

Psalm 51 is an amazing Psalm. It was written by David and it was written for the choir director, which means it was to be publicly communicated. As the superscription says, it was written after Nathan the prophet had confronted David after his sin with Bathsheba.

The background of Psalm 51 is II Samuel 11:1-12:13. The LORD sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke David of his evil sin. There are at least six sins we know of plus five major violations of the 10 commandments in this episode with Bathsheba:

- 1) David coveted (II Sam. 11:2-3/Ex. 20:17);
- 2) David committed adultery (II Sam. 11:4/Ex. 20:14);
- 3) David bore false witness by lying (II Sam. 11:7, 15/Ex. 20:16);
- 4) David stole another man's wife which makes him guilty of stealing (II Sam. 11:27/Ex. 20:15);
- 5) David had a man murdered making him guilty of killing (II Sam. 11:15-16/Ex. 20:13);
- 6) Plus David intentionally got Uriah drunk (II Sam. 11:13).

Nathan confronted him with all of this and **somewhere between David's confession of his sin in II Sam. 12:13a and his realization that God had taken away His sin in II Sam. 12:13b, he wrote Psalm 51.**

**This is an extremely important chapter in the Bible because this presents to us that even if a believer has committed terrible sin against God, if he will face it and deal with it in a proper Biblical manner, he can find the forgiveness of God and he can be restored to a wonderful life of joy, fellowship and service for the Lord.**

**PSALM 51 IS A PSALM OF AMAZING GRACE BECAUSE IT SHOWS HOW THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN TERRIBLE SIN STILL MAY FIND THE FULL FORGIVENESS OF GOD.**

The rebuke of Nathan got to David. It hit him hard in his heart. Because of that, David responded to God. He reacted in exactly the way he should and as a result he experienced victory. There is a pattern here for any who have sinned to follow and if you follow the pattern, you will experience exactly what David experienced:

**FORGIVENESS REALITY #1 – David asks God to completely take away his sin. 51:1-6**

Notice carefully how David identifies his sin—"transgressions" 51:1 - specific defection and rebellion against God; "iniquity" (51:2a) - perverse and depraved sin; "sin" 51:2b - which means to miss the mark completely. **Now please do not overlook the critical pronouns "my transgressions," "my iniquity," "my sin." David blames himself. He takes full responsibility for his own sin. He does not try to pass the buck to someone else.**

Now there are four amazing requests that David makes here. These are all based on the fact that in **verse 1**, he knows God is a loving, kind, merciful God, who is also compassionate:

**Request #1** - He asks God to be gracious to him. **51:1a**

David is asking God to see him as a helpless and hopeless sinner and grant Him unmerited pity, compassion and favor (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 292). If the possibility for grace forgiveness exists for David, then it certainly does for us.

**Request #2** - He asks God to blot out his transgressions. **51:1b**

The word means to completely remove, wipe out and take away all of the sin.

**Request #3** - He asks God to wash him. **51:2a** - thorough washing inside and out.

**Request #4** - He asks God to cleanse him. **51:2b** - So clean, one shines bright. Sin makes one dirty.

Now David lists seven reasons why he dares to make these requests to God:

**(Reason #1)** - Because David has precise knowledge of his sin. **51:3a** - word means precise.

**(Reason #2)** - Because David has the constant memory of his sin. **51:3b**

His conscience could not shake it. As Calvin said he lived with a constant “anguish of mind.”

**(Reason #3)** - Because David fully admitted his sin before God. **51:4a**

When one realizes it, the weight of sinning against God moves one to ask for His grace.

**(Reason #4)** - Because David knew he had done evil in God’s sight. **51:4b**

The word “evil” means wicked evil that is hurtful, noxious and malignant (*Ibid.*, p. 772).

**(Reason #5)** - Because David was born with a sin problem. **51:5**

David knew that he sinned because he has a nature to sin, which he received from his parents. This is called “genetic depravity” and it is taught in many passages (Job 14:4; Ps. 58:3; Jn. 3:6; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:3).

**(Reason #6)** - Because God desires truth in the inner parts. **51:6a** - only God can do this.

**(Reason #7)** - Because God can make one wise in the inner parts. **51:6b** - only God gives this.

**FORGIVENESS REALITY #2** – David was aware of the personal results if God would answer his requests. **51:7-9**

There are six results that would occur if God would answer David's request:

**Result #1** - If God would purify him, he would be clean . **51:7a** - judicially and ceremonially clean with no liability for any penalty. Hyssop was used to add fragrant aroma.

**Result #2** - If God would wash him, he would be whiter than snow. **51:7b**

Sin needs to be washed white and not whitewashed. Man tends to whitewash his sin, but only God can wash the sin away. Isaiah said, "though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Is. 1:18). This is what God's grace is capable of doing.

**Result #3** - God could make him joyful and glad . **51:8a** - Sin never makes one happy.

**Result #4** - God could heal his broken spirit. **51:8b** - Sin affects one emotionally and physically.

**Result #5** - God could hide His face from his sins. **51:9a** - "hide" - completely remove from sight. "Sins" is plural. God can completely remove all sin from someone from His sight and memory.

**Result #6** - God could blot out all of his iniquities . **51:9b** - all perverse and depraved things.

**FORGIVENESS REALITY #3** – David asks God to completely change him and restore him. **51:10-13**

It is a shame that most people do not have an understanding like David. David realized he could not change himself. Only God could change him. There is no hint here that he is depending on himself of his choices to resolve this:

**Request #1** - He asks God to create in him a clean heart. **51:10a**

The word create is bara; to create something from nothing. David asks God to create in Him a clean heart that is not in existence; that will shine bright.

**Request #2** - He asks God to renew a steadfast spirit within him. **51:10b**

"Renew" means to repair and restore David's spirit which was very unstable and unsure. God could do a work of grace so that he would be a confident and sure man of God.

**Request #3** - He asks God not to cast him away from His presence. **51:11a**

The O.T. idea of being cast away from God's presence is not having God's blessings and peace and protection. A good illustration is Cain (Gen. 4:16; 12). Moses believed God's presence meant having God's blessings, direction, protection and care (Ex. 33:12-14).

**Request #4** - He asks God not to remove His Holy Spirit from him. **51:11b**

In O.T. dispensation, there was no permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit as in the N.T. (John 14:17). There was a temporary anointing for leadership and service. We may see this in the lives of Samson (Judges 13:24-25/16:20); Saul (I Sam. 10:10/16:14); and David (I Sam. 16:13-14/Ps. 51:11).

David has sinned terribly and yet he wanted to remain King and so he appeals to God's grace.

**Request #5** - He asks God to restore the joy of his salvation. **51:12a**

No child of God can ever be joyful apart from being right with God. Only God can put joy back into one's heart when he has sinned against Him.

**Request #6** - He asks God to sustain him with a willing spirit. **51:12b**

David is asking God to sustain him so that he will never fall again and lose his joy.

Now in **verse 13** he says that if God would do this, then he would teach transgressors God's ways and convert sinners.

Now just exactly what would he teach sinners? He would teach them the key theology of the lesson he learned. You cannot possibly clean yourself up. You cannot possibly make yourself spiritual. You cannot possibly make yourself steadfast. You cannot possibly give yourself a great status with God. You cannot give yourself joy. Only God can do that. So what a sinner needs to do is turn to the Lord and cry out to Him. That is what He would teach sinners.

**FORGIVENESS REALITY #4** – God can forgive and make one useful again. **51:15-17**

Notice **verse 15**; God is the God of salvation and he can deliver one from all sin. David says when one experiences salvation, notice one sings of "God's righteousness."

In **verse 16** David brings out the fact that one cannot ever be right with God by external religion. No one can be right with God by doing external religious things. A person could offer sacrifices and offerings and be baptized and take communion and never be right with God.

As **verse 17** says, God forgives one who is broken and contrite in heart because of his sin.

**Being right with God has to do with the internal and not just the external.**

**This is the kind of righteousness David would sing about if God would forgive him.**

**FORGIVENESS REALITY #5** – God can forgive and bless the entire organization again.  
**51:18-19**

God's grace was not only able to forgive and bless David, but bless Israel under David's leadership.

David is asking God to forgive and bless him and also the entire nation.

Now you may wonder what happened in the aftermath of this discussion.

**Two Final Questions pertaining to this Psalm:**

**(Question #1)** - Did God forgive David? The answer to this question is found in Psalm 32:1-5. God completely did forgive him.

**(Question #2)** - Did God use David and bless Israel? The answer is found in I Kings 2:10-12 and I Chronicles 29:26-30. David ended up leading Israel into one of her more blessed times in history.

**When we fail and sin, run to the Lord and ask for His cleansing grace and you will sing again.**