

# **The Life of David: David's Roadmap: The Pathway Back to God**

## **Psalm 51**

Psalm 51 is a roadmap to anyone who has ever gotten away from the Lord; it is a beacon that clearly captures for us the roadway back to God.

David fell so far, so fast, and he didn't even realize it until the dullness of his soul spread to every inch of his spiritual life.<sup>1</sup> Soon his cold and lonely heart was combined with his tormented soul and trapped in a painfully chastened body. And he stayed at the bottom like that for almost a year.

Does that length of time surprise you? After all, think of whom it was that had fallen so far away from the God he passionately loved and served. For David was a man who:

### **Getting out of The Ditch of Sin**

How deep was the ditch, it was deep because David had known God so closely, so warmly, and so completely. David:

- Was talked to directly by God through inspiration;
- Knew the indwelling presence of God the Spirit;
- Had the direct line to God's throne by way of prophets;
- Could enter the very tent of God built to the Lord's specs;
- Perhaps held the very scrolls Moses had written down;
- May have seen the stone tablets of the Law that were kept in the Ark of the Covenant;
- Had seen God's supernatural protection month after month in hand-to-hand combat. David was never defeated on the battlefield and, as far as we know, never even wounded in spite of the tens of thousands of weapons that had at some time been aimed at him by those who hated him and wanted him dead.

David was a man who knew God, experienced God's presence, loved God, sang scores of songs inspired by God, wrote chapters of the eternal Word of God—and yet he seemed to lose touch with God for a YEAR!

Amazingly, David hid this well as he went through the motions of being the king. After

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<sup>1</sup> DSS-19; 060723AM DSS-26; 060723PM DSS-27; 060813AM DSS-28; 060813PM DSS-29; 060820AM DSS-30

all, he was still God’s leader—the sweet psalmist of Israel, head of the family line that would never end, and the one through whom the Christ would come. But like an engine without fuel or an electronic device with no power, those blessings and benefits meant nothing when he walked away from the Lord and stayed away for a long time.

To the casual observer, it may have looked like David had gotten away with sin. But David was God’s man and He would never let His choice servant get by with sin. In reality, during the interval David kept quiet, he was tormented from within and without—as seen in Psalm 38, which was a prayer of intense lament during chastening.

Psalm 32, which I like to call “The Song of a Soul Set Free,” was probably an expression of his initial gratitude over the relief of forgiveness. That song shows what really went on in David’s heart during this distressful period. The self-inflicted stress of those many months was completely debilitating to him:

*When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the daylong. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me: my vitality was turned into the drought of summer (Psalm 32:3-4).*

If we could have visited the court of David during that nearly year of hidden sin, we would have seen him literally aging before our eyes! But now

## **COMING BACK TO GOD**

Only God could relieve David’s cold, distant, lonely tormented heart by granting complete forgiveness and restoring his joy, peace, and security. Hence Psalm 51 is all about David, who had been so far away, coming back to the Lord. It stands as a paradigm of prayers for forgiveness of sins—a divinely inspired roadmap to the path back to God.<sup>2</sup>

As we read this inspired Psalm, watch how David laid bare his soul as he sought restoration from the Lord. Please stand with me for the reading of:

### **PSALM 51— A PRAYER OF REPENTANCE**

TO THE CHIEF MUSICIAN. A PSALM OF DAVID WHEN NATHAN THE PROPHET WENT TO HIM, AFTER HE HAD GONE IN TO BATHSHEBA.

<sup>1</sup> *Have mercy upon **me**, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out **my** transgressions.*

<sup>2</sup> *Wash **me** thoroughly from **my** iniquity,*

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<sup>2</sup> Note: Psalms 6, [32, 38, and 51], 102, 130, and 143 are the seven penitential psalms.

And cleanse **me** from **my** sin.

- <sup>3</sup> For **I** acknowledge **my** transgressions,  
And **my** sin is always before **me**.
- <sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, have **I** sinned,  
And done this evil in Your sight—  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge.
- <sup>5</sup> Behold, **I** was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin **my** mother conceived **me**.
- <sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,  
And in the hidden part You will make **me** to know wisdom.
- <sup>7</sup> Purge **me** with hyssop, and **I** shall be clean;  
Wash **me**, and **I** shall be whiter than snow.
- <sup>8</sup> Make **me** hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from **my** sins,  
And blot out all **my** iniquities.
- <sup>10</sup> Create in **me** a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within **me**.
- <sup>11</sup> Do not cast **me** away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from **me**.
- <sup>12</sup> Restore to **me** the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold **me** by Your generous Spirit.
- <sup>13</sup> Then **I** will teach transgressors Your ways,  
And sinners shall be converted to You.
- <sup>14</sup> Deliver **me** from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of **my** salvation,  
And **my** tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
- <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open **my** lips,  
And **my** mouth shall show forth Your praise.
- <sup>16</sup> For You do not desire sacrifice, or else **I** would give it;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.
- <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.
- <sup>18</sup> Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;  
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
- <sup>19</sup> Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,  
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;  
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

## **PRAY**

Psalm 51, designed primarily for public reading and worship, is one of the most

treasure-laden psalms in the Bible. It was part of the regular songs of the tabernacle, then the temple, and now the church.

Inspired by the Spirit of God, written by David, the song has been lifted up before God as a memorial to His great love that made Him able and willing to forgive men such as David.

The structure of Psalm 51 was intended for effective communication in public assembly and worship. Note the emphasis and how it changed:

- **David asked for Forgiveness.** In verses 1-2, David asked six different yet parallel ways for God to restore and renew him.
- **David took the blame.** In verses 3-9, David emphasized his responsibility for his sin eight times, but God was not mentioned by Name.
- **God was his desire.** In verses 10-19, the Holy God against whom David sinned was emphasized twenty times, but sin and sinner were only mentioned once.

The primary lesson of this psalm is that ALL SIN is AGAINST GOD—not simply a personal defeat. If you believe that your sin is only a defeat you experience, sin becomes manageable and thus something to just learn to live with. But that would be a serious misconception because:

... when the church has a superficial view of sin, this attitude affects everything the church believes and does. If men and women are basically good and not sinners under the wrath of God, then why preach the Gospel? Why send out missionaries? For that matter, why did Jesus even die on the cross? If people are good, then what they need is counseling and consoling, not convicting; we should give them encouragement, not evangelism.<sup>3</sup>

David, however, understood that sin is against GOD (v. 4). In fact, out of the 327 words in Psalm 51, thirty-five times he used "I," "me," or "my" to repeatedly say, "I am guilty!" Doing so was his acknowledgement of God's perspective that we are all sinners (Romans 3:10-12, 23). But because David's sins were forgiven, countless other believers have been comforted that their sins can also be forgiven by following the same pathway back to God.

## **THE PATHWAY BACK TO GOD**

God inspired David to show four steps that will lead us back to God when we feel defeated by sin:

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Holy* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994).

### **STEP 1—**

**We must REALIZE that all sin is REALLY against God.**

(Psalm 51:1-4)

- The Lord can renew our relationship. (v. 1)
- The Lord can wash us clean. (v. 2)
- The Lord can remove the roadblock. (v. 3)
- The Lord can utterly forgive. (v. 4)

### **STEP 2—**

**We must take personal responsibility for our sin.**

(Psalm 51:5-9)

- As sinners we show our nature, our choice, and confirm God's declaration. (v. 5)
- As sinners we need truthfulness. (v. 6)
- As sinners we need cleansing. (v. 7)
- As sinners we need joyfulness. (v. 8)
- As sinners we need fellowship with our God. (v. 9)

### **STEP 3—**

**We must believe that only God can cleanse and restore us.**

(Psalm 51:10-13)

- God wants to wash our hearts. (v. 10) [see also Hebrews 9:14; 10:22]
- God wants to restore our walk in the Spirit. (v. 11)
- God wants to renew the fruit of the Spirit. (v. 12)
- God wants to prepare us for further ministry. (v. 13)

### **STEP 4—**

**We must Seek God and repent.**

(Psalm 51:14-19)

- Call sin what it is [e.g., David murdered Uriah]. (v. 14)
- Talk to God [e.g., David had dried up spiritually in Ps. 32]. (v. 15)
- Experience true contrition, not mere externalism. (vv. 16-17)
- Begin zealous worship anew and afresh. (vv. 18-19)

Now for an in-depth look at this Psalm. First:

## **DAVID SAYS: I AM GUILTY**

Psalm 51:1 *Have mercy upon **me**, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out **my** transgressions.*

"I am guilty. I was wrong. I am sorry. Please take from me the just punishment I deserve!" So began the greatest song about the love of God a desperate David experienced when he was overwhelmed. For in a moment, he went from absolute gloom and heaviness of soul to the joy of having his sins lifted off!

The spiritual scales that had slowly taken the color and light from his life were removed. His soul, now flooded with light and peace, began again to drink deeply from the wells of his salvation. His cold heart was warmed; his tormented soul was set free; and he was no longer trapped in a painfully chastened body. David had left the bottom where he had stayed for almost a year!

How did David get back on track? And even more pressing for each of us is this: How can we come back to God when we've sinned and grown cold and distant?

David began at quite a different reference point from that of modern psychotherapists or social workers who usually begin with "... *our inner experience. They invite us to try to face up to our moral problems, to recognize how our misdeeds affect society for the worse or how we have even broken society's laws.*"<sup>4</sup>

## **GO STRAIGHT TO THE TOP**

But David swept beyond all these human and moral considerations and looked straight at the Almighty and Holy God he had sinned against. By confessing that he was guilty, David was coming back to God who alone can renew a relationship broken by sin: *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions* (Psalm 51:1).

David appealed to God's love and compassion as he petitioned the Lord to forgive him by grace and cleanse him from his sin. Mercy is to *not* get what we deserve and grace is to *get* what we don't deserve. Mercy withholds; grace outpours.

*God's attributes of **unfailing love (chesed)** for His servant and His **compassion** for the helpless, were the basis for David's appeal for mercy. Even the verb **have mercy** was a prayer for **God** to act in accord with His nature. It is also a recognition that David did not deserve forgiveness. God's forgiveness is by His grace alone.*<sup>5</sup>

If you want swift, immediate, and relationship-restoring help from God, start with that simple guilty plea. A David-type response to God in the New Testament is in Luke 18:13: "*And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast ["kept on" - present active participle], saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'*"

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<sup>4</sup> George A. F. Knight, *Daily Study Bible Series: Psalms, Volume 1*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, ©1984).

<sup>5</sup> John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1983, 1985).

God just can't resist this type heart cry to Him! The Greek tenses tell us that the publican couldn't stop saying this; it was an ongoing longing of his heart. Like the publican who wouldn't even lift his face toward God, but just said, "*God, be merciful to me,*" we can also come back to God in this manner.

Such a cry of acknowledgment of our sin is very humbling. In fact, the very way we started is how we are to continue: *As you have therefore **received** Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him ...* (Colossians 2:6). The word "*received*" in Colossians 2:6 is the very same word for salvation that appears in John 1:12: *... as many as **received** Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God ....* In other words, the humble contrition that brought us salvation also brings us back to God whenever we sin.

Let's remember again that each of us came, just as we were, and humbly fell at His feet pleading for mercy!

## **WE ALL MUST COME: JUST AS WE ARE**

The humble approach we need when we come to Jesus was beautifully seen in the story behind one of the best-known hymns in America. It took place in 1822 when a visiting evangelist was invited to a very large and prominent home in London where a choice musical was to be presented.

The musician was Charlotte Elliott, who was born in Clapham, England. As a young person she had lived a carefree life, gaining popularity as a portrait artist, musician, and writer of humorous verse. At age thirty, however, her health began to fail rapidly, and soon she would become a bedridden invalid for the remaining years of her life. With her failing health came great feelings of despondency.

The visit that night by the noted Swiss evangelist, Dr. Caesar Malan, proved to be a turning point in Charlotte's life.<sup>6</sup> After Charlotte finished thrilling the audience with her singing and playing, the evangelist threaded his way through the crowd gathered around her.

When he finally had her attention, he said, "Young lady, when you were singing, I sat there and thought how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if you would dedicate yourself and your talents to the Lord. But," he added, "you are just as much a sinner as the worst drunkard in the street, or any harlot on Scarlet Street. But I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, will cleanse you from all sin if you will come to Him." In a very haughty manner, she turned her head aside and said to him, "You are very insulting, sir."

And she started to walk away. He said, "Lady, I did not mean any offense, but I pray that the Spirit of God will convict you." That night this young woman could not sleep.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from two different stories of this hymn. The first was written by Kenneth W Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997).

At two o'clock in the morning she knelt at the side of her bed and received Christ as her Savior. And then she sat down and wrote the words of this favorite hymn—a prayer of repentance:

### **Just As I Am**

*Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am, tho' tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind—  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find—  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come!*

**—Charlotte Elliott, 1789-1871**

And that is the basis on which all of us must come to Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the remainder of her life, Miss Elliott yearly celebrated the day on which her Swiss friend had led her to a personal relationship with Christ, for she considered it to be her spiritual birthday. Although she did not publish this hymn until 1836, fourteen years after her conversion experience, it is apparent that she never forgot the words of her friend, for they form the very essence of this hymn.<sup>8</sup>

The words of this hymn are a wonderful reminder of the pathway back to God that David found. No matter how many steps away from God we have taken, its always only one step back to Him.

Tonight, turn in your hymnbooks to this precious old hymn, it is number 342.

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<sup>7</sup> Details of Charlotte Elliott's conversion recorded by J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, ©1981).

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997).