

**“FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL”**  
**A Sermon Preached at**  
**FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Belleville, IL**  
**By The Rev. Rob Dyer**  
**August 3, 2025**  
(transcribed from audio file)

Our scripture this morning is Psalm 51.

*To the Leader: A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:  
according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my  
transgressions.*

*Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.  
For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.  
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.*

*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive  
me.*

*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part  
thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

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

*Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast  
broken may rejoice.*

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

*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within  
me.*

*Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from  
me.*

*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free  
spirit.*

*Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be  
converted unto thee.*

*Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation:  
and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.  
O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.  
For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not  
in burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite  
heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.  
Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of  
Jerusalem.  
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.      NRSV*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This series that we are doing during the month of August is called Beyond Psalm 23. I would say that if I asked you to think about the different Psalms that you know from the Bible, Psalm 23 makes most people's list and then it drops off very quickly in terms of our knowledge of the Psalms and our engagement with the Psalms. Psalm 23 is a beautiful Psalm which expresses so much of our life experience, but there is more to be found.

So, what we are going to do this month is, each week the sermon is going to be a little different to try and fit what's going on in that particular Psalm so you can engage with it. Really what I'm trying to give you today is I want to give you a spiritual superpower. I want to give you something spiritual that you can use yourself in times when this particular Psalm would speak to you and hopefully this Psalm 51 can go on that short list that you might have of favorite Psalms that can really feed you.

So, let's go ahead and take a look at that. I'm going to ask our tech crew to bring the scriptures back up again. It starts off with a little side note to the leader because the Psalms are often meant to be used to lead the people in song. *To the Leader: This is a Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone to Bathsheba.*

Now for those of you who may not be familiar with this story, in 2 Samuel 11 & 12 we get the story of, you've got King David. He's in charge. He's anointed. He's trying to do the good work of God with his people and he's just looking out on all of his kingdom from his balcony, and he happens to look over and sees this woman,

Bathsheba, taking a bath. And the eyes linger a little too long. He starts to get some notions, some ideas. Her husband Uriah is a great general. He's out there fighting the fight to help protect the kingdom and David decides, I think I'm going to go visit her. And he does. And they get together. They really get together and she ends up pregnant.

Well, David's like, I gotta do something. I gotta cover my tracks. OK! Here's the deal. Let's call Uriah back from the battlefield. Uriah, you come back and like, "Hey, welcome back" cause he's hopin' he's gonna go back and take this opportunity to be with his wife and then Uriah will just think, oh, the baby's mine. Great. The problem is Uriah comes back and he says, "Oh, I can't go and enjoy the pleasures of home while my friends are out there on the battlefield. I'm going to sleep out here with the servants. I'm just not even going to go home to my wife."

David's like, ugh! Darn it! Ok. "Hey, Uriah, why don't you come, and we'll party together". And so, they drink a bunch of wine together and he gets Uriah to drink a lot of wine and he's thinkin', now he'll stumble back to his house. Good King David! Not the best morals, let's just say. But Uriah ends up not stumbling back to his house, but just stumbles back to being with the other servants and doesn't go home, so this doesn't work. So, David's like, how am I going to get out of this?

So, he tells the other generals, "I want you to send Uriah to the front line". They're like, "the front line? It's really dangerous there." He's like, "trust me."

So, they send him to the front lines and he gets killed. And then David says, "Well, my good servant, Uriah, has been killed so I will take his wife as my own and make her as my very own and everyone's like, "Oh that King David. He is wonderful. Look at what a good man he is."

He did all that to cover up what he had done. But the problem is there's a prophet amongst them, Nathan, and there's a whole long story. I'm not going to tell it to you but you can summarize it by Nathan comes in to King David and he goes, "Uh, we know what you did."

"What?"

"no. no. no. We know what you did."

And so, King David finds himself convicted of what he has done. Now granted, he's the King. He can kinda do whatever he wants, but he does feel the guilt of the sin,

and the brokenness. He does understand that he did wrong and he basically murdered Uria, just using the enemy as the weapon.

And so, this Psalm is meant to be from David's lips, that David wrote this and it may have been that King David actually did write this Psalm. It may be that someone who knew of the story of what David went through in confessing this sin and trying to make things right and wrote this to capture what was going on in David's heart. So, that's the context. Ok? So now you have King David speaking these words. Because I think for us to have to pull anything out of these Psalms you have to kinda know, who's talking here? What is this about? This is the back story to Psalm 51. Little spicy for a Bible lesson.

So, he said, *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin."* He doesn't start off with saying, "Hey God, you know I'm a good guy. Right? I've done a lot of good things as king, so come on, let this one little thing slide."

He starts off immediately saying, "I need your mercy. I need your love. I need to count on that because what I have done is wrong and I am not making excuses here. I'm recognizing that I need to come to you and rely on that love."

And then he goes on. He says, *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me."*

He is taking the full blame for what he has done. He's not blaming Bathsheba. She shouldn't have been out bathing like that. He's not blaming Uria. He's not blaming his workload. He's not blaming anything but himself.

Now it might sound like he's trying to get out of it at the end cause he goes, "Well you know I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me." That is not a line for him saying like, "Hey look God, you made me this way. You know, I just can't help myself. This is the way I was made."

What he is doing there is acknowledging that his sin and his brokenness goes back to the very core of who he is. He knows it's part of him and he is accepting that.

So, in these first two stanzas the spiritual lesson that we have is to know that when we have done wrong, when we are broken, when we are less than our very best Christian selves, when we harm others either by doing things or by not doing what we should, that our first move is not to make excuses. Our first move should be to appeal to our God, to that love, to that mercy. To know that it is our transgression that has brought this out and we're not blaming other people. We're accepting that responsibility.

When you learn to take the mistakes of your life, of your faith; when you learn to take the brokenness that's in your own life and accept it and to realize that you need to take this to God, it's like a superpower. It takes it away from an exercise of excuses and dodging and weaving and puts us right in the middle of it and puts us in a position of realizing that we cannot do this alone. That if we are going to change it, we're going to need to appeal to our God.

So, then he goes on. He says, *"You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities."*

David realizes that what's most important is for him to not fool himself but to be truthful. In his inward being to know that something needs to change inside of him. And he calls upon these rituals, these rituals that were in their Hebrew culture of using hyssop and ritual cleansing that would have been used to heal people and to help them recover from their own brokenness in various ways. He's asking for that, that same type of relief that only God can give.

He understands that the joy and gladness in his life is threatened by what he has done. That by his mistake he's put a barrier between that relationship with God, and he needs to reestablish it with this truthful look at himself. And we have to do the very same thing. Because what we will do is, we will be less than our best selves and we'll take all of our faults and say, "well, you know, it's just the way I am. You know, I just get that way sometimes. Well, I didn't really mean to do it. I'm generally a good . . . ." We took all those things and we put them between us and God as excuses as if we can hide behind them.

The truth is, this is not what God desires. God desires a truth in our inward being and again it's like a superpower. When you realize that you don't have to do all that work to build up a justification with a messed-up-ness that you maybe just did, for

the things that you left undone, for the lack of that fullness of grace that you live out your life. When you realize you don't have to do all that work, you just have to let go of it and go to God, it's like a superpower.

And there is a joy and a gladness in life that can't be fully met so long as we aren't honest with ourselves and our relationship with God. So long as we continually justify what we've done, how we did it, who we did it to – oh they deserved it, it will get in the way of feeling that full joy and gladness that we have intended for us.

And then he goes on. He says, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*”

That very first phrase there, *create in me a clean heart, O God*. In the original Hebrew that this is written in, the verb there is bara. Bara is the verb that is in the very beginning of our Bible where it says, *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*. Bara is a verb in the Hebrew language and there can only be one subject that is allowed to use that verb. I cannot say, Rob barad anything. That is an offense to the Hebrew language. It is an offense to the Hebrew understanding of who God is. Only God can bara because to bara means to create out of nothing.

You and I, we can make stuff. We can do our little recipes of life and put things together, knowledge and actions, but only God can take nothing and make it into something and what he says is, it's not a matter of like, ah we just need to fix up all the parts in me. Instead, what David says is, I need a creation. I need something made out of nothing. I bring nothing to the table, God. You. I need you to create something in me and that is a lesson for our own spiritual life as well.

If we are going to change our ways, if we are going to break from the path that is leading to our destruction, or just to us being not nice – not good – selfish. It's not going to be because you and I just well up enough good will power – just gotta stick to it and I'll make myself a better Christian.

To understand, and again this is the thing that should set you free. To understand that this is going to take God creating something in my heart out of nothing. I bring nothing to the table, God. I need you in this moment. That reliance on God frees us in the moments when we feel like we are lousy, in those moments of guilt when you know you've done wrong, and you know you've been a bad person. I think most of us have been there where you had at least one moment in your life where you were

a bad person. And turning that around is something that requires God to create something in you. To have that knowledge and to look at life that way, it's like a superpower. Let's keep going.

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.* He's basically going on to say, look it's not just a lesson that is going to end with me. I could learn a lesson from this and then I could help others. If my struggle has been one that is like your struggle, then I can help you. If my story is similar to what I hear happened in your story, I will use that to help you. I will not let this creation that you do in my heart, God, end with me. It's the words of David and it's the words to us. That if we are actually able to turn our behavior around, if we are actually able to redeem a bit of the brokenness that we participated in then we have to figure out a way to share that with other people, to teach others, to guide them.

*Deliver me from the bloodshed,* he says which is the bloodshed that he caused and we need deliverance from the consequences that we've caused, from our own actions, or inactions.

Then he goes on. *O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you wouldn't be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* That's a good verse to hold onto, folks. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. This is a call to humility and for King David – **King David** – to take a position of humility is a big move and I would argue that for a lot of us modern day Christians, taking on humility is just as big of a move cause boy we like ourselves.

Humility is at the very center of all of this and when you encounter yourself doing wrong, being less than what you could be, instead of making excuses for it, meeting with humility transforms the situation. You're no longer in shame and guilt, instead you are a humble person ready to be changed and it's like that brokenness and pain can't get you anymore. It's like you are invulnerable to it because you realize, yep, I need help, and I don't want to be that, and I need to change.

For the modern Christian to actually take a position of humility and believe that they do need to be changed is one of the greatest faith steps that anyone of us can take. That's what God wants from us so, all the comin' to church, all the givin' money to church, all the volunteerin' you do, don't get me wrong, we like all that and that

helps make everything go, but it's not what makes up for what we have done. Instead, what we need is humility.

Then he goes on. *Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings* and this is to say that David realizes that his sin, his brokenness, has threatened his kingdom. The actions of the king have an effect on the people.

Now while we are not royalty, some of us think we're royalty, but if we're not royalty we do have an influence in our friend circles, in our families, in our workplaces, in our communities. When you let your sins, your brokenness, your wrongdoing go without any repentance, without any I'm sorry, without any efforts to let God create something new in you, we end up hurting those very communities that we are a part of.

So, when we understand that when we take this action of asking for God's forgiveness and asking God to truly change us this isn't something that's just going to benefit us, it's going to benefit your family, your friend, your community. Imagine if you found yourself surrounded by a group of humble people who realize their wrongdoing, sought forgiveness for that and truly desired to be changed. Imagine if we had that in our communities. Imagine if we had that in our government. Imagine if we had that in our schools. Imagine if we had that in our grocery store. Imagine if that was everywhere. Well, that starts by we the people of God living into that.

I hope that when you leave here, whatever your Bible is, if you have to mark it on your online Bible you use or you go home to your Bible at home, I hope you put a bookmark on Psalm 51 and I hope that you understand it a bit better now.

And I hope that when you read it, it can help you reflect on what it means to truly be sorry. I hope that when it comes to that day when you really mess up, I mean you have really messed up that you will go to Psalm 51 and with a humble heart you will reach out to your God and know that you are part of a faith community that will reflect that same forgiveness and grace as a reminder as well.

To God be the glory.

Halleluiah and Amen.