

Broken Bones

Dealing with Remorse

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

John H. King

BROKEN BONES: DEALING WITH REMORSE

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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*

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

Preface

The story of David's bones is a story of his struggle with sin, in others against him, but, foremost within himself. In Psalm 51 broken bones became a metaphor for a soul in anguish, a despondency that weakened resolve and drained any enthusiasm for life.

Broken bones do not dance, which means, broken bones do not celebrate in song and music the Lord's grand victories among His people. Nothing could be more descriptive of David's heart and spirit after Nathan—not literally but in every way more real—entered the bed chamber and threw back the sheets, uncovering David's indefensible act of depravity. David knew Nathan was God-sent.

After this David didn't find Temple worship the same as before. In his misery, sacrifices no longer seemed the gifts of love they were intended to be—not until he sought and received God's mercy. That's the story of Psalm 51.

Consider this work to be an exposition on this Psalm, but it is more. It is the record also of my struggle with sin, my personal agony when temptation appeared more monstrous than it really was. Psalm 51 should speak to us all.

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.

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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.

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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."*¹

The dynamic of David's experience must parallel ours. The young theologian argued, *"The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness."*² But this did not take into account the provision of God's forgiveness not so much as a "reward" as a gift.³

At some point in his career David maintained, *"I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin."*

1. Daniel 9:13

2. 1 Samuel 26:23

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

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The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight."⁴ Well, 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. Some 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.*"⁵

First things first. David must come to repentance over his affaire de cœur, his candle lite evening with a forbidden smile, when he cuckold a good man and then had him murdered. But even this requires a little savoir-faire, the knowledge of how to approach the God he has deeply grieved. Praying is not an art, per se, but it is the path to a relationship. Repentance itself, comes in steps, first *justification* or forgiveness, dealing with the stain of sin, and then, *renewal* or creating in us the person who will not take this road again.

4. Psalm 18:23-24

5. Matthew 13:46

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Even repentance is a strange idea because it is God's idea and understanding it means understanding the heart of God toward us. 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!?

Irony of ironies, repentance, in David's language is nothing more than *returning* to the God he left. Finding his way back, however, after he has become so terminally lost, will require God. Like the good Shepherd He is, God must seek David out first. Now we understand Nathan's role in all of this and why David's misery was so essential to keep him from giving up on the search. "We have not searched for Him." learned Vincent J. Donovan, missionary to the Masai of Central East Africa, "He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God."

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

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;

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for, in time every temptation costs, and the collector is remorse.

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 buried and 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 become painful recollections. Remorse, yes a friend,⁶ brings us to a torturous finality, misunderstood as a punishment, which the soul seems to exact upon the self, deserved and unrelenting, until or unless we find a way to cope, to outsmart its haunting pursuit. ...or we find a way to forgive and be forgiven.

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 against the kingdom, Israel. This was, for him, no private matter; 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! But God through Nathan knew otherwise if David wanted to lighten such a heavy load of deception before Israel. Living a lie is never easy. Eventually, the lie becomes too heavy to carry and in

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

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dropping it we expose the truth. 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!)

Uriah, Forgive Me!

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 causal but an 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.

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...⁷

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.*"⁸ Even if David wanted to seek Uriah's forgiveness, he couldn't. 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.

7. 2 Samuel 11:2

8. 2 Samuel 11:15

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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.”*⁹

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!”*¹⁰

Conviction is always—as it must be—a punch in the gut. Then Nathan said to David, *“You are the man! 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.’”*¹¹ David just told God’s prophet that, he, David, is worthy of death. As the king such a pronouncement has unrepentant weight in a public pronouncement. But Nathan assures him, *“The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.”*¹²

We need to learn to appreciate God’s Nathans whom He sends: to remind us of unrepentant sin; to help us past the 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.

9. 2 Samuel 12:1

10. 2 Samuel 12:5

11. 2 Samuel 12:7

12. 2 Samuel 12:13

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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

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intellectual exercise which might allow us to pass a written seminary exam but fail at faithfully living for Christ.

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.*"¹³

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

13. 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.'*

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

34:18

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 here, we have the message of Calvary. If we say this and mean it, we are assured of our salvation.

Mercy

The word *mercy* in David's cry speaks more to God's longing after David than David's after God. God's mercy or compassion is nothing less than His longing or yearning, His inclination,¹⁴ to forgive and to favor us with His blessings. The modifier form, *gracious*, is only used as an attribute of God. [*"I am compassionate."*]

*"If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."*¹⁵

14. cp. The BDB English and Hebrew Lexicon. 337

15. cp. The BDB English and Hebrew Lexicon. Exodus 22:26-27

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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.

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 weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them."*¹⁶

David, like this woman, had much to be forgiven. Jesus's cryptic response (somehow we know what He meant) taught Simon that to the degree 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 our Lord.

*"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."*¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.

16. Luke 7:38

17. Luke 7:47

18. 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.

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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."

To understand God's kindness, we are led into a study of His mercy. His kindness entails action on His part to assuage the pain of guilt and the misery that accompanies sin. But David must repent for real, not just express sorrow over being found out.

In terms of the actual use of this word *kindness*, it "denotes an attitude of man [and] God which arises out of mutual relationship... a relationship of trust."¹⁹ 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 while as a teenager David attended the sheep.

And if, perchance, we come for the very first time in need of God's kindness and mercy, it is not just the pain of our misdeeds that should bring us to Him, but a desire for a forgiveness that begins a lasting relationship with Him.²⁰

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.

19. G. Kittell, "The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament," Vol I, p. 479

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

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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*. 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 daddy: “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*”²¹ 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,*”²²

So it stands to theological reason that the Lord is nauseous²³ around those who see nothing wrong in their faithlessness²⁴ but He gladly hears confessions: “*Whoever*

21. Psalm 103:13

22. Psalm 116:5

23. 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.*

24. 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.*”

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conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”²⁵

David knew how to tug on the Divine heartstrings. David, perhaps, remembered his mother’s love realizing how intense God’s heart longed after that closeness with him—if only he would confess his wrong and repent.²⁶

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.²⁷

In this verse 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.*”²⁸ 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*

25. Proverbs 28:13

26. 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.*

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

28. Psalm 51:9

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*went," the promise of forgiveness affirms, "so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*²⁹

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.*"

It is important to note that *transgressions* is another word for the sin of rebellion or unfaithfulness. A sin by its nature is unfaithfulness in serving or in relation to God. 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;...*"³⁰

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

Fuller's Soap

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

Wash me and wash me and wash me again, Lord!

Thoroughly

There is a word written here which does not find its way into some translations because the spelling is debated

29. Psalm 103:12

30. Psalm 51:4

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(though not its meaning) and as a consequence, how to say it has been lost. It carries the idea of *multiple times*. Some like to translate it: *thoroughly*.³¹

I sought a clearer understanding of this term from the Greek translation which uses the term *much* or *too much, more than enough, an overflow*.³²

The NIV 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.*"³³

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 or penitence held him there asking God to take away the sin and the misery it produced.

There are burdens which are not washed away in the first tears we cry. We still seek to be free from the hurt we caused to others and the pain we caused to ourselves. We might know in the theology that we are forgiven but this does not deny us a desire to keep asking God for His touch. Again and again our hearts seek His mercy. Again and again and again we discover no satisfaction in the "amen." We stay on our knees asking to be washed clean, and this is most appropriate because here, we sense, is

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

32. 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.*"

33. Psalm 139:17-18

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where we belong, at His feet, seeking His cleansing 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.

Wash

When David cried to the Lord to “wash” him, he used the word which refers to the “fuller's” work, a professional cleaning. Scholars chalk this up to a poetic use in place of the usual word to “wash” used elsewhere in the Old Testament, but I want to disagree here. Using the usual word for a personal washing or washing oneself, one's hands or feet, Asaph wrote: “*Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence.*”³⁴ As Asaph knew, there are times when our own efforts at self-washing, spiritually living a righteous life, are weak and incomplete.

There is a sense in which David might have seen himself capable of self-discipline and self-control.³⁵ At times, he, no doubt, felt he could handle life. He gave

34. Psalm 73:13

35. John 13:10 “Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you”

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himself some credit for living a righteous life. He used the common word for self-washing (bathing and not laundering) in this spiritual sense. *"I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, Lord."*³⁶ ...but not here; not in Psalm 51! Here David wants the Divine fuller's soap, an industrial strength process, to cleanse him from the sin he committed.³⁷ 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 solution to a problem he created. The word *wash* (no pun intended) is awash with his tears.

Iniquity

This word 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."*³⁸

36. Psalm 26:6

37. *"to wash by rubbing and kneading up ...iniquity is conceived of as deeply ingrained dirt."* Keil & Delitzsch. vol 5. p 135.

38. Psalm 31:9-10

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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 future. The dominoes have been falling. Much of David's domestic, political, and diplomatic setbacks and woes would follow this one "indiscretion." C. H. Spurgeon referred this to a "*dungeon of distress*."³⁹

"Lord," David averred, "*I am in trouble!*"⁴⁰ "*My life is consumed by anguish,*" he lamented, "*and my years by groaning;*"⁴¹

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 guilt and the pain inflicted on a family and on a nation. David as well, found himself constantly at war with the neighboring nations.⁴² With God David found peace, the eye of the storm, but his world was

39. C. H Spurgeon "The Treasury of David. p 550.

40. Psalm 6:3

41. Psalm 6:6

42. 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.

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still living in the swirling winds this single tragedy was reported to have caused.⁴³

Let us return to this word later because 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, a conviction that enlightens the conscience teaches us when we have stepped off the path (one Greek word for sin carries this idea)⁴⁴ and need God's cleansing power.

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. I want to believe that if I regret the way I treated an old girlfriend, (Yes, this is an example for me of something that needs to be addressed) I can ask God to

43. "Talking to God: How I Found Peace" p 111

44. 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. "

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reveal His forgiveness to me and let me know that even if I couldn't go back and "make things right," He would!

We all need *cleansing from sin*! But before we admit this, we may need to understand what these words mean. Even before this—and perhaps with scholarly disapproval—we should try to profile⁴⁵ 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.)⁴⁶

There was no word or 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" or created a "new creature" in Christ but God's mercy was available each time he regressed into a state of misery over another misstep in His pursuit of God's friendship.

David confessed his weakness⁴⁷ in things that matter to God.⁴⁸ Admitting one's weakness or frailty in spiritual matters and asking for God's help is an expression of one's humility. This is a good thing. For any

45. a record of a person's psychological or behavioral characteristics, preferences

46. 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.*

47. 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."*

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

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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.

David referred to his own soul as *vexed*,⁴⁹ terrified of the consequence of his sinning. Some believers, sadly, exhibit such anxiety of going to hell if they slip up. Here's not the place to debate this concept but simply to show that David's anxiety in his unfaithfulness to God is something with which believers should be able to empathize.

Perhaps, God's forgiveness meant more to David than most believers might imagine.

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 six additional penitent Psalms⁵⁰ worth studying—all of which are written around the theme of God's forgiveness.

Cleanse-Purify Me

David wants to be purified, undefiled, made once again ready for service to God. He used a familiar word meaning *ceremonially* cleansed as a sacrifice ready for Divine service.⁵¹

49. Psalm 6:3

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

51. 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*

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But *purity* in the mind of God runs deep. As the professor said, “...words often contain a witness for great moral truths —God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know...”⁵² When David asked for a cleansing, how should God interpret his heart!? We are actually blessed to know that God discerns the heart’s intent,⁵³ which, if you think of it, makes God more of a friend than a wayward David might have realized in his hour of spiritual need. David’s remorse and repentance doesn’t represent at all how he acted that night on the roof. Often the heart is not in sync or unity with what we do when temptation grips us. “*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do,*”⁵⁴ Paul theologized.

If we are honest, we would admit that the holiness of God which He through Peter enjoined us to embrace⁵⁵ is an advanced course in purity. How often we use terms in a conversation with God hoping He picks up on our meaning rather than we on His. Many admire the sentiment but don’t see how it is possible to be so holy until we are with Christ in glory and like Him in holiness. Our prayer of purity is probably a watered down version of living a good life, one in which we do not repeatedly self-inflict by yielding to temptation.

Years of counseling and consoling had taught me this much but what about David. A half dozen Psalms tell

52. Richard Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures* (New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown), 56.

53. 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.*

54. Romans 7:15

55. 1 Peter 1:16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.

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us how tormented he became at times thanks to his human frailty. I don't think there was another Bathsheba. Bathsheba wouldn't hear of it! But we know that at times he found himself as we all have in need of God's mercy.

Yet, in the heat of the moment when what we have done afflicts the conscience with unconscionable pain, we would gladly let God define purity for us and make us pure. 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.*"⁵⁶

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

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 are real. Here is where this book 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.

56. 1 Peter 1:22

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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 began to perceive and appreciate their own feelings and actions for what they really were—or are.

I spent considerable time and thought recalling one girl friend whom I left for my wife's hand. I even wrote about her in a brief memoir justifying my actions at the time. If anything, I used a form of sarcasm to accuse her, the girl friend, of being too nice for someone like me. I felt, in a sense, out-classed. From all appearances and according to the grapevine, here was the young lady I was planning to marry. It was during my college years and all campus (at least on the girl's side) was buzzing with the news giving this sweet young woman—what turned out to be—a false hope. I didn't do or say anything to discredit this headline until a public announcement of my engagement to my wife.

In the course of relaxed reminiscence years later with my wife I updated her with details that I had forgotten and *she never knew*. In spontaneous outburst she scolded, "*If I had know **that**, I never would have gone with you!*" Something in my character was hid from both my wife and I until this shocking breakthrough moment in which I began to see my reflection in the mirror of a real conversation with a friend. I later called myself "scum," a feeling now I could hardly shake⁵⁷ without studying this inspiring Psalm!

57. Whatever did I do!? I was simply "dating" one girl while getting engaged to another. I didn't then realize the hurt it might cause and how all the girls on campus would probably come to hate me.

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Years have passed and this sweet Christian lady is not even on social media. I cannot (and will not) find out how she's doing, if, in fact, she is still this side of heaven. Psalm 51 addresses this. David's words are revelatory; they are born of God's conversation with him when in humble admission he carried his pain to the mercy seat.

For

How are we to understand the word "*for*"?⁵⁸ "...*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.*"⁵⁹ 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.*"⁶⁰ But the force of David's plea is best served, not merely by the reasonable connection between confession and mercy [the theology] but by this truth as the cry of his heart.

58. because, since.

59. BDB,474.

60. Psalm 32:5

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Transgressions-Unfaithfulness

Not one transgression, one night of sin. Transgressions—more than one. And David uses the word *rebellion*. I have used the word *unfaithful* because David is talking about his act or acts of disobedience to the Law, the Torah. The 10 Commandments themselves spoke against coveting his neighbor's wife and murder—just for starters. There is nothing vague here or defensible before God. God's reasoning is sound.⁶¹

The beautiful truth here is God's desire to show mercy, He writes a Law we cannot faithfully maintain.⁶² 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.*"⁶³ 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. In the New Testament it is greed⁶⁴ which makes sense because we cannot serve both God and money.⁶⁵ 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.

61. 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.*

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

63. Romans 11:32

64. Colossians 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: ... **greed**, which is idolatry.*

65. Matthew 6:24 *You cannot serve both God and money.*

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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 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.⁶⁶ ..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.

But why unlock the doors of a prison we have no intention of leaving! To be free, to know truth, without repenting leaves us imprisoned in the sin we created. Move beyond it through a choice to honor this truth by living free of the sin that caused so much grief to ourselves, to others, and, first and foremost, to God..

Always Before Me

My “sins” have not always been as obvious as David’s. [I suppose some have.] At times, I wondered if some major decision I made might have been outside the direct will of God for me at the moment. That’s the very definition of unfaithfulness!

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

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How about that sweet face I walked away from in the name of love. (You know that this story would never have made it into this commentary if it wasn't bothering me.) A memory after all these years "triggered" by a conversation with my wife. And now, to use the NLT it "*haunts me day and night.*"

Hurting others is not my thing! But how much damage has my tongue and my actions caused over the years!? How many times I might have struck a rock to which I should have spoken? How many others have had their experience in Christ hindered because they knew me? How many might have lost their way because of a hypocritical moment, intentional or no, as a believer? How many doors of opportunity to serve Christ were open to me but I never walked through. Has anyone else ever asked such questions ...or only me!

According to David here in this Psalm the barometer that tests the recollection strength of a real sin is whether or not it "*...is always before me.*" If I could shake these memories or explain them away, fine! But some things 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.*"⁶⁷

But these words "*always before me*" strike a different note here in Psalm 51. Most Hebrew I need to study or look up in lexicons and concordances but not these two word (in the Hebrew) *before me always*. Here is a friend when it is God's convicting Spirit calling us to His

67. Psalm 16:8

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forgiveness. There are so many more blessings that follow—as the verses ahead inform.

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? Or did he not care about anything or anyone else than his damaged relationship with his Lord! ...After all, he knew God wore another hat ...as a judge.

The real world teaches a hard lesson about sin. *“You may be sure that your sin will find you out.”*⁶⁸ 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. And had Uriah spent the night with his own wife, David’s lie would need massaging a bit to lead a nation into believing the little boy Bathsheba bore was her husband’s. 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 revealed. Some scholars reasonably maintain that within a collective

68. Numbers 32:23

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culture in David's world the word was already well publicized.⁶⁹

It seems correct to surmise that Nathan in private shared God's concerns with David. 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 he must be reconciled. But is there more to this truth? The Lord's mercy, David's trumpet call, would have encouraged Bathsheba as well to accept God's forgiveness and forgive herself.⁷⁰

They named their first son, *Peaceable*, i.e. Solomon. And lest we assume his name only referred to the peaceful kingdom he would someday rule over, Nathan called the baby, Jedidiah⁷¹, "Beloved of the Lord." All is well between David, Bathsheba, and the Lord but David does not yet know this while 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. *I want You, Lord, and You alone to be my Judge. You are merciful and fair. Whatever punishment, You decide I know will be the right one. I accept it humbly.*⁷²

Said boldly: If we have His forgiveness, we need be reconciled to no one else to realize that our sin is part of a past that need not be dragged into our future. Forgiveness

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

70. 2 Samuel 12:24 *Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba*

71. 2 Samuel 12:25 *because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.*

72. 2 Samuel 24:14 *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."*

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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.

I wrote a book on Forgiveness, "*I Forgive You: A Personal Journey into Forgiveness*" where the emphasis was on the one offended or hurt. Here David must argue as the offender or the one who caused another's hurt [God's grief]. David could argue that sin puts God in a bad light. Scholarship calls this "...the scandal put into the mouths of the enemies of Jahve [the Lord]."⁷³

In his night of passion with another man's wife, David did not honor the Lord in the eyes of those who would learn of it. David knew that He needed God's mercy to correct him and therefore correct this false perception of God's merciful dealings with His people, It makes sense that we should want God to not only forgive us but mercifully bring back our testimony. We should want to sanctify or honor our Lord before others.⁷⁴ 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!

David prayed more than once (as all believers do and should) "*For the sake of your name, Lord, forgive* my*

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

74. 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."*

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iniquity, though it is great."⁷⁵ *"Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake."*⁷⁶

Another thing: as one clergy once said it: when the wind scatters the feathers, can you recover them all? Sometimes, like David's sin, our entire world is disrupted. David was the king and his word and actions paralleled an interpretation of whatever law or laws enacted. He must be first as the leader in honoring his own fiats and foremost God's Law. The confusion, alone, when he broke that unwritten covenant with God's people would have been sufficient to require the genius of the God of grace and love to fix things. 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."*⁷⁷

Perhaps lastly, David stands guilty before the Creator of the universe, The Judge of every man and woman, and the Savior of the world. Somehow such an awareness of God's majestic Presence overwhelms the senses and eclipses all other concerns: *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.*

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

This is the true definition of *confession*; it is agreeing with God! All self-justification, all rationalization, has ceased. When David confessed that he knew his

75. Psalm 25:11 וְסַלְחֵנוּ לְעֵוֹנוֹ [forgive my iniquity] The Hebrew occurs 46 times in 45 verses*

76. Psalm 79:9

77. C. H. Spurgeon, vol I. p. 935.

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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*.

“What I have done,” David admitted, *“was evil.”* The word evil has an emphasis on the consequence⁷⁸ of David's unconscionable act.

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; in view of this, I know, Lord, you are right in judging me.”

78. 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.

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If God punishes him, David feels that, it is earned. He doesn't appear, though, to be particularly anxious about this possibility.⁷⁹ 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 in the painful consequence of doing evil.⁸⁰ (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.*"⁸¹ 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?*"⁸² "God's judgment is *pure, clean.* ("*Beyond all controversy.*")⁸³ 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 toward us 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.

79. 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.

80. 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.

81. Galatians 6:7

82. Genesis 18:25

83. C. H. Spurgeon. p. 935

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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).

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 sin⁸⁴ and all the regret that comes with this frame of mind that we also believe in God’s mercy to bring us to self-forgiveness and, first and foremost, an awareness of God’s forgiveness.

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...”*

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

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

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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 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.⁸⁵ "*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,*"⁸⁶ 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)⁸⁷ ...how he must have displeased God!

Might David had bemoaned, "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!" Is there in this

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

86. Psalm 51:5

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

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explanation a hint at blaming the Creator. "If there had been no tree of the knowledge of good and evil, there would have been no sin. And who planted that tree!? Not me!"

An Emotional Coup

I am not debating original sin or the Fall of humankind through Adam in the Garden. I am comfortable with this theological explanation. What was in the spiritual poison they bit into that caused the image of God they were created into to mutate into something sinister and evil? *Born sinful* speaks of the state at birth, of a broken or severed relationship with God.

How should we now interpret and deal with the passions and desires within that organized a coup against our Creator's purpose. God seems no longer in charge but feelings have taken over and we are helplessly led to the dungeon of forgotten promises. 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 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 desire*⁸⁸ *and enticed.*"⁸⁹ 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*

88. desire for what is forbidden

89. James 1:14

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merely human concerns."⁹⁰ Psalm 51 is not just David's profession of guilt; it is all of ours. Where sin is exposed, when what we do or say brings true conviction, we need the healing this Psalm inspires.

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.⁹¹ 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 woman and desire her. Jesus would not have condoned such behavior.⁹²

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

90. Mark 8:33

91. 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 Talmai 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....

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

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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.⁹³ 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 true, David still was no innocent when he took that night stroll to the roof.

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

93. One wife might if there is love.

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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.

Hopefully I will not lose you here but I went to prayer once to discuss with God the neglect my, then, girlfriend was showing me at a time I was preparing to ask her hand in marriage. I told the Lord (quote), "*You have to change her!*" It was then the words seem to drop out of the sky into my heart with a thud as if God disagreed with me, "*I need to change you.*" The peace of God in my soul confirmed the source of this correction which was as welcome by me at the time as forcing me to chew on a raw garlic clove. I knelt there in utter silence for a time before I accepted the instruction and continued to talk to the Lord about other things. (Oh by the way: she said, "No.")

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

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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 legally free to covet his wife, just because she was too beautiful to resist. Self-deception has a name and it is "David."

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!⁹⁴

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...*"⁹⁵ 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

94. John 8:32

95. John 10:27

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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 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.⁹⁶ It might have been a while since this was true.⁹⁷ 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."*⁹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon interprets, *"God is teaching him*

96. 1 Samuel 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1 *David enquired of the Lord*

97. 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.*

98. verse 6 הַיְאֻמַת הַחִפְצֵת בַּטְחוֹת וְנִסְתָּם חִכְמָה תוֹדִיעֵנִי:

cp. Job 38:36 מִי־שֵׁת בַּטְחוֹת חִכְמָה אֹ מִי־נָתַן לִשְׂכֹּרֵי בִינָה

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

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truth concerning his nature, which he had not before perceived."⁹⁹

If I may: God reads the heart,¹⁰⁰ 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”*¹⁰¹ ... *In the closed chamber of the heart.*¹⁰² Who would have guessed that one benefit of true confession before God is a lesson in who we are!¹⁰³

LXX τίς δὲ ἔδωκεν γυναίξιν ὑφάσματος σοφίαν ἢ ποικιλικὴν 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?*

99. C. H. Spurgeon. p. 936

100. 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.*

101. cp BDB p. 377

102. BDB. p. 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.*

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

Part I - Justification

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 image¹⁰⁴ 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."*¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶

104. 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*

105. Keil & Delitzsch. vol 5. p. 139.

106. 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 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*

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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.¹⁰⁷ It 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.¹⁰⁸ The other penitential Psalms, like Psalm 38, give us further insight into David’s desperation. Keil describes this as, “*David’s distress, ...forsaken by his friends and regarded by his foes as one who is cast off forever.*”¹⁰⁹ Scholarship just described the distance people stay from a leper. David’s disease was spiritual. “*My heart pants*¹¹⁰ [palpitates, a rapid heartbeat]” He wrote, “*My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds [sore]; my neighbors stay far away.*”¹¹¹ “*The fire of God’s anger burns within him like a fever,*” Keil continues, “*and the divine withdrawal as it were rests upon him like darkness.*”¹¹² 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

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.

107. “*Ver. 9a recalls to mind the sprinkling of the leper....*” - Keil, vol 5. p. 138

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

109. Keil & Delitzsch. vol. 5. p. 20

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

111. Psalm 38:11

112. *ibid.*

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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"*¹¹³ he cried to the Lord. 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,¹¹⁴ 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 grieve¹¹⁵ 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."*¹¹⁶ Spurgeon insightfully remarked, *"...fit effusions [unrestrained and heartfelt] for a man so tempted, so strong in his passions, and yet so firm in faith."*¹¹⁷ David is not at peace. Nothing should be more disquieting to a believer than to realize the garrison of the heart¹¹⁸ is sounding the alarm of a present spiritual danger.¹¹⁹

113. Psalm 39:12

114. cp Psalm 51:11

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

116. Psalm 39:10

117. C. H. Spurgeon. vol 1. p. 722

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

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

Part I - Justification

Hyssop

David asks for God to stand in as a priest ceremonially cleansing a leper¹²⁰ ..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.

White As Snow

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."*¹²¹

Wiping away the tears, David must have known God heard him,¹²² David must have sensed, as if in a whispered promise, in a still small voice, God was once again speaking peace to his soul.

He is moments away from shouting his joyous return to divine fellowship.

"I will be clean ...; I will be whiter than snow."

120. cp. Leviticus 14

121. Keil & Delitzsch. vol. 5. p.139

122. 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..."*

Part I - Justification

Crushed Bones

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

Translating the original for such words as *joy, gladness, and rejoicing* leaves me starved for more meaning. I say this because English is a technical language devoid of a true passion in the words which generally can only be approximated through a poetic use of analogy, simile, or metaphor. Biblical Hebrew, on the other hand, is rich, challenging the translations to correctly represent not just the words but the spirit in which they are written.

Zephaniah 3:17

Read Zephaniah 3:17¹²³ 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)¹²⁴ 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.*”

123. יהוה אלהיך בקרבך גבור יושע ישיש עליך בשמחה יחריש באהבתו יגיל עליך ברנה

124. ...εὐφρανθήσεται ἐπὶ σὲ ἐν τέρψει ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐορτῆς

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Psalm 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 they be happy and joyful*” which is rather bland. I think the language should represent a bit more enthusiasm—a bit more “spirit.” The Greek¹²⁵ 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.*”¹²⁶

Psalm 51:8

A glance in our text at some of the translations of the words for *joy, gladness, rejoice*, leads me to believe that their use here in the 51st Psalm might include some significant for David that we missed in a quick read. The New English Translation [NET] reads “*Grant me the ultimate joy of being forgiven!*” Misery does not know happiness. 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.

125. (LXX 67:4) καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι εὐφρανθήτωσαν ἀγαλλιάσθωσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ τερπθήτωσαν ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ

126. Luke 1:44 Modern Hebrew reads מרבה שמחה...רקד leaped for great joy.

Part I - Justification

- ◆ *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 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 dance¹²⁷. 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.*”¹²⁸ Samuel narrated. Sadly there was no music in his 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

127. to keep a pilgrim feast. Haggai’s name derives from this word. ללן
“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/>]

128. 2 Samuel 6:14

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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.¹²⁹

Bones

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

129. Psalm 42:2-4

Part I - Justification

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.”*¹³⁰

Perhaps, the best New Testament word for all of this is translated *rejoicing*¹³¹ in the angels’ account over a sinner coming to repentance before God. *“I tell you, there is **rejoicing** in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*¹³²

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.”*¹³³

130. C. H. Spurgeon. vol 1. p. 937.

131. What does the preacher do with Matthew 13:44 *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and **then in his joy went and sold all** he had and bought that field.”*

132. Luke 15:10

133. 1 Peter 1:8 *rejoice with joy* is better translated “leap for joy.”

Part II - Renewal

Renewal

David's contrition, however, was step one. True repentance leads to a holy life before God. This can explain why David proceeds to ask for seven additional gifts of God's mercy:

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.

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

Part II - Renewal

Hidden Sins

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

David's prayer that God would wipe away the record of his tryst with his coveted lover still lingers on his lips, "*Blot out all my iniquity.*" Getting inside David's heart might be improper but there is a lesson here. He asks God again to erase, expunge, the entry of his crime against God. But this is unlike his first cry of despair.¹ When David began, he prayed,

"According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. [Rebelliousness]" Now he prays "*Blot out all my iniquity [guilt].*" 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, there was no Calvary yet. David confessed, "*... my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity [misery], and my bones waste away.*"²

David's prayer should sound familiar to anyone eavesdropping, as we are here, on this, his, night before God to take away the agony he is experiencing ever since when ...we know when.... Scholars will debate whether David's emotional pain was shame or guilt, conscience or conviction. I content for both. David was simply miserable since God sent Nathan. Even if he had not been self-aware earlier, he was still in God's evaluation of the man, someone after God's heart—and God's heart was not about to keep this hidden!

1. Psalm 51:1

2. Psalm 31:10

Part II - Renewal

When David began praying, he correctly recognized that he was unfaithful, not to his wives or his kingdom or Uriah, in particular, but to God. Here he asked 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.

Please don't miss his word *ALL!* "Blot out all of it, Lord, please. 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." Okay, those are my words but I don't think I am far off from what David would have meant.

David's words? "*Hide your face from my sins.*" Spurgeon interprets David repeating what he said earlier, "*All repetitions are not 'vain repetitions.' Souls in agony have no space to find variety of language: pain has to content itself with monotonous [without variety].*"³

But I am not finished. Repetition was not wordiness or some poor style of writing. Repetition was the child of emphasis and emphasis here is a reflection of David's hurting, the heaviness of his misdeed on not just his memory and night dreams but on his future.

David, perhaps, was not finding the proper words but that's our experience as well when we are asking God to address pain on any level or of any cause. David simply pleaded that the Lord would continue the relationship they had before, as if this had never ever happened, that his sin would no longer be remembered or spoken of. What an act of mercy!

I don't want to be insensitive—and forgive me if I am—but over the years I have counseled with individuals

3. C. H. Spurgeon. vol 1, p. 937

Part II - Renewal

who couldn't seem to deaden, mute, numb, the mental anguish of some wrong, some mistake, some error. Oh, if they could relive the moment and say, "NO!!!" I think, in this Psalm, God may have found a way. Ask Him!

A Fixed Heart

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

When David asked God to give him a pure heart and a spirit that doesn't waver⁴ in doing what is right it is understandable if we connect this with his forbidden romance with Bathsheba. We may assume he wanted the Lord to make him the kind of person that doesn't do such things. His repentance was followed by an honest resolve ...never again. His moral⁵ conscience was given back its voice.

It is easy for Christian scholars⁶ 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!"*⁷

But this goes beyond David's words for a couple reasons. Not only did David have no knowledge of Calvary but he already had a heart after God's. If his heart

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

5. Pure heart can appropriately be taken in a moral sense.

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

7. 2 Corinthians 5:17

Part II - Renewal

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 the Torah,⁸ 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 forgiveness⁹ and a desire, from deep in his soul, to learn how to live truth.¹⁰

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. Be honest.

Steadfastness

I struggled to understand what David—or, for that matter, any other psalmist—meant by the word *steadfast*. Psalm 108:1 reads in the NKJV “O God, my heart is *steadfast*” but here are a few other translations:

- NLT: My heart is **confident** in you, O God
- KJV: O God, my heart is **fixed**
- NET: I am **determined**, O God!
- YLT: **Prepared** is my heart, O God

Psalm 112 celebrates the person who fears the Lord and in verse 7 the Psalmist proclaims, “*They will have no*

8. Psalm 119

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

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

Part II - Renewal

*fear of bad news; their hearts are **steadfast**, trusting in the Lord."*

Psalm 119

Psalm 119¹¹ is replete with memorable verses that join in the dialogue: "*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*"¹²

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 Word of God is timeless. In Psalm 119 he expounded:

Scholarship adds, "*The poet 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....*"¹³

Some believe this to be 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. I might stumble at my words but my prayer is the same,

11. *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*

12. Psalm 119:105

13. Keil and Delitzsch. vol 5. p. 243-4. see verses 23, 46, & 161

Part II - Renewal

“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 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.

Amen.”

A Confirmation

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

To be deprived of God’s presence, of God’s Spirit, would be for a believer to be deprived of God’s gift of inner 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;

Part II - Renewal

nor are we believing that a person has “sinned away” his or her salvation. 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—let me boldly state it: he knew he had God’s ear and heart. 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. I apologize in advance for looking so closely at these words but this might magnify the heart of a man who cannot imagine life without God. In this verse the form could possibly express a *wish*¹⁴ that something should not happen, that God should not leave him. If this form is on his lips David might be reasoning with God not to leave him but I was surprised not to read the magic word “please” (Hebrew has one, which is not always used).

There is another answer: This form may express something which cannot or should not happen.¹⁵ This is stronger than a wish; it is a longing, “*Lord, You cannot possibly leave me!!!!*” How his heart pants after his Lord!¹⁶ David’s cry here is not a command, an imperative or ultimatum or just a wish. David reminds me of Mary

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

15. Gesenius. Section 109, c & e. p. 321f.

16. Psalm 42:1

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Magdalene when she first met the risen Savior.¹⁷ She couldn't imagine life without her Lord.

Sometimes the cry of the heart is a confirmation of a promise¹⁸ which at last is learned or realized. Sincere and heart felt prayer is often the vehicle by which God shares truth with us.¹⁹ 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.

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

17. John 20:15-17

18. 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.*

19. 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."**

Part II - Renewal

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 promised²⁰ 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 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.²¹ David in a transparent honesty reveals his heart and gives us the testimony of God's compassion and

20. Isaiah 43:2

21. Psalms 3-71

Part II - Renewal

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.”*²² David ultimately learned: *“God is present in the company of the righteous.”*²³

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 on our knees 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 need.

Restoration

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

I looked at the words of this verse in the Hebrew, *Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me*, and was about to dive into the meanings of word, but I find it unnecessary since the late Andrae´ Crouch put this verse to music.²⁴

Here is the true healing of God’s forgiveness.

Take me back, take me back dear Lord
To the place where I first received you

22. Psalm 86:5

23. Psalm 14:5

24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0I9iEUfRvI>

Part II - Renewal

Take me back, take me back dear Lord where I First
believed

...

Those simple things that I once knew,
Their memories keep drawing me

...

I must **confess**, Lord I've been blessed
But yet my soul's not satisfied
Renew my faith, restore my joy
And dry my weeping eyes

- *Restore my joy* actually means “Bring back my joy.” The Hebrew word in a simple form means “to return.” This is Hebrew for *repentance*.
- *Sustain* is their 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.”²⁵ Only He can 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.”²⁶ 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

25. 1 Peter 5:7

26. I am reminded of Mark 9:24 “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Part II - Renewal

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.

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.

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

Then 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,"*¹ David hungering for righteousness beseeches the Lord, *"Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins."*² C. H. Spurgeon interprets, *"David...applies for a scholarship in the college of grace."*³ [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."*⁴ 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

1. Psalm 25:4

2. Psalm 25:18

3. C. H. Spurgeon vol I, p. 442

4. *ibid.* p. 441

Part III - The Teacher

that are dead ends while seeking God's forgiveness. Psalm 51:13 starts *then*:

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: *I will teach transgressors your ways! I will teach* is a future form lengthened in the Hebrew language by the additional ending.⁵ The English equivalent is "Let me:" *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.⁶ David's use of language here is more of a humble request than a promise. David's heart is talking, not his head. By all implication God has answered his prayer in the previous verses.

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 life. 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

5. Cohortative form: אֲלַמְּדָה

6. cp Gesenius section 108 p. 319

Part III - The Teacher

Samaritan who poured in the oil and wine,⁷ salvation is a welcomed experience. When David thought God would strike him, God draped His great arm around his shoulders and whispers “Be still” to his soul!

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.

Even individuals who never knew the Lord can be said to return to Him. There is nothing in these words that suggests David would only talk to Israel, since every man and woman in sin can be said to be in rebellion against their Creator and the reason for His creating them. Had David known the song, *Love Lifted Me*,⁸ 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!

7. 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*

8. written by James Rowe, 1912

Part III - The Teacher

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.

David's cry here was, pointedly, unexpected! Perhaps, we hear Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*: "*Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!*"⁹ In this play, King Duncan, a fictional character, is the victim of a well-plotted regicide in a power grab by his trusted captain Macbeth. Lady Macbeth assassinated him.

David cries out, "*Rescue me, Lord, deliver me, from this guilt over Uriah's death! Save me, my God! May my tongue [again?] shout aloud*¹⁰ *your righteousness.*" And here is why such a prayer strikes a chord of mercy in the great heart of God: because when one of God's children are publicly, and rightly, shamed, God is shamed. David took the Lord's name in vain. (Another commandment he broke.) "*Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools.*"¹¹ David pleaded, and then added (in another Psalm but just as heartfelt), "*Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.*"¹²

But are we misreading this verse? Did David relapse? He was doing so well, on the verge of becoming an instructor of God's truth. ..and now, another nightmare shakes his faith!?

9. *Macbeth* Act V Scene 1

10. *Exultingly praise* cp. Keil and Delitzsch. p. 141

11. Psalm 39:8

12. Psalm 79:9

Part III - The Teacher

For the first time David admits in clear language that he murdered Uriah. This is a spiritual break through 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 work in him, then shall his tongue ... praise ...God’s righteousness.”*¹³

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!*”

A former Bible college instructor told the humble story of seeking God with regards to someone who confronted him incessantly. But the Lord spoke to this instructor’s heart to pray for them, ask God to bless not curse.¹⁴ He obeyed, though he wasn’t initially in favor of the idea. In a short time he was asking God to bless his accuser and meaning every word.

It is not uncommon to start out in prayer favoring our own well-being. In David’s case it was asking God to remove the anguish of his soul even though he caused his own hurt. But 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.

13. Keil and Delitzsch. p. 141

14. Romans 12:14 *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

Part III - The Teacher

Boasting in The Lord

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

When David wants to *declare*¹⁵ the Lord's praises, is this not his testimony? 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 praise¹⁶ 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 Lord to open his lips.¹⁷ The dance, once, was gone out of his feet and the joy off his lips until God gave them back to him. Now he wants the Lord to be praised and honored through his living.

15. BDB p. 616 Declare - expound something before not understood, concealed or mysterious

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

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

Part III - The Teacher

God answers a prayer of repentance, a prayer for mercy. *“My soul makes its boast in the Lord;”* David stood in the congregation, *“let the humble hear and be glad.”*¹⁸

Ritual or Righteousness

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

Whatever is David saying? God’s delight and pleasure is not to be dismissed as separate from our religious devotion and the practice of our faith. 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. *“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,”* David learned, *“.. my ears you have opened; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.”*¹⁹ I was surprised to hear David say this ...twice! But even Jesus agreed.²⁰ 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.”*²¹

Moses described what was acceptable and unacceptable regarding offerings under the Law.²² There is

18. Psalm 34:2 [ESV] vs 1 *Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left. I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.*

19. Psalm 40:6

20. Matthew 5:24 *...leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*

21. Isaiah 1:11

22. Leviticus 22:17-33

Part III - The Teacher

here a hint at sacrifices being unacceptable if one's heart is not pure.²³ There is nothing (that I know of) in the Law that clarifies that God will not find a sacrifice acceptable but the heart must be right before Him.

But does this seem reasonable? If our hearts were pure, would we need to bring a sin offering for forgiveness? The Jews asked Paul this very question, "*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*"²⁴ God's forgiveness is needed by those who need to be forgiven. The logic is circular but seems reasonable. What they didn't understand was what forgiveness meant *to God*—something David learned in prayer!

This is 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 the moral law. Not murdering or coveting the woman nextdoor should have been common upbringing. The central focus was on worshipping God *alone*—something 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.*"²⁵ Samuel had correctly observed, "*The word of the*

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

24. Romans 6:11

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

Part III - The Teacher

Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation."²⁶

It is reasonable to suggest that Samuel was David's hero and might have introduced this truth to the soon-to-be king. But Samuel replied: *"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."*²⁷ In Jeremiah's day, Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins. Sacrifices and celebrations were, for now, a thing of 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.*"²⁸ And this also David knew: *"The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."*²⁹

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.

26. 1 Samuel 3:1 NKJV

27. 1 Samuel 15:22

28. Jeremiah 9:24

29. Psalm 147:11

Part III - The Teacher

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 scripture *prayer* is referenced as a means to induce God's good pleasure or favor. One translation is *to beseech* the Lord. This Biblical word provides uncommon insight into the relationship between God's servant and God. 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 essentially means: he *stroked* [properly: rubbed] *the face* of the Lord.³⁰ But Moses **sought the favor** of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "*why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?*"³¹ This question is a dynamic thought to which God responded with forgiveness and patience. He gave them another chance! Is there a lesson here?³² 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.*"³³ Hezekiah's prayer 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*

30. In the Piel: to pacify or induce one to show favor, to make the face of anyone pleasant. cp BDB p. 318

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

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

33. Psalm 119:58

Part III - The Teacher

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!”³⁴

Malachi heralded the message of impassioned prayer when he cried, “*And now **plead** for God’s favor.*”³⁵ 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.*”³⁶ Turning from sin is repenting and returning to the Lord. Giving attention to Truth is agreeing with God or confession. Nothing pleases God as much as these!

There is much here to digest. When David sought the Lord, he found the words to say in his humbled condition that in affect palmed the cheek of the King of kings which pleased Him. 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 saves those who are crushed in spirit.*”³⁷ 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.*”³⁸

34. Jeremiah 26:19

35. Malachi 1:9 [CSB]: עֲתָה חֲלַרְנָא פְּגִימָאֵל

36. Daniel 9:13

37. Psalm 34:18

38. Keil and Delitzsch. vol 5. p.141

Part III - The Teacher

And does this move 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."*³⁹ Yes! We have or should discover that coming humbly to God in effect beseeches His favor, strokes His face.⁴⁰ David said the broken hearted would not be despised [shown contempt].⁴¹ Jesus's calling with regard to us was *"to bind up the brokenhearted."*⁴²

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 Spurgeon, *"if we do not feel for the church of God, and take a lasting interest in its welfare."*⁴³ For David, that was Zion. *"Be pleased Lord to do good to Zion,"* David sensed God's forgiveness. David was coming out of his funk. He was interceding in prayer for others, a marked indication that God had healed his heart answering his prayer.

The revelation of God's mercy is not a theological footnote but a real healing touch that resolves the inner conflict of deep seated rebellion. No matter if sin takes root deep inside the soul over years of spiritual neglect; God,

39. Isaiah 57:15

40. 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.*

41. the feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless, or deserving scorn, disregard

42. Isaiah 61:1

43. C. H. Spurgeon. vol 1. p. 940.

Part III - The Teacher

when we pray, confess and repent, has the therapy that uproots it all and gives us back our joy.

David has arrived. *"I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me."*⁴⁴ David bore witness to the Lord's guidance. *"Now I stand on solid ground, and I will publicly praise the Lord."*⁴⁵

We know this because he is not praying for himself but for Zion. Misery does not bless others, A soul at rest and a peaceful spirit do.⁴⁶

The Walls of Jerusalem

This had been a dream of David, to make Zion into the "City of David."⁴⁷ David retrieved the Ark of God from the Philistines and after a brief stay in Obededom's house, brought it to Zion with gladness.⁴⁸ *"...leaping and dancing before the Lord."*⁴⁹ This joyous occasion would antedate his romance with Bathsheba. After that, he had lost all joy and gladness which is the witness of Psalm 51.. The dancing went out of his feet. As he put it: *let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*

44. Psalm 16:7

45. [NLT] Psalm 26:12

46. 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.*

47. 2 Samuel 5:7 *David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.*

48. 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.*

49. 2 Samuel 6:16

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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.⁵⁰

A Spiritual Meaning

C. H. Spurgeon believes there is more meaning to this verse, and I agree. 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 His, God's, people. In a spiritual sense "*he had done mischief and had, as it were, pulled down her walls.*"⁵¹ 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 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

50. 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.

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

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here to pray always for the people of God and His work among them.

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. "Then," means *at that time*, written twice here but nowhere else in this psalm. It is as if David concludes his prayer of repentance, knowing that the Lord mercifully heard him, with an awakened longing, now as a righteous man, to offer his sacrifices to God.

Burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings, as some translations correctly read, are the same sacrifice.⁵² This verse "*speaks of real Old Testament offerings,*" one commentary reads, "*and indeed again of thank-offerings, especially ... bullocks [young bulls] which are ... burnt-offerings.*"⁵³ 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, in the courts of the house of the Lord—in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise the Lord.*"⁵⁴

52. 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.

53. Lange, vol 5. p. 327. To which Spurgeon agrees. cp Spurgeon. vil 1. p. 940

54. Psalm 116:16-19

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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.

Thank offerings, according to Mosaic law, were primarily meal or bread offerings.⁵⁵ Young bulls were offered in the sin offering, particularly when a leader, a priest, commits the sin.⁵⁶ 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 possible that he had both on his heart. It makes sense that David would want to 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 sees many faithful followers of the Lord and multiple sacrifices in a wholehearted eagerness to get back to what he loves the most, with a pure devotion, honoring and praising God.

55. 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.*

56. 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.*

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Conclusion

And what about us? What about me? Deep inside this poetic verse of 19 strophe-antistrophe couplets (or whatever they are called), this musical arrangement written for a praise or worship service in the Temple Solomon would build, is an inspired and—I must say—anointed and revelatory message for the ages. This is not David's mea-culpa alone. It should be all of ours unless we are perfect in our devotion in following Christ. ..and to say this would be a spiritually dangerous self-deception.

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 would remind me in the days, and even years, following 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 a "bad" side to my personality. There is a Greek word for this—*pride*—that fits me. It is not the "arrogance" James preached against⁵⁷ or the "pride of life" John spoke of.⁵⁸ Knowing these were not me, made me prouder of myself!! No! My pride was exposed by Peter, "*God opposes the*

57. James 4:16

58. 1 John 2:16

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*proud...*⁵⁹ And this put me smack dab in the middle of this Psalm. This pride represents proud thoughts that may never be expressed except in those stray moments, those few times in life when leaks occur in the pipeline of my mental ramblings, and I say or do what is best not only not said or done but best *not thought*. To quote Trench, *"A man can show himself [boastful] only when in company with his fellow-men; but the proper seat of ... pride, ...is within. He that is sick of this sin compares himself, it may be secretly or openly, with others, and lifts himself above others, in honor preferring himself;...."*⁶⁰

The scripture I struggle with is Philippians 4:8. I'll leave this here for you to research. But I would lay my head on my pillow at night and say to myself about all the opposition in life, *"They're going to miss me when I'm gone!"* I have had a few girlfriends over the years that have probably felt the sting of my tongue or unanticipated reactions. My wife tells me that they probably do not even remember me, while I continue to wonder! I have been prone to pray for them, and that's not bad—right?

Sometimes I think that if my humanity is showing, that's not so bad a thing. I like that song, *"Everybody plays the fool, Sometime, Somewhere."* 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.

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

59. 1 Peter 5:5

60. Trench. p. 101

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the 51st Psalm and I want to continue to dive deep 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

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