

Fuller's Soap

now, David will find peace, the eye of the storm, but his world was still living in the swirling winds this single tragedy was reported to have caused.

If we never sensed the misery of our actions when we are stepping off the path of righteousness, if there never were any pain when we sinned or yielded to temptation, David's message in this Psalm, written to us all, would have no relevance. This Psalm likely would not have been written. But divine inspiration encouraged David to share his pain with us that we might find such a prayer spiritually life-giving.

Misery born of a sinful act becomes the cry of a divine wisdom that it is time to repent. Like a physical pain that tells the surgeon where to operate, conviction teaches us when we have stepped off the path (one Greek word for sin carries this idea)¹⁰ and need God's cleansing power. "*...godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted*" [2 Corinthians 7:10]

David

By now you might be thinking, "*I'm not as bad as David was! My life doesn't exactly read like the 51st Psalm.*" You might even feel a bit righteous, but pardon me if I don't join you in that attitude. True: I didn't do what David did but I want to think that this Psalm speaks to all persons, saved and unsaved, felony murderers and jaywalkers.

We all need *cleansing from sin!* But before we admit this, we may need to understand what these words mean.

10. Ezekiel 18:24 [LXX] οὐ μὴ μνησθῶσιν ἐν τῷ παραπτώματι αὐτοῦ ᾧ παρέπεσεν

Hebrews 6:6 "*and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance.*"

Fuller's Soap

Let me profile David. Bathsheba wasn't the only "indiscretion" or unwise decision in 40 years of leadership. It seems unreasonable to think that once David confessed his sin of adultery he lived a pristine Jewish life. David's Jewish theology kept him in a bondage to every misdeed or act of unfaithfulness to God (as God designed it.)¹¹

There was, also, no concept in David's understanding of "grace" as Christians understand it. (Mercy was closer in the Old Testament to the concept of New Testament grace than the Old Testament word for grace.) David wasn't—nor could he be—"born again"¹² or created a "new creature"¹³ in Christ but God's mercy was available each time he would misstep in His pursuit of God's friendship. David confessed his weakness¹⁴ in things that matter to God.¹⁵ Admitting his weakness or frailty in spiritual matters and asking for God's help is a good thing.

For any believer that has run out of things to pray about, let them go down the list of their shortcomings and failures as example of how weak and unprepared they are without God's help to live the Christian life. Seriously!

11. Galatians 3:22 *But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.*

12. John 3:3

13. 2 Corinthians 5:17

14. Job 14:2 defines the word as a flower withering, limp, and hanging down: *"Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble. They spring up like flowers and **wither away**; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure."*

15. Psalm 6:2 [KJV] *I am weak, Lord*

Fuller's Soap

A Cry for Mercy Under Judgment

David referred to his own soul as *vexed*¹⁶. He was not at peace. *"Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak (David's strength, passion for life? Was leaving him); O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled (vexed). My soul also is greatly troubled; Lord, How long"* [Psalm 6:2-3].

The word "vexed" is difficult to translate. Some translate "frightened." Wordsworth noted the words in the Greek translation were echoed by our Lord:¹⁷ *"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour"* [John 12:27]. According to Mark [Mark 14:34] Jesus confessed a pain of soul so overwhelming He wanted to die. *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death."* This is a feeling of apprehension in a situation difficult to face.

C.H. Keil adds about David, *"God's love is hidden from him ... in affliction beyond all other afflictions."*¹⁸ Charles Spurgeon correctly observed, *"Ah, when the soul has a sense of sin, it is enough to make the bones shake."*¹⁹

"Until when, Lord?!" These are the words of a soul whose despondency is overwhelming and whose heart finds no peace. It is no small blessing to have God's peace reigning and guarding the soul!²⁰ *"The peace that passes all understanding"* is an essential aspect of a believer's well-

16. Psalm 6:3

17. John Peter Lange. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V page 80..

18. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 133.

19. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 63.

20. Philippians 4:9 "...the God of peace will be with you" See Isaiah 26:3

Fuller's Soap

being: physically, emotionally and, most importantly, spiritually. We live to sense the love of God that affirms His presence.²¹

David lived under an Old Testament covenant and economy. David was driven by “old-man” impulses. Unlike believers who have the fruit of the Spirit within, David went on the strength of his own self-control, often failing in the effort. God’s forgiveness was asked and received, no doubt, numerous times. (And each time God graciously complied.) There are seven penitential Psalms²² worth studying—all of which are written around the theme of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

For now David is hurting—a pain of soul that has him praying for healing. Is this not our experience? It is mine. Crying unto the Lord is not a euphemism for going to church or being reverent during public prayer. In my emotional pain—primarily when I hurt because of sin—I am shut in with my God and in earnest about repentance, seeking His help in all matters spiritual. In simplest terms: God, finally, has David’s attention. “Let’s talk.”

Cleanse-Purify Me

“It is not the punishment he cries out against, but the sin.” Spurgeon taught.²³ This is a clear advancement in his thoughts taking His attention off his pain and on his sin. And how might we know this is happening? Five words. David prayed, “*Cleanse me from my sins.*”

21. Philippians 4:7 “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

22. The penitent Psalms are Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.

23. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 934..

Fuller's Soap

1. *Cleanse* is a word used for **ceremonial** cleansing²⁴ perhaps because
 - **lepers** undergo a ceremonial cleansing after a healing from the disease and leprosy is a simile for sin.²⁵ *"Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting."* [Leviticus 14:11]
 - The **sin offering** was offered as a ceremonial cleansing for sin. *"For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD."* [Leviticus 16:30].
 - Ceremonial cleansing represented a **moral** cleansing. *"I have seen your adulteries And your lustful neighing [shrieks of delight], The lewdness of your harlotry, Your abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?"* [Jeremiah 13:27].
2. "My" David begins to "**own**" his sin.
3. "Sins" He **confesses** his sin. This is the word used for the sin-offering.
 - what he did was clearly "wrong," off the path of right and against God—unlike

24. Genesis 35:2 *So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves*

25. 2 Kings 15:5 Then the LORD struck the king, so that he was a leper until the day of his death; so he dwelt in an isolated house....

Numbers 12:10 And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam *became* leprous, as *white as snow*. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.

Fuller's Soap

Joseph with Potiphar's wife, as the young man explained to her, "...you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" [Genesis 39:9].

- An all inclusive, general, universal term for any and all unrighteousness: Humbly, he is not as righteous as he used to see himself "there is no one who does not sin" [1 Kings 8:46].

When David asked for a cleansing, how should God interpret his heart!? God discerns the heart's intent,²⁶ which, if you think of it, makes God a best friend. A half dozen Psalms tell us how tormented David became at times. I have often wanted the Lord to make sense out of my actions. I just knew they were not biblically endorsable. "Search me, O God, and know my heart;

Try me, and know my anxieties" [Psalm 139:23]. There is wisdom in this prayer!

A prayer of cleansing and a desire to be purified from an unfaithful past needs to be more than a desire to get by the painful memory of what we did. We should allow God to purify us in a way He interprets. When we arrive at Calvary, purification gets easy because it is no longer ceremonial and it is now in the language of a believer's experience in Christ. "Seeing you have purified your souls," Peter spoke encouragingly, "in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned [without hypocrisy] love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" [1 Peter 1:22].

26. Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, ... and is a discerner of the ... intents of the heart.*

Fuller's Soap

[All this is in the heading of this Psalm. Starting in verse three David's prayer begins in earnest.]

Painful Remorse

Verse Four

Painful Remorse

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

I cried when I read this in the Hebrew [*“my sin is always before me.”*] because the words are familiar to me ...and they make sense. The NLT (New Living Translation) reads *“my sin haunts me day and night.”* David cannot bury the memory of his salacious and brutal act, nor can he excuse it. Here is where this Psalm begins for David ...and for me.

“I know my transgressions,” David admitted to himself in retrospect—something he didn’t acknowledge until Nathan, the prophet, knocked on his bedroom door. This single confession speaks volumes to counselors who work with hurting people who in turn cannot seem to own any of their pain. This is what makes David’s testimony a dynamic and inspired chapter in the lives of all people, particularly believers, who have broken through the haze of self-justification and have begun to perceive and appreciate their own feelings and actions for what they really were. Here healing begins—a healing he prayed for [Psalm 6:2].

We must own our shortcomings even if we tone down the seriousness of them calling them mistakes in judgment or indiscretions instead of outright sin. At least this is a good beginning because we have graduated from bemoaning our own pain and confusion to recognizing the cause of it. ...and we have left others out of our story.

Blaming others has a technical label: *projection* and it is one of four different defenses to self-deprecation. If we are not finding another person or group to blame, we might justify the action as human or in some way legitimate, excusable, warranted, necessary. “Everyone

Painful Remorse

does it!" Or we might deny it outright, lie, "I didn't do what you are saying I did! Or we might "downplay" its consequences or significance. "Get over it; what a wimp; grow up! It's not that big a deal!" But it is a big deal, even if no one but God agrees because whatever is a big deal to Him should be a big deal to us! And if we did it, we did it!

David here is wrestling within himself with a growing consciousness of a consequential act of depravity of which he must repent. Why must he repent? Why not show Nathan the door or as the king have him imprisoned like Henry the 8th did to Thomas Moore (if you know any British history). Why does he have to repent? For the same reason you and I would have to: we have a heart after God's and this we will not give up for a moment of pleasure or any temptation. Repentance requires I recognize that "I am the man" Nathan is talking about.

Chronologically Speaking

Is there an order to what God is revealing to David in this Psalm? Or is it only necessary that all the verses are there regardless of any sequence? I have been suggesting that there is some chronological order—not only here for David but—for the lessons God teaches us. Jumping ahead of God or anticipating what we think He might say to us is as wrong as searching Scripture to justify what we are doing.¹

I must say it again for emphasis: God wants to be merciful! It's His schtick, His special talent, interest, or area of activity. If you are not interested in seeking mercy from Him or if you are planning to complain rather than express thanksgiving to Him—I advise not to pray, not to go before

1. eisegesis: the process of interpreting text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas or biases.

Painful Remorse

Him until seeking His mercy with thanksgiving is what you want.

The Psalms are replete with David's complaints, his fears and self-justification. *"My eye wastes away because of grief; It grows old because of all my enemies. ... Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; Let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly"* [Psalm 6:7, 10]. *"Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, And according to my integrity within me"* [Psalm 7:8].

It is reasonable to assume that in the first verse of our Psalm David's emphasis is on his own hurting or misery—he is even despondent—and wants God to get it to stop! In verse 2 he sees his sin but in a general sense. He is admitting weakness as a human. David begins to see the chink in his armor, in his nature and behavior. And this is good. Still God has not begun to discuss the particular act that had brought Nathan to his door. Now, in verse 3 David agreeing with the Lord cries out, "I² know! I know! How can I forget!"

David now speaks of many transgressions but all of which began from this singular moment of prurient curiosity. In a footnote we noted earlier, *"many other sins were developed out of [this single act of adultery], as his guilt of blood in the case of Uriah, the scandal put into the mouths of the enemies of [the Lord], his self delusion, which lasted almost a whole year; but also because each solitary sin, the more it is perceived in his fundamental character... all the more does it appear as a manifold and entangled skein³ of sins..."*⁴

2. The Hebrew word 'I' is written out for emphasis.

3. a tangled or complicated arrangement, state, or situation

4. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 134.

Painful Remorse

Perhaps David throughout is only thinking of Uriah's death but most persons, even believers, confronted with their misdeed or called out for what they did that was wrong, have a more immediate reaction of pushing back on this judgment. Confession is not always up front and immediate—I have observed as a pastor/counselor. It is important to prepare the counselee for this moment of full disclosure. Perhaps, the year spent with Uriah's widow was important for David to live with his mistake before he was ready to talk to the God Who was always ready to talk to him.

For

How are we to understand the word “for”?⁵ “... *cleans me from my sin. For [since] I know my transgressions.*” All scholars do not agree on the force of this word. “*Authorities especially read the Hebrew differently, when the choice is between for and yea.*”⁶ I take my liberty to translate the word: *yea, certainly, surely, indeed.* Is it possible David is saying, “Forgive me; *surely*, I confess...”?

For is theologically correct. David knew that forgiveness and mercy was always given to the humble and those who acknowledge their need of cleansing and forgiveness. So David testified, “*Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin*” [Psalm 32:5]. The force of David's plea is best served, not merely by the reasonable connection between confession and mercy [the theology supported by translating “*since*”] but by this truth as the cry of his heart—*yea!*

5. because, since.

6. Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page 474.

Painful Remorse

Transgressions-Unfaithfulness

David uses the word *rebellion*. "I know my rebellion, my transgressions against God and Uriah." I might use the word *unfaithfulness* because David is talking about his act or acts of disobedience to God's Law, the Torah, and therefore, to God. There is nothing vague here or defensible before God. Sin always tears at relationships. God's reasoning is sound.⁷

The beautiful unspoken truth here is God's desire to show mercy, He writes a Law we cannot faithfully maintain.⁸ Until we acknowledge that our misery is the result of breaking that Law, we will never acknowledge this truth and seek His mercy. Paul explained, "*For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all*" [Romans 11:32]. All sin is unfaithfulness to God, that's why throughout the Scriptures it is equated with idolatry which is being devoted to someone or something else instead of God. David's dalliance with another man's wife was foremost unfaithfulness to God because his action strained that sacred bond of fellowship with His Lord.

I Know

How many counselors dealing with people laden with the sorrow of misguided steps and unwise choices long to hear this break through revelation: *I know what I did and I know it was wrong!* How many marriages would be on a path toward healing if each spouse, independent of the other, could have the light go on: *I know what I did and I*

7. Isaiah 1:18 "*Come now, let us settle the matter,*" says the Lord. "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*"

8. Romans 7:9 *Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died.*

Painful Remorse

know it was wrong! How many people would experience the mercy and love of God in salvation if they could confess: *I know what I did and I know it was wrong!* How many Davids among the people of God would be more at peace in their salvation and have a more vibrant faith, if they could affirm: *I know what I did and I know it was wrong!*

Perception among other things is a changed view of our circumstances that hopefully opens our eyes to truth. Self-justification blinds us to a reality that would free us from our misery and our sin that caused it.⁹ ..And there is no better counselor than God Who shows mercy when we finally come to the truth of our own actions and seek His mercy.

Always Before Me

According to David here in this Psalm the barometer that tests the seriousness of sin is whether or not it “...*is always before me.*” Could I shake these memories or explain them away! Some acts require God’s forgiveness. Some things require a conversation with the God of mercy.

Years ago in learning Hebrew, I added the words *always* and *before me* to my vocabulary and I have enjoyed these in different contexts. Godliness is living life with one eye on God as David boasted, “*I keep my eyes **always** on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken*’ [Psalm 16:8].

Some people are sorry for everything that happens. They instinctively seem to take blame for things for which they are not to be blamed. “I’m sorry” is a part of their regular discourse. I fathom a guess there probably is a couple millennials who blame themselves for World War 2. But this, too, is as wrong as not taking responsibility for

9. John 8:32 ...*the truth will set you free.*

Painful Remorse

the harm we do cause. In prayer, the Lord zeroes in on truth.

These words “*always before me*” strike a note here in Psalm 51. Most Hebrew I need to study or look up in lexicons and concordances but not these words *before me always*. Here is a friend when it is God’s convicting Spirit calling us to His forgiveness. There are so many more blessings that follow—as the verses ahead inform.

God Alone

Verse Five

God Alone

Against 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. [Thou art pure in Thy judging. YLT]

When is a sin offensive only to God? Did David imagine that his romantic evening with Bathsheba would have no consequence, no lingering hurt to anyone else? His children? His other wives? His kingdom? Only God? Wasn't there a need for David to make amends to those persons he harmed or was that list empty? Or did he not care about anything or anyone else than his damaged relationship with his Lord!

David's cover-up would become a black hole that would swallow up a few others within the gravity of his influence. He made Joab—not to mention, Bathsheba—complicit in his crime. David's scheming and lying was a tangled web that he thought only three people knew about: Joab, Bathsheba, and himself. I wonder if what David and Bathsheba thought hidden would inevitably be leaked through gossip. Some scholars reasonably maintain that within a collective culture in David's world the word was already out.¹

There was no one else whose forgiveness he needed to seek? Uriah was gone and Bathsheba, now, was his wife. With God and God alone David sought forgiveness and reconciliation. But is there more to this?

1. Richard E. Randolph, Brandon J. O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes*. (IVP Books Inter-varsity Press, 2013), chap 5, Kindle Edition.

God Alone

They named their son Solomon which means *Peaceable*. And lest we assume his name only referred to the peaceful kingdom he would someday rule over, Nathan called the boy, Jedidiah², “Beloved of the Lord.” But for now, David does not yet know this; he is living in this Psalm!

But there is another reason for coming to the conclusion that our sins are solely against God and we should, first and foremost seek His forgiveness and peace. His judgment is always just and fair and administered in love. “*I want You, Lord, and You alone to be my Judge.*” I can imagine David praying, “*You are merciful and fair. Whatever punishment You decide, I know will be the right one. I accept it humbly.*” This was a principle by which David governed his legal appeals. “*David said to Gad, ‘I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.’*” [2 Samuel 24:14].

God’s forgiveness is a spiritual balm, both comforting and restorative, when we emotionally wrestle with yesterday’s sins. Some sins cause us to toss and turn, not only in a sleepless night but during the day when our thoughts should be wholesome, productive and beneficial. We are self tormented because we need to be forgiven for a true healing of the soul to occur. God alone provides this spiritual healing in the privacy of a prayer of repentance.

David could argue that sin puts God in a bad light. Scholarship calls this “...*the scandal put into the mouths of the enemies of [the Lord].*”³ God’s forgiveness needs to mercifully bring back not only his testimony but restore God’s honor before the world. We, too, should want to

2. 2 Samuel 12:25 *because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.*

3. Keil & Delitzsch. vol 5. p. 134.

God Alone

sanctify or honor our Lord.⁴ When we sin, His image before the world is distorted and misrepresented. The argument in prayer to desire to be restored as an effective or empowered witness of God's love is very convincing to God! Moses knew how to intercede for Israel when they made that golden calf. Moses appealed to God's own witness before the world:

"Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: "LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? "Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people." [Exodus 32:11-12].

And then later when Moses struck a rock he should have spoken to (to get drinking water) he did not honor God and paid for that by being denied entrance into the promised land.⁵

David prayed more than once (as all believers do and should) *"For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great."*⁶ *"Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake"* [Psalm 79:9].

David stands guilty before The Judge but He is also the Savior of the world. Somehow such an awareness of God's majestic Presence eclipses all other concerns: *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*

4. Numbers 20:12 *But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."*

5. see Numbers 20:8-12

6. Psalm 25:11 לְעֹנֵי לִפְתּוֹחַ [forgive my iniquity] The Hebrew occurs 46 times in 45 verses*

God Alone

When David sinned his entire world was disrupted. He must be first as the leader in honoring God's Law, God's Word. The damage when anyone breaks covenant with God is never inconsequential. C. H. Spurgeon explained, "*The psalmist's sense of sin toward others rather tended to increase the force of this feeling of sin against God. ... To injure our fellow men is sin, mainly because in so doing we violate the law of God.*"⁷

You are Right, Lord, I Did An Evil Thing!

Asking whether or not David owed anyone other than God an apology, or that he should seek forgiveness of another other than God, is not relevant in this moment. David is seeking restoration of his peace, of a sense of God's presence, of reconciliation with the God his heart pants after. No one else is in view. He is alone with God in prayer, in conversation, as he should be.

All self-justification, all rationalization, has ceased. When David confessed that he knew his transgressions, it wasn't just admitting what he did—and he probably couldn't say why—it was a confession of his wrong *against God*. This is the true definition of *confession*; it is agreeing with God!

"*What I have done,*" David admitted, "*was evil.*" The word evil has an emphasis on the consequence⁸ of David's unconscionable act. Of all the meanings ascribed to this word I like two: evil is most painfully harmful and it displeases God making it the worse thing ever I could have imagined doing!

7. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 935.

8. This is the word used by Samuel when Israel asked for a king in lieu of God's leadership, cp. 1 Samuel 12:19. The consequences of sin.

God Alone

The world might not agree. Cultural evolution is slowly eroding any bible-based foundation of morality. Postmodernism discards any definition of sin: redefining the nuclear family unit in terms of any and all social contracts, explaining away conviction as a self-inflicted guilt, and arguing against the reality of a God of mercy. Today's world might contend that this Psalm is merely the unfortunate state of a man whose conscience misdirected him into thinking he needed to make amends.

But David knew God. He had a relationship with God. He could recognize God's intervention in protecting him and delivering him in battle. He had experienced the joy of God's salvation. He knew God to be consistently wise, truthful, and merciful. In God's eyes and judgment, what David did was evil! After a year went by (according to one scholar) and after Nathan cornered him, David, finally, agreed. The misery he felt may have helped to bring him to this place of prayer.

So

"So" means, "in view of which, on this account" "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so [in view of this], I know, Lord, you are right in judging me."

If God punishes him, David feels that, it is earned. He doesn't appear, though, to be particularly anxious about this possibility.⁹ David understands that he sinned against God and that if God punishes him, it is deserved. Judgments is what judges make; so, God might intend at this point in relationship with David to make this a lesson

9. In a cursory review of the Hebrew terms that might suggest some form of punishment I have yet to read David's thoughts on the subject.

God Alone

in the painful consequence of doing evil.¹⁰ (Thus the use of the word “so.”) “*Do not be deceived:*” Paul cautioned, “*God cannot be mocked. [A man dare not turn his nose up at God!] A man reaps what he sows*” [Galatians 6:7]. David emotionally exposes his own back to the lash because he knows he is in the wrong but he also knows the love of God.

God is in the Right

God is in the right whatever His judgment! ...to quote Abraham, “*Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* [Genesis 18:25]. “*God’s judgment is pure, clean. (“Beyond all controversy.”)*¹¹ If I may say it: unlike us, God’s decisions, conclusions, evaluations, judgments, perspective—call it what you will—is never based on a bias against anyone much less a hidden, self-seeking, motive, as if greedy for power. God’s judgment is based on *covenant* and the one we are under now was written in the Savior’s blood on Calvary.

10. But I might add quickly that David knows God to be merciful. Punishment seems reserved for the proud not the humble who confess. But we will let this point rest here for a while.

11. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page. 935

Born in Sin

Verse Six

Born in Sin

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness [truth] even in the womb (inward parts, i.e. the heart and mind); you taught me wisdom in that secret place (my thoughts).

I was not surprised to read David call himself a sinner since birth. These two verses, 5 & 6, some maintain, are an aspect of David's theology. This theology in Pauline terms is I Corinthians, 15:22 "For as in Adam all die..." The language, to me, suggests more. David's words speak of a self-loathing more than an intelligent evaluation of his life. This was not his thought "BB" [before Bathsheba]. David then testified, "...From My mother's womb You have been My God" [Psalm 22:10]. Now, however, David is learning things about himself hidden or suppressed from memory.

No one was bold enough in his kingdom to tell this emperor he had no clothes on until God instructed Nathan to inform him. We might guess David was unprepared for this encounter with the prophet. Perhaps it was suggested in David pronouncement of a capital punishment upon himself by mistake. Had David been living with this memory flavoring every decision he made, he might have made the connection. But more than this, confrontation from God is shock and awe—a shock because it is certainly feared if not unexpected and "awe" because Godly sorrow leads to salvation and healing [2 Corinthians 7:10].

David's vacillation from thanking God for his birth to hating it is not unexpected since confrontation and correction tends to knock one emotionally off their feet. Is this a set back or simply a real moment God recognizes as an essential step in his healing?

Born in Sin

David uses vulgarity because he is still bathing in self-pity in his disgrace. *“My mother in the heat of passion goes ahead and gets pregnant. Little wonder, I would be the product of such an act!”* David justified himself.

I can totally relate to David’s despondent overview of his life. Let’s be sure that when we are bemoaning our human frailty, our *shortcomings*, our *sin*¹ and all the regret that comes with this frame of mind, that we remind ourselves that the merciful God we still want in our lives is behind this moment.

When Are Tongues Really Tongues?

I am reminded of something told me once which I hope you accept in the spirit it is offered: as a real life example of David’s situation. I grew up in a pentecostal denomination which puts a value on, what has been known as, “a message in tongues” (an unknown language) in a church service—which is generally interpreted by someone else whom we believed God inspired to interpret it. What you think of this, theologically speaking, is not significant here. This is the story of what happened to one believer who used to regularly offer such a message which the assembly learned to honor and actually look forward to hearing. This story is—what I like to call—long ago and far away; so, perhaps, it is less likely to be repeated this same way these days. Some of us mourn the loss because, as it was maintained, some contributions from believers open to expressing encouraging words this way served a very vital ministry.

But the story goes that God directed one saint whose credentials were never in question to tell this young “tongues” speaker that their presentation was “an

1. Psalm 51:2-3 ... *cleanse me from my sin. For I... and my sin is always before me.*

Born in Sin

abomination” to the Lord. At first this elderly saint refused but they knew God’s voice and eventually did just that. But not before they put out a fleece, “If you, Lord, want me to say this, have them walk by me”—and they did!!

After receiving such a profound rebuke this novice in spiritual matters went silent for some time before once again bringing a message in tongues. Only now they had something different, something inspiring, something spiritually refreshing, to say. They went to God’s modern day Nathan and thanked them confessing that back then they were doing what they were doing out of a personal pride loving the attention they received in a pentecostal environment ...but not any more. Their repentance from an out-of-control pride was real.

Sinful at Birth

David’s comment is more than a theological treatise on sin—if that at all. The first dozen verses of Psalm 51 are overflowing with remorse and conviction. So much emotion should not be credited with an intellectualism that could outline a serious theology. The heart knows no theology. Everything we reason out in language studies, everything the preacher promotes as doctrinally significant, somehow gets washed away in our tears. Pain does not hear reason. And how do we know David is in pain? How do we know he is miserable with the day-mare of Uriah’s death?

David used less common terms for *birth* and *conceived* which seem raw or crude. He referenced birth as *travail* or the pain of giving birth, not the joy of another child being born (there is a Hebrew word for this). His word *conceived* is not the usual one but a term used only four other times in scripture about *cattle*. It refers more to the heat of passion that is the context of the moment of conception. Instead of birth and conception being spoken

Born in Sin

of here as something beautiful, bringing a new life into the world, David sees his own arrival—dare I suggest—as an explanation, if not an excuse, for his magnetic-like attraction to Bathsheba.

Scholarship contends that this is David's argument for original or hereditary sin.² *"We have a proneness to sin with its guilt and corruption propagated from parent to child,"* goes the theological argument. But if I may say, there is more here than dry theology. Look in the NIV at the two words for *sinful* in the verse referenced here. *"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me"* [Psalm 51:5]. The first Hebrew word for *sinful* may reference David's pain and misery (and fits the mood that penned the words for birth and conception) and the second "sinful" by definition speaks of how he had *missed the mark* (his *shortcomings*: a familiar New Testament idea)³ ...how he must have displeased God! David bemoaned (if I may suggest), *"This is me! This is what being human is all about."* *"I am not the only one who ever thought to do such a thing!"*

An Emotional Coup

I don't seriously believe David went as far as to blame God. That's no way to ask for mercy! And I am not debating original sin or the Fall of humankind through Adam in the Garden. I am comfortable with this theological explanation. Simply stated: Somehow in the grip of remorse, God's peace has disappeared.

Even after salvation we have a lot to learn to live a holy life. Something said or done to us might trigger an emotional response, an intense feeling, and we do or say

2. "...the proneness to sin with its guilt and its corruption is propagated from parents to their children." Keil & Delitzsch, vol 5. p. 137.

3. Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Born in Sin

something in turn that we shouldn't. Temptation's golden opportunity to torment us! James taught, "... each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire⁴ and enticed."⁵ Jesus informs us that Satan is afoot and somehow involved in all this: "But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but *merely human concerns*" [Mark 8:33].

Psalm 51 is not just David's; it is all of ours. Where sin is exposed, when what we do or say brings conviction, a Divine intervention or confrontation, we need the inspiring message of this Psalm.

Me

Being human or born of Adam into sin might be explainable in psychological terms. Most Christians prefer to talk theology but humor me. In time we all become a potent mix of innocence and hormones, physiological needs and—if I may—conditioned responses to circumstances that are not clear to us at the time we exhibit them. That's why we have counselors, therapist, doctors, pastors and a few neighbors.

David's interest in Bathsheba is a study in romantic attraction. David had more than seven wives before meeting Bathsheba.⁶ And since a wife was only a step above a man's possession that he could do with at will, it would not be unusual for David to look upon a beautiful

4. desire for what is forbidden

5. James 1:14

6. 1 Samuel 18:27 Michal; 1 Samuel 25:42 Abigail the Carmelitess; 1 Samuel 25:43 Ahinoam of Jezreel; 2 Samuel 3:3 Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur; 2 Samuel 3:4; Haggith 2 Samuel 3:4 Abital; 2 Samuel 3:5 Eglah; 2 Samuel 5:13 And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron....

Born in Sin

woman and desire her. Jesus would not have condoned such behavior.⁷

Such a temptation can be overwhelming if it comes unexpectedly. When the bull rider, positions himself on the animal's back, before the gate is opened, he grasps the rein hard in a gloved hand and settles in for an 8 second or less ride and an adrenaline rush that only the young can physically endure.

Romance, forbidden or not, is a powerful pull on the heart. When I think of my bride of over a half century, here's what I wrote, in my work *Grandma's Eyes*: "To say I think of her often understates the attraction she has to me. Now that I am retired, daydreams of her occupy my thoughts. Night dreams are vivid visions: some of memories, some of longings, some of just the never ending delight that comes with thinking of her. Dreams share the paradox of marital oneness, the silence of unspoken words, the evolving expressions of an aging yet ageless romance—all—continuing to stimulate the mind and stir the heart."

David did what men are prone to do, if they are not principled and prepared to resist: he summoned Bathsheba to his side ..and we know the rest of the story. One thing is evident: a hundred wives legally that we may want could not protect us from such a temptation.⁸ Millionaires want to be billionaires! I doubt David was lonely. Bathsheba was younger, no doubt; so, he could relive those earlier days of a frisk and frolic, running through the tall grass, laughing his life away with a young damsel who could keep up. And even if this were not true in fact; it was true in his dreams. All this being said, David still was no innocent when he took that night stroll to the roof. His humanity,

7. Matthew 5:28 *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

8. One wife might if there is love.

Born in Sin

born a man child, notwithstanding, animalistic impulses must be tamed by a faithful heart after God's.

You Desired Faithfulness [Truthfulness]

This one verse should have been expanded—if not already—into countless sermons on salvation as well as texts on counseling. David arrives here after a winding journey through self-justification to self-condemnation to blaming his mother for giving him birth. Off the record, I little doubt, he could have rationalized a way of blaming even Uriah; for, had he not neglected his wife that fateful night, David wouldn't be in this state of mind now.

Perhaps, some time elapsed while he tried in his own way to assuage the pain, to sleep through the nightmare. To be factual: the Ammonites killed Uriah. There might have been many ways to interpret events surrounding Uriah's death. David must have either contented himself with one such rationale or simply soothed his conscience with the knowledge that kings do what kings do as expressions of their supremacy.

This is an all too familiar dialog between counselor and counselee. Blaming everyone else first seems to be a recognizable mile marker on the road to recovery for us in finding our way back to the right path.

God is not listening yet, when we are not honest within ourselves. Maybe we do not really know ourselves well enough, we don't know why we did what we did. Maybe we are unprepared to give an account of our behavior. Nonetheless, without truthfulness, there is nothing here of any therapeutic value. There is no opportunity for God to restore David's joy or heal his conscience because he has not yet decided to be truthful in prayer. David murdered an innocent man in order to be

Born in Sin

legally free to covet his wife, just because she was too beautiful to resist.

But David's humanity cannot absorb murder and keep its identity. This is not what kings do—not in God's world, not a David. So David needs God desperately to touch his life and get him back to a time before this indefensible act of a numbed conscience. He would not be the young David again, whose innocence sought the Lord's prayerful presence, until he confessed. Confession meant—and always means—admitting truthfully, plainly, openly, the sin that separated him from God.

Here is the preacher's sermon on salvation or repentance or revival or whatever topic he wishes. Here is the message of the Cross. You shall confess *the truth* and it will set you free!⁹

You Taught Me Wisdom...In ... Secret

"The Lord taught Me Wisdom," David testified, *"in secret."* In New Covenant parlance: Jesus explained *"My sheep hear my voice and they follow..."* [John 10:27]. We learn a lot while in prayer and God's interest is in us. The secret place he spoke of, the heart physically hidden from literal sight, was an analogy of the soul or the seat of deep feelings and thoughts where what we do and say originates. These feelings and thoughts might be deeply buried under the debris of years of fun and amusement designed to cover over painful experiences. We may have been living a lie, an intentional neglect of what discipline once tried to drum into us, and now whatever we once heard or knew as wisdom is not wisdom anymore to us.

David was tortured by the memory of his crime against God in committing murder and adultery. God had

9. John 8:32

Born in Sin

to send Nathan, though, to entrap him and push him forward into reconsidering what he had done. How much time had gone by might be estimated by how long the joy of his salvation was not part of his experience. Kings go to war each Spring and David was in the habit of getting God's counsel.¹⁰ It might have been a while since this was true.¹¹ His Psalms are a diary of his prayer life which must have been on pause.

Yet, David's heart was still a heart after God's own heart. This had not changed, but his sin contradicted this truth and disrupted his relationship with God. Here is where David discovered something merciful and kind about the God he served: *"In my guiltiness, You taught me, Lord, to be truthful to myself."* David discovered. He testified, *"Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts [heart], And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."*¹² C. H. Spurgeon interprets, *"God is teaching him*

10. 1 Samuel 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1 *David enquired of the Lord*

11. Psalm 51:8-12 *Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

12. verse 6 הַיְאֹמֶת הַפִּצְתָּ בְּטִחוֹת וְנִסְתָּם חֲכָמָה תּוֹדִיעֵנִי:

cp. Job 38:36 מִי־שָׂת בְּטִחוֹת חֲכָמָה אֹ מִי־נָתַן לִשְׁכֹּוֹ בִּינָה

NKJV *Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding to the heart?*

LXX τίς δὲ ἔδωκεν γυναιξὶν ὑφάσματος σοφίαν ἢ ποικιλικτὴν ἐπιστήμην. *Who has given to women skill in weaving or knowledge of embroidery?*

Vulgate: quis posuit in visceribus hominis sapientiam vel quis dedit gallo intellegentiam. *Who hath put wisdom in the heart of man? or who gave the rooster understanding?*

Born in Sin

*truth concerning his nature, which he had not before perceived.”*¹³

If I may: God reads the heart,¹⁴ not the circumstance nor the outward perception of things. Truthfulness pleases Him; so, an honest prayer of repentance, a prayer for God’s mercy, waits on the breakthrough when all rationalization and self-justification ceases. While we fault others on our knees, expect God to use the time—as Spurgeon correctly interpreted this verse—to “*teach ... [us] truth concerning ...[our true] nature, which ...[we] had not before perceived.*”

Any counselor worth their salt would stir our thoughts in the same direction. Blaming a spouse or a friend or a congregation or the world has no therapeutic value if we ultimately want God to restore our joy. “*Faithfulness, Lord,*” David found out, “*you desire in the heart*¹⁵ ... *In the closed chamber of the heart.*”¹⁶ Who would have guessed that one benefit of true confession before God is a lesson in who we are!¹⁷

13. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David.* (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 936

14. Hebrews 4:12 *discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*; 1 Samuel 16:7 *The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

15. Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page 377

16. Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page 711 cp Psalm 25:5 *Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*

17. Psalm 16:7 *I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.*

Hyssop

Verse Seven

Hyssop

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

David at last sees a true mirror image¹ of his person, the man who did what he did that was so evil and against God. God, in the context of David's praying, brought him to this realization. And it is a good thing. Now He can ask for forgiveness because now he is in truth and in heart asking for forgiveness. Forgiveness is not just a word now. David who has come to this point in converse with the God of mercy wants to wipe away the misery of this heinous act and restore their fellowship. There is no longer any sense in which David does not own the deed. There is no pride left standing in defense of an act he is guilty of committing. His request for forgiveness is a humble recognition of how total His need of God is.

Scholarship shares with us the obvious that "*there is no mention here of atonement by blood; for the antitype of the atoning blood [Jesus Christ] was still hidden from David.*"² He could not appeal to Calvary and the forgiveness provided through Christ's death. He did not know there would be such a provision. He could not appeal to that with which he was not familiar. He knew about the use of hyssop, though, in cleansing a leper healed of their leprosy.³

1. James 1:23 *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror*

2. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 139.

3. When leprosy disappeared, since God was said to cause it because of sin, God was said to heal it in an act of forgiveness. The single verse

Hyssop

Leprosy

Leprosy is a very significant term even though David did not mention it by name in this Psalm. He alluded to it elsewhere as we will see shortly. “[Hyssop] recalls to mind the sprinkling of the leper....” C. F. Keil alludes⁴ to the sacrifice offered when a leper is healed. Leprosy was called a “plague” in those days as something God sent to address sin. It was considered a divine strike or blow in punishment. The well-known example of Miriam, Moses’s sister, comes to mind.⁵ The other penitential Psalms, like Psalm 38, give us further insight into David’s desperation. Scholarship describes this as, “*David’s distress, ...forsaken by his friends and regarded by his foes as one who is cast off forever.*”⁶ Scholarship just described the distance people stay from a leper. David’s disease was spiritual. “*My heart pants*⁷ [palpitates, a rapid heartbeat]” He wrote, “*My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds [sore]; my neighbors stay far away*” [Psalm 38:11]. “*The fire of God’s anger burns within him like a fever,*”

which does not speak directly of leprosy, does reference God’s stroke on the Egyptians. The hyssop is prophylactic: Exodus 12:22 *Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning.*

4. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 138

5. Numbers 12:10 *When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam’s skin was leprous—it became as white as snow.*

6. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament.* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 20

7. palpitates. possibly caused, according to WEBMD, by “*Strong emotions like anxiety, fear, or stress*”

Hyssop

C. F. Keil continues, “and the divine withdrawal as it were rests upon him like darkness.”⁸ David was spiritually leprous and standing unclean at a distance from the God he wanted to—needed to—embrace in worship to restore spiritual health, to sense God’s mercy and salvation, to simply be happy once more. All theology fails one in such times.

David sensed God’s distance. His tears spoke to an anguish nearing despair. “*Do not be silent at my tears; For I am a stranger with You*” he cried to the Lord [Psalm 39:12]. These are some of the saddest words in scripture spoken by someone who knew the joy of his salvation, who walked with God, followed God’s counsel in battle to victory, and could not count the blessings God showered upon him over the years, and whose prayer life *was* his life. But now he sees himself as leprous. “*Unclean, unclean,*” was the cry of alarm! God’s Spirit stood aloof,⁹ as if punishing him, but David already knew how justified God was in doing so. God’s holiness cannot condone or even pretend to condone what David had done. God must grieve¹⁰ as much as David suffered through this disruption of their fellowship. “*Remove your scourge from me;*” David bemoans his state, “*I am overcome by the blow of your hand*” [Psalm 39:10]. Spurgeon insightfully remarked, “... *fit effusions [unrestrained and heartfelt] for a man so tempted, so strong in his passions, and yet so firm in faith.*”¹¹ David is not at peace. Nothing should be more disquieting to a

8. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 20

9. cp Psalm 51:11

10. Psalm 78:40 *How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the wasteland!*

11. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 722

Hyssop

believer than to realize the garrison of the heart¹² is sounding the alarm of a present spiritual danger.¹³

Hyssop

David asks for God to stand in as a priest ceremonially cleansing a leper¹⁴ ..and cleanse *him*! If he was no longer spiritually leprous, he could return to close fellowship with God. He would be able to sense God's *forgiveness*. He would apply God's forgiveness now to his life—live in the assurance of God's forgiveness in genuine repentance and that humble admittance of God's support to rescue him from the temptations that crouch in the darkness of a sinful world.

Cleanse Me

David's choice of words is revealing. Cleansed mean purged¹⁵ of sin and reconciled¹⁶ to God. David's relationship with the Lord restored, he looks ahead to what scholars call being renewed. Scholarship sees this verse as the end of part one. *"In the second part, the prayer for justification is followed by the prayer for renewing."*¹⁷

12. Philippians 4:7 [NLT] "His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

13. Genesis 4:7 [NLT] "Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master"

14. cp. Leviticus 14

15. A more correct translation

16. 2 Chronicles 29:24 the priests ...made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel

17. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 139

Hyssop

White As Snow

David knows now that God heard him,¹⁸ *“And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him”* [1 John 5:15]. David must have sensed, as if in a whispered promise, in a still small voice, God was once again speaking peace to his soul. *“I will be whiter than snow”* the king proclaims in his excitement.¹⁹ As a figure of speech this is a tautology.²⁰ Snow is naturally white—the whitest. God never leaves anything half done. We might content ourselves with tolerances, with almost perfect, with mostly holy, with an all-around good person, for the most part. But not God! Paul describes God’s work in us as a work in process *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”* [Ephesians 4:13] ... perfect! ...Christlike ...all white!

18. Isaiah 1:18 *“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...”*

19. For the idea of David being excited about his renewed relationship with God, see the next verse.

20. the saying of the same thing twice in different words.

Part II - Renewal

Renewal

David's prayer of repentance is now a prayer of renewal. He ask:

1. That the Lord would continue the relationship as before,
2. That his sin would no longer be remembered or spoken of,
3. For purity of heart,
4. For steadfastness in spirit,
5. That the Holy Spirit's presence, the source of his joy, would return
6. For emotional and spiritual restoration, and
7. For God's support helping him live the life God wants of him.

This alone is a credit to God's teaching. Never underestimate the value of prayer. Not only does God deal with the misery of our past sins but His forgiveness comes under warranty to keep us true to Him.

Crushed Bones

Verse Eight

Crushed Bones

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Words such as *joy*, *gladness*, and *rejoicing* in Psalm 51 represent excitement and are filled with life and jubilation. *“Joy and gladness together frequently combined are always used of loud and festive manifestations of joy.”*¹ But how should we understand² David’s words?

Most translations read as a prayer: *“Make me hear joy”* or *“Let me hear joy”* because David is verbalizing a longing for God to renew the joy he, David, once shared with God’s people during festival or simply in attending Temple. David testified that his sole desire for which he prayed was to spend his life worshipping God in the Temple. Here he would learn all he could about the Lord, searching out the deepest, most cherished, truths in prayer of how good God is. *“One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek,”* David confessed, *“That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His Temple”* [Psalm 27:4].

But this cannot be while he remained unrepentant, hiding behind the crown, living with the memory of a sin that could not, and would never, represent the person he really was. He seeks renewal.

1. John Peter Lange, *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V. Page 326.

2. For those readers grammatically curious: The translation “Let me” or “Make me” are either Imperative or Jussive forms but even the Blue Letter Bible recognizes this is an Imperfect form. Scholarship recognizes that sometimes the Imperfect does duty for a Jussive. The LXX uses a Present form which could be either Declaratory (indicative) or Imperative (command).

Crushed Bones

The New Living Translation has David pray, *“Give me back my joy...”* Young’s Literal Translation recognizes God as the sole source of his joy: *“You cause me to hear joy and gladness...”* The Message reads *“Tune me in to foot-tapping songs, set these once-broken bones to dancing.”* So, regardless how the translators see this verse, they share the nuance that this is David’s heart praying to get back the joy once a part of him. This suggests, understandably, that David’s visits to the Temple had devolved into lifeless ritual, if he went at all. Bathsheba and he paid a heavy price for their infidelity, but it’s time to get right with God and get back the experience of celebrating God’s goodness.

David knows that it is only God Who turns mourning into dancing.³ There are signs here that David’s heart is experiencing God’s forgiveness. “Experiencing” is the correct word, here; for, when God reveals that it is time to reconcile it is never just words but He brings with it His peace. David asks God to put the song back in his life and the dance in his feet. The cloud of despondency that silenced his voice and quill and crippled him spiritually is lifting since he realizes God’s forgiveness. *“Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.”* Lord, give me back my song! Let me dance again. God’s forgiveness is always confirmed by His peace and this is the beginning of better times for David. It is time to celebrate with unrestrained delight, spontaneous shouts of joy, and loud praises to God for how unspeakable His goodness, His compassion, His love, and His mercy.

Where David is at in his spiritual journey as he penned this verse is not clear other than to affirm that prayer does change things and David has been in with God discussing the misery of his sin and his desire to get back the excitement that motivated him—animated him, to

3. Psalm 30:11

Crushed Bones

Temple and to worship. It was never just a ritual with David.

Zephaniah 3:17

Read Zephaniah 3:17⁴ in the NIV: *“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”* The Greek does not say “singing” because the word more correctly signifies a shout (here: for joy) So the Greek says: *“He shall rejoice over you with delight as in the day of feasting.”* The important thing here is the addition of the words *in the day of feasting* (a feast day or festival)⁵ in order to show that this is not the concert sung by a Sunday morning choir but the unleashed merriment and jubilation, celebrating a great event with singing and dancing.

The New American Standard [NASB] translates, *“He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”*

There is a theology here worth exploring. *“I tell you,”* Jesus revealed, *“there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”* [Luke 15:10]. If angels celebrate the new birth of each believer even though they will never experience it, there appears no limit to the rhapsodic enthusiasm, the effusive and unrestrained happiness God and His entourage of angels are capable of experiencing when we repent!

Psalms 68:3

Read Psalm 68:3. I prefer the English Standard [ESV] *“But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy!”* The NIV reads *“may*

4. יהוה אלהינו בקרבך גבור ישיע ישיש עליך בשמחה יחריש באהבתו יגיל עליך ברנה

5. ...εὐφρανθήσεται ἐπὶ σὲ ἐν τέρψει ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἑορτῆς

Crushed Bones

they be happy and joyful" which is rather bland. I think the language should represent a bit more enthusiasm—a bit more "spirit." The Greek⁶ translates, "But let the righteous rejoice; let them exult [leap joyously] before God; let them be **delighted with joy.**" The Hebrew word for *jubilant* properly comes from a root word meaning *to leap, to spring*. Carrying this enthusiasm forward into the text does not poison the translation but adds the spice that brings out the flavor of its meaning. Some scholars are reminded of Elizabeth's testimony "...the baby in my womb **leaped for joy.**"⁷

Psalm 51:8

A glance in our text at the words for *joy, gladness, rejoice*, leads me to believe that some of the significance of these terms for David we may have missed in a quick read. The New English Translation [NET] reads "*Grant me the ultimate joy of being forgiven!*" Misery does not know happiness. Sin does not know happiness—not what God gives. David needed to appropriate God's forgiveness before he would once again know the gladness that accompanies the people of God while celebrating the Lord's deliverance.

- ◆ *Joy* comes from a word whose root idea was prancing, foot lifting, akin to the idea of leaping.
- ◆ *Gladness* runs the gamut of pleasurable feelings which could be as calm as a *smile*. But there can be a loud message in a smile. The word is very popular in scripture with meanings running from

6. (LXX 67:4) καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι εὐφρανθήτωσαν **ἀγαλλιάσθωσαν** ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ τερψθήτωσαν ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ

7. Luke 1:44 Modern Hebrew reads מרב שמחה...רקד leaped for great joy.

Crushed Bones

gladness to mirth. In Psalm 68:3, the KJV reads “*But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.*” This word is translated both *glad* and—yes—*exceedingly!*

- ◆ *Rejoice* is akin to the Jewish word to dance⁸. A favorite verse at festival time to introduce the Horah or circular dance is Psalm 35:10 “*My whole being,*” declared the Psalmist, “*will exclaim [NKJV All my bones shall say], ‘Who is like you, Lord?’*”

David, The Dancer

David was a dancer. “*David danced before the Lord with all his might,*” said Samuel [2 Samuel 6:14]. But sadly sin turns off the music in the heart and in the feet. It was, perhaps, while David fled from his son, Absalom, he missed the shouts of joy and praise time.

“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng” [Psalm 42:2-4].

Bones

Certainly all the translations support the preacher in talking about the joy of the Lord that through his sin

8. to keep a pilgrim feast. Haggai’s name derives from this word. אגף
“Israel ben Eliezer Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, used dance to attain religious enthusiasm (*hitlahavut*) and devoted adherence to the Almighty (*devekut*). He taught his followers that “the dances of the Jew before his Creator are prayers,” and quoted the Psalmist, “All my bones shall say: Lord, who is like unto Thee?” (Psalms 35:10).” [<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/all-my-bones-cry-out-to-the-lord/>]

Crushed Bones

David lost. David missed the ebullience, the excitement, he experienced during great feasts. Now, sadly, in a metaphorical sense, his legs were broken, his bones crushed. Dispirited by his waywardness, there was no dance in the dancer.

Yet the assurance of God's forgiveness would signal the spiritual healing to those "bones" that could put the sacred music back into those feet. David's relationship with God was far more than a ceremonial moment, far more than the rituals. David cherished his time in the Temple, in festival, with the people of God when they, in a very Jewish way, gathered to celebrate the goodness of God. When he stumbled in his walk before God and brought shame upon his rulership, my guess, he stopped frequenting all the places and times where and when God's people assembled in merriment to praise God through song and dance. His bones were indeed crushed!

He accused God of breaking his bones, i.e. taking away the joy of his salvation that made festivals festive. And if God must heal, God, it could be said, took away his joy because God's Spirit and God's peace took flight the moment David jumped into bed with his neighbor's wife.

And what about gladness? Here is the quiet joy in his heart confirming forgiveness and the exciting anticipation affirming that the promise of forgiveness is guaranteed to the humble. It is time through repentance and forgiveness to get the music back.

"When the prodigals return," wrote Spurgeon, *"the father is glad, and the neighbors and friends rejoice and are merry with music and dancing."*⁹

9. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 937.

Crushed Bones

There is more than hand clapping envisioned in these verses. Forgiveness does not necessarily lead to dancing but forgiveness, realized and accepted, does unleash a flood of praise to God and a joy that Peter correctly noted is a leaping, jumping joy, "*inexpressible and glorious.*"¹⁰

10. 1 Peter 1:8 *rejoice with joy* is better translated "leap for joy."

Hidden Sins

Verse Nine

Hidden Sins

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Is there a distinction to be made between verse 1 and verse 9? In verse 1 David prays, “Blot out my *transgressions*.” In verse 9, he asks God, “Blot out all my *iniquities*.” Now David wants “*all*” his sins to be under God’s erasure,

There is not here the “variety of language”¹ that even I use as a writing style where synonyms are more interesting. Monotones in English bore readers but not in Hebrew especially when the speaker is in pain—as David’s remorse must show.² We can reasonably believe David has a reason for adding the word “all” here in verse 9. Also, transgressions and iniquities must be understood as having a different emphasis. In verse one, as we noted, the word “transgressions” are acts of rebellion against God which must bring to mind the decalogue. He broke 2 of these commandments. Iniquities adds the notion of liability, guilt, and the punishment it bears.

In using the term “blot out” David wants forgiveness. His rebellious fling with another man’s wife is forever a thing of the past but the consequences of this deed, the pain caused, linger. Now David wants forgiveness from both.

For us, there is no condemnation in Christ [Romans 8:1]. The Lord’s forgiveness is absolute, all-inclusive, in every respect, both the act and its consequence. But this is

1. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 937

2. Hebrew uses the conjunction “and” often where we might use a variety of junctures: but, even, etc.

Hidden Sins

because of Christ satisfying or fulfilling the Old Covenant on the Cross by His death [Matthew 5:17]. Jesus bore the punishment for sin. Can't David expect this now on his side of the Cross? David prays that God would wipe away the aftermath of his tryst with his coveted lover: "*Blot out all my iniquity.*" What he needs to know is that if God forgave him (and He did) that forgiveness is never conditional; so now, he can forgive himself ...and Bathsheba.

Getting inside David's head might be improper but there is a lesson here. David confessed that his sorrowful life, which included the demise of a couple of his sons trying to wrest his kingdom from him, somehow was his fault. In his mind these circumstances tied back to his own disobedience before God. Whether or not we would agree, David concluded, "... *my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity [misery], and my bones waste away*" [Psalm 31:10].

Even if he had not been self-aware, he was still in God's evaluation a man after God's heart—and from God's perspective, that relationship is eternally cherished! He is asking God to heal his tortured soul. It hurts and his circumstances ever reminded him that he was frail humanity prone to doing things of regrettable consequence.

"Wipe out *all* of it, Lord." All the pain, all the memory, all the consequence, all the sin that kept and might keep me from living in the peaceful awareness of Your gracious presence." "*Hide your face, God!*" (According to the dictionary, "*Be not observant of my sin.*")³ How far off might this prayer be from Paul's description of agape love

3. Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page 711.

Hidden Sins

in 1 Corinthians 13:7 Love “*bears⁴ all things*” or as the NASB, The New American Standard Bible, translates it, “*keeps every confidence.*” One scholar talks of love “keeping the lid tightly on” all offense committed by someone loved. David is praying, “Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, And teach me Your statutes”⁵ [Psalm 119:124].

We might pray and ought, “Lord, forgive me all my sinfulness” not failing to add, “and teach me, Lord. Show me, the right way to be, to speak, to act.” David, perhaps, was not finding the proper words but that’s our experience as well when we are in conversation with God over our sinfulness. David wants a new heart and for this he must rely on the surgeon, on God.

4. One meaning of the word, στεγω, means to keep secret, keep hidden.

5. See verse 1.

A Fixed Heart

Verse Ten

A Fixed Heart

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

David's prayer represented here in this Psalm is not a 5 minute monologue shared with God in some effort to convince God that he, David, is a good candidate for mercy. This is not a well-written argument presented to the court of heaven for clemency. We know this because of Christ. There never was such an argument. It took His shed blood to provide a fixed heart in man. This is an ongoing dialog, a discourse, over the span of perhaps years in prayer while God correcting and teaching His servant because David's heart is teachable. This explains why a one night stand of forbidden love with another's spouse cannot cancel out God's interest in David, and this explains Nathan.

The language in these verses are indications of this education in prayer. These verses sound like they could have been penned by a Christian this side of the Cross. "*Create in me a clean heart... do not take Your Holy Spirit from me ... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...*" could have been written by any apostle after Pentecost. Could we contend that they meant something different to David because Jesus had not died and rose yet! I can't argue this. These words must mean something to us this side of Calvary. To give these words meaning, they must apply to us in the here and now—this side of the Cross. Is this not a clear indication that God was teaching the king and is not

A Fixed Heart

His message the same, for David and for us? How else would Psalm 51 be applicable to our lives!¹

Purity of Heart

David asked God to give him a pure heart and a spirit that doesn't waver² from doing what is right. This sounds most like the New Covenant that would come with Christ.³ But did we expect God to teach David or any Old Testament saint anything else other than what centers on the death and resurrection of His Son to provide it!

How close in meaning is David's prayer to the Beatitude: "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*" [Matthew 5:8]. David wanted the Lord to make him into the kind of person that doesn't live with deception and selfish interests that can lure innocence into his bedchamber and then plot the coverup. What kind of person had he become. It was ugly. It was dirty.⁴ David needed a good heart washing. Pure is always clean and

1. Modern scholarship often argues the authorship or genuineness of a Bible book based on the language thought appropriate for the prophet or apostle writing it and not on what the Holy Spirit would teach us through his words. Sad!

2. "A spirit constant in the purpose of virtue" - Gesenius' Lexicon

3. Jeremiah 31: **31** "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— **32** not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, [a]lthough I was a husband to them, says the Lord. **33** But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their [b]hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. **34** No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

4. Proverbs 30:12 calls purity cleanliness and contrasts it with filth.

A Fixed Heart

always holy.⁵ A pure heart respects and honors God by living in accordance with His Word.⁶ God's Word is pure.⁷ All this is obvious to the Christian but that does mean we always live out this truth. The torment David's night of passion caused him was punishment enough for him, but he does not trust himself to promise God anything. He would rather God, who is faithful, promise Him a new heart that God would please God.⁸ There have been "*given to us,*" Peter reminds us, by God, "*exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*" [2 Peter 1:4].

It is easy for Christian scholars⁹ to see this prayer as a need for the new creation that will come in Christ. After all, David begins by asking God, the Creator, to create again, only, in him. This sounds genuinely Pauline in tone: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: [that person is a new creation] The old has gone, the new is here!*" [2 Corinthians 5:17].

David had a heart after God's. If his heart wasn't already a heart that sought God's presence and peace, it is reasonably doubtful that this Psalm would have been written. David was prone to carry on conversations with God. The Psalms are a testimony to this. David's interest in

5. Ezekiel 44:23 And they shall teach My people *the difference* between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean [pure].

6. Psalm 19:9 The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether.

7. Psalm 12:6 The words of the LORD *are* pure words, *Like* silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times.

8. Proverbs 15:26 The thoughts of the wicked *are* an abomination to the LORD, But the words of the pure *are* pleasant.

9. "*He is too experienced in the hopelessness of the old nature.*" - C. H. Spurgeon. 937

A Fixed Heart

the Torah,¹⁰ the law of Moses, was not an academic curiosity but more a love. The 25th Psalm, David's work, is not an intellectual attempt to formulate a theological treatise. As here, the Psalm is full of passion for forgiveness¹¹ and a desire, from deep in his soul, to learn how to live in God's truth.¹²

If Psalm 51 is a salvation message, it is much more a roadmap back to the peace of God for the *believer*. Even we, God's people, at times fail to ward off the temptations we later call depraved in others.

Steadfastness

Psalm 108:1 reads, "O God, my heart is **steadfast**." Some other translations say *confident, fixed, determined, or prepared*. Psalm 112 celebrates the person who fears the Lord and in verse 7 the Psalmist proclaims, "They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are **steadfast**, trusting in the Lord."

With the clean heart God will give David, David wants to purchase a life-time warranty. The price for that would be the Savior's crucifixion, but David didn't know that. How much we ask of God without pondering the price such a prayer will require of someone else. When Israel cried in Egyptian bondage and prayed for freedom, God heard and answered [Exodus 3:7-8]. They did not know it would cost Egypt their first born [Isaiah 43:3]. David's prayer for a clean and steadfast heart ultimately cost our Savior's life.

10. Psalm 119

11. Psalm 25:11 *For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.*

12. Psalm 25:1, 5 [NKJV] *To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ... Lead me in Your truth and teach me*

A Fixed Heart

Psalm 119

Psalm 119¹³ is replete with memorable verses that join in the dialogue: “*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path*” [Psalm 119:105].

In Psalm 119, which does not speak directly to a need for forgiveness, a 19th century Lutheran scholar recognized the Psalmist’s need of a steadfast spirit while facing the challenges living in a society that mocks our God and persecutes His people. I mention the century to point out that time does not change this truth or erode it.

*The poet [David when writing Psalm 119] is a young man, who finds himself in a situation which is clearly described: he is derided, oppressed, persecuted, and that by those who despise the divine word. ...the whole Psalm is a prayer for **steadfastness** in the midst of an ungodly ...race, and ..great trouble, which is heightened by the pain he feels at the prevailing apostasy....”¹⁴*

Some think this is not David, but whether or not that is the case, the Psalmist speaks to a need of *steadfastness*, same as David did in verse 10 of our Psalm.

A Prayer

“Lord, put in me a rock hard determination to learn, believe, trust, and live Your Word. I don’t know, Lord, how you might do this but I am weary of faltering and stumbling along in

13. *This long Psalm deserves a long introduction. The author is unnamed; older commentators almost universally say it is a Psalm of David, composed throughout his entire life. More modern commentators often say that it is post-exilic, coming from the days of Nehemiah or Ezra. We lean towards agreement with the older commentators, but do not insist upon it; if it were important, God would have preserved the name of David to this Psalm. - David Gizik, Study Guide for Psalm 119*

14. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page. 243-4. see verses 23, 46, & 161

A Fixed Heart

my faith: one moment filled with hope, and the next, filled with worry about the unknown; one moment filled with love for others and the next with rage for reasons soon forgotten; one moment confident of my walk before you and the next humbled because I have been unfaithful.

Lord, I want the childlike faith I once knew while everything spiritual was exciting and new, when I was starved for your Truth and I could think of nothing but my next opportunity to frequent the House of God or join you in private conversation.

Lord re-affirm, one more time, the promise of your loving presence as a guarantee that my faith is real. May I never know the absence of your abiding peace, Lord. By your wondrous grace upon my life fix my heart and mind that I might serve you faithfully—always and evermore.”

[Yes, I wrote that, and, yes, about me, but that is what I see in this verse.]

Amen.

A Confirmation

Verse Eleven

A Confirmation

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

David and I have this in common that God's presence is the most cherished gift He offers us after our salvation. I say this because of who He is, "*my only source of well-being*" [Psalm 16:2]. "*my source of strength*" [Psalm 18:1; 22:19], "*my source of security*" [Psalm 119:57], "*the source of your confidence*" [Proverbs 3:26].¹ David's summation is simply this: "*You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*"

A believer, realizing it or not, depends upon the Lord's leadership. They are, according to Jesus, His sheep [John 10:27]. His presence is very much a vital and active part of their total experience even during storms or when wolves roam nearby. They know He is there! They would know when danger looms if He were not there. David's astute understanding based on his own experience as a shepherd and as one of God's sheep, himself, and sensing here the Lord's displeasure over his sneaking into the wrong bedroom, prays this prayer as if it alone was all he would ever want of God. Where Solomon asked for wisdom, David wants to know that his God is near.

David's choice of words is interesting. He asks God not to cast him away (reject him)—the Hebrew term carries the thought of flinging, hurling, throwing him away.²

1. New English Translation

2. A softer word but similar (probably not by coincidence) is translated "divorce" or to cast off a wife, i.e. send her away with a bill of divorce [Deuteronomy 24:1]. See also Leviticus 20:23. Was David alluding to his act of rebellion, his lack of faithfulness to God and God in discuss sending him away?

A Confirmation

David's language suggests deep emotion, perhaps even, anxiety and apprehension, over God's evident disappointment in him. David's words reveal, in a sense, a knowledge of God's holiness and, in David, a conviction that there can be no further wrangling to justify or explain anything, only sincere repentance!

To be deprived of God's presence, of God's Spirit, would be for a believer to be deprived of God's gift of peace. David knew that the absence of peace would be a rupture in his relationship with God. There are sermons here for the preacher. We will leave them to him or her but we can note that our sin and God do not have a symbiotic relation. They cannot co-exist in the same heart. It is not possible.

We are not saying that God has not forgiven us. God's forgiveness can still co-exist with His displeasure, even His anger [Numbers 14:20-22]. What we are saying is that sin makes believer's absolutely miserable: the joy is gone; the theology makes no sense; the church service is mere ritual without meaning; a worship service is pure noise (even the drums are too loud).

David did not accuse God of having abandoned him in his hour of spiritual need. The language is future. David was asking God *not* to leave him. With all that David discovered already in this prayer—clearly he had a heart after God's own—he knew he had God's ear.

God had not gone anywhere; so, why should David even broach the subject of the Holy Spirit leaving? This is not his head forming these words but his heart—as it should. David cannot imagine life without God.

A Confirmation

In this verse the form could possibly express a *wish*³ that something should not happen, that God should not leave him.

There is another answer: This form may express something which cannot or should not happen.⁴ This is stronger than a wish; it is a longing, “*Lord, You cannot possibly leave me!!!!*” How his heart pants after his Lord!⁵ David’s cry here is not a command, an imperative or ultimatum or just a wish. David reminds me of Mary Magdalene when she first met the risen Savior.⁶ She couldn’t imagine life without her Lord.

Sometimes the cry of the heart is a confirmation of a promise⁷ which at last is learned or realized. Sincere and heart felt prayer is often the vehicle by which God shares truth with us.⁸ The fact that David’s cry sounds so passionate, almost demanding, is more the voice of God declaring in clear language His faithfulness. Theology is learned in an intellectual pursuit but often real truth comes with confirming tears.

3. The imperfect and jussive forms are the same. This could be a jussive with the subjunctive “no” אֶל־תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי

4. Gesenius, William A *Hebrew And English Lexicon of the Old Testament*.(Houghton, Mifflin and Company. Boston, MA:1882.) Section 109, c & e. p. 321f.

5. Psalm 42:1

6. John 20:15-17

7. Hebrews 13:5 *Because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. I count five negatives in the Greek n this promise: I will never, never, never, never, never leave you.*

8. Daniel 9:20-22 **While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding.”**

A Confirmation

Our tears become a living, healing stream
To cleanse our hearts of what He disapproves,
To free our faith of what things falsely seem,
To learn the special way His Spirit moves.

1979-2018

In 1979 I spent a week in the hospital with an unidentified heart issue. My BP kept dropping off the map while they watched over me, a few days in ICU and then in post-coronary. There was only one thing on my mind and heart while I spoke to the Lord, I wanted to know He was with me.

It wasn't a question of sin—at least I don't think so. I needed time away from the stress of making poor decisions and confronting the people I loved. I needed time away where my Lord might take His opportunity to work on the details of, then, problems that I was struggling with.

The simple truth here is that if the Lord, through His abiding peace, affirmed His presence, I knew all would be well. You see, God's first job was and remains as the Creator and, I knew that, as a Creator, He couldn't just stand around and watch me flail away in deep water. Beside, He promised⁹ He wouldn't let me drown.

For me, praying this way started when I was first serious in prayer as a teen and I asked Jesus not to leave me. I didn't say "ever" (I didn't think to) but I did pray what would become a lifelong request. It might not make theological sense but it felt right.

In 2008 and again in 2018 when I was diagnosed with cancer, I was serious with the Lord that if I sensed His presence I knew all would be Okay. I needed Him near

9. Isaiah 43:2

A Confirmation

and to be aware of that inner peace He gives was all I really wanted. As David prayed, *“Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me,”* I prayed, though, not for the same reason and not in the same words but in the same spirit.

God's Presence

73 Psalms bear the inscription: *To David* (a Psalm of David). These are scattered by arrangement throughout the Book of Psalms but a number of them are found early in the list.¹⁰ David in a transparent honesty reveals his heart and gives us the testimony of God's compassion and mercy toward those who seek Him. *“For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee”* [Psalm 86:5]. David ultimately learned: *“God is present in the company of the righteous”* [Psalm 14:5].

All David needs now—and by extension all of us—is that this moment will last, that all that the Lord has shared with us while we lingered in prayer seeking His mercy and forgiveness will become a vital part of who we are in relation with Him. We want to leave our prayer closet with the affirmation of our faith that what the Lord has done for us here was not a one time act of His kindness but the unending participation of His faithfulness in our lives.

10. Psalms 3-71

Restoration

Verse Twelve

Restoration

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

God is in the restoration business whether we are discussing a return to Eden, the Tree of Life, and partaking of its fruit¹ or getting back the years lost in sin.² A study of “The Simplicity of God” teaches that because God is eternal and immutable, He is eternally perfect and all His works are eternally perfect.. His purpose in creating us was for fellowship.³ So in dealing with sin He rescues the sinner who repents and His love forgives. Nothing God does can be thought as incomplete (imperfect). His Word finishes all He purposes.⁴ This is why Paul could speak confidently that God “who has begun a good work in you will complete it...” [Philippians 1:6). When we sin, God awaits that conversation with us that will lead to our recognizing exactly what we did that His holiness finds objectionable and we, in turn, repent. If God could be anxious (probably not because He is omniscient) He looks forward to our returning to Him for mercy. So much so, He

1. Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. See also Revelation 22:2.

2. Joel 2:25 So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,

3. 1 Corinthians 1:9 God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

4. Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

Restoration

will at times encourage our return⁵ as the Psalmist learned, “*Blessed is the one you discipline, LORD, the one you teach from your law*” [Psalm 94:10 NIV].

Praying for restoration, a return to spontaneous and impassioned worship, to a heart overflowing with joy, is not just a good thing; it’s a God-thing! No longer downcast or despondent where temptation took him, David longs for the sweet fellowship he once enjoyed with God’s people when his faith was young and God’s salvation (over lions, bears and Goliaths) was new. Only now David is asking God for His help, so he will never again be that wayward sheep who slipped under the fence to the sheep fold and, self-deceived, took off looking for greener pastures.

- *Restore my joy* actually means “*Bring back my joy.*” There is healing in this request—even before God answers it, which is guaranteed by promise.⁶ David recognizes where his sin took him and he needs a divine GPS to find his way back on the right road to serving and worshipping God and fellowshiping with God’s people.
- *Sustain* is his word for support or leaning upon for support. “*Let me lean on You, Lord.*” My heart gravitates toward Isaiah 26:3 *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are **steadfast**, because they trust in you. Steadfast* is a translation of our word here for *support*. Trust the Lord to forgive you and bring you back, David, and give you peace! Lean on Him. Peter added, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*” [1 Peter 5:7]. Only He can

5. See also Hebrews 12:6.

6. Isaiah 12:3 ...with joy you will draw water \From the wells of salvation. See also Romans 14:17.

Restoration

return your joy. We depend on Him for this blessing.

- *Grant me a willing spirit - "Lord, I want to want to serve you, help me to want to."*⁷ David asks the Lord to make him willing. Only the KJV and the NKJV interpret this as a reference to *God's Spirit*. All other translations see this as David's willingness to obey God. Even here David learned that he needed God. We know this as well as the work of His grace.

A Prayer

I depend on You, Lord , to hold me up and keep me upon my feet; with your support bring me back to the excitement of Your Salvation I once knew. Amen

7. I am reminded of Mark 9:24 *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Part III - The Teacher

David, the Teacher

There might be one remaining question some will ask: Are the verses of Psalm 51 in any particular order? We suggest there are three parts which might be just our way of organizing our analysis, not David's thoughts. Within each part, do the verses show a progression, a step by step conversation with our Lord that might indicate that the Lord was taking David through a series of spiritual lessons? Or do these verses show us the searchings and longings of David's heart—a kind of diary—and they can be read as rambling cries of a heart in pain. Pain, including misery, speaks out discursively. Do these verses flow together or do they jump from subject to subject? Or does it really matter? David's prayer was from the heart; so, even if he could have said it better, God knew what he meant, what the ache in his heart or the burden of his soul was trying to verbalize. The lessons we learn in prayer, in any case, are seldom in sync with some logically drawn up curriculum.

A more pertinent question might be: did David leave anything out that should be part of this inspired prayer that we should know? Was he hiding something? No! He's talking to God and lesson one is total honesty. God will bring this out of us, every time, if we continue in earnest prayer.

Part III - The Teacher

Now David appears to turn teacher but his remarks are not entirely directed toward us, his reader. Co-mingled in these last few verses are thoughts directed at God.

If we dare, this last part can become part of a theology that we should consider as Christian as it is Jewish. So, I share my thoughts with you as to what David may have meant. Your personal study can verify or refute.

Love Lifted Me

Verse Thirteen

Love Lifted Me

I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

Ps 51:13 must go with Psalm 25, which some consider also to be a penitent Psalm. “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths” [Psalm 25:4]. David hungering for righteousness beseeches the Lord, “Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins” [Psalm 25:18]. C. H. Spurgeon interprets, “David..applies for a scholarship in the college of grace.¹ [David’s] ... trust [in God], his many conflicts, his great transgression, his bitter repentance, and his deep distresses are all here; so we see the very heart of “the man after God’s own heart.”² There is no better instructor than one who has lived the message, and having experienced the overcoming power of God’s mercy, can guide another through the maze of feelings and attitudes that are dead ends while seeking God’s forgiveness. Psalm 51:13 starts

Then I will teach transgressors your ways. But the word “then” isn’t there. The link with the previous verse reads, “Restore me, Lord, ~~then~~ I will teach others.” It was a good idea but the force of David’s promise here is inherent in this verse alone: *Let me teach transgressors your ways!* What better definition of restoration than God making his life an instrument of God’s mercy for others.

1. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 442

2. *ibid.* p. 441

Love Lifted Me

Let me teach,³ give me this calling, Lord! Let me teach those who have been in rebellion against You, Lord. They will turn to You!!" This lays stress on David's determination and personal interest in sharing with others in his situation what God had done for him. God's forgiveness is now treasured above all other possessions. David longs to teach others how he came to accept forgiveness and what God did for him through it. David's use of language here is more of a humble request⁴ than a promise.

David is impassioned about helping others find the magnanimity of a divine love and wisdom that alone can rescue them whose remorse is burdening their future, pulling them back into their past, and taking away from them the joy of Lord in the present. David will introduce them to his God, Who alone resolves the misery of a self-inflicted punishment.

David has learned much about God's approach to healing the soul who is hopelessly desperate to find help from a guilt or a misery that badger-like has attached itself to their life. When he thought God would punish him severely, God forgave him outright. Like the good Samaritan who poured in the oil and wine,⁵ salvation is a welcomed experience. When David thought God would strike him, God draped His great arm around him and whispered "Be still" to his soul!

3. Cohortative form: אֶלְמִדָּה [exhortative: to strongly encourage or urge (someone) to do something: Oh Lord, let me, please; let me teach!!

4. cp Gesenius William. E. Kautzsch ed. *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press. Second English Edition. London:1974) section 108 p. 319.

5. Luke 10:33-34 *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him*

Love Lifted Me

Sinners will “*turn back to You*” David envisioned. And why not!? There is no healing like God’s when He removes the agony of sin and the sin, too! When He strengthens us and gives us a steadfastness, a resolve, to overcome temptations. David is teaching *repentance*, the sole guiding principle, back to God for those who cannot find the way. Had David known the song, *Love Lifted Me*,⁶ he probably would have gone about humming and singing its message.

Love lifted me!
Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help
Love lifted me!

A Christian Idea

As Paul instructed the Galatian believers: “*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” [Galatians 6:1-2].

Consider his encouraging words to the Philippians : [my free interpretation/translation. David’s heart in ecclesiastical terms], “*If there is, therefore, any opportunity to encourage⁷ another in Christ, if any opportunity to lovingly persuade⁸ another struggling with discouragement, if there is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit by your common*

6. written by James Rowe, 1912

7. παράκλησις in John 14:16 this is the Spirit’s ministry of guidance and instruction but not in a harsh or threatening tone but with an encouraging, supportive tone.

8. παραμύθιον persuasive words which both calm and inspire, console and at the same time encourage the disheartened to try again. cp. 1 Thessalonians 2;1 “as a father *doth* his children.”

Love Lifted Me

experience or fellowship⁹ to use you who have overcome to help another overcome, if the compassion¹⁰ Jesus knew that sent Him to Calvary is in you as His disciple, if any empathy,¹¹ confirm my praise of you by your being united with the Savior in your concern¹² for one another” [Philippians 2:1-2].

If this is indeed David’s heart—and I think so—his remorse over all he did to Uriah is now well along on a healing path. This is not contradicted by his next prayer: Does not the next verse share with us something else David learned in prayer: Only God can deliver us from ourselves!

9. κοινωνία πνεύματος Christian community based on sharing. Quickened or made alive by the Holy Spirit cp. 1 John 1:3 “*truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*”

10. σπλάγχνα A heart of mercy (Philippians 1:8 “of Jesus Christ”) unlike the Greek’s understanding of “the seat of violent emotions” in our Bible it follows the Hebrew thought of the seat of the tenderer affections, esp. kindness, benevolence, and compassion. Used in Scripture of Christ and His followers. The verb form is not found earlier in Greek literature.

11. οίκτιρμοί pity. an inward feeling abiding in the heart which is more likely to be accompanied by prayer and tears. cp. 2 Corinthians 1:3 “*The Father of οίκτιρμοί is the God of all παράκλησις,*”

12. σύμφυχοι A biblical word only meaning unanimity of thought and purpose.

Rescue Me from Me

Verse Fourteen

Rescue Me from Me

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

“My hope is in you, Lord.¹ Don’t let me be a source of shame and disgrace, the conversation of fools. Tear me free from unfaithfulness Don’t let me naively wander into temptation’s trap” [Psalm 39:7-8²]. “Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, from being a murderer!” David is not bemoaning a lingering sense of guiltiness here. He is in simplest terms confessing himself a killer (of Uriah). And he cannot trust himself to never be unfaithful to God again except with God’s help. God, my Savior, my rescuer, in my remaining faithful to you, I will herald (shout aloud)³ your victory. David humbly recognizes God’s merciful intervention in his life. He refuses any longer to credit himself as a righteous man.

This is a spiritual breakthrough for a man whose focus had been on his own misery and not what he did that was so unconscionable to others. *“Nevertheless the consciousness of sin no longer smites him to the earth,”* informs scholarship,...*He prays only that [mercy] will complete her*

1. The LXX reads “the ground of hope is with you, Lord” where “ground” is the word translated “:substance” in Hebrews 11:1 “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for.*” The similarity here must be more than coincidental.

2. 1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

3. The LXX “celebrate joyously”

Rescue Me from Me

*work in him, then shall his tongue ...praise ...God's righteousness."*⁴

There is no relapse here but at long last an honest confession and a concern for others in his life rather than keeping the focus on his own pain. There is a clear move here away from "poor-me" to "*Lord, save me from myself lest again I hurt others and hurt You Whom I most love!*" Now David is asking the Lord to make him a man of God, a better king, that doesn't ever do again what he had done in Uriah's case. He will raise his voice to proclaim God's righteousness at work among His people—and in particular in his, David's life.

4. KC. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 141

Boasting in The Lord

Verse Fifteen

Boasting in The Lord

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

There is no scribal correction even suggested in verse fifteen; so, we must point out that for the first time now in this Psalm David calls his God, his Lord! He knows that his unfaithful act is now behind him and there is healing in prayer and repentance.

There is no contextual reason to make the word *open*, which starts this verse, an exclamatory, a wish or a prayer. (Oh, Lord, may my mouth be opened!!) This is not the cry of the penitent but the exulted praise of the healed. In this verse the Lord has already restored David's song and put in him a renewed heartfelt desire to sing it. David is back with the choir, back with the saints, and with quill in hand, back with the sheep, writing hymns and praises to God! This is a joyous time and a testimony to the healing power of our God. A hundred counselors with college degrees could never do what God alone must do and did for his servant who once again refers to Him as his Lord! God "*invokes ... praise*" says Dr. Lange.¹

"The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song shall be with me..." David bears witness to God's goodness [Psalm 42:8]. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "It is always edifying to listen to the experience of a thoroughly gracious ...saint."² God's kindness toward him, healing him, forgiving him,

1. John Peter Lange, *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V. Page 327.

2. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 783.

Boasting in The Lord

restoring him, answering his prayers, were an overwhelming blessing.³ *“My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long— though I know not how to relate them all.”* [Psalm 71:15 NIV].

When David wants to *declare*⁴ the Lord’s praises, he says it in a song given to the choir director for worship. In a prayer of repentance God was able to counsel him, share what a gift forgiveness really was, resolve the memory of a horrid act, and replace the anguish of his soul with a joy worth celebrating in song.

David wants to “declare” God’s praises. He wants to expound and explain what God did for him. He wants to instruct others, whose hurt pride defends their injustice to their own harm. He wants to encourage those in the grasp of a joy draining strangle hold on their futures to quit struggling but in a humble resignation before God confess all and let God’s mercy do what God’s mercy alone can do.

David wants to praise⁵ God, boast of all God has done for him when all other hope was abandoned. He wants to celebrate anew in the time of festival not just Israel’s deliverance from Egypt but his personal deliverance from sin. A time of thanksgiving for Israel now has a personal meaning to a humbled king who wants the

3. see Malachi 3:10 “pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*” where “pour” means to empty out the coffers of glory on them (which is impossible for a God whose resources are infinite). “And not room enough” means until God’s abundance is exhausted, which will never be. see also, Psalm 72:7.

4. Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page 616 Declare - expound something before not understood, concealed or mysterious

5. Praise - song of praise [boast], thanksgiving

Boasting in The Lord

Lord to control his lips.⁶ The dance, too, once gone out of his feet is now back like a prancing horse.⁷ God restored his joy. Now he wants the Lord to be praised and honored through his living.

God answers a prayer of repentance, a prayer for mercy. *“My soul makes its boast in the Lord;”* David now can stand in the congregation, and testify, *“let the humble hear and be glad.”*⁸

6. Psalm 141:3 *Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.*

7. see Psalms 68:3; 70:4; 119:14 where the word rejoice depicts a display of joy. see also Job 39:21 where it is said of the horse “he paws in the valley, and rejoices in *his* strength;”

8. Psalm 34:2 [ESV] *I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.*

Ritual or Righteousness

Verse Sixteen

Ritual or Righteousness

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

What a truth now has been revealed to David. He reflects upon this time in prayer, whether it was an hour, a day, or even years long before he was reconciled with his past and aware of the healing power of God's forgiveness. Through introspection he has learned that faithfulness to God is first lived before it can be considered important in the Temple worship. Time spent in church for us becomes meaningless ritual if God is not Lord of our lives first. Somehow a dead goat will not suffice to calm God down when we wish to live in rebellion to His Word. We know this, but when did we discover this truth? I doubt the preacher's zeal was sufficient to bring us to this conviction. It is an aspect of our repentance and only perceived in prayer. *"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,"* David learned, *".. my ears you have opened; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require"* [Psalm 40:6].

Jesus echoed an amen, *"...leave your gift ... in front of the altar."* The Savior cautioned, *"First go and be reconciled...; then come and offer your gift."* [Matthew 5:24]. It should remind us of what the Lord shared with Isaiah, *"The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?"* says the Lord. *"I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats"* [Isaiah 1:11]. Moses described what was acceptable and unacceptable regarding offerings under the Law.¹ There is implied here that a sacrifice is

1. Leviticus 22:17-33

Ritual or Righteousness

unacceptable if one's heart is not pure.² The practice of faith must be evaluated in terms of God's delight and pleasure, not in terms of our religious devotion to church or Temple ritual..

A Sad History

Historically, this became a sad comment on a people who were God's chosen nation and who should have had golden opportunities at festival time and around each harvest to celebrate God's deliverance from Egypt, the miracles in the wilderness, and the Judean campaign under Joshua. Performing the ceremonial law (the sacrifices) should have gone hand and glove with living a moral law—not, as David had, committing murder or coveting the woman next door. But the Law of God, the Torah, was not commonly honored during the period of the Judges.

What should have been a common upbringing from parent to child, the Decalogue, was lost until the time of Josiah.³ The central focus of worshipping God *alone* they lost sight of. Scholarship sadly concluded that *"The religious community set up ... in the wilderness [the Tabernacle], with its sacred centre ..., disappears and leaves no trace as soon as Israel settles in a land of its own [Canaan], and becomes, in any proper sense, a nation."*⁴ Samuel had correctly observed, *"The word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation"* [1 Samuel 3:1 NKJV].

In Jeremiah's day, Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins. Sacrifices and celebrations were, for now, a thing of

2. Leviticus 22:31 *Keep my commands and follow them. I am the Lord*

3. see 2 Kings 23:25

4. Julius Wellhausen. *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* p. 6. Kindle Edition.

Ritual or Righteousness

the past. Now what pleases God!? "... let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord" [Jeremiah 9:24]. And this also David knew: "The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" [Psalm 147:11].

David's Hero

Samuel was David's hero and probably introduced this truth to him when he was soon-to-be king. Samuel reminded us all, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" [1 Samuel 15:22].

Is it poor theology to believe that such truth might have been reinforced and owned by David in the wake of the nightmare he brought on himself? When David sought the Lord for relief from his anguish of soul, it was time to learn something about God, the giver of mercy. Pleasing God should matter to us, especially when we are asking something of Him. God is not the cookie jar but the Baker! He doesn't distribute miracles, He performs them. We do not take, He gives!

Forgiveness is a gift of God that comes with a commitment to the God Who gave it and neither David nor we can ignore this truth and still claim forgiveness as a prize of faith.

Pleasing God?

There are two words translate "pleasing" in David's thoughts. The NASB [New American Standard Bible] reads "For You do not *delight* in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;

Ritual or Righteousness

*You do not take **pleasure** in burnt offering."*

The first word, delight, is highlighted by the prophet Jeremiah. God had never left us in doubt as to what pleasures Him. *"Indeed if you claim credit⁵ for being clever, wise, insightful⁶ or you have knowledge⁷ of me, claim to have made my acquaintance, or that we have a relationship—indeed, if you really do know me, then you know three things about me (John 16:8) I am merciful,⁸ just,⁹ and righteous¹⁰ in my dealings with men. Indeed, in these to I take pleasure,¹¹ revealed¹² the Lord to His servants"* [Jeremiah 9:24].

The second word, translated above "pleasure" notes what God finds acceptable. The Father expressed such pleasure in Christ at the Savior's water baptism. *"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* [Matthew 3:17]. *"The LORD delights in*

5. self-praise or celebratory recognition of one's own achievement.

6. This word speaks to an intense focus, pondering, to be prudent, showing care and thought.

7. Biblical knowledge is never purely academic but based on experience.

8. A Hebrew term that is variously translated, love or mercy but is based on a covenant relationship with God.

9. Just is the word for judgment. fairness. God loves to be in charge, but He forgives, redeems, and saves and cannot condone division, deception, and disobedience.

10. righteousness is a term of relationship which defines this word in terms of community. God loves being in the midst of His people, the saints.

11. The LXX translates God's pleasure in terms of His will. God's will is God's desire, His good pleasure. Ephesians 1:5 "the good pleasure of his will,"

12. A word often translated in the NIV as "declares" but its nuance suggests to me not so much a public disclosure as a private revelation to God's servants.

Ritual or Righteousness

those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love” [Psalm 147:11].

What David Learned

David learned that animal sacrifice without faithfulness is not pleasing to God. We might theologially distance ourselves from this message until in repentant prayer we actually learn its value. Much scripture is reviewed in the choreography of a Sunday ritual or in the exercise of a catechism or memorized for the applause of our fellow church-goers but never really known by experience or practice. For decades my wife claimed I never listened because I failed the occasional quiz on what she told me (an experience many men have had). “Listen” was her word for “do what I said.” I get it now because wives have desires worth honoring. This might be God’s experience.

Consider James’ interpretation: *“If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” [James 1:26-27].*

...something very much worth praying about.

The Brokenhearted

Verse Seventeen

The Brokenhearted

My sacrifice, O God, is [The sacrifices of God are] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

12 times in the Old Testament *prayer* is a supplicant's way of appealing to God's favor, *to beseech* the Lord. This Biblical word provides uncommon insight into the relationship between God and His servant. Even the words they used to *beseech* the Lord should inspire our own prayer life when we approach the Lord's throne.

When Moses, for example, prayed, he sought the favor of God. The Hebrew word comes from the idea of *stroking the face*.¹ The image is one of a husband's anger being pacified by a loving wife who caresses his face while reminding him of something he accomplished or said that was praiseworthy. Such an act has a calming effect that defuses a man's rage. The word is employed before a monarch by a servant who *beseches* the king [strokes his face] praying for his mercy. It shows a humble attitude and is often accompanied with remorse, confessing something done which is worthy of punishment.

When Israel pressured Aaron to build an image of a calf of pure gold to worship, God was beyond furious and thought to begin again with Moses and his descendants only. Moses, however, **sought the favor** [stroke the face] of the Lord his God. "*Lord,*" he said, "*why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt*

1. In the Piel: to pacify or induce one to show favor, to make the face of anyone pleasant. cp Brown, et al [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, MA.: 2015) page p. 318

The Brokenhearted

with great power and a mighty hand?"² God responded with forgiveness and patience. He gave them another chance!

Is there a lesson here?³ God requires respect, honesty, humility, and a request for His mercy. David found the right words when he stroked the divine face in prayer, according to His promise, "*I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.*" [Psalm 119:58]. Hezekiah's prayer, too, showed a marked respect for or fear of God. Jeremiah warns Judah in his day to follow the king's example. "*Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death?*" Jeremiah asked, "*Did not Hezekiah fear the Lord and seek his favor? And did not the Lord relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? We are about to bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!*" [Jeremiah 26:19]. Malachi, as well, employed this term, when he heralded the message of impassioned prayer, urging "... now *plead* for God's favor." [Malachi 1:9 CSB]. Israel in his day was sacrificing blemished, lame, and crippled animals to the Lord which was a crime against the Mosaic ceremonial law. As Daniel agreed, "*Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth*" [Daniel 9:13].

When David sought the Lord, he found the words to say in his humbled condition that in effect palmed the cheek of the King of kings. In prayer regarding the misery of his sin, he learned that there is no sacrifice that means anything unless we give it with a *broken and contrite* heart. He discovered that "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and*

2. Exodus 32:11. Some scholarship puts the emphasis on God's Glory being *shamed* if Israel does not ultimately inherit Canaan.

3. Luke 11:1 *Lord, teach us to pray*

The Brokenhearted

saves those who are crushed in spirit" [Psalm 34:18]. Scholarship called this "*Panting after grace*" and added, "*The inward part of a man is said to be broken ...when ... his impenetrable hardness [is] softened, his haughty vain-glorious brought low, — in fine, when he is in himself become as nothing, and ... God is everything.*"⁴

This moves the great heart of our Lord. He informed Isaiah, "*I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.*" [Isaiah 57:15].

We have or should discover that coming humbly to God in effect beseeches His favor, strokes His face.⁵ David said the broken hearted would not be despised.⁶ Jesus's calling with regard to us was "*to bind up the brokenhearted*" [Isaiah 61:1].

Brokenness

David was broken .. And not just his "bones." It was not as simple as losing his joy or the excitement that called him to dance. His heart was broken. His spirit was broken. His enthusiasm or passion for serving God, for life, itself, was gone. And all because of one forbidden night of pleasure!

This metaphor might have a sparse representation in scripture but few could doubt what it means. It was prophesied of the Savior, "*They taunted reproaches and*

4. C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1978) vol V. Page 141

5. James 4:6 *But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.* cp. Proverbs 3:34 [ESV] *to the humble he gives favor.*

6. The feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn, disregard

The Brokenhearted

treated me abusively with insults and scorn breaking my heart. I was made sick and waited for sympathy but there was no one and for someone to show pity but I found no one" [Psalm 69:20]. Charles Spurgeon called it, "[intense mental suffering arises from slander"].⁷ "Distress may become so great," Dr. Lange argued, "that life may sink under it⁸ ...many die of...a broken heart."⁹

But David found it a breakthrough moment, God's opportunity to rescue him from his sinfulness. In retrospect, David learned to cherish his tears¹⁰ as God's open door to minister to him in ways he could not help himself. He witnessed of the Lord "Every time I wandered away, you kept track of me and my tears and the pain I caused myself did not go unnoticed by you, Lord." [Psalm 56:8]. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "We perhaps are so confused after a long course of trouble, that we hardly know where we have or where we have not been; but the omniscient and considerate Father of our spirits remembers all in detail, for he has counted them as men count their gold, for even the trial of our faith is precious in His sight."¹¹

And for us? Under the New Covenant provision has been specifically made for this purpose. Jesus testified "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD... has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted" [Isaiah 61:1].

When our own unfaithfulness brings us to our knees in tearful repentance, let us cherish the occasion

7. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 1233.

8. Matthew 26:38 [YLT] Exceedingly sorrowful is my soul -- unto death...

9. John Peter Lange, *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V. Page 897.

10. Psalm 126:5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.

11. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 1007.

The Brokenhearted

because, as we must recall, that was first and foremost of all, our day of salvation.

Pray for Jerusalem

Verse Eighteen

Pray for Jerusalem

May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

“There is surely no grace of God in us,” asserts Charles Spurgeon, *“if we do not feel for the church of God, and take a lasting interest in its welfare.”*¹ For David, that was Zion. *“Be pleased Lord to do good to Zion,”* David can now seek God on behalf of others. He was interceding in prayer, a marked indication that God had healed his heart.

The revelation of God’s mercy is a healing touch that resolves the inner conflict of deep seated rebellion. David now can say, *“I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me”* [Psalm 16:7]. David bore witness to the Lord’s guidance. *“Now I stand on solid ground,”* he exclaimed, *“and I will publicly praise the Lord.”* [Psalm 26:12 NLT].

He is not praying for himself but for Zion. Misery does not bless others, A soul at rest and a peaceful spirit do.²

The Walls of Jerusalem

This had been a dream of David, to make Zion into the “City of David.”³ David retrieved the Ark of God from the Philistines and after a brief stay in Obbedom’s house,

1. C. H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. (Scripture Truth Book Co. Fincastle, VA: 1984) vol I. page 940.

2. Matthew 5:9, 44-45 *Blessed are the peacemakers ... But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*

3. 2 Samuel 5:7 *David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.*

Pray for Jerusalem

brought it to Zion with gladness.⁴ “...leaping and dancing before the Lord” [2 Samuel 6:16]. This joyous occasion preceded his romance with Bathsheba. His prayer for Zion and its defense is a marked breakthrough in prayer. The miracle of God’s forgiveness is everywhere here in evidence. God healed his bones. God restored his joy and now his heart returns once again to thoughts of Zion and the Temple his son, Solomon would someday build.⁵

A Spiritual Meaning

C. H. Spurgeon believes there is more meaning to this verse. David was praying for the prosperity of God’s purpose in the life of His people. For us, this signifies God’s work within His Church. David asks God to undo the effects of his sin upon the People of God under his monarchy. In a spiritual sense “*he had done mischief and had, as it were, pulled down her walls.*”⁶ David, now, prays for the people of God that the influence of what evil he perpetrated would be undone somehow by God on behalf of His own people.

This regret has been mine, too, over the years when something I said or did was as indiscreet as it was well-known and one can only wonder how many lives were

4. 2 Samuel 6:12 *Now King David was told, “The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God.” So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing.*

5. 1 Kings 3:1 *Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem. cp 1 Chronicles 22. verse 5 David said, “My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it.” So David made extensive preparations before his death.*

6. C. H. Spurgeon, vol 1. p. 940

Pray for Jerusalem

impacted in a negative way by it. I have prayed this verse in my own way and still pray it, asking God to work his miracle in my life so that my testimony would be of His love and not my faltering humanity. I found it meaningful here to pray always for the people of God and His work among them.

Sacrifices

Verse Nineteen

Sacrifices

Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

If this were the story of one's quest for forgiveness, this verse would be the epilogue. David is leaving his prayer chamber with a lighter heart and a renewed enthusiasm toward the things of God. The first word in our translation "Then" means *at that time, when this has been done.* "When what has been done? Why, all that has been said in the 18 verses above. This word is written twice in this verse but nowhere else in this Psalm because now, at last, it can be said that sacrifices have meaning again as part of real worship that pleases the Lord. Now, forgiven, and having returned to God David can offer his sacrifices to God as God's servant restored to true fellowship.

Burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings, as some translations correctly read, are the same sacrifice.¹ This verse *"speaks of real Old Testament offerings,"* Dr. Lange wrote, *"and indeed again of thank-offerings, especially ... bullocks [young bulls] which are ...burnt-offerings."*²

As another manifestation of God's healing touch on David, he specifically longed to join the pilgrims making a thank offering to the Lord. He is revived in spirit: *"I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,*

1. as in Psalm 90:2 in reference to the land, *the earth and the world* or Psalm 44:3 where *your right hand, your arm* are the same.

2. John Peter Lange, *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures.* (Zondervan Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI:1980) vol V. Page 327. To which Spurgeon agrees. cp Spurgeon. vil 1. p. 940

Sacrifices

in the courts of the house of the Lord— in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise the Lord” [Psalm 116:16-19].

I can imagine David, after all this time, perhaps over a year, walking into the outer Court with his free-will offering for his vow and some more as a Thanksgiving offering to put in the treasury and some of the priests whispering among themselves with loud smiles, “He’s back!”

True, the message of verse 17 joins with verse 19 to instruct all true believers that God is pleased with our sacrifices if we give them in humility and with a contrite heart. But with David this truth is personal and it comes in the context of his anguish over the sin he committed. This is not only a theological note; this verse reveals the yearning desire of a man now free in spirit to worship God.

Thanksgiving offerings, according to Mosaic law, were primarily meal or bread offerings.³ Young bulls were offered in the sin offering, particularly when a leader, a priest, commits the sin.⁴ Did David have this offering in mind and heart? Because the 51st Psalm is written as Hebrew poetry the rules get altered at times. Scholars tend to lean toward David offering the thank-offering with a young bull as a burnt offering, totally consumed by the fire. But nothing denies us the right to imagine that he had both on his heart. It makes sense that David would want to

3. Leviticus 7:12 *If they offer it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this thank offering they are to offer thick loaves made without yeast and with olive oil mixed in, thin loaves made without yeast and brushed with oil, and thick loaves of the finest flour well-kneaded and with oil mixed in.*

4. Leviticus 4:3 *If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect as a sin offering[fn] for the sin he has committed.*

Sacrifices

honor God's total forgiveness with a sin offering and then offer thanks for his emotional and spiritual healing.

After all, the word *sacrifices* is plural. David brought multiple sacrifices in a wholehearted eagerness to get back to what he loved the most, with a pure devotion, honoring and praising God.

Strophe-Antistrophe Couplets

And what about us? What about me? Deep inside these verse are 19 strophe-antistrophe couplets. This musical arrangement was written for a praise or worship service in the Temple Solomon would build, as an inspired revelatory message for the ages. This is not David's mea-culpa alone. It should be all of ours.

I began this Psalm after reading verse 3, *My rebellion ... haunts me day and night*. There were deeds, decisions, indiscretions, words spoken, and those reckless "jump-off-the-cliff" moments that became reminders of my need for a merciful God.

When I began this work, I thought I would tell you all about them, not as a catharsis but as an example of what this Psalm is all about for all of us not just David. Then, I thought better!

I excused myself along the journey as an immature zealot for God, but life is not that simple. Through introspection and writing a half-dozen books or so about myself (I'm not a narcissist. Please!) I began to see reasons for repentance.

Sometimes I think that if my humanity is showing, that's not so bad a thing. But lumping my badness in with others is not what God wants! (Psalm 51) This is not a matter between me and the world but between me and God.

Sacrifices

I am back in church—a little wary about the people, I must admit. I am trying my mouth out in a men's Bible study. This is scarier, but for other reasons, I think. The point is that life is a challenge to me; I am a challenge to me! My need for God's compassion, mercy and leadership is unending. I will never—I hope to never—lose my love of the 51st Psalm and I want to continue to deep dive into its message to discover even more secrets to overcoming sin and living for Christ.

Healing Bones

Psalm 51 is alive with the tears, the agony, and the longing of a servant's heart to put to rest the turbulence of a tortured memory. ..And God? He still speaks, "Peace, be still" to the waves.

1. Oh God, I hurt over all the pain I caused, but I have learned in all You have done for me that You can mercifully stop the hurting. I need to know that the record of my unfaithfulness is erased, Lord. I want back what we had before.
2. Wash me and wash me again, Lord, with fuller's soap! Wash away this guilt and remove the blemishes of all my shortcomings so that I might be again a vessel of honor to You.
3. I struggle to admit it, but I know I have sinned; I know the many ways I have been unfaithful to You. Every misstep haunts my memories.
4. I have argued this in my mind. How can I have the forgiveness of others? But even if others were offended, I want You, Lord, and You alone to be my Judge. You are merciful and fair. Whatever punishment, whatever sentence, You decide, I know will be the right one. I accept it humbly.
5. I have been a trouble, Lord, ever since I caused my mother great pain in having me. ...Oh, that night of passion that conceived me!

Healing Bones

6. I haven't been totally truthful with myself nor with You, Lord ..as well You know. I tire living this lie. I agree with You, Lord, regarding all I have done.
7. We have been estranged. I am not at peace. I am a spiritual leper, unclean and aloof from You when we used to walk together. Take away this plague and pronounce me clean, Lord!
8. My joy is gone. At church there is no worship in me. I want the music back in my soul.
9. Forgive me, Lord. Take away the pain of this terrible thing I've done.
10. With Your help, I can be transparently faithful. Strengthen my will and resolve to be faithful!
11. Lord, You cannot leave me!!!!
12. I depend on You, Lord, to hold me up; with your support bring me back to the joy I once knew of Your Salvation.
13. Let me teach those who have been in rebellion against You, Lord. They will turn to You!!
14. Save me from myself lest again I hurt others and hurt You Whom I most love!
15. May my voice again be raised to make its boast in You, Lord and to celebrate how You rescued me—how You rescue all of us—from evil!
16. No celebration or church service can drown out my misery. I need Your Mercy, Lord.
17. I have learned now that I am nothing without you. I know now that being humble before You is everything. You are everything.
18. Be pleased Lord to do good to all Your people. Bless Israel; bless Your Church. Defend them against all spiritual enemies.

Healing Bones

19. Then once again I can enjoy being in Your service. The rituals and celebrations will again become sweet. My heart will again look forward to gathering with Your people, my tongue will again shout Your praise. My feet will feel once again the dance, my broken bones healed. Amen

Bibliography

Bibliography

- Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB).. Peabody, MA. Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing 2015
- Caragounis, Chrys C. *The Development of Greek and The New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*. Grand Rapids, MI.:BakerAcademic, 2006.
- Donovan, Vincent J. *Christianity Rediscovered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 2003.
- Godet, Frederick Louis. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 1971.
- Gesenius, William A *Hebrew And English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1882.
- Gesenius William. E. Kautzsch ed. *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*. London:Oxford at the Clarion Press. Second English Edition. 1974.
- Girdlestone, Robert B. *Synonyms of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids , MI: Grand Rapids Book Manufacturers, Inc. 1974
- Keil C. F & Delitzsch F. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.
- Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.
- Lange, John Peter. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1980.

Bibliography

- Lightfoot, J. B. *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1974.
- Lightfoot, J. B. *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1974.
- Moulton, James Hope and Milligan George *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.
- Richards, E. Randolph; O'Brien, Brandon J.. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*. InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.
- Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David*, Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Co., 1984.
- Thayers, Joseph. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.
- Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1961
- Trench, Richard C. *Synonyms of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975
- Trench, Richard C. *On the Study of the Words Lectures*. New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown.
- Vidu, Adonis. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2014