

## Psalm 51

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Psalm 51. 1-6— atonement/ lent

<sup>1</sup>Have mercy upon me, O God,  
according to thy lovingkindness:  
according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies  
blot out my transgressions.  
<sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
<sup>3</sup>For I acknowledge my transgressions:  
and my sin is ever before me.  
<sup>4</sup>Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,  
and done this evil in thy sight:  
that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest,  
and be clear when thou judgest.  
<sup>5</sup>Behold, I was shapen in iniquity;  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.  
<sup>6</sup>Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:  
and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

This is the 15<sup>th</sup> reading for Lent 2025.

Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

In addition to being one of our Lent readings, this passage is the first of three from Psalm 51 and is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “How We Repent and Change.”\*

Because this psalm’s superscription connects it with David’s sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David’s capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent’s life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation l<sup>c</sup>-dawid may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David’s sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner’s experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. In the Book of Mosiah, King Benjamin comments, “ye have been calling on his [God’s] name, and begging for a remission of your sins’ (Mosiah 4.<sup>20</sup>). He also asks “Are we not all beggars?” (vs. 19) ? How does the Psalmist reflect this same truth that we are beggars when it comes to seeking forgiveness? Consider particularly verse 1.

2. We will read the KJV's, "according to thy lovingkindness," as "because of thy lovingkindness (or fidelity)." We will read its, "according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies," as "in keeping with the multitude of thy tender mercies."
  - ? Do such readings change the way you understand the Psalmist's request for "lovingkindness" and "mercy"?
  - ? Do they shed light on the reality of our being beggars when it comes to seeking forgiveness?
  - ? What do they reveal about the character, nature, and disposition of God?
  
3. Unlike Psalm 38, where the Psalmist utilized several intense metaphors to describe the depth of his sin and the remorse that he felt for them, the Psalmist does not use intense imagery in this Psalm. But his language does reflect a similar intensity.
  - ? How does the Psalmist get across the intensity he feels about his sins in today's reading?
  - ? How many different words does the Psalmist use to describe his error and misdeeds?
  - ? What is the impact of the Psalmist's use of so many words associated with error: "transgressions" (twice), "iniquity," "sin, sinned" (three times), and "evil"?
  - ? How does this reflect his intensity of feelings?
  - ? What other language reflects the Psalmist's strong feelings?
  - ? What does the Psalmist ask God to do with his sins?
  - ? When you think of "blotting out" and "washing thoroughly," what images come to your mind?
  - ? How are they appropriate images in reflecting what we hope God will do with our sins?
  
- ? How will today's reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?
  
- \* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
  - "Fall: Our Need of Atonement"
  - "Grace: The Savior's Generous and Earnest Invitation"
  - "At-one-ment: The Savior's unity and connectedness with us"
  - "Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us"
  - "Glorification: The Savior's Resurrection, Ascension, and Enthronement"
  - "Justification: How We Repent and Change"
  - "Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement"
  - "Sanctification: Imitating and living a life of Atonement"
  - "Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement"
  - "Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me"

Psalm 51.<sup>7-12</sup>— atonement

- <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 to hear joy and gladness;  
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup>Hide thy face from my sins,  
and blot out all mine iniquities.
- <sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
and renew a right spirit within me.
- <sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from thy presence;  
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- <sup>12</sup>Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;  
and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Psalm 51 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 142). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance.

This reading, the second of three from Psalm 51. It also represents one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Justification: How We Repent and Change.” \*

Because this psalm’s superscription associates it with David’s sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David’s capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent’s life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation l<sup>c</sup>-david may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David’s sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner’s experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 6 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In today’s passage, the Psalmist makes several requests.
  - ? What are those requests?
  - ? What comes to your mind when you consider the following requests that the Psalmist makes of God?

Purge me with hyssop  
Hide thy face from my sins

Create in me a clean heart  
Renew a right spirit within me  
Cast me not away from thy presence

- ? How does actually “*create* a clean heart” where it does not exist?
  - ? How does he “renew a right spirit”?
  - ? Why do you answer as you do?
  - ? What role do you play in this divine “creative” and “renewing” work?
  - ? How does this “creative” and “renewing” go beyond the request for mere “cleansing”?
2. In verse 9, the Psalmist makes use of two very different metaphor’s for forgiveness. In the first God covers his eyes so that he does not even see the sin. In the second, God seems almost to attack and annihilate sin.
- ? What do you think when you contemplate these two different ways of viewing forgiveness?
  - ? Why, do you think, does the Psalmist resort to so many different metaphors for forgiveness—sometimes presenting metaphors that seem to contradict each other (for how could God attack something that he refuses to see)?
- ? How will this reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create, renew, and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?
- \* The following ten titles are part of our atonement series:
- “Fall: Our Need of Atonement”
  - “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation”
  - “At-one-ment: The Savior’s unity and connectedness with us”
  - “Sacrifice: What Jesus Suffered for Us”
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  - “Justification: How We Repent and Change”
  - “Renewal: The Hope, Joy, Peace, and Power of Atonement”
  - “Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”
  - “Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”
  - “The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalm 51.<sup>16-17</sup>— atonement

<sup>16</sup>For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:  
thou delightest not in burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:  
a broken and a contrite heart,  
O God, thou wilt not despise.

This reading is one in a series of readings on Atonement that we entitle, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.” \*

We have shared this before, I have found from past experience that it does not hurt to provide the reminder often. Because this psalm’s superscription associates it with David’s sins in relation to the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David’s capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent’s life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l<sup>e</sup>-david* (of David) may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David’s sin should not be dogmatically maintained. It was utilized by many who came to the Jewish temple seeking forgiveness of sins.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner’s experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

1. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”
  - ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
  - ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
  - ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
  - ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, and that it is this that we must bring and present to God?
  - ? How difficult is it to present a wounded heart to God as opposed to a heart that is well (humility)?
2. This reading is placed under the heading of our Atonement reading, “Grace: The Savior’s Generous and Earnest Invitation.”
  - ? How appropriate, do you feel, is this passage under this heading?
  - ? Why is the Savior’s willing acceptance of our broken (unwell) heart such an act of grace?
  - ? What do you think when you consider that although traditionally God required a sacrifice be “without blemish” this passage contends that God is happy with and accepts the “blemished” sacrifice of our broken, wounded heart?
  - ? We usually domesticate the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” into some desirable

“humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that one seeks to avoid?

- ? How do you feel about the promise to the humiliated that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?
- ? How will today’s reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

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“Fall: Our Need of Atonement”

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“Sanctification: Imitating and living Jesus’ life of Atonement”

“Thanksgiving: In Praise of Atonement”

“The Song of the Righteous: A Song unto Me”

Psalms 51. <sup>7-12, 16-17</sup>— Lent

- <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 to hear joy and gladness;  
that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
- <sup>9</sup>Hide thy face from my sins,  
and blot out all mine iniquities.
- <sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
and renew a right spirit within me.
- <sup>11</sup>Cast me not away from thy presence;  
and take not thy holy spirit from me.
- <sup>12</sup>Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;  
and uphold me with thy free spirit.
- <sup>16</sup>For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:  
thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- <sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:  
a broken and a contrite heart,  
O God, thou wilt not despise.

This is the 30<sup>th</sup> reading for Lent 2025. It represents a return to the Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These seven psalms have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

We have shared this before. I have found from past experience that it does not hurt to provide the reminder often. Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

- a. The Hebrew designation *l<sup>c</sup>-david* may not indicate authorship, but possession. It may have been written for or dedicated to David, or a member of the Davidic dynasty.
- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
- c. To dogmatically maintain that David has not or cannot be forgiven and that we know his final state seems speculative, unwise, and arrogant. To suggest out of such uncertain dogmatism that the expressions of penitence found in this psalm are not relevant to the sinner's experience is even more unwise and unprofitable.

For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God. If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 6 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In today's passage, the Psalmist makes several requests.
  - ? What are those requests?
  - ? As you consider each, how do they reflect your own feelings?
2. Among his requests, the Psalmist pleads,

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

- ? What is the significance of hyssop?
- ? Where else in the Old Testament is hyssop used?
- ? What, do you think, might be the relationship between using hyssop to apply the Passover lamb’s blood to a doorway and its metaphorical use as a spiritually cleansing agent?

3. In verse 9, the Psalmist makes use of two very different metaphor’s for forgiveness.

“Hide thy face from my sins,  
and blot out all mine iniquities.”

In the first God covers his eyes so that he does not even see the sin. In the second, God seems almost to attack and annihilate sin.

- ? What do you think when you contemplate these two different ways of viewing forgiveness?
- ? Why, do you think, does the Psalmist resort to so many different metaphors for forgiveness?

4. The Psalmist also asks that God “create in me a clean heart” and “renew a right spirit within me.

- ? How does this go beyond the request for cleansing?
- ? How does God actually “*create* a clean heart” where it does not exist?
- ? How does God really “*renew* a right spirit”?
- ? What makes you answer as you do?
- ? What role do you play in this divine “creative” and “renewing” work?
- ? What is the relationship and balance between your efforts and God’s?

5. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”

- ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
- ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
- ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
- ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, which we bring and present to God?
- ? How difficult is it to present a wounded heart to God as opposed to a heart that is well—as in our traditional understanding of a broken heart as “humility”?
- ? We usually understand the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” as some type of domesticated and positive “humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that one usually seeks to avoid?
- ? How do you feel about the promise to the individual humiliated at and by their sins that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?
- ? How will today’s reading contribute to your acknowledging sin in such a way as to create and deepen a healthy relationship with God—one that is free of guilt and doubt about your state and standing with God?

Psalm 51. <sup>13-15</sup>— lent

- <sup>13</sup>Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;  
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
- <sup>14</sup>Deliver me from bloodguilt,  
O God, thou God of my salvation:  
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.
- <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open thou my lips;  
and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

This is the 32<sup>nd</sup> reading for Lent 2025 and represents a follow up to our two previous readings from Psalm 51, one of seven Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). These seven psalms have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

1. In the previous readings from Psalm 51, the Psalmist confesses his “evil,” “transgressions,” “iniquities,” and “sins” and asks God for forgiveness. In today’s reading, the Psalmist commits himself to a particular course of action if and when his request for forgiveness is granted.
  - ? What does the Psalmist promise to do in response to God’s merciful forgiveness?
  - ? How do you feel about this response?
  - ? Is it enough? Would you expect more? What more would you expect?
2. Both Book of Mormon characters, Enos and Alma, did as the Psalmist did: confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness. Both received a remission of sins. In response to being forgiven, the two men have the following to say.

“And after I, Enos, had heard these words [“thy sins are forgiven”], my faith began to be unshaken in the Lord; and I prayed unto him with many long strugglings for my brethren, the Lamanites” (En. 1.<sup>11</sup>).

“Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Al. 36.<sup>24</sup>).

- ? How do Enos’ and Alma’s response to God’s merciful forgiveness compare to that which the Psalmist promises?
- ? What do you think and how do you feel about these three men’s interest in sharing their experience with others in hopes of helping them also experience God’s merciful forgiveness?
- ? How do these responses to God’s mercy and forgiveness compare with your own?
- ? What can you do to imitate these three individuals?

Psalms 51. <sup>13-19</sup>

- <sup>13</sup>Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;  
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.
- <sup>14</sup>Deliver me from bloodguiltiness,  
O God, thou God of my salvation:  
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.
- <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open thou my lips;  
and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
- <sup>16</sup>For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it:  
thou delightest not in burnt offering.
- <sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:  
a broken and a contrite heart,  
O God, thou wilt not despise.
- <sup>18</sup>Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion:  
build thou the walls of Jerusalem.
- <sup>19</sup>Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,  
with burnt offering and whole burnt offering:  
then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

Psalms 51 is one of the seven psalms known as penitential psalms (Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). They have, for millennia been a source of inspiration. They have provided motivation to repent, and served as a guide or example on how to engage in repentance with faith in God. Christians have utilized them to deepen their commitment to repentance during Lent.

Because this psalm's superscription associates it with David's sins associated with the Bathsheba incident, and because many LDS people dismiss David's capacity to be forgiven, this psalm is often dismissed and found to be without relevance in the penitent's life today. We do not have time here to go into detail, but I will share three reasons why I believe that this is a grave error.

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- b. The superscriptions are almost certainly secondary. The connection between Psalm 51 and David's sin should not be dogmatically maintained.
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For these and other reasons—not least of all my own experience with the Psalm—I suggest that this Psalm can be instructive in each of our lives as we seek forgiveness and right standing with God.

If you feel it needful, take a moment to review the first 12 verses of Psalm 51.

1. In return for Yahweh's mercy in forgiving him, the Psalmist speaks of his commitment to proclaim Yahweh's goodness to others (verse 13 and 15).
  - ? After reading Enos 1.<sup>9</sup> and Alma 36.<sup>24</sup>, respectively, consider how and to what degree you have responded likewise to God's mercy in your own life.

“Now, it came to pass that when I had heard these words I began to feel a desire for the welfare of my brethren, the Nephites; wherefore, I did pour out my whole soul unto God for them.”

“Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

2. We often think of the “broken heart” and “contrite spirit” as simple metaphors for “humility.”
  - ? But why, with humility being such a virtue in our minds, would the Psalmist feel to proclaim that God does not despise them? This seems somewhat self-evident.
  - ? Can we understand these two phrases differently? If so, how?
  - ? How would you feel about understanding these two phrases as being indicative of a real “brokenness,” of being “shattered” in regard to “heart,” and “spirit”—energy, vitality, enthusiasm, strength, and capability?
  - ? What are the implications for our lives if we read it in this way—that we experience a serious deficiency in who and what we are, which we bring and present to God?
  
3. In Hebrew, the Psalmist asks to be “delivered from blood.”
  - ? To what might this refer in addition to actual murder?
  - ? How would you feel if we suggested that it takes in all forms of violence?
  - ? In what forms of individual and societal violence are we engaged and for which we require forgiveness?
  
- ? We usually domesticate the idea of a “broken spirit” and “contrite heart” into some desirable “humility” achieved through personal effort. But how would you feel to discover that a “broken heart” and “contrite heart” are more akin to vulnerable humiliation that is not sought for?
- ? How do you feel about the promise to the humiliated that God will not despise them for their vulnerabilities but will take a special interest in them?