

Psalm 51:10-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-51/psalm-5110-12/>

Beyond healing and cleansing, David sees that he needs an entirely new heart. His old heart leads him astray. He prays that God would not take away the Holy Spirit from him. His desire is to fully lean on God's lead in his life, to restore him to joy in walking in His presence.

The first nine verses of this Psalm contain perhaps the most complete statement and act of repentance that we find in Scripture. David plumbed the depths of his own sin until he totally threw himself on the mercy and love of God. He was not just looking at the past in his repentance, but he was now completely aware that he needed something more if he was going to live in the full fellowship and joy of the presence of the Lord.

The entire Psalm revolves around David's cry in verse 10,
*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

As David grappled with the depth of his own sin, he realized the only solution will be a new, *clean*, pure *heart*. And that is something God provides.

The recognition of the sinfulness of the *heart* and the call for a new or *clean heart* is heard throughout both the Old and New Testament. The prophet Jeremiah declares that humans are born with a self-rationalizing heart that cannot be trusted to seek and see what is true:

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”
(Jeremiah 17:9)

The prophet Ezekiel provides an antidote: a *heart* transplant. God, through him, declares,

“And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh.”
(Ezekiel 11:19)

Transitioning centuries ahead to the New Testament, Jesus continues the thread when He says:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
(Matthew 5:8)

This verse is from the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus sets forth that those who are merciful unto others, and live in forgiveness have a pure heart.

When Jesus says that the “pure in heart” will “see God,” He is indicating that a pure heart will desire to see what is; to seek what is true. The pure in *heart* will seek to see and keep God's (good) design.

The Apostle Paul says this about purity of *heart*, indicating that those with a pure heart see things that are consistent with God's (good) design:

“To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.”
(Titus 1:15)

Once again, David is not asking God to simply take his *sins* off his record. He is asking God to *create in Him a clean heart*. In other words, He is asking God to make him the kind of person who loves to do God's will more than anything else.

When we seek what is true, we begin to more fully see how God is all around us. In fact, Colossians 1:16-17 says that Jesus is in all things, holding them together.

Because of the fall, death entered the world, which separated humans from God's (good) design for us (Genesis 3:19, 24). However, right away God promised a savior who would redeem humanity from this catastrophe (Genesis 3:15). This savior was the God-become-man, Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:7).

This newness of life comes through faith in Jesus (John 3:14-15). As the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians,

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Through Jesus, God gives New Testament believers a new *heart* and a new nature. We still have the old nature, which is why confession and repentance are still important. It is through confession with God that we restore broken fellowship (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:22). The same is true for human fellowship (James 5:16).

As we will see in the following verses of Psalm 51, David was becoming aware that a *clean heart* would change everything about his life.

And renew a steadfast spirit within me (v 10 b). As David has seen the depth of his own sin, he has realized the meagerness of his own spirit: *Let the bones which You have broken rejoice* (v 8b). His hope for a *clean heart* is based on the “lovingkindness” and “compassion” of God, but he knows he will need the continuing presence of a loving God to sustain him.

The willful transgressions, the evil pursued, the break of fellowship between *God* and the king were all David's doing. The immediate and long-term consequences of such waywardness were initiated by the now repentant psalmist. The judgment of sin, however, and the assignment of penalty—*the bones which You have broken*—belong to *God* alone (Psalm 75:7; Hebrews 10:30; James 4:12). In his plea for mercy before the Sovereign Lord, David foreshadows the rejoicing to follow the disposition of the penalty *God* would exact of Himself on behalf of all humankind for its sin. In Jesus Christ, the Father would provide an avenue away from death brought on by sin to

life that instead rejoices in *God's* living, eternal presence: “But *God* demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

With a *clean heart* will come a *steadfast spirit* that will move David from the brokenness and guilt of sin to the joy of living the reality of the constant presence of God. The *steadfast spirit* is of God, not something David can achieve or just determine on his own. He knows his own weakness and vulnerability, so he is trusting in God's enduring love and compassion (Psalm 136).

David is calling on God to be *steadfast* as he says,

*Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me* (v 11).

David could have settled for the forgiveness of his *sins*, as the prophet Nathan had told him was already granted by God (2 Samuel 12:13). However, the depth and breadth of his repentance opened his heart to a new possibility of experiencing intimate fellowship with God. Confession and repentance is a means to an end; a renewed, restored, and enhanced fellowship with our Creator (1 John 1:9).

David's desire was to experience an ongoing *presence* of God. God is always present—He is omnipotent. What David expresses here is a desire to walk with an awareness and experience of God's presence. Scripture here is leading us to pursue God, to draw near to Him. David's seeking provides an example of a human seeking to draw near to God. We are promised that as we draw near to God, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

In the Old Testament, God's *Spirit* came upon people for a special service. God's *Spirit* descended on David when he was anointed as king (1 Samuel 16:13). Shortly thereafter, God's *Spirit* departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). Perhaps David had seen the terrible effects of when God's Spirit was removed from Saul, and was seeking here to avoid the same fate. Although Nathan promised David his sins were forgiven, he was warned of severe negative consequences stemming from his actions (1 Samuel 16:14).

It seems that in this psalm, David's focus is not on the external, but the internal. David did, indeed, entreat God to spare the life of the child born of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:16). However, it seems the first order of business was to set aright his fellowship with God.

David could see the possibility of losing fellowship with God when he sought the Lord,

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit* (v 12).

It is inferred here that David lost his *joy* while living in unrepented sin. He requests that God's *salvation* be given back to him, that he be saved. In scripture, context determines what is being saved or delivered from what. In this case, David speaks of God's *salvation*. As this psalm

asserts, it is only God's grace and mercy that saves humans from being separated from having a familial relationship with God (Psalm 51:1).

David had that relationship (1 Samuel 13:14). But sin broke his fellowship with God, and therefore he lost the *joy* of the *salvation* he had been granted. Now David prays that God would restore the *joy* of fellowship. Perhaps the Apostle John had this psalm in mind when he wrote his first epistle, in which he expressed a desire for the fellowship among the believers, Jesus, and the Father to be such that "our joy may be made complete" (1 John 1:4). John goes on to tell his disciples to confess sin which they become aware of in order to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9).

It is inferred that David knew he could not accomplish a restoration on his own. He even asks God to *sustain me with a willing spirit*. It would seem that in this context, David would be asking God to *sustain* him to walk in righteousness before God—to set aside sin. Accordingly, the *willing spirit* that would be needed would be a spirit that is *willing* to recognize that God's ways are for our best. It seems then that in this respect, David is asking God for wisdom, to see things as they really are. New Testament believers are admonished to do likewise, noting that God is a liberal giver to those who seek His ways (James 1:5).

New Testament believers have the benefit of having God's Spirit dwelling within them as a matter of being made a new creation. When we come to faith in Christ, we are "born of the [Holy] Spirit" (John 3:8). This is a work of God, received by faith (John 3:14-15). Those who believe are made a "new creature" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Thus, New Testament believers have the ability to not only pray as David prayed, but also to rely on God's Spirit to help them pray (Romans 8:26).

David recognizes that his being has been "crushed," but sin's pain and guilt can turn to rejoicing (Psalm 51:8). The key is David's repentance, and his faith in God's mercy. New Testament believers have the same hope. We also can cry out to God *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit*.

Like David, we can have faith in God's love and goodness. We can agree with the Apostle Paul, who said: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31b), and that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).

To learn how to Biblically respond to our sin and/or guilt, see the Bible Says article—"Guilt and Repentance: The Healthy Way to Deal with Remorse."

Biblical Text

**10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.**