

1. I want to say right off the bat that my opening comments here about Psalm 51 are going to be brief. That is because I am going to take over two pages discussing the title of this psalm. Given that fact, let me explain what this psalm is about and how it affects our lives.
 - a) I'll start by asking a question: "Why is Psalm 51 here at this location?" In other words, why have this psalm, come right after the last few psalms we studied in the last lesson?
 - i) To explain that, first, let me remind all of us what the last lesson was about: It dealt with warnings to believers of issues that draw us away from God such as money and just "going through the motions" of going to church. The last lesson was not so much about sins we commit, but about warnings of the most common things that keep us as believers from drawing close to God.
 - ii) In other words, the last lesson talked about unbelievers and the main reasons that keep them from having a close relationship with God. That last lesson also applies to believers about what can draw us away from God.
 - b) With that last lesson in mind, a logical question might be, "OK, I haven't suffered from the issues mentioned in the last lesson. However I am not perfect and I know I battle against sin in "this" area of my life. Therefore, the next logical question in the order of the psalms might be, "Since I know I battle sin in this (whatever "this" is for you or me) what do I do about it?" The answer is we let God help us to overcome the urge to commit that sin.
2. This does lead us to Psalm 51. The whole psalm is about David confessing one of the most famous sins in the bible to God. It is about confessing the sin of his martial affair with a woman named Bathsheba and the fact David had her husband killed in order to cover up that affair.
 - a) The purpose of this psalm is not just to know about the dangers of having an affair and what that does to people around us. It is about how and why we confess our sins to God. It is to teach us in effect, when we have sinned, how and why do we confess that sin to God? It also focuses on how we deal with our sins once we are aware of them.
 - b) This psalm is saying in effect, "When I sin, what does God want me to do about it? One does not have to recite this psalm verbatim to God when one sins, but this psalm does offer us good guidelines as to how we should deal with one's sins once we are aware of them. Yes we confess that sin, but there is more to repentance than just confession.
 - c) This leads to my title of this lesson: It is, "understanding how we are "sin positive" (as I like to call the human nature to sin) and what we are to do about it." With that said, it is best if I jump forward to the introduction of the psalm itself. What we can learn from this title will become evident as we go through this psalm and this lesson.
3. Psalm 51, introduction: For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.
 - a) Psalm 51 has one of the most famous introductions in the book. Let me explain:
 - i) First the basics: This psalm was written by David when he was King of Israel. It was written to be sung, which is the first comment made about this psalm.
 - b) David must have made his sin public knowledge, since this psalm song was sung in public worship. It was sung not so that all of Israel could know about David's affair, but so all who study the psalm can know how our sin affects God and what we should do when we (not David, but us) become aware of our sins.
 - c) It occurred me to how tough it must have been for David to write this psalm. Imagine if we committed a horrible sin. We then broadcast that sin through a song, and told everyone, "Here is a good confessional psalm and it tells of something horrible I did.

- d) I want to now spend some time giving the background story that goes with this psalm. I'm sure most of you (readers) are familiar with the story of the affair of David and Bathsheba. For the sake of the few who are not familiar with it, let me give some background and remind the rest of us of some of the key details of this story.
 - i) The story opened with the fact that David should have been out fighting battles, since Israel was at war with its neighbors at this time. (Gee, what's changed in the last 3,000 years? ☺) The king was expected to lead the army. Instead of being out fighting in the battle, David was home one day and spotted a woman named Bathsheba bathing. This woman was married and her husband was out with the soldiers fighting the war. (See 2nd Samuel 11:1-2.)
 - a) There are many commentators who suspect that Bathsheba was not totally innocent of this affair and that is why she was bathing in view of the king. However, that is not the key point of this story, so with that said, I'll just leave the point hanging that David may not have been alone in his guilt.
 - ii) The story grew to the point where the two of them had sexual relations and she announces to David that she is pregnant from their affair. (See 2nd Samuel 11:5.)
 - iii) David invited her husband home from the battle so that he could sleep with his wife and cover up the affair. Her husband refuses to sleep in his own bed while his fellow soldiers are out in the field. (See 2nd Samuel 11:11.)
 - iv) In a desperate move to cover up the affair, David gives an order to his general to place her husband in the heat of the battle so that the woman's husband would get killed. The general later reports back to David that Bathsheba's husband was killed in battle. (That is 2nd Samuel 11:14-15.)
 - a) At that point, David marries Bathsheba and he adds her to David's collection of wives. So David thought he covered up the affair well.
 - v) Some unspecified time later, a prophet named Nathan tells David a made-up story about a rich man with lots of sheep (remember that David had lots of wives) and a poor man who only had one lamb that he kept as a pet. The rich man threw a big dinner one day and instead of killing one of his own sheep, took the lamb of the poor man for his dinner. (See 2nd Samuel 12:1-4.)
 - vi) When David heard that story, he yelled out in effect, "That rich man should be killed for what he did." Nathan the prophet then gives one of the most famous lines in the bible where he says, "You David, are that man." (See 2nd Samuel 12:5-7.)
 - a) At this point, David realizes his guilt for the affair with Bathsheba.
 - vii) One point to come out of that story is that if Nathan was aware of David's affair, then others in Israel would be aware of it too.
- e) This does lead us back to the title of this psalm. The title of the psalm says in effect that this psalm was written right after Nathan the prophet told David that story. It was the point at which David was aware of how he had sinned before God.
 - i) Keep in mind that there may be a time gap between the date of the affair and the date that Nathan told this story. We don't have the dates in the bible, but most commentators assume there may be a time gap of "some months" involved.
 - ii) Many people, including myself think that David was personally miserable in that unknown time gap. David had a heart for God and he knew he was guilty of having this affair. When we hold in our sins, the pain of holding it in can do far more damage to our bodies than to confess that sin and relieve our guilt.
 - iii) With all of that said, the psalm has to do with the issue of forgiveness of sins.
- f) Now comes a key point to consider: When David confessed his sin to God, which he does in this psalm, was David instantly forgiven of his sins? I would argue yes. Still, at the same time, God does punish David for that sin. So my question of the moment is, why was David still punished for those sins and what should we learn from that punishment?

- i) To answer that question, let me describe the punishment itself. The child that was born from that affair died soon after birth. David prayed hard for that baby's life. When the baby died, David was convinced he would see that baby again in heaven. On an important side note, it gives biblical support to the idea that babies do go to heaven because they are not old enough to understand right from wrong. (See 2nd Samuel 12:18-23.)
- ii) God told David that because of his sin, the "sword" would never leave David's house. If you read the story of the rest of David's life, one of his sons kills his half brother. A different son rebelled against David and worked to overthrow him as the king. The point is Nathan's prediction about the sword and David's house came literally true over the rest of his life.
- g) This leads me back to the key question: If God instantly forgive David of his sin, why was this punishment necessary? Why did God announce that the child would die (after all, the affair was not the child's fault) and that the "sword" would never leave David's house?
 - i) I'll come back to why the child had to die in the minute. Let me now come back to the issue of confessing one's sins. If we just sincerely confess our sins as wrong, does God instantly forgive us? I would answer yes. (See 1st John 1:9.)
 - a) Are we likely to repeat the sin if we have instant forgiveness and no punishment for that sin? Yes. God will often discipline believers for their sins if for no other reason than it will remind us of what we did wrong and keep us focused so we won't commit that same sin again.
 - ii) Another point here is that David was the leader of that country. God does hold leaders to a higher standard because others will follow what a leader will do.
- h) So does that mean that every time things are going wrong in our lives, it is due to some sin we have committed in the past? No it does not. It is only a possibility to consider. If we do confess our sins as wrong, we should be aware that God can punish us so to help us not to repeat that sin. At the same time, we cannot blame every bad thing on being punished for something we have done wrong in the past.
 - i) In cases where we are punished, I find that God does make it obvious that such punishment is being done. If we believe some sin is coming "home to roost", we should simply confess that sin and realize it may tie to the original event, or it may not tie to some other event.
 - ii) A friend of mine thinks that whatever bad thing happens to his kids is "justice" due to all of the sins my friend did when he was young. Instead of teaching his children, "Here is what your father did wrong and I hope you don't repeat my mistakes", he blames fate for any and all sins committed by his children.
 - a) My point here is if children repeat the mistakes of the parents, it is not due to God punishing the parents for their sins, but a case of God working on the lives of the children. The bible clearly teaches that each one of us is accountable for our own sins and not our parent's sins. (See Ezekiel 18:20.)
 - iii) So if that is true, why did God take away David's baby? It wasn't the baby's fault that David had the affair. In David's case, God made it clear that David was accountable for this affair and the baby's life was the results. I believe God is teaching us a principal through David, about the consequences of sin. That point is that innocent people suffer due to the sins we commit. Unfortunately in life, innocent people do suffer from the mistakes we make and God allowed that baby to die to make that point.
- i) OK, we are now at the end of Page 3, and I still haven't touched Verse 1 of this psalm.
 - i) I purposely gave that long introduction mainly because this psalm would not make sense unless one has a fresh reminder of that story in 2nd Samuel.
 - ii) With that said, believe it or not, we can actually begin Verse 1 of this psalm.

4. Verse 1: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
- a) The psalm opens with a cry of mercy on David's behalf. Let me start with the obvious question: Why pray for God's mercy?
 - i) Know that the word "mercy" refers to asking for forgiveness for something we did wrong. The word "grace" means to get something good that we don't deserve.
 - ii) You may find it interesting in Paul's letters, when he writes a letter to a city, Paul usually starts off by saying, "May God's grace and truth be with you." When Paul wrote letters to pastors such as Timothy or Titus, Paul always said, "May God's grace, mercy (note that) and truth" be with you. So why does Paul ask for mercy for his disciples and mercy is not mentioned when Paul is writing to churches?
 - iii) The answer has nothing to do with pastors carrying more sin around than anyone else in the church. The answer (which does tie to Verse 1 of this psalm) is that God has raised up Paul's disciples to positions of leadership just as David was raised up to a position of leadership. Asking for God's mercy here is about asking God to allow one to continue, "just as one is" despite the sin committed.
 - b) Meanwhile back in Verse 1, David is asking for God's mercy, not so God would just forgive David's sin and move on. I believe God forgave David the first split second that David was willing to confess his sins to God. The idea of mercy here is David is crying out to God to not give him any punishment in this lifetime for the sins he has committed.
 - c) Let's think of the verse this way: David had the husband of Bathsheba killed. It would be "fair" of God to allow David to die a violent death for that sin. Asking for God's mercy is not about God forgiving the sins; it is about asking God to not punish David the way David deserved to be punished for the sin.
 - i) To put it another way, David knew before and after this sin that he was still going to be in heaven one day. What David didn't know was how this sin would affect the rest of his life on earth. In that sense, David is asking God for mercy in that he understood the lengths to which God was offended by this sin.
 - d) OK, let's personalize this for a moment. Suppose you or I say, "I have never killed an innocent person." Still, I would argue that anyone who has lived to adulthood is guilty of some sin, be it confessed or not. The point is we don't want God to treat us the way we deserve to be treated, which is the point of asking for God's mercy.
 - e) This does lead me to the rest of the verse. Notice David does not appeal to God based on how good he is. David does not say, "Dear God, please forgive me, because deep inside I am a good person." Instead David only appeals to God's "goodness". David knows that God is a "God of loving compassion" and he appeals to God based on that love.
 - i) OK, given the punishment that David did receive for this sin, did God deny David's prayer request here? I would answer no. Let's face it, the law in the Old Testament called for the death penalty for murder. The fact that David received a "lighter penalty" alone shows that God had mercy on David.
 - f) Does this story indicate that we should go "easy" on murderers who confess their sins before a judge or court? Does this story argue against the death penalty for murderers because David was "set free" of that particular punishment?
 - i) I would say no, and let me quickly explain why: If we commit murder, the murderer is not there to testify on his or her own behalf as to what is the fair punishment. That is up to the judge and jury. I might argue for "life sentences without parole" in some cases where the defendant fully admits his or her guilt before the court. David was given a "lighter sentence" mainly because he confessed his sin to God. It is best if a judge and jury decide what is best and in many cases, I don't have a problem with the death penalty especially where the guilty refuse to admit their guilt.

5. Verse 2: Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.
 - a) The confession in Verse 2 is much stronger than just saying, "I was wrong for committing that particular sin". The confession here is saying in effect, "Lord, I have this sin nature within me and I can't help doing what I did. Still, I desire to be clean to a point where I no longer have that desire to sin the way I did."
 - i) To put it another way, David is not saying, "I confess because I was caught." He is saying he confesses that he has this ability to sin, "deep within his inner being" and David desires that God cleanse him from that sin.
 - b) There is an expression among Christian teachers that we as human beings are born "sin positive". I like that expression and if you recall, it is part of the title of this lesson. That term "sin positive" means we are born with a nature to sin. In other words, we may never have an affair with someone or have an innocent person killed, but we are all guilty of some act of sin. The reason we sin is because we are born "sin positive". The point as it affects Verse 2 is that David realizes he was born that way and asks God to cleanse him.
 - c) OK, if all people have this "disease" called sin we are born with, how can David possibly ask God to cleanse him of that "disease"?
 - i) The request is in effect, "God I don't have the physical capability to overcome my sins, but You God, have the ability to change me to overcome sin. That is what I am asking of you at this moment.
 - ii) Have you ever noticed that the few times we don't sin is when we are sticking close to Jesus and doing His will for the moment? That in effect is what David is asking for here, to stick close to God so David won't give into sin's desires.
6. Verse 3: For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
 - a) David is confessing that he was always aware of his "sin nature".
 - b) Let me personalize it this way: All of us are aware of the things we know are capable of doing in sin. Jesus stated that if we think about killing someone, in effect that is as bad as committing the deed itself. (See Matthew 5:21).
 - i) I hold the view that actually killing someone or actually stealing something should be punished while thinking about a sin is not a crime. In fact in "Jewish thought" it is not even considered a sin to think about doing harm to someone.
 - ii) So why did Jesus say in Matthew 5:21 that it is a sin to think about committing a sin? Because Jesus understands that sin begins with a thought in our head.
 - a) In other words, when we are mad at someone and we think about hurting them, that sin begins in our thoughts and unless we control that thought, that sin is being thought out in our heads.
 - c) This believe it or not, does lead back to Verse 3 here in this psalm. David is confessing in effect, that he knows the thoughts that goes through his head and he is more than aware that he is capable of committing a sin at any moment in his life.
 - i) I don't believe David is confessing a specific sin in Verse 3, but he is confessing in effect that he knows he was born "sin positive" and it is a part of his life even though David wishes it was not a part of his nature.
7. Verse 4: Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.
 - a) The first part of Verse 4 is a difficult phrase to understand. Let's face it, when David had the husband of Bathsheba killed, didn't David also sin against her husband?
 - i) Yet Verse 4 clearly says that David has sinned against God alone. What does that mean? When we sin, the primary "entity" we are hurting is God. After all, it is God who put inside of all humans the basic knowledge that killing and stealing is wrong. Therefore, if God put that desire within us to not murder or steal, we offending God who made us that way in the first place. David committed a crime against Bathsheba's husband, but he sinned against God alone.

- b) The rest of the verse is David reminding himself and us that God does judge us.
 - i) Yes it refers to eternal judgment, but I believe it also refers to the fact that God judges us in this lifetime. In case you forgot the introduction, David had to suffer for the rest of his life due to the sin he committed here.
 - ii) So does that mean you and I may have to suffer for the rest of our lives on earth due to some sin we have committed? In some cases the answer is yes. There are many devout Christians in prison serving sentences that they deserved. The idea of being forgiven is not (note the "not") about being released for crimes against people. It is about being eternally forgiven for the sins we have committed.
 - iii) The main point here in the psalms is that God can and does punish us for our sins not so we can suffer, but so that we are less motivated to repeat that sin again.
 - iv) So does that mean that every bad thing that happens to us is due to punishment of some sin we committed? Of course not. I have found that the punishment we do get from God is "obvious" and fits the context of what we have done in the past.
 - a) A lot of bad things that happen to us are simply due to circumstances or they are due to the sins of others.
 - v) When something bad happens, ask God to help us learn what lessons He wants us to learn from that bad thing so we can move on from that event.
 - c) Gee John, that was a wonderful speech. ☺ What does it have to do with Verse 4?
 - i) The connection is that God does judge people and we should be aware of that fact. He has every right to punish us if He believes it will be helpful to help us avoid sin. Remember that we commit our life to Him, so it is His right to punish us.
 - ii) It is up to God and not us (outside of what punishment we deserve from society) to decide whether or not we should be punished in this lifetime. We shouldn't walk around fearing what God can do to us as punishment. We should just be aware that God has that right to do so, and it is a reason to plead for His mercy.
8. Verse 5: Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- a) I heard a great explanation of this verse: Do we have to teach children how to lie? Do we have to teach children how to throw a temper tantrum? Of course not. Children just know how to sin, essentially from birth. That is the point of this verse. I find that people who believe all children are born innocent have never raised children of their own. ☺
 - b) So why is David reminding us that he was born a sinner? Is David saying it was not his fault that he was born "sin positive" as I like to call it? David is not making excuses for his sin. David is just realizing that a reason that confession of sin is necessary because we all have that sin nature within us.
 - i) If God could take away our desire to sin, wouldn't life on earth be a lot easier? What this verse is reminding us is that in order to have free will, we must be born with that "sin positive" nature so we can choose to follow God with our lives.
 - ii) No we can't eliminate the sin nature from within us, but we can confess our sins when they occur and we can turn from sin when we notice it is occurring.
9. Verse 6: Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
- a) Verse 6 is a logical transition to follow Verse 5. Let me explain:
 - i) Verse 5 says in effect that all people are born with a sinful nature.
 - ii) Verse 6 then says that God desires His "truth" in the inner parts of our body.
 - b) What Verse 6 is saying is that the way to overcome sin is not by trying harder to avoid it, but by replacing that desire to sin with the truth of God's desire for our lives. Avoiding sin is not about being disciplined enough to never commit sin, but it is about thinking about God regularly and in effect, replacing bad thoughts with good thoughts.
 - i) When the thought of committing a sin pops in our head, we not only need to confess that sin to God, but we also need to replace that thought with a good one.

- c) This concept of replacing the thought of sin also ties to something Paul said, "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2nd Corinthians 10:5, NIV).
 - i) What that verse means is when we think about doing something that is not right (i.e., sinful) we take that thought captive in that we eliminate that thought. I believe the best thing to do is to replace that thought with something positive. In such cases, it is helpful to memorize some bible scripture so we can replace bad thoughts with good ones.
10. Verse 7: Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- a) To explain this verse, first I need to explain what "hyssop" is, and then I can talk about the cleaning associated with hyssop. That term refers to a leafy bush that is common in the Middle East. This bush has a stickiness quality to its leaves. The night of the original Passover, the Israelites used hyssop to sprinkle lamb's blood on their doorposts. In the book of Leviticus, hyssop was used on a number of occasions to sprinkle either water or blood in a form of a ritual.
 - i) OK, John, you told me how hyssop is used, but what is it? It is a plant and as best I can tell, it is associated with cleaning. It is not a soap product, but a good plant for sprinkling say water or blood on something due to its stickiness. Think of it as sort of a "paint brush" in that it can hold a liquid until it is applied on something.
 - b) OK, with that sort of understood, ☺ let me describe this verse. David is asking God to cleanse him with hyssop. Obviously David is not asking God to make Himself visible and literally sprinkle something on David, so it must be something more symbolic than that.
 - i) The idea is David is asking God to remove the desire to sin from his life. Since no matter how hard we try, we still have a sin desire within us, what is David asking?
 - a) He is asking for salvation in the sense that in eternity (the "next life") David wants to permanently remove that desire to sin.
 - ii) To put it another way, David is asking God to make him "sinless". Think of it as an Old Testament equivalent of asking Jesus to fully pay the price for all of one's sins and for God to see us in our eternally, perfectly forgiven state of being.
 - iii) It is a poetic way of asking God to forgive David of sin in this life, but in the long term, it is about asking God to take away the desire to sin in the first place.
11. Verse 8: Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- a) OK, why would David ask in the first part of this verse to hear "joy and gladness"? I don't believe this has anything to do with any actual celebration at that time. The idea here is that David wants God to rejoice with Him. So what makes God rejoice? It is about seeing ourselves as "broken" before Him and that we are fully dependant upon Him to restore our relationship with Him. It is about saying, "God, without You, I have no hope of enjoying not only an eternal life, but this life on earth. Forgive me of my sins so I can have the joy of a wonderful relationship with You."
 - b) This leads us to the second part of this verse. The second part mentions crushed bones. This is not being literal as David's sins did not cause his bones to be crushed.
 - i) I believe what the second half of the verse is saying is, the guilt of the sin David has committed makes him feel like his bones are crushed.
 - ii) It can also say that God has made us aware of sins we have committed and the pain of our awareness of our sin feels like our bones are crushed.
 - c) With that tough thought in mind, David is then saying, "God let me, with all of my sins before you, be happy in You, because I know You have forgiven me of my sins simply because I have asked You to do so and I know You do forgive all of those who seek You and desire to live as You desire for our lives."
 - i) Well, that would be a happy way to end this lesson, but I'm only half way through this psalm, so I better keep moving. ☺

12. Verse 9: Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.
- a) Can God literally not see the sins we commit? Can we actually ask Him to hide His face from our sins? Obviously, this verse is not meant to be that literal. It is a poetic way of asking God to forgive David of his sins.
 - i) This verse reminds me of Habakkuk 1:13, which teaches in effect that God cannot look upon evil. So does that mean God turns his back on wicked deeds? No, it means that God cannot tolerate any (big emphasis on any) sin we commit.
 - ii) It goes back to something I teach every now and then: God does not grade on a curve. Getting into heaven is not about our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds. It is about God having a zero tolerance for sin. Whenever we become aware of our sins, we need to confess them, as God cannot tolerate any sin.
 - b) Why is David going on and on about his sins? Why doesn't he simply state in a few verses that he is sorry for the sins and ask God to forgive Him of his sins?
 - i) Going on and on does not convince God more to forgive us. God forgives us the instant we are sincerely sorry for committing a sin and desire to turn from it.
 - ii) This psalm goes "on and on" about sin so we can know just how much God hates sin and if we desire to please Him, how much we should hate sin as well.
 - iii) Meanwhile, David is still pleading with God in the next verse. ☺
13. Verse 10: Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- a) If one reads through the entire bible, one becomes aware that God never "cleans up" our heart, but somehow gives us a new heart. Obviously we are not talking about the actual organ that pumps blood. This verse is David's poetic way of saying, "God, create in me a fresh desire to seek You with every aspect of my life. I desire to be with You forever." That means we desire to live by His rules and His desires for our lives. It means we make decisions in life based on whether or not we believe such a decision would please God.
 - i) This verse is sort of a plea for God to help David "do what is right" and David is painfully aware the sins he committed were displeasing to God in the first place.
 - b) The second part of the verse is David asking God to renew a steadfast spirit. The essential idea is David is asking God to give him that desire to seek God in his life.
 - i) Think of it this way: Would David have had an affair with Bathsheba if he was concerned with pleasing God? Would you or I have the desire to sin as we do if we cared about pleasing God completely with our lives?
 - ii) This prayer in effect is for us not only to ask for forgiveness, but also that God come to the forefront of our minds when that desire to sin does appear.
14. Verse 11: Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- a) I have to admit, I am excited to get to Verse 11 and have been waiting to discuss it. ☺
 - b) The first part of this verse is pretty straightforward. It is asking in effect to not be cast in hell and be forgiven of sin. We have to remember that if God has every right to say, "You are not perfect and in order to be with me forever in heaven, I cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever." One of the great things about understanding what Jesus did on the cross is to understand how God can be perfect in forgiveness and perfect in justice at the same time. The cross is God saying, I cannot tolerate any sin but I want to be with people forever. All I ask of people is that they do trust in my perfect sin payment for their sins.
 - c) David is asking not to be cast from God's presence. David understands that God cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever. I believe David also understood he was perfectly forgiven. Still, David understood that to be forgiven does not give him a license to sin. That leads us to the second phrase of this verse:
 - i) It is a plea on David's behalf to not take the Holy Spirit from David.
 - ii) This is a complicated topic. I'm going to need half a page more to explain it. ☺

- d) First of all, what would an Old Testament religious Jew think of the "Holy Spirit"? Since they (and we) believe God is "one", it must somehow tie to God Himself. Religious Jewish people don't think of the Holy Spirit as a separate entity from God the Father, but simply as the power of God working through people. The idea of the Holy Spirit is explained more in the New Testament, but one can see from this verse here in Psalm 51, that the concept of the Holy Spirit did exist in the Old Testament, just never expanded upon.
- e) So what did David mean by saying, "Don't take your Holy Spirit from me?"
 - i) There is a view in the Old Testament that the spirit of God could come and go from people. For example, when King Saul turned from God, somehow the "spirit of God" left him and now Saul had a desire to kill David so David could not take over his throne. (See 1st Samuel 16:14 on the spirit of God leaving Saul.)
- f) Notice the word "or" in Verse 11. When David did not want God take away the Holy Spirit, this was a separate thought from the danger of being condemned.
 - i) What David meant was that he did not want the "joy" of a close relationship with God to be taken from him? That is an Old Testament view of the Holy Spirit.
- g) Let me now talk a little about Christians and the Holy Spirit.
 - i) There is a common view (one that I hold) that a Christian can never lose the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in effect that once He went away (i.e., paid the price for sin), then the "Helper" (a title of the Holy Spirit) will come to believers. (See John 16:7.)
 - ii) Many Christian bible teachers argue that Christians cannot pray this verse here in Psalm 51. The argument is that the Holy Spirit can come and go amongst Old Testament believers, but with a Christian, the Spirit is always there.
 - iii) I do believe that Christians can "suppress" the Holy Spirit. We can be so busy worrying about things and not turning our issues over to God. At any moment, we can suppress the Holy Spirit from actually working in our lives.
 - iv) So what does the Holy Spirit do anyway? His main job is to help us draw closer to God. He also helps to lead nonbelievers to God in the first place.
- 15. Verse 12: Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
 - a) Remember that David was in a bad mood because he understood that he deserved to die for the sin of killing Bathsheba's husband. David understood that he had to appeal to God based on His love and not on any or all good "works" that David did.
 - b) I started thinking again about how God took the life of the baby that came from the martial affair between David and Bathsheba. The death of that baby is a model of an innocent person paying the price for the sins as committed by others. Maybe God took the life of the baby to show David (and Bathsheba) that the price of sin is death. Just because David got away with killing Bathsheba's husband, does not mean he got away with it forever. The price for murder is death. David's son became a model of the substitute payment for the punishment that David deserved.
 - c) Meanwhile, back at this verse, David is pleading with God to restore a close relationship with Him. That last line is a prayer I don't think God can resist.
 - i) What God wants from us is a close relationship with Him. At the same time, God cannot just forgive sins. There must be a price paid for sins so that David and us can enjoy that close relationship with God.
 - ii) What David is praying in effect is, "God, show me what I have to do in order to be close to You again." If I have to die for my sins, so be it. If you are going to let me live, but still punish me for what I have done, so be it. All I want is to be close to You and I am willing to suffer any penalty in order to be close to You again.
 - iii) What is interesting is if you read David's life after God announced the punishment of "the sword will never leave your house", David never complained about all the suffering he had due to the rebellion of his sons. David understood that the son's rebellion was a direct result of his own sins and the damage of this affair.

- d) OK John, good for David. ☺ How does this affect me? The point is the sins we commit can damage those around us as well as our own relationship with God. He may allow some disaster in our lives in order for us to see the consequences of our sins.
 - i) So how do we know if a bad thing that happens to us is the result of something we have done in the past? If we are badly reacting to a situation that is a temptation to us, that may be an example of God testing us over that particular sin issue.
 - ii) If our children are acting the same way we acted when we sinned, that is also an example of our sins affecting others. We may not be able to stop the pain of our children sinning, but we can teach them what we have learned from our sins and hopefully that will help them to make better choices in life.
16. Verse 13: Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.
- a) Whenever a sentence starts with a "then", one should ask, what is the "when" that causes the "then" to occur: In this case we look back at the last verse. That last verse was a request to God to "restore the joy of my salvation". David is saying in effect, I want this guilt to go away for the sins I have committed. I want to have that "joyful" relationship where I know God is guiding me in my life.
 - i) Suppose we have committed some sin and we know we are guilty before God for that sin. We confess it. We are aware of the fact that God instantly forgives us of our sin. Yet due to the guilt of that sin, we don't feel close to God at the moment. That is what David is feeling here. The problem is our guilt is still there because we think we should have done better.
 - ii) The hard part is letting go of our own guilt so we can draw close to God again.
 - b) With that said, this verse is like asking, "If I don't feel close to God, is it because He moved away or because I moved away?" For David it is because he moved away in his sins.
 - c) So if we feel guilt over some sin in our life, what do we have to do to feel close to God again? Yes we have to confess the sin. That is usually step one of the problem.
 - i) The next step is usually to think about what motivated us to commit that sin and think about how we can avoid that situation in the future.
 - ii) God desires teamwork among believers. He knows we each have weaknesses. Having others willing to pray for us is the only way I have found to overcome the temptation to sin. This is one reason why the bible has such a heavy emphasis on working as a team to make a difference for God in all that we do.
 - d) What does all of this have to do with Verse 13? Everything. The point is David didn't feel close to God due to His sin. Overcoming the guilt associated with sin starts by a willing attitude to want to turn from that sin. Let me deal with sin another way: The cross is a slow and painful way to die. The best way I have found to avoid sin is to slowly and painfully keep away from that temptation to sin, so that desire can slowly and painfully die. In other words, sin requires "crucifixion" to slowly and completely kill it.
 - e) The older I get, the more I am convinced that all people have to deal with some form of weakness to overcome. For David, it was the desire for women, which is one reason why I believe he had so many wives. For you or me, something else might be our weakness. The point is we can't enjoy a great and close relationship with God until we are willing to turn from our sins. God is more than willing to help us if and when we are willing to turn to Him to help us. Further, involving others in petitioning Him to help us is the best way I have found to overcome such desires.
 - f) Notice in this verse, David wanted to teach others about having a close relationship with God. David realized that he couldn't do that, unless he first felt close to God himself.
 - g) Another point of this verse is we can't be of any good to God unless we are willing to first come to him "broken". That means we realize that we need his help, not only to restore our own relationship with Him, but also to lead others to Him.

17. Verse 14: Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
 - a) After that long speech that I gave over Verse 13, the rest of the chapter falls into place pretty easily. Verse 14 is David asking God to save him from "bloodguilt". Let's face it, David had the husband of Bathsheba killed so he could have Bathsheba to himself.
 - i) David knows he can't bring her husband back to life and is guilty of what he did.
 - ii) David is asking for forgiveness, not so he could avoid punishment that he deserves, but solely so he could have a close relationship with God again.
 - iii) David desired to sing praises to God, but he couldn't do that with the guilt of sin hanging over his head. In order for David to have that closeness again, not only did he need to confess that sin, but also turn from it as well.
 - b) Since David can't undo what he did by having Bathsheba's husband killed, what David is asking God for here is to help him to turn from that desire to have more women in his life and help him turn from that sinful desire. I have found that if we are willing to turn from sin, God will help us, over time be willing to turn away from whatever our own sinful desire is. Since we can never be "sin free", the secret is to stay close to God so He can help us turn from our own temptations.
18. Verse 15: O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
 - a) First let me state the obvious here: David could open and close his mouth all by himself in order to praise God. With that said, what is David asking God here in this verse?
 - i) I am convinced that David is still concerned about feeling close to God and not wanting to feel any more guilt over the sin he has committed.
 - b) The idea of God controlling David's mouth is the idea of submitting to God with our lives. It is about saying in effect, "I can't deal with this weakness all by myself. My only hope is to trust in You, not only to forgive me, but to help me turn from that weakness as well."
 - i) Once we are aware that our weaknesses are now God's problem, we are now free to focus on other things. That includes praising God, for the good things He has and will do through our lives.
19. Verse 16: You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
 - a) Let me translate this: Dear God, I can't go through a series of rituals in order for my problems to go away. The only way I can turn from sin is to come to You "empty handed" and say, I can't do it without Your help.
 - b) It is important to state that God is not "wiping out" the Old Testament sequence of sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. Verse 19 coming up is my proof of that.
 - i) God still wanted the rituals of sacrifices for sins, but He wants it done with a "broken heart" attitude that we are fully dependant upon Him not only to forgive us of our sins, but also to develop the desire to turn from that sin in the first place.
 - c) The reason God requires shed blood for the forgiveness of sin is to remind us that sin is "deadly". That is why Jesus' blood had to literally be shed for the forgiveness of our sins.
20. Verse 17: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
 - a) Let me this verse with a short story. The story is about a man who had a bad temper. One day he told God in effect, "I can't deal with this temper any more God, it is now your problem." The man stopped worrying about his temper. Some time later his wife said to him (without him prompting her) that she noticed how much better his temper has been lately. He said to her, "truthfully, I hadn't really thought about it much, I just let go of that fear and turned it over to God."
 - i) The point of that story is once we let go of our problems is not only when God forgives us but works to make us a better person.
 - ii) That is the point of this verse and probably the main point of this chapter.

21. Verse 18: In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- a) Verse 18 seems like a strange transition verse. Why all of sudden talk about "Zion" which is a nickname for Jerusalem and build up the walls of that city?
 - i) David is not talking about building the city walls or just going out and having a good time in the city. He is talking about having a broken heart before God.
 - b) The point here is about David realizing that the key to having believers live and work together to make a difference for God is all about all of us believers letting go of our worries and problems and making those issues "God's problems to deal with." Once we turn over our issues to God, then and only then can we work together with other believers to make a difference for Him. That is what David meant by the metaphors in this verse.
22. Verse 19: Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.
- a) If you recall from Verse 16, I stated that God still required the animal sacrifices as stated in the Book of Leviticus. The purpose of those animal sacrifices is that they show one's total commitment to God. By our willingness to shed innocent blood on God's behalf for the sake of our sins, we are telling God we understand that sin requires a sacrifice of life. Again, Christians don't do animal sacrifices, because we look to the shed blood of Jesus for our salvation.
 - b) To put it another way, to ask God to accept a blood sacrifice on our behalf is no good unless our "heart" is in the right place, and that means in effect coming to God "empty and broken". We need to realize that we need His help not only to forgive us of our sins, but to give us the ability to turn from our sins as well.
23. Let me summarize some key points about this psalm. It is not so much about David's affair with Bathsheba. That story is the "background" of this psalm. What this psalm is really about is how we should deal with sin, how we should confess it and what we need to do to turn from that sin. We have learned that God can and does punish believers in order to keep us from repeating a sin and that God holds believers accountable for the sins we commit as believers.
- a) David desired to have a close relationship with God. That is what God desires of you and me. In order to have that relationship we need to confess our sins when we become aware of them and turn from them. That is what David does in this psalm.
24. On that convicting note, I'll end in prayer: Heavenly father, without You, we have no hope not only of going to heaven, but of living the type of life that You desire for us here and now. Help us to remember that when a desire for sin comes, help us to give You that desire and remember that such a desire is pleasing to You. Help us to crucify that desire by turning from it. Help us to be dependant upon You to change for the better. Then, with Your help, may we then go out in the world and make a difference for You what You desire for us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.