

Always A Time To Praise the Lord

The Lord is Gracious to Forgive

Psalm 51

Main Idea: Sin brings the righteous judgment of God, but the Lord is gracious to forgive.

The context of Psalm 51 is 2 Samuel 11-12. David's military victories established the Kingdom and brought God's peace and security to the King. Rather than going out to war with his army, David stayed at home in Jerusalem. In this state of idle neglect of his duties, David was tempted. He saw Bathsheba, who was the wife of one of his soldiers, and lust grew in David's idle mind until it gave birth to sin. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and once he realized that she was pregnant, he arranged to have Uriah come home for a visit from battle, hoping that he would go home and stay with Bathsheba, giving David an opportunity to cover up his sin. Uriah came to Jerusalem, but he won't go home. He refused to go and to stay with wife when the Ark was in a booth and his fellow soldiers were on the battlefield. As a result, David arranged to have Uriah killed on the battlefield in order to hide his sin, but sin is never hidden from the Lord. Nathan the prophet confronted David, revealing the depth of his sin and the judgment that he deserved. Thankfully, David responded not in prideful resistance to the conviction of his sin; rather, David repented. Psalms 51 captures the repentant heart of David and the mercy of God towards those who turn to him in true repentance.

True repentance comes from the heart (1-6).

- A heart that looks to God for mercy rather than what's deserved (1-2).
- A heart that trusts in God's righteousness rather than self-righteousness (1-2).
- A heart that believes that God has the power to forgive (1-2).
- A heart that confesses sinfulness and sin (3-5).
- A heart that accepts God's just judgment of sin (4b).

David's true repentance is instruction for the sinful soul today, and one of the keys to David's repentance was that it came from the heart. It wasn't lip service. It wasn't a lot of work to try to atone for his sin. It was repentance that came from the heart, because David knew that God delighted in "truth in the inner being" (Ps. 51:6). There are at least five elements of David's heart of repentance that are worth careful study. The first is where David starts, crying out for God to be gracious to him! David looked to God for mercy rather than what was deserved. David deserved God's judgment. David didn't deserve mercy, but that's exactly what he requested from the Lord. David did this because he knew the Lord! He didn't rely on his own self-righteousness to make his case; rather, David relied on the righteousness of God. He knew that God was the Lord of steadfast love. He knew that God was the Lord who was merciful to those who turned to him for mercy. David appealed to the character of God rather than to himself as he pleaded for God to show him mercy, knowing that God had the power to forgive! David knew that the Lord was the one he had ultimately sinned against; therefore, God was the only one with the power to fully forgive. So David confessed his sinfulness and his sin to the Lord. This is critical. David knew that he had not only sinned but also that he was a sinner. He knew that God's judgment of his sin was just. He had no appeal and no case to argue before the Lord. So all he could do was cry out for mercy from the gracious judge!

1. Use the BlueLetterBible app to study the word that's translated "have mercy on me" in verse 1. What is the meaning of this word? What is David asking the Lord to do?

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2. In verse 1, how does David look to and call on the character of the Lord – his righteousness – as he asks for the Lord’s graciousness in his life? What is the “steadfast love” and the “abundant mercy” of the Lord?
3. Why is it important to recognize our sinfulness as well as our specific sin when it comes to confession and repentance? How does our culture often downplay and deny these things? Do you know someone who is doing this in their life right now? Discuss, and pray.

True repentance longs for a true change of heart (7-13).

- *A heart that's truly cleansed (7, 9-10).*
- *A heart that's truly transformed (8, 10).*
- *A heart that's truly with and for the Lord (11-13).*

David's prayer expressed his longing for God's grace in his heart. David didn't want his sins to just be forgiven. He wasn't looking for his sin to be overlooked or brushed aside. David wanted his sinful heart to be cleansed! He wanted the Lord to truly wash away his sin, taking it out of his life completely. David wanted a heart that was truly transformed. He didn't want the brokenness of sin and the destructiveness of his sin to be the defining and controlling element of his soul, he wanted a heart that rejoiced in the Lord and a heart that was cleaned and renewed by the Lord. David wanted a heart that was with the Lord. He wanted God in his life and the presence of the Lord to be with him. God was the object of his heart, and he wanted a heart that was truly for the Lord: Cleansed and transformed so he could be used to lead others to true repentance to the Lord! In other words, David didn't just want forgiveness, he longed for a true change of heart by God's grace in his life.

1. David longed for a cleansed heart because his heart was stained with sin. Have you ever felt this spiritual reality in your heart? Why? How would you share that experience and God's cleansing work in your heart with someone who needs that in their life today?
2. David longed for a transformed heart because his heart was burdened and broken over sin. Have you ever felt this spiritual reality in your heart? Why? How would you share that experience and God's transforming work in your heart with someone who needs that in their life today?
3. David longed for a heart that's truly with and for the Lord. Do you? Is God's presence what you long for in your heart? Is God's work what you long for in your life? Pray for this today!

True repentance leads to true worship from the heart (14-19).

David's repentance and God's grace stirred his heart to worship! He sang of God's righteousness (not his self-righteousness). He declared God's praises (not his own). He recognized God's grace in forgiveness through true repentance rather than through ritual works of the law. David recognized that true worship from God's people will flow from hearts that are truly cleansed and transformed by God's mercy through true repentance, and he knew that King, his repentance would have an impact on true worship in the Kingdom.

1. What's your favorite song that tells of God's grace in his forgiveness of sin? Share, and perhaps pick a song to listen to and sing along with to worship the Lord of forgiveness today!
2. How can you declare God's praise through his forgiveness in your life? In thinking through all of what he's called to mind in your heart so far, take time to praise him today for his grace in forgiving your sins and cleansing and transforming your hearts in Christ!
3. What is your sphere of influence? David's was Israel. Who will be impacted by your repentant heart for the Lord? Pray for worship to be the true result of true repentance!