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## Growth Group Spring 2020

### *How Do We Talk About Sin in a Postmodern World?*

Week 5 – May 17, 2020 - Psalm 51:1-17

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at [connect@ljpres.org](mailto:connect@ljpres.org). Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

### Setting the Context

Psalm 51 is a prayer of penitence composed by David after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 11 and 12 tell the details of David’s poor decisions that lead to the composition of this psalm. What is disturbing about this story is the reality that Scripture tells us that David was a man after God’s own heart, in 1 Samuel 13:14. It is hard to reconcile this verse with the actions of David.

In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan confronts David about what he has done. Nathan tells a parable about abuse of power to make his point and David is furious about the “rich” person who has misused and abused his power and control against a “poor” person. Nathan tells David that he is actually the man who has abused his power. He has sinned against God.

Psalm 51 is the outworking of David’s personal sin, but it is a psalm that is appropriate for all of us. As the apostle Paul reminds us, in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We all miss the mark. David acknowledges his sin, confident that God will forgive. He appeals to God’s steadfast love and mercy. Throughout Scripture there is a consistent theme of humankind’s sinfulness and God’s graciousness.

It is interesting that, in verse 5, David moves from just talking about one sin to talking about a life that is marked by sin. Many of our prayers say change my situation so I may praise you. This one says change me because I am the problem. David asks for God to create a clean heart within him, in verse 10. This Hebrew word for “create” is only used with God as its subject and is used in Genesis 1 as God “creates” something out of nothing.

Though this psalm is often thought of as a psalm of confession of sin, it is also a psalm of great reassurance. The forgiveness and restoration of God is mentioned way more often than the sinfulness of David. Though sin clouds our relationship with God, we find that God does not give up on us. David prays that God would allow his Holy Spirit to continue to rest on him in spite of his sinfulness.



# Exploring the Text

## Read Psalm 51:1-17

*For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.*

*<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. <sup>2</sup> Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. <sup>4</sup> Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just. <sup>5</sup> For I was born a sinner— yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. <sup>6</sup> But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there. <sup>7</sup> Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me— now let me rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. <sup>13</sup> Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you. <sup>14</sup> Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness. <sup>15</sup> Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you. <sup>16</sup> You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*

## Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) Share about a time in your life when you felt like you had an honest conversation or prayer time with God.
- 2) In vs. 2, David asks God to “wash me clean from my guilt.” And in vs. 7, “wash me and I will be whiter than snow.” Where else in the bible is this language used? How are our sins today washed whiter than snow?
- 3) As background for this Psalm, David had sinned by sleeping with Bathsheba, a woman who was not his wife but got pregnant from their union. David then tried to cover it up by sending her husband to the frontlines of a battle, so that he would be killed. David's sin is against Bathsheba and her husband but in v4, David says “against you alone have I sinned.” Why would David say that?
- 4) In vs. 5, David says, “For I was born a sinner – yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.” What are your thoughts on “Original Sin”? Do you think we are born sinners? Who is this traced back to?
- 5) What are the consequences of our sin? See verses 8 – 11. Discuss times when you experienced some of these consequences of sin.
- 6) In v 16, David refers to a sacrifice or burnt offering. In the Mosaic Law, if someone unintentionally sinned, they were required to sacrifice an animal at the temple (there were different requirements based on their status or wealth). The priest would burn the offering and the aroma would rise to heaven as a burnt offering. The animal died in place of the person and the sin was atoned for. In this instance, David says that God does not desire a sacrifice or burnt offering but instead desires that David have a broken spirit. What do you think that means?
- 7) Do you ever find yourself talking about sin with others? If so, what do you say? If not, how would you talk about sin in our postmodern world? Is it an important conversation to have?
- 8) Do you find this psalm encouraging or discouraging?