

# The Prayer of a Penitent Person

## An Exegesis of Psalm 51

Pastor Jon A. Baumann

[Dakota-Montana Eastern Conference January 24, 1994: Elkton, South Dakota]

*Prayer is the burden of a sigh  
The falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye,  
When none but God is near.*

*Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice  
Returning from his ways,  
While angels in their songs rejoice  
And cry, "Behold, he prays!"<sup>1</sup>*

"Desperate times call for desperate measures." This proverb proves itself time after time, but nowhere is it probably more true than in the actions one takes in the aftermath of a sin. When a person is caught in sin, his desperation will lead him to do almost anything—rationalize, minimize, draw comparisons, make excuses, maybe even the most desperate act of all—try to forget about it. Hopefully in the life of a Christian, desperation will drive him to prayer and ultimately to God. Before us we have such an example—a desperate person turning to God for help, "calling on (him) in the day of trouble" (Ps.50:15).

Psalm 51 is a testimony to the power of sin in the life of a believer. Someone can be so close to God, enjoy his blessings day after day, strive to live by his Word and lead by example, and yet sin can still creep in and cause unnecessary stress and strife. It happened in the life of David. It happens in the life of God's New Testament servants, too. At the very least, Psalm 51 reminds us of this fact. However, there is more to David's prayer than just sin and confession. Psalm 51 is also a testimony to the power of God and his Word. It was the Word of the Law, applied by Nathan in the parable of II Samuel 12, that took root in David's heart, caused him to recognize his sin and led him to repent of his sin. It was the Word of the Gospel, again applied by Nathan and no doubt already known to David, which led him to pray to God and request his love and mercy. If David had no hope for forgiveness, he never would have uttered this wonderful prayer. Consequently, this prayer serves as a model for all who see their sin and their need for a Savior. Let us contemplate

### *The Prayer of a Penitent Person*

#### *I. The Plea for Mercy*

- 1 לְמִנְצַחַת מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:
- 2 כְּבוֹא־אֵלָיו נָתַן הַנְּבִיא כְּאֲשֶׁר-בָּא אֶל-בֵּית-שֶׁבַע:
- 3 חַנּוּנֵי אֱלֹהִים כְּחַסְדֶּךָ כָּרַב רַחֲמֶיךָ מְחַה פְּשָׁעַי:
- 4 הָרַב כְּכֹסְפֵי מַעֲוֹנֵי וּמַחֲטָאֹתַי טַהַרֵּנִי:

**1 To the music director, a psalm of David. 2 When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba. 3 (1) Be gracious to me, O God, according to your covenant love; according to your great compassion wipe out my transgressions. 4 (2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.**

The first two verses in the Hebrew give us all the background we need to this penitential prayer. That this is a psalm of David, there is no doubt. Yet, there are those among the historical critical proponents who would be so bold as to deny even this basic fact. "That the psalm was written by David, as the title states...cannot have been the case; apart from other reasons, in view of his treatment of Uriah, how could David

---

<sup>1</sup> Montgomery, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 454:2,4.

have uttered such words as: 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned?'"<sup>2</sup> The facts are recorded for us very clearly in II Samuel 11 and 12, and even though in the superscription it seems as if the sin is being glossed over (לָךְ אָצַף - "gone into," i.e. had sexual relations), we know that the entire sordid affair was known to all, even the enemies of Israel. That is why this private sin finds itself in a public forum, the book of psalms. Sin was committed, sin was confessed, and David wants all to know where he is going, and where they, too, could go for forgiveness. He wants his experience of sin and grace to serve a purpose for the rest of God's people.

"**Have mercy on me!**" With the very first word, David makes it clear that he is not only a sinner, but lie is also a believer. Only a person who has faith in God can rightly address him. Only a person who has faith in God can rightly make requests of God. Only a person who has faith in God can lightly lay claim to the love God has promised him. With the very first word of his prayer David also makes his appeal clear. The imperative does not indicate that he is commanding God to do this. He is in no position to command! Instead, we see that this is the plea of a humble and contrite sinner. With the very first word, David also mentions what it is that brings together two entirely incompatible things, an unholy sinner and a holy God. It is only mercy—mercy by God for the sinner. This is vital, for one cannot proceed with any prayer, let alone a plea for mercy, unless the first word is one that sets the right tone, one of humility, and the right order, one where God is in the right and we are in the wrong. "**Have mercy on me**" not only defines true humility as it is taught in the Bible; it also outlines David's entire basis for this prayer.

After the first word David proceeds to the general part of his petition to God. Note that David doesn't even mention "sin" until the last word of the first verse. He would rather spend his fast breath imploring the mercy of God. We would also do good to notice that this is a personal prayer. David is not afraid to be accountable: "**me, my sin.**" But that isn't the only thing that comes to our attention in this plea for mercy. We also find that there are a number of literary devices in this section: a trio of synonymous triads, a couple of chiasims, and even a play on words. No doubt the first part of this prayer was meant to stir the Hebrew spirit, and it is even effective to this day, if we put ourselves in sandals, gird up our loins, roll up the sleeves of our tunics and dig deep into the timeless sands of God's inspired Word, examining and exposing the different meanings.

Let us first concentrate on the three words which David uses to address his sinful actions. The first one to cross our eyes is a word that denotes crossing God and his Word. מַעֲשֵׂה is a rebellion, a breach of a covenant, a casting off an allegiance. David's adultery and murder were open rebellion against God's will. Instead of fidelity to God, he had preferred allegiance to his sinful nature. עֲוֹן is an iniquity or twisting of moral standards, and it also includes the guilt that accompanies such sin. In the planning stages of his bold sins, even during the very actions themselves, David undoubtedly compromised God's Word and put sound moral values aside in order to indulge himself, and even now he was still living with the guilt as a consequence. חָטָא of course is a word that means "miss the mark." The Septuagint has translated this word into the familiar ἀμαρτία which carries with it that same classic meaning. These three words makeup the triad of "sin" words, but it would do us well to note that David did not just choose these words as aimless synonyms. They correctly describe sin, not only David's, but also our own and all sin as it presents itself to this day. "Sin is ever, and his sin especially is, rebellion, the deflection of the life from the straight line which God's law draws so clearly and firmly, and hence a missing the aim."<sup>3</sup>

Now let us turn our attention to the counterparts of David's "sin" words, the different words which define for us God's love. In a general sense all three words could be translated "mercy," but then that wouldn't be doing the Hebrew justice. רַחֵם has already been introduced to us. It is a verb that designates showing favor or being gracious, indicating action from a superior to inferior. Coincidentally we are accustomed to conveying this same action each Sunday to our congregations: **The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you**" (Deut. 6:25). רַחֵם can mean kindness, mercy and love, but when used in connection with God it means "covenant love." David knows that God has an obligation to forgive sin when a person is contrite. David

<sup>2</sup> Oesterley, A Fresh Approach to the Psalms p.271.

<sup>3</sup> Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, p.5.

appeals to this covenant from the very start. **מְהֵרָה** speaks of the tender mercy a mother has for her child. David prays to his Father "as boldly and confidently as dear children ask their dear father," knowing that lie is "**the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin**" (Ex. 34:6,7). This is the triad of "love" words, and any combination of the three can be found throughout the Old Testament, usually depicting that God's tender mercy is rooted in his free love and grace.

Now comes the final part of David's plea for mercy—the methods by which he implores God to cleanse him of his sin. **מָחַה** is a rather strong word, but then sin calls for stern action. It means to wipe out or obliterate from memory, usually used in connection with debts, but it's also the same word used to describe how God dealt with the heathen world in Genesis 7. David knows that his debt of sin against God is great. "Blot out," therefore, as the NIV translates, is just not strong enough; "wipe out" or "erase" is what David wants done to that debt, and he knows only God can thoroughly do that. **כִּבֵּס** is a laundry term, but it does not specify just a simple rinse cycle. This term is used when there are stubborn stains which call for hard scrubbing. No doubt David would have chimed in with Isaiah, "**all our righteous acts are like filthy rags**" (Is.64:6). **טָהַר** indicates the kind of cleansing or purifying required of lepers. David probably felt as loathsome as a leper as he addressed the Holy One, and he was in need of God to do the purifying. This final triad of "cleansing" words proves to us that sin is not superficial, but instead it is set like a stain in the fabric of our life and can only be removed by the Lamb's laundering blood.

We have to admit that David had a way of turning a phrase. The imagery and literary devices not only add to the pulchritude of this penitential prayer, but they also serve to emphasize his plea for mercy. David's heart longed for God's love, and his spirit joined in, piling petition upon petition. We, too, can appreciate his cry, for it not only magnifies the beauty of God's love, but it also augments the repulsiveness of our own sin. For the pastor who struggles Sunday after Sunday to shed new light and breathe new life into sin-and-grace sermons, these first two verses of David's plea for mercy offer a wealth of insight.

## II. The Penitence over Sin

5 כִּי־פָשַׁעִי אָנִי אֲדַע וְחַטָּאתִי נִגְדִי תָמִיד:  
 6 לָךְ לְבַדְּךָ חַטָּאתִי וְהָרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עָשִׂיתִי  
 לְמַעַן תִּצְדַּק בְּדִבְרֶךָ תִּזְכֶּה בְּשִׁפְטֶךָ:  
 7 הִנֵּנִי בְּעוֹן חוֹלְלֵתִי וּבְחַטָּא יָחַמְתָּנִי אֱמִי:

**5 (3) For I know my transgressions and my sin is continually in front of me. 6 (4) Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and I have done what is evil in your sight, so that you are right when you speak and you are blameless when you judge. 7 (5) Behold, I was born in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.**

The tone of David's prayer now changes ever so slightly and we find that, instead of concentrating on God's covenant love and responsibility to forgive, David now introspects and dwells on what has initiated this prayer in the first place. He logically progresses from the nature of sin itself to his own sinful nature. Let us pick up on his last thought—he pleads for mercy and love because he is sin-stained and sin-diseased. Then, lest it seem that David is only giving superficial consideration to sin, he delves into another triad, this time penning three verses of repentance which bemoan how much sin has been a part of his life. This is another reason why this psalm finds application in our lives. It is not just limited to one or two sins of a historical individual; it speaks of all sin and how it affects all people and how we can penitently approach God in a pleasing way.

The first word of verse five can be misleading. **כִּי** is not a causal particle; instead, it is a conjunction which draws on the preceding thought. David is not saying, "Wash me because I know I'm sinful." That is not

what the Bible teaches about repentance. Merely recognizing sin does not make for a true confession. וָיָתֵן means that David knows and readily admits that he is sinful. He's not just aware of his sins; there is personal experience involved here. This is a hear-felt acknowledgment, this is a meaningful confession, this is a living repentance.

Finally the confession begins by addressing the personal nature of the sins which David had committed. These are "**my transgressions...my sin.**" Oh, that we would all be so bold so as to incriminate ourselves at times of confession. There is no Eden-like evasion here, no passing the buck or laying the blame on others. David is solely responsible for what he has done. In addition, he confesses that his sinfulness is something from which he can never be apart; it would always be "**continually in front of (him).**" For pastors who realize that we "**fall short of the glory of God**" (Rom.3:23), that there are many times when we are not always faithful with the trust given to us (I Cor.4:2), that we are at fault for some of the shortcomings in our ministry, these words ring out all too clear. Likewise for David there would always be reminders of his sin and its consequences. The distrusting look from his troops who had once been betrayed by him would remind him of his sin. The grave of a son taken in infancy would remind him of his sin. Even the very sight of the woman lie now called his wife, and how she came to be so, would remind him of his sin.

However, all of this does not hide the fact that his rebellion had first been against God. His words here echo the first words from his lips as soon as the Law, which Nathan had announced, had taken effect. "**I have sinned against the Lord**" ( II Sam. 12:13).

He recognizes that his sins were not merely sins against Bathsheba, with whom he had committed adultery, against Uriah, whom he had treacherously murdered, and against the people who were offended or misled by his sin. His sin was above all against the holy God.<sup>4</sup>

We have to marvel at the doctrinal integrity David displays in the midst of his penitence. So often sin is seen as a social misbehavior—mere bad manners or tasteless misdemeanors committed among friends or fellow man. However, we know God's Word teaches differently, just as Joseph once explained when tempted to sin, "**How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?**" (Gen. 39:9) So also here David rightly defines sin for what it is—a violation of our relationship with God: "**Against you ...have I sinned.**"

...sin is a theological problem—not moral, ethical, social, or psychological. The problem is that sin violates God. This does not mean that others are not also hurt. But the righting of the wrong concerns the "godness" of God, and none other. In the flat world of modernity, this psalm affirms to us a forgotten reality. Our skewed lives finally must deal with God.<sup>5</sup>

God has told us in his Word, "**Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy**" (Lev. 19:2). However, when we look at our reflection in God's mirror, we see that "**our offenses are many in (his) sight, and our sins testify against us**" (Is.59:12). When we are not holy, when we "**fall short of the glory of God**" (Rom.3:23), when we sin, we must realize to whom we are really accountable. "We must remember that the sins against the neighbor and against oneself are sins only because they are transgressions of God's commandment. The general canon is: *Omne peccatum in Deum committitur.*"<sup>6</sup>

David realizes this, which is why he continues by saying that when we sin, God is right in condemning us: "**so that you are right when you speak and justified when you judge.**" Paul uses this same logic, in fact in his letter to the Romans he uses this same verse (v.4b), in order to teach us about God's righteousness. God's righteousness demands perfection. God's righteousness sees imperfection, that "**there is no one righteous, not even one...**" (Rom. 3:10). God's righteousness prevails when he speaks against our sin and condemns us from his holy judgment throne. This will drive the person of faith to repent of his sins and seek the righteousness

<sup>4</sup> Brug, *The People's Bible - Psalms*, p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggeman, *The Message of the Psalms*, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol.I, p. 567.

which only God can offer: **"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known..."** (Rom.3:21). It is the nature of true penitence, to "confess one's self to be in the wrong in order that God may be in the right and gain His cause."<sup>7</sup>

Having taken a little time-out to vindicate God, David now turns back to the indictment of man. After all, it is only proper if one is going to confess actual sin that one also address original sin. "Surely I was sinful from birth..." Here we have the *sedes doctrinae* of original sin. In fact, the word that David uses pinpoints the birth of an individual's sin with great accuracy. חַיָּוִי conveys the meaning "to conceive," but the root of the word also means "to be in heat." In other words, the very moment of the conjoining of his father and mother was also the genesis of both his natural life and sinful nature. If only all people would acknowledge this basic fact of life related to us in the precise and perfectly concise inspired Hebrew language. It would not only shed new light on the vitality of the unborn who might face abortion, but it would also shed the light of accountability on all people, since **"flesh gives birth to flesh"** (Jn. 3:6), and illumine the necessity for all to be **"born again of water and the Spirit"** (Jn. 3:5). In true penitence, David rightly recognizes that sin is in his nature and contritely claims responsibility for this part of his sinful life, too.

This section concerning an individual's sin also speaks to us as individuals. We too, are sinners, and even if we are able to hide this fact from those whom we lead and serve, our thoughts, words and actions are still evident in God's eyesight. There is also something to be said about being penitent of our own sinfulness as we preach God's Word. Before we can even begin to convince others that they are sinners, we need to let God first convict us of our own sin. We need to let God's Law speak to us. We need to realize our own want for forgiveness. As Luther said, "Even a prince or a husband (or dare we say a pastor?) who is righteous in the external administration of his office must say in the sight of God, "Against thee only have I sinned; Thou only art righteous."<sup>8</sup> It has been said that the best way to teach is to lead by example. If this is true, then a pastor's penitence is also a vital part of his preaching.

### III. The Petition for Renewal

- 8 הַיְאֵמַת חִפְצָתָּ בְּטָחוֹת וּבְסִתָּם חֲכָמָה תּוֹדִיעֵנִי  
 9 תַּחֲטְאֵנִי בְּאֵזוֹב וְאֶטְהַר תַּכְבֵּסֵנִי וּמִשָּׁלֵג אֶלְבִּין:  
 10 תִּשְׁמִיעֵנִי שְׁשׁוֹן וְשִׁמְחָה תַגְלֵנָה עֲצָמוֹת דָּפִית:  
 11 הַסְתֵּר פְּנֵיךָ מִחַטָּאֵי וְכַל־עֲוֹנֹתַי מַחֵה:  
 12 יֵב טָהוֹר בְּרָא־לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ נְכוֹן חִדַּשׁ בְּקִרְבִּי:  
 13 אַל־תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְרוּחַ קִדְשְׁךָ אַל־תִּקַּח מִמֶּנִּי:  
 14 הַשִּׁיבָה לִּי שְׁשׁוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִסְמְכֵנִי:

**8 (6) Behold, you delight in truth in the inward parts; and you teach me wisdom in the hidden places. 9 (7) Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow. 10 (8) Cause me to hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. 11 (9) Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquity. 12 (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 13 (11) Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. 14 (12) Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

The next section starts with a verse which has cause problems for many a translator down through the ages, partly because some of the words are so rare and partly because a misunderstanding of the sinful human nature and God's will for man. During Luther's day, a popular translation of this verse went something like this:

<sup>7</sup> Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works. American Edition*, p. 339

"Behold, Thou hast loved truth; Thou hast revealed to me the uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom." Luther's comment to this: "Whoever the translator of this passage was, he ought to be called a lot of names. Not only did he awkwardly confuse the two parts of the verse, but he produces an ungodly meaning."<sup>9</sup> For a clearer understanding on our party, let's start by considering the rare words. The first is **טְהוֹת**.

This noun...describes an object covered over, hidden, or concealed. Ps. 51:6 clearly communicates the sense of "inward being" –the inner man covered by the body. **טְהוֹת** is parallel to **אָרְז**, a "closed up place," and to the seat of the sin nature (v. 5), denoting the residence of truth or faithfulness, referred (to) elsewhere as (the) "heart."<sup>10</sup>

Next, we need to be aware of what was in David's "heart." In order to find that out, notice the object of his petition—"**truth and wisdom.**" It makes sense that David would request such things, since he had been previously filled with just the opposite. From the start of his affair with Bathsheba, he had flirted with the foolishness of licentiousness: gazing on the body of a desirous woman; allowing such a temptation to develop into devious scheming; finally providing the opportunity for the fantasy to become reality by engaging in an adulterous affair. Soon his lasciviousness led to outright lies, lies which went against not only the moral standards of his day, but also God's holy standards: justifying in his mind that such an affair was perfectly acceptable since he was the king and her husband was away at war; plotting and planning the death of her husband to appear purely accidental; and finally arranging for the "bereaved" widow to be taken in by the seemingly "caring" king. For the better part of at least a year, such lies and foolishness had reigned supreme in David's heart. No wonder "**the thing David had done displeased the LORD**" (11 Sam 11:27).

This is why David spent the first part of this psalm penitently admitting that lie was sinful, rightly recognizing what was in his heart and repenting of the sin that permeated his life. Now David switches gears, acknowledging what should have been in his heart all along. He knows that God wants truth and wisdom in the inner places, filling the seat of emotions, occupying the heart of life itself. And what is this truth and wisdom? "**Your word is truth**" (John 17:17) and the "**holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation**" (II Tim. 3:15), describe for us what God desires in the heart. God's Word is necessary for our salvation. God's Word reveals to us his love which not only has freed us from the bondage of sin and freed us for a new life in Christ, but also motivates us in this new life. God's Word serves as the faithful guide in our Christian lives. Hence, it is only logical that any spiritual renewal in David's life, as well as in ours, start with God's Word.

However, renewal is more than just a one step process. It calls for God's continued grace, ever building up the new man, ever keeping the saint strong in the faith. David illustrates that lie knows just how much lie needs God's continued help by launching into a long list of verbs, some of them imperfects, some of them imperatives, but all of them imploring God to be the one who does the renewing.

The first petition is one that echoes previous thoughts—that David the sinner needs cleansing. **אָרְז** has the root meaning of "sin," but in the Piel it has the special meaning of "de-sin" or "purify." David interestingly combines this imperfect verb with an instrument of cleansing well-known to any Jew, the hyssop plant. This plant was used in the ceremonial washings dictated by God in Leviticus 14 and Numbers 19. However, we note here that David does not make this cleansing request of some priest, but of God. David knows that if God does the cleansing and purifying, he will indeed be clean, "**whiter than the snow.**" Isaiah preached this same good news using the same visual aid: "**Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow**" (Is. 1:18). It would also do us good to remember another instance in which the hyssop plant was used. The very first time we find it used is as an application instrument for the Passover lamb's blood on the door-posts of those Jews who were looking to be spared of the final Egyptian plague. This "reference in Psalm 51:7...refers to the application of the blood of the lamb, for it is only, Scripture says, with the shedding of blood that there can be remission of

<sup>9</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 12. p. 351.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, *op. cit.* p. 802.

sins."<sup>11</sup> The blood mixture used with the hyssop plant in these religious ceremonies also reminds us how we are made completely clean: "**The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin**" (I John 1:7).

The next petition for renewal concerns the spirit in which David wants to serve God. As we said before, David had been crushed by Nathan's indictment. He was so affected by Nathan's message that he spent an entire week fasting and weeping. (The depths of his grief are also evident from the message of Psalm 32, another penitential psalm.) But now David wishes to be restored; he wants to "**hear joy and gladness**;" he wants to be reminded once again of God's free and faithful love. How often doesn't this same situation play itself out, not only in our own lives, but the lives of our parishioners? The guilt and shame of a particular sin might weigh heavy on a person's conscience for days or weeks, until he finally seeks out our guidance and counsel. What is the only thing that will restore him? The same words our Lord himself uttered: "**Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven**" (Matt.9:2). When a person becomes sure of his divine forgiveness, his entire being is filled with gladness. This is the kind of good news that promises to bring happiness to any crushed sinner, and thus it is vital to the renewal process.

Earlier David had confessed that his sins were done in the sight of God. Now another part of the renewal process is that God hide those sins from his face. This is the first imperative in this long list of petitions, and it is immediately followed by another which begs God to also wipe the slate clean. Remember that כרת is usually used in connection with debts—debts of sin that we cannot hope to pay back or delete from our account. However, God can, and when he does, he no longer holds a person's sin against him; the person no longer has a huge debt in his spiritual account. This same picture of love is related to us in Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant. The servant had accrued such a debt that there was nothing left to do but appeal to the pity of his master, which he did. And we know what happened: "**The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go**" (Matt. 18:27).

That these two petitions were answered, we can be assured, for David has told us so in another one of his psalms: "**As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us**" (Ps. 103:12). However, we need to realize that God does more than just remove our sins from us. He also removes them from our "account" and even from his own memory. "**I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers them no more**" (Is. 43:25). Likewise, forgiving and forgetting sin is something we are instructed to do, "**forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you**" (Eph. 4:32). Unfortunately, it may be something that is not easily done among ourselves, but fortunately for us, it is something that God promises to do and has already done for us.

Following this verse is another imperative, the meaning of which indicates the destructive force of sin. David asks, "**Create in me a pure heart, O God.**" It is interesting to note that, just as David knows there is nothing he can do for his own justification ("**Have mercy on me, O God**"), so there is nothing he can do for his own sanctification. Both have to be addressed by God and accomplished by God. In fact, this renewal process calls for a special miracle of God, the use of his almighty creative power which was first demonstrated at the beginning of time. And because renewal is a never-ending process in a never-perfect human, David correctly prays for a "**steadfast spirit**," one that will be able to weather the attacks of the devil, world and flesh because it is strengthened by God.

No doubt one thing that crossed David's mind when he was still in the throes of guilt and shame over his sin was that God might abandon him as he did his predecessor Saul. For this reason, the next petition begs that God would never leave him or forsake him: "**Do not cast me from your presence.**" Again we see just how serious sin is, and how important the saving grace of God is. Without God we have no grace; without grace we have no forgiveness of sins; without the forgiveness of sins we have no life. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is also vital to the renewal process of a repentant sinner, and David includes the request for his presence as well ("**or take your Holy Spirit from me**"), realizing that a loss of the Spirit would mean a total loss of God's saving grace. There is a lesson here for us, too. Through careless and reckless sinning, we put ourselves in danger of

<sup>11</sup> Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. III, p.235.

being prohibited from the presence of our Protector and Provider and being excluded from the comfort and control of our Counselor. Renewal in our sanctified lives needs to have all persons of the Trinity present so they can work their mighty wonders on us in their own special way.

Finally David ends his prayer for renewal with another appeal to God to bring happiness into his life: **"Restore to me the joy of salvation."** This joy is different from the **"joy and gladness"** which offered to him the forgiveness of sins, but it is related, for without forgiveness there can be no hope of salvation. David's sin obviously drove him to the depths of depression, even to the point of fearing the final condemnation itself. In his contrition, therefore, it is his desire to once again experience the joy of salvation which reassures him that he will be with his Lord on the Last Day. Until that day comes, there is the added opportunity to put that joy into practice, serving the Lord in his kingdom. For this reason David prays for a spirit that is willing to serve God and not succumb again to the selfish desires of the sinful flesh. Once again we notice that God has to be the power behind this renewal, for we know that **"the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak"** (Matt. 26:41).

The fact that David prays that God renew so many things in his life is a testimony to how many things we lose when we sin. The devil seems to argue, as he has since the beginning of time, that we stand to gain so much if we would just follow our own desires. Likewise, the temptations he uses are tailor-made for each one of us individuals, enticing us to indulge in what we might consider real pleasure and happiness. However, the hard fact is that sin robs us of God's grace and the blessings he wants to bestow on us, and unless God renews the new man, we will never realize the potential of those blessings. That is why repentance and renewal ought to be uttered in the same breath of any prayer that seeks forgiveness from God.

15 אֲלֶמְדָּה פִּשְׁעִים דָּרְכֶיךָ וְחַטָּאִים אֶלֶיךָ יָשׁוּבוּ:  
 16 הֲצִילֵנִי מִדַּמִּים אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי תְשׁוּעָתִי תִרְגַּן לְשׁוֹנֵי צִדְקָתְךָ:  
 17 אֲדַנִּי שִׁפְתֵי תִפְתָּח וּפִי יִגִּיד תְהִלָּתְךָ:  
 18 כִּי לֹא־תִחַפֵּץ זֶבַח וְאַתְנָה עוֹלָה לֹא תִרְצֶה:  
 19 זָבַחֵי אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ נִשְׁבָּרָה לִב־נִשְׁבָּר וְנִדְכָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא תִבְזֶה:  
 20 הִיטִיבָה בְרִצּוֹנְךָ אֶת־צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם:  
 21 אַז תִּחַפֵּץ זָבַחֵי־צֶדֶק עוֹלָה וְכִלְיִל אַז יַעֲלוּ עַל־מִזְבִּיחְךָ כָּרִים:

**15 (13) I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. 16 (14) Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. 17 (15) O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will make known your praise. 18 (16) For you do not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you are not pleased with a burnt offering. 19 (17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. 20 (18) In your favor do good to Zion; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. 21 (19) Then you will delight in righteous sacrifices and whole burn offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.**

The petitioning for mercy and cleansing is now over. David realizes that he has sinned, and that he has offended God; his repentance has been heart-felt and soulful, fully trusting in God for forgiveness. However, David's penitent prayer would be woefully incomplete if he did not also include a list of good intentions that would prove to God and to others that his repentance was indeed genuine. That is why he ends his prayer with a promise of thankful service, an inventory of good works which he plans to do to show his love and thanks to God for his wonderful love and mercy. We must realize that this promise is not out of line in a penitential prayer, but right in line with what the rest of Scripture promotes—that good works must follow true repentance.

For it is true that in the doctrine of repentance works are required, because certainly a new life is required...And yet Christ often connects the promise of the remission of sins to good works, not because He means that good works are a propitiation, for they follow reconciliation; but for two



reasons. One is, because good fruits must necessarily follow. Therefore he reminds us that, if good fruits do not follow, the repentance is hypocritical and feigned. The other is, because we have need of external signs of so great a promise.<sup>12</sup>

The first good work which David promises to do proves that he knew he was forgiven and renewed; for only the love of God which has been realized by one sinner will motivate that same sinner to tell others of his new-found joy and happiness. What catches our attention, though, is the kind of sinners with whom David is going to share this good news. **כִּשְׁפָעִים** are those who "rebel" against God just like he did. Notice, also, what the content of his message- **דְּרִבְרֵיךָ** "**your ways**," God's good and holy ways as opposed to the ways of the wicked. These ways, of course, include the whole counsel of God, both the Law and the Gospel, just as David had experienced it in connection with his situation. David knew that the only "way" which causes others to recognize their sinfulness is to have the Law applied to their hearts. Likewise, the only "way" which causes others to see God as their Savior and to "**turn back to (him)**" is to hear that wonderful Gospel call which proclaims God's covenant love and his tender mercy.

There are a number of similarities between the work of David's first promise and the work we have vowed to do. The message that David carried to others is still the same one we carry today—Law and Gospel, just as Jesus commissioned us to teach "**everything I have commanded you**" (Matt. 28:20). In fact it was this same message, even the same "ways," that Isaiah also had the privilege of preaching: "**Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will freely have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'**" (Is. 55:7-9). The method also remains the same for us to this day. The only way we can ever hope to "**teach transgressors (his) ways**" is not through slick-sounding logic or fancy gimmicks, but through the faithful use of God's Word, expounding the ways of God so that men might turn from their wicked ways and be saved. Even the motivation remains the same as in David's day: "**Christ's love compels us...**" (II Cor. 5:14). Since we are also sinners who are covered by the blood of the Lamb, a fact we can't help but be reminded of in our daily study of God's Word, may we daily renew ourselves in this same promise that David made as his first response of thankful service.

The next verse is one that catches us a little off guard because it doesn't seem to flow naturally with the rest of this section. David cries out, "**Save me from bloodguilt, O God...**" **דַּמְיִךְ** simply means "blood," but in many instances it also denotes the guilt which accompanies the crime of shedding blood, which in this case would be the murder of Uriah. It shouldn't bother us that David breaks his line of thought here to cry out in anguish, for who of us doesn't occasionally feel the guilt pangs of past sins, even when we are intently trying to carry out sanctified lives? Part of living with a sinful human nature is the fact that we will never be totally apart from the effects of sin (guilt, shame, ruined reputations, etc...) this side of heaven. Like Paul said, "**What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**" (Rom. 7:24) David knew the answer ("**the God who saves me**") as soon as he cried out, which is why he was able to continue with his next promise: "**and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.**" Likewise, when the residue of sins long past invades our memories and tries to disrupt our lives, we would do well to remember the righteousness that God makes available to us repentant sinners, that righteousness which hides our sin from his sight, that righteousness Paul also spoke of "**Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord**" (Rom. 7:25).

David naturally continues with this spirit of thanks by promising not only to use his tongue to teach others of God's love, but also to use it in making known the praises of God: "**O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.**" What a contrast this verse gives us of the old David and the new David. Before forgiveness, David would probably have preferred seclusion in the privacy of his palace; but now after forgiveness, we see him willingly and fearlessly proclaiming the mercy of God in public. David couldn't help but sing of God who had taken him from the depths of such unmoral degradation to newfound heights of hope

<sup>12</sup> *Apology*, Art. III, 154. P. 199.

and happiness. What a testimony to the power of God's love—where sin was so great, and yet God's love was even greater. It was this same love which now enabled David to glorify God. "It is the responsibility and privilege of all men to make God's excellencies prominent before the Old Testament church and before the world."<sup>13</sup>

If David is going to make an outward show of service through praises and singing which result from his renewed life, then it is only logical that inwardly he have the proper spirit to produce these God-pleasing works. Consequently he spends the next two verses privately reflecting and publicly instructing what kind of a spirit God is looking for. David first addresses this subject from a negative point of view: "**You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**" The main thrust of this verse, of course, is that God is not pleased with those who simply go through the motions of making offerings. It doesn't matter whether it is an offering of a general nature (קָרָבָן) or even the ones used to make atonement (עֹלֹתָהּ). The sacrifices do not make a person's penitence God-pleasing. What God cares about is whether they are offered in the right spirit and in faith. Again we hear Isaiah echo this same theme: "**The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me? says the LORD. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats**" (Is. 1:11).

Having made his point with the negative, David then proceeds to the positive: "**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.**" David knew what true sacrifice was. It was not a heart which covered up sin, but instead one which freely confessed it. It was not a spirit which was proud and haughty, but instead one which was humble and penitent. It was not a life that was filled with hatred and stood in defiance against God, but instead one which had been cut down by God's Law and was now yearning for the soothing salve of the God's Gospel.

This whole concept of heart worship instead of hand worship is not indigenous to David. Other prophets and servants of God made similar appeals to God's people. One of the most memorable calls for true repentance and worship comes from Joel: "**Even now, declares the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity**" (Joel 2:12-13). There is much value in these verses, from both David and Joel, which should find its way into our messages, too. God accepts only those spirits who recognize their sins. Anyone who fails to see his sin will be rejected by God. On the other hand, God will not turn away from any who come to him with their broken spirits, asking for forgiveness.

Finally David concludes his wonderful message with a special request of God, even though, again, we have another part of this prayer which seems a little out of the ordinary. In fact, there are those holding to the historical critical viewpoint who would deny outright that David could have penned these words. "They are clearly added by a Jerusalem enthusiast who must have come along later, and who seems to contradict the statement of verse 16."<sup>14</sup> There are a number of ways we could refute this theory. First, v.19 does not contradict v. 16, as we will see later. Second, the words "Zion" and "Jerusalem" are often used to refer to God's church, his family of believers. This is one of those examples. Third, we have no problem attributing these verses to David, for we know that by his sin, he caused damage to the "walls" of God's church, tearing them down and causing spiritual ruin among God's people. Finally, since David was both the civil authority among God's people and a religious leader, and since he was the one who had caused spiritual harm, it is only fitting that he is the one who includes the spiritual welfare of God's church in his prayer.

It is in the loving spirit of a spiritual leader that David prays: "**In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.**" The verb בָּנֶה is in the emphatic position in this verse, and for good reason. David "acknowledges that the covenant LORD is the source of all that is good and pleasing to mankind. This 'doing good' is not capacious, but based on the covenant relationship revealed to the patriarchs."<sup>15</sup> David

<sup>13</sup> Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 549-550.

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>15</sup> Harris, *op. cit.* p. 375.

was concerned about his people. He didn't want them to fall into the same trap that he had, nor did he want them to become spiritually lax just because their leader had faltered. Consequently he wants God to do the good that he couldn't. He wants God to make sure his good Word is preached correctly—the Law stinging like it should, the Gospel saving like it should. He wants the good blessings which God has in store for his people not to be hindered because of himself. Then, when God is the one who does the building and the blessing, when God is the one who makes the church prosper and works in it according to his good pleasure, when God strengthens faith and instills faith-works, "**then there will be righteous offerings,**" which are the kind that God will be pleased with (cf. v. 16).

The humility which David shows in this request tells us something about our own leadership. There are times when we may cause spiritual damage to the Church, maybe through insensitivity or immaturity or just plain ignorance. And the damage we have caused may be irreparable as far as our own power is concerned. That's when God comes shining through for us. His love not only forgives us the times when we do harm to his Church; we can also appeal to him and his love to work in spite of us to continue building his Church.

What is involved in the act of repentance? Ask that question of your parishioners or confirmation class, and more than likely you will only get half an answer: "Being sorry for our sins." Thank God that David included quite a lengthy section of his penitential prayer in order to remind us that repentance also includes "intending with the help of the Holy Spirit to amend our sinful lives." Nowhere is that expressed more beautifully, I think, than in this little known poem by Esther Schumann:

*It's easy to say we are sorry, and look to our Savior for grace,  
But the proof lies in shunning the evil, with God's strength to do an 'about face.'  
God seeks for the fruits in His children, that their sins they would truly lament,  
And His cry still rings out to each sinner, 'Repent, O my children, repent.'  
It is easy to speak of forgiveness and the love and the mercy of God  
And to humble ourselves for a moment when we feel the sting of his rod.  
But if we would follow the Master and answer discipleship's call,  
Our lives must conform to His teachings, not in some channels, but all. "<sup>16</sup>*

Of course, no exegesis on Psalm 51 would be complete unless we also included the keen insight of Luther as he summarized each of the psalms on which he lectured. His summary also serves as a very fitting conclusion to the exegesis part of this paper.

The Fifty-first Psalm is one of the leading doctrinal Psalms (*Lehrpsalm*). In it David teaches us aright what sin is, what the origin of sin is, what harm sin does, and how one may rid himself of sin. For in this Psalm and nowhere else is sin set forth so clearly, as something that is inherited and inborn, which no work can counteract, but against which God's grace and forgiveness alone can help us. God must create us anew by his Spirit and must beget us as new beings and creatures. Otherwise sin is so powerful that it also breaks the bones, as he says, instilling us with fear and despair, until his grace comes to comfort us. After we have again become renewed by grace and the Spirit, then we can teach, praise, give thanks, and preach aright, yea, even carry our affliction and cross. All of these he also calls the right sacrifices and service and repudiates all the other sacrifices which are brought by the mad saints minus the right sacrifices. At the close of this Psalm the Psalmist prays that God may build and preserve Jerusalem for such sacrifices and services.<sup>17</sup>

### *Doctrinal Values*

<sup>16</sup> Schumann, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Peters, *Quartalschrift Theological Quarterly*, pp. 24-25.

Psalm 51 is arguably one of the richest and most important psalms, both in doctrine and in genuine Christian spirit. Add this to the fact that it is one of the most recognizable psalms, and the pastor has a portion of Scripture that is most valuable for preaching, for counseling, for devotions, even for personal contemplation. The psalm calms the troubled soul, leads to true repentance, reveals a truly loving God; it offers forgiveness, restores hope, lifts up the spirit; it is **"useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"** (II Tim. 3:16-17). Specifically, there are a number of doctrines this psalm addresses and, consequently, it could be used for sermon texts or proof passages. Some of these doctrines are as follows:

### *Sin*

Sin is serious in God's sight. It is open rebellion, it is straying from the mark of perfection he has demanded of us, it is a debt which, when left unchecked, accrues on a daily basis. Sin affects our relationship with God. Sin is a part of the human life—no one is excluded. Sin includes not only our actions, but also our sinful nature, and both kinds need to be included in our repentance. Sin is a stain on the soul. Sin proves that God is the only one who is righteous and the only one who can justify. Sin makes repentance a prerequisite to Christian living. Without recognizing that we are sinful and without repenting of that sin, we cannot begin to live in a God-pleasing way, much less show our thanks for all God has done for us.

### *God's Love*

The love of God is never-failing. It is something which he has promised to the contrite sinner, and thus we have every right to hold him to that covenant-promise. God's love far exceeds all our sin. In love, God not only takes away our sin, he obliterates it from both his memory and our record. We have confidence in knowing that when he washes us, we will be clean and whiter than snow. It is only by God's love, and not our own merits, that we are forgiven. God not only empties us of our sin, he also fills us with the ability to lead a life of love in response to his love. God's love in the Gospel gives true joy and happiness to the repentant sinner.

### *Sanctification*

First of all, this psalm displays for us the vital truth that sanctification follows justification. Any portion of Scripture which teaches us this should be duly noted so as to offer ready material to refute reformed theology. It then goes on to teach us that there is a desire in the one who has realized God's love to live a sanctified life as a loving response. Part of that response will be the sharing of the same good news which has been made known to that individual. Another verbal response will be the singing of praises to God for the wonders of his salvation. Sanctified living which is inspired by God's love will also lead to giving which pleases God, giving which comes from a cheerful heart. The forgiven sinner will also realize that renewal is an ongoing process, one that needs constant attention from God, one that constantly needs to go to the Word for strength, one that realizes the need for constant prayer to God for renewal

### *Homiletical Suggestions*

Just in case you missed the theme and parts of this paper, they could just as well serve as theme and parts for a sermon on this psalm:

#### *The Prayer of a Penitent Person*

- I. The plea for mercy
- II. The penitence over sin
- III. The petition for renewal
- IV. The promise of thankful service

Since this psalm was written by one of God's leaders, we as leaders in his kingdom can especially take its message to heart. The message might be appropriate at a conference's or district convention's worship service under this theme:

#### *God's Leaders Long For God's Love*

- I. We realize our own condemning sinfulness.
- II. We remember God's covenant love for us.
- III. We respond by leading congregations to know God's love.

The text can find use on other occasions, too. If the preacher is looking for a slightly different flavor for a Trinity Sunday text, or maybe he's looking for a children's sermon that has a text they already know and a theme they can relate to, then the following might serve a purpose:

#### *The Holy Trinity - Spiritual "Tide" For Today's Toughest Sin-Stains*

- I. God the Father promises to "wash" us from our sin. (v. 1)
- II. God the Son "cleans" and "whitens" us with his blood. (vv. 2,7)
- III. God the Holy Spirit "brightens" our lives with a new spirit. (vv. 10-12)

One final homiletical suggestion has to deal with the manifold opportunities this psalm outlines for the individual or congregation of believers who are looking for ways to express their thanks. These opportunities can find avenues both in the public worship service and the private spiritual life of just about anyone, and each one has the common denominator of God's motivating love which is known to the believer and is to be made known to others.

#### *Let Us Give Thanks To The Lord For His Unfailing Love*

- I. By teaching others about his love (13)
- II. By praising him for his love (14,15)
- III. By offering sacrifices which acknowledge his love (16,17)
- IV. By praying that the church may be built up in his love (18,19)

### *Pastoral Values*

I have yet to meet a brother who does not need extra material for devotions, a mini-Bible study series for administrative meetings, or a topical series for meetings with different ladies' groups. Since this psalm speaks of sin and its serious effects on us, and since it also rightly speaks of the intensity and immensity of God's love which pities the sinner and pardons the sin, there are many different themes and ideas which could well be used in these other avenues of our ministry. Psalm 51 is one of those rare texts which refers to sin in a number of

different ways. When a pastor can rightly display how distinct sin is, and how diversely it affects the relationship between God and us, there will surely follow a realization of the many facets of sin and a spirit of true repentance which this psalm aims to produce. Likewise, the pastor will have at hand in the many illustrations of God's mercy a number of ways which describe how selfless and all-sufficient God's love is. You will notice that the different themes and parts which follow rely very heavily on the individual meanings of the Hebrew words found in each verse (something you can bring out easily without sounding like too much of an egghead), and you will also notice that some of the individual parts draw heavily from the writings of the apostles as they portray Jesus as the fulfillment of this Scripture (hence the underlined proof passages). The vivid portrayal of sin, the repentance which comes as a result to the believing heart, and the only place to which a sinner can go for forgiveness can all be summed up in the general theme:

### **The Contrite Sinner Cries Out To God**

Among the many different texts throughout the Bible which could establish a spirit of true repentance and reveal the only remedy for sin, Ps. 51:1a is one that achieves that purpose very well. It speaks of the inferior subject crying out to the superior God, the covenant love which never fails, and (if you want to include the "sin" word of v. 1b) the rebellious nature of the sinner. For these reasons the first cry is this:

*"Have Mercy On Me, O God" (1a)*

- I. I rebelled against the covenant of your Law.
- II. I rely on the covenant of your love.

Proof passages: Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 108:4; Eph. 2:1-4

The next theme focuses mainly on the verb which deals with the wiping out of a debt. Having this as the main thought avoids too much overlap with other verses that speak of "transgressions." It also incorporates some of Paul's ideas on this theme of debit and credit.

*"Blot Out My Transgressions" (1b)*

- I. I have accrued a debt of sin against you.
- II. You have accredited your Son's righteousness to me.

Proof passages: Ps. 130:3; Lam. 3:22-23; Rom. 3:23-26; 5:1-2; II Cor. 5:19,21

The theme and parts in this section take their cue from both of the "sin" words found in the verse and the cleansing process which rids us of such sin.

*"Wash Away All My Iniquity" (2)*

- I. Purify me from my "less-than-perfect" life. (2b)
- II. Remove the stain of my guilt and shame. (2a)

Proof passages: Is. 64:6; Eph. 5:26-27; Titus 3:4-7

The main thrust of this entire verse is the actual acknowledgment of sin and the accompaniment of sin's consequences. Note the help from John's wonderful confessional verses in his first epistle.

*"I Know My Transgressions" (3)*

- I. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.
- II. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and will forgive us our sins.

Proof passages: Ac. 5:1-11; I Jn. 1:8-9

This verse speaks of nothing but God's righteousness and our failure to meet his standards. Since Paul used this same verse in his discourse to the Romans, it is only fitting that we use his words to help explain this verse.

*"Against You Have I Sinned" (4)*

- I. God's righteousness demands a perfect life of me.
- II. God's love provides a perfect righteousness for me.

Proof passages: Lev. 19:2; Rom. 3:1-22

Here the focus is on the sinful nature which has been passed on from generation to generation. Paul provides the parts which prove this theme in our own lives.

*"Surely I Was Sinful At Birth" (5)*

- I. Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.
- II. Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Proof passages: Jn. 3:6; Rom. 5:12-21; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 4:4-7

This next theme deals with "the truth" which God desires and teaches. Incorporate Pilate's infamous question into the scheme, and now we have a subtle way of examining what the truth is and how it applies to our contrite hearts.

*"Surely You Desire Truth" (6)*

- I. What is truth?
- II. What does the truth have to do with me?

Proof passages: Jn. 8:38; I Tim. 2:4; Titus 1:1

There are some who may hesitate to include the word "hyssop" in this next theme, but remember that it lends itself very well to teaching us just what it is that makes us pure and holy in God's sight.

*"Cleanse Me With Hyssop and I Will Be Clean" (7)*

- I. The blood of animals only cleanses ceremonially.
- II. The blood of the Lamb cleanses completely.

Proof passages: Ex. 12:22; Lev. 17:11; Jn. 1:29; Heb. 9:11-14:22; I Pet. 1:18-19; I Jn. 1:17

Finally, one cannot have any sort of devotional series or Bible study unless it ends on some sort of positive note which brings joy and gladness to the heart of the believer. Consequently, this last theme serves quite well as a transition from the sadness and strife our sin has caused to the joy which only God can offer through his Son Jesus Christ.

*"Let Me Hear Joy and Gladness" (8)*

- I. Your Law has crushed my spirit.
- II. Your Gospel has lifted my spirit.

Proof passages: Mt. 19:17-19; Jn. 3:16; Ac. 16:25-34; Gal. 3:10-12; II Tim. 3:15

(or)

- I. My Savior lived, obeying God's commands perfectly for me.
- II. My Savior died, taking away the wages of death.
- III. My Savior rose, giving me the gift of life.

Proof passages: Ac. 2:32-38; Rom. 6:23; I Cor. 15:20-23, 55-57; Hebr. 4:14-15

## Vocabulary

### Verse 1

לְמַנְצִיחַ    לָ + Pi. act. part. נָצַח = "lead in music"

### Verse 3

חַנּוּנִי    Qal impv. m.s. חָנַן "show favor, be gracious"  
 כְּחֶסֶדְךָ    חֶסֶד "loving kindness, covenant love"  
 רַחֲמֶיךָ    רַחַם "tender affection (mother to newborn); pity"  
 מְחָה    Qal impv. m.s. מָחָה "wipe out, erase, blot from memory"  
 פְּשָׁעֵי    פָּשַׁע "rebellion, transgression"

### Verse 4

הֶרַב    Hiph. inf. abs. רָבַר used adverbially, "completely, thoroughly" (GK 75gg)  
 כְּבַסְיָי    Pi. impv. m.s. "to wash" (GK 120g)  
 וַיַּחְטְאֵתִי    מָן + חָטָא "sin" (miss the mark)

### Verse 6

תְּזַכֶּה    Qal impf. 2 m.s. זָכָה "be pure, cleanse"

### Verse 7

חֹלְלֵתִי    Polal pf. 1 s. חוּל "be born"  
 יִחַמְתָּנִי    Pi. pf. 3 f.s. יָחַם "be in heat; conceive" (GK 64h)

### Verse 8

חִפְצֵךָ    Qal pf. 2 m.s. חָפַצ "desire"  
 בְּטַחֹתַי    בָּ + טָחַת "inward parts"  
 וּבְסֻתָּם    בָּ + Qal pass. part. סָתַם "hidden, secret places;" lit. "shut up, stop up"  
 תּוֹדִיעֵנִי    Hiph. impf. 2 m.s., 1 s. suffix יָדַע "know; (hiph. - cause to know)"

### Verse 9

תַּחַטְטְאֵנִי    Pi. impf. 2 m.s. חָטָא "sin;" privative piel = opposite: "de-sin, purify"  
 בְּאֶזוֹב    בָּ + אָזוֹב "hyssop"  
 וְאֶטְהַר    Qal impf. 1 m.s. טָהַר "be clean (morally)"  
 וּמִשֶּׁלֶג    מִן (of comparison: "than") + שָׁלַג "snow"  
 אֶלְבִּין    Hiph. impf. 1 m.s. לָבַן "be white"

### Verse 10

שִׂשׂוֹן    "joy, rejoicing"  
 תִּגְלָנָה    Qal impf. 3 f.p. גִּיל "circle around; run around in joy; rejoice"  
 עֲצָמוֹת    אָצַם "bones" (GK 155h)  
 דְּכִיתָ    Pi. pf. 2 m.s. דָּכָה "crush, pound, beat" (used only in Psalms)

### Verse 11



הִסְתַּר Hiph. imv. 2 m.s. סָתַר "hide"

Verse 12

נָכוֹן Niph. part. m.s. כּוֹן "fixed aright; steadfast"

חִדְּשׁ Pi. imv. 2 m.s. חָדַשׁ "renew"

Verse 13

תִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי Hiph. impf 2 m.s. שָׁלַךְ "throw, cast"

תִּקַּח Qal impf. 2 m.s. לָקַח "take"

Verse 14

הִשִּׁיבָה Hiph. imv. emphatic שׁוּב "return"

תִּסְמְכֵנִי Qal impf. 2 m.s. + 1 s. suffix סָמַךְ "support, lean, rest, sustain"

Verse 15

אִלְמָדָה Pi. impf 1 s. לָמַד "learn; (piel) teach"

Verse 16

הִצִּילֵנִי Hiph. imv. m.s. נָצַל "rescue, deliver"

תִּרְנֹן Pi. impf. f.s. רָגַן "shout for joy, sing"

Verse 17

תִּפְתַּח Qal impf 2 m. s. פָּתַח "open"

יִגִּיד Hiph. Impf. 3 m.s. נָגַד "tell, make known"

Verse 18

זָבַח "offering"

תִּרְצָה "burnt offering"

Verse 19

נִשְׁבְּרָה Niph. part. m.s. שָׁבַר "break in pieces"

וְנִדְּכָה Niph. part. m.s. דָּכָה "be crushed"

תִּבְזֶה Qal impf. 2 m.s. בָּזָה "despise"

Verse 20

הִיטִיבָה Hiph. impv. m.s. יָטַב "do good, deal well with"

תִּבְנֶה Qal impf. 2 m. s. בָּנָה "build"

VERSE 21

יַעֲלוּ Qal impf 3 m.p. עָלָה "go up; (with sacrifices) offer"

### *Bibliography*

- , *Concordia Triglotta. Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1921.
- Brown, Francis. *The New Brown - Driver - Briggs - Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass. 1979.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms*. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1984.
- Brug, John F. *The People's Bible: Psalms*, vol. 1. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1989.
- Harris, R. Laird; Gleason, L. Archer, Jr.; and Waltke, Bruce K. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, 1980.
- Kautzsch, E. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, transl. by A.E. Cowley. Oxford University Press, London, 1976.
- Keil, C.F.; F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol.V: Psalms. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1978.
- Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of the Psalms*. Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1959.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works, American Edition*. vol.12. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1955.
- Maclaren, Alexander. *Exposition of Holy Scriptures, Book of Psalms: LI to CXLV*. Hodder and Stoughton, New York.
- Montgomery, James. "Prayer is the Soul's Sincere Desire" found in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1941.
- Oesterley, Willian Oscar. *A Fresh Approach to the Psalms*. Ivor, Nickolson and Watson, London, 1937.
- Peters, Paul. "A Translation of Some of Luther's 'Summarien'" found in *Quartalschrift Theological Quarterly*, vol. 50. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1953.
- Pieper, Francis, D.D. *Christian Dogmatics*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1950.
- Schumann, Esther A. *The Northwestern Lutheran*, vol. 41:6. Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1954.
- Tenney, Merrill C., gen.ed. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1976.