

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

“CONFESSION: THE WAY BACK”

For individual study or discussion

Psalm 51 reminds us that God’s grace can transform our worst failures into sincere worship. After hearing the prophet’s story of the rich man who steals and kills a poor man’s lamb, King David is furious. In 2 Samuel 12:1-15, David’s anger burns against the rich man, *“As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.”* Nathan challenges him by revealing, *“You are the man!”* Psalm 51 is a testimonial of David’s repentance, *“I have sinned against the Lord”* (v. 13).

An Urgent Cry for Forgiveness According to God’s Mercy (vv. 1-5)

David shows us the pathway back to right relationship with God after his catastrophic moral failure. He fully owns his sin and boldly asks God for thorough cleansing, calling upon God’s steadfast love (*hesed*) and mercy. David recognizes God is his only hope. As one commentator points out, *“The word that Psalm 51 offers to the desperate is the reiteration of the nature of the God to whom we pray: steadfast love and abundant mercy, a God who is eternally ‘for us’ with the endless love of a mother for her child. The God who is everlasting love will never abandon us, no matter what our guilt says. Steadfast love and abundant mercy heal us not only of the stain of sin, but also of the lie of our worthlessness. Who among us doesn’t need to hear that word?”*¹

- Read Exodus 34:6-7. What does God promise his people at Sinai? What does David teach us about the nature of God’s forgiveness? How does it serve to encourage us today, especially when we fall prey to sin and temptation?
- David says that he has sinned against God, and God only (v. 4). How can that be? What do you think David means by this?

An Earnest Cry for Inward Renewal That Only God Can Bring (vv. 6-12)

David cries for an inward renewal that only God can bring, *“Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean”* (v. 7). OT priests used hyssop in cleansing rituals (Leviticus 14:49), and David is asking God himself to be his priest who will cleanse him from his sin. Not only does David ask for thorough cleansing, he also boldly asks for a restoration of joy. He is not content with a mere pardon, but a full renewal of relationship with God (v. 12).

- Read Exodus 12:22 and Hebrews 9:19-22. What does the OT symbology of hyssop point us toward?
- Read Ezekiel 36:25-27 and Jeremiah 31:33-34. What does the phrase, *“create in me a clean heart”* have in common with the prophetic hope of restoration found in these OT passages?

The Beautiful Fruit of God’s Forgiveness and Renewal (vv. 13-19)

With his heart again aligned with God, David is ready to worship and lead Israel in renewal. In verses 16-17, we learn that right worship is a natural consequence of true repentance which comes from a broken and contrite heart: *“Many people miss this truth. Rather than repent, they try to ‘clean up their act,’ give more, pray more, or busy themselves in other religious activity in the hopes that God will finally ‘get over’ being mad at them. In Psalm 51, David is saying that God wants none of that. External religious activity cannot replace internal, heartfelt contrition (1 Samuel 16:7).”*²

- Theologian Henri Nouwen in his book *The Wounded Healer* states that *“The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there.”*³ In verse 13, David asks for the privilege to be a *“wounded healer”*—one who can lead other sinners down this same path of repentance that he has walked. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:3-6, how do we become *“wounded healers”*?

DATE: June 8, 2025

SPEAKER: Frank/Wil

SERIES: Summer in the Psalms

PASSAGE: Psalm 51

Family Dinner Table

Repentance Unto Life

What does it mean to repent? In his commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, Robert Shaw states that *“true repentance springs from a sight and sense of sin. All men will readily acknowledge, in general terms, that they are sinners; but no man can have a clear sight and sense of his sins until the Holy Spirit becomes his teacher.”*⁴ The WCF shorter catechism (Q&A #87) asks, *“What is repentance unto life?”* Answer: *“Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”* True repentance means understanding your need for a Savior and recognizing that God in his mercy provides that salvation in Christ alone through faith alone. We are not to rest upon our repentance for our salvation. Rather, we rest upon Christ and his finished work (Ephesians 2:4-10).

- Read Hosea 6:6, Joel 2:13, and 2 Corinthians 7:10, describe the difference between repentance and remorse.
- Discuss as a family how Psalm 51 helps you better understand what true repentance looks like in the Christian life.

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

PCA Committee on Discipleship Ministries, denominational ministry partner

PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Charissa & William, supported missionary partners

¹Webb, Elizabeth. *Commentary on Psalm 51:1-12*. March 22, 2015. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-psalm-51-12-3>

²Got Questions. <https://www.gotquestions.org/broken-spirit-contrite-heart.html>

³Nouwen, Henri. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. 2012, London. Darton, Longman, & Todd Ltd. 72

⁴Shaw, Robert. *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. 1998, Ross-shire, UK. Christian Focus Publications. 200