

# PRAYERS OF REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Psalm 51; 2 Samuel  
11

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Create in me a  
clean heart, O God,  
and put a new  
and right spirit  
within me.  
(Ps. 51:10)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Sept. 30	Heb. 10:26–35	Do Not Persist in Sin
T	Oct. 1	2 Cor. 7:5–11	Godly Grief Leads to Repentance
W	Oct. 2	Prov. 28:4–18	The Righteous and the Wicked
Th	Oct. 3	2 Sam. 11:1–5, 14–24	Sin's Deadly Spiral
F	Oct. 4	Lam. 5:1–3, 15–22	God, Restore Us
Sa	Oct. 5	John 21:15–19	Follow Christ

## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

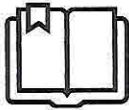
**G**rief theory teaches us that acceptance is a crucial aspect of the healing process. As we work through the losses we experience, whether they are consequences of our actions or losses that are far beyond our control, acceptance acknowledges that a loss is real and we cannot change it. At times, the losses we experience are the result of our actions, for example, when King David took Bathsheba and had his loyal soldier Uriah killed. This is an extreme case, but it illustrates the point that sometimes acceptance in grieving a loss includes taking responsibility and embracing the need for change. In Psalm 51, we witness David's acceptance of his responsibility as he confronts the depth of his transgressions and his genuine desire to do and be something new.

David's plea for mercy and acknowledgment of his iniquities reflect his acceptance of his role in his grief. He laments the pain he caused, not only for others, but for himself, as it affected his connection with the divine. This is a vital step toward true repentance because it opens the door for

transformation and restoration, including the capacity for healing and growth. When we genuinely accept the consequences of our actions, it enables us to let go of the burdens of denial and guilt. It liberates us from the cycle of self-condemnation and allows us to experience the peace of God's mercy.

We can draw inspiration from Psalm 51, remembering the ways that we share responsibility, so that our prayers could include acceptance as a way to think of repentance. Just as we imagine that David found solace and forgiveness through his heartfelt confession, we too, as communities of faith, can experience healing and restoration when we acknowledge our mistakes, take responsibility for our actions, and actively seek repair and restoration.

*Merciful God, help us to acknowledge our mistakes in the presence of your assuring grace, so that we may renew our spirit, and restore within us the joy of your boundless love and endless mercy. May we reflect your grace and forgiveness, given strength by your Spirit. Amen.*



**SCRIPTURE**

Psalm 51:1–4, 10–12, 15–17

**51:1** Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy,  
blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup>Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup>For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

<sup>4</sup>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.

.....  
<sup>10</sup>Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup>Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.  
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Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

- <sup>15</sup>O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- <sup>16</sup>For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- <sup>17</sup>The sacrifice acceptable to God<sup>[a]</sup> is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

## HAVE MERCY, O GOD

Psalm 51 is understood as a prayer of confession, opening with a plea for forgiveness. The psalmist uses a reference to what seems like an unforgivable abuse of power by a king. In reminding us that the prayer speaks of God's steadfast love, the psalmist offers an example to express lament for the harm that we cause others and ourselves, either intentionally or unintentionally.

The psalmist begins by writing, "A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The *Masoretic Text*, the Hebrew version of the Jewish Scripture, counts the opening as verses one and two, indicating that this opening is part of the psalm. Modern English versions of the Bible often represent those first two verses as pre-text, removing the verses from their status as part of the Scriptural tradition. It begs the question, who are we protecting or what are we privileging by making a choice like that? I find it ironic that a representation of the psalm, which we hold up as one of our finest examples of repentance, would somehow, even if slightly, divert attention from the person whose repentance the psalm presumably represents. This instinct to take the edge off a confession of guilt may be an unintentional embodiment of a general human struggle with acknowledging the harm that has been done.

We can see how the psalmist gets to the point: "Have mercy on me, O God" (Ps. 51:1). Whether the psalm was composed by David or by a priest in defense of the king, the author understands the wrong that has been done and asks for God's mercy. The psalmist continues, "For I know my transgressions, / and my sin is ever before me" (v. 3). The guilt and remorse expressed by the psalmist becomes palpable with the image of the wrong that was done being ever in the mind's eye.

In response to the guilt, the psalmist prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, / and put a new and right spirit within me" (v. 10). This plea is rooted in the assurance of God's steadfast love, going back to the initial plea to have mercy, "according to your

