

## Leader Notes – Lesson 11 – Lord, Have Mercy! Psalm 51

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.  
YOU WILL ROB YOURSELF OF THE JOY OF DISCOVERY!**

### To the facilitator:

YOU PROBABLY WON'T HAVE TIME TO DISCUSS ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THE LESSON IN YOUR SMALL GROUP, BUT **SAVE TIME TO END WITH THE RESPONSE QUESTIONS** AS THE CLOSE OF THIS LESSON. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT EVERYONE SEE HOW COMPLETE GOD'S FORGIVENESS IS AND HOW HE CAN WORK GOOD OUT OF BAD!

### DISCUSSION STARTER

- Think of a time when you received something you absolutely did not deserve. How did it make you feel?

### PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 51**, ask the **Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth** (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read **Psalm 51** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that are meaningful to you and put a question mark by anything that you don't understand.

**Suggestion for reading the Psalm together:**

**Reader A:** Odd verses

**Reader B:** Even verses

3. Write out a verse from this Psalm that you would like to remember.

**Have a few share what verse they chose and why they want to remember it**

### QUESTIONS

4. In order to understand the setting for this Psalm, read what led to David writing it in **2 Samuel 11-12:14**. (It's not a boring story!)

**Have someone review the highlights of David's story so that everyone understands why David wrote this Psalm**

Considering David's statement and Nathan's reply in **2 Samuel 12:13**, why do you think David found it necessary to compose **Psalm 51**?

After David admitted that he had sinned against the Lord, Nathan told him that God "has taken away your sin". Forgiveness was given at that point. However, Psalm 51 is the cry to David's heart to a God he deeply loved and whom he deeply grieved by what he did. This psalm is David getting his relationship right with God again. David wanted to express to God personally his sorrow and ask for forgiveness and cleansing. Confession of sin is important for us for the same reason. Our relationship with God needs to be restored.

♥ How did David the Psalm-writer, react to God's correction? How do you react to God's correction? David was a poet and a musician. He used his creative gifts to express his sorrow over his sin and to express his love of God. Each of us will have our own way of communicating with God and expressing our love to him. Very often, we will express ourselves with the very gifts and abilities that God has put into us when he designed us.

5. What three things does David ask God to do in **51:1-2**?  
(Some might say there are 4 things that David asks for)  
He asks God to have mercy  
Blot out his transgression  
Wash and cleanse me from my sin

Why did David dare to ask for these things? **51:1**

The only reason David dare approach God and ask to be restored is because he knew God was a God of UNFAILING love and GREAT compassion. We cannot do anything to "earn" our forgiveness. It is a gift from God given because of his loving and compassionate character. God doesn't forgive us because we "promise to never do it again" or "I'll serve you the rest of my life". We ask for forgiveness solely on the basis of God's loving and compassionate character.

6. What terms does David use to describe himself and his wrongdoing in **51:1-5**?  
Transgressions; stain of my sin; iniquity; shameful deeds; sin, sinner, sinful; evil

♥ Sin has become an unpopular and little-used word in our culture. What do you think it is and how would you define it?

The short answer is disobedience to God's law, God's word and God's commands. However, it is interesting to ask, "What makes something a sin"? What makes good, good and what makes bad, bad? Is something a sin just because God says it's wrong? Does God just make up what is right and what is wrong?

Those who did the GTBS Old Testament study (Unlocking the Treasures of the OT) may recall that God's holy and pure character is behind all his commands to us. God's laws, which we are to obey, are rooted in his nature or character. For example: Love is right and good because God IS love – not because God just decided it was a good thing to do. God doesn't just make up rules for us to live by. The commands and laws he gives us to live by are a description of his character. His commands are WHO HE IS. So, we can say that **sin** is any **thought, word or action** that is NOT LIKE GOD. Sin is anything we do (or don't do) that doesn't reflect the pure and holy character of God.

Instead of living by a set of rules (which we find to be more comfortable), we need to ask: Does this action, thought or word (that I am about to do or have done) reflect God's character? Does it mirror and imitate WHO GOD IS? If the answer is **yes**, the action is good and not a sin. If the answer is **NO**, because it does **not** reflect God's character, it is sure to be a sin.

God **IS** everything we know to be right, good and true. It is WHO GOD IS that makes things "right". That is why moral (moral means "having to do with right or wrong") absolutes do not change. Right will always be right and wrong will always be wrong because God's character never changes! (This is why David says in 51:4 – "Against you (God), and you only have I sinned")

7. What is David's attitude toward his sin? **51:3-5**

He totally admits his wrongdoing. He does not makes excuses or try to rationalize his actions. He takes full responsibility. He admits to always being sinful. (We all are born sinners because we inherit a sin nature from our sinful parents who inherited it from their parents – all the way back to Adam and Eve.)

♥ How honest are you about your sin? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10.

♥ Do you ever recall getting your hand "caught in the cookie jar" as a child? An adult? How did you react?

8. What effect (physically, emotionally and spiritually) did David's guilt have on him?

**Psalm 32:1-5** (specifically **verses 3-4**) – physical discomfort – bones wasting away, groaning; the weight of guilt on him day and night; strength sapped

**51:2,7** – He felt dirty and asked to be washed and cleansed and made white again

**51:3** – He couldn't get his sin out of his mind – it was haunting and hounding him

**51:8** – no joy or gladness – sorrow, sadness, depression

**51:10** – he felt his dirty heart and his spirit felt dead

**51:12** – lack of joy and lack of a willingness to want to obey

♥ How do you feel when there is unconfessed sin in your life? How does God convince you of your sin?

♥ As Christians, we know we are sinful. Why then, is it so painful to be confronted with a specific sin?

9. Since David's sin involved others, what is the meaning of **51:4** and what does this show us about the nature of sin?

(See the answer to the Heart Questions above that defines sin.) All sin is against God first. Something is sin because it is us falling short of God's glory and righteous standard. We can still sin even if we don't hurt or offend someone else. Sin is anything that offends God.

10. If we are born as sinners (**51:5**), sin must be something more than doing wrong things. What else is it? See the answer to question 7 and the Heart Question under Question 6

11. According to **51:6**, what does David infer to be the opposite of sin and guilt?

**TRUTH (honesty)**

Can sin and truth coexist in the heart (your inner being)? Why or why not?

Have several explain their answer. Truth exposes sin. The minute we admit the truth or are honest with ourselves, we have to admit our sin. We cannot continue in a sinful behavior and have "truth in our inner parts".

♥ What role does honesty play in our receiving forgiveness and what part does denial play in our remaining guilty?

♥ How would you answer the person who says, "I've never done anything as bad as what David did. Psalm 51 doesn't really apply to me." Sin is sin (see definition above) and we all are sinners. All sin has consequences. It doesn't really matter if it is a BIG sin or a SMALL sin. Any sin offends God's holy character and it needs to be confessed and forgiven and cleansed.

♥ Are you ever tempted to rationalize your sin? How should you view your sin?

♥ Why did David verbalize his sorrow and confession so specifically? What can we learn from his example? It is not enough (and not very satisfying) to say "God, forgive me of all my sin." The word confession means that we specifically admit to what we have done. Literally, confession means "to say the same thing about my sin that God does". We need to be very specific when we confess our sins. It is for OUR benefit that God asks us to be specific.

12. David asks to be *restored* in **51:7-12**. What does the word *restore* imply?

To return something or someone to a former condition, place or position. Restore means to get back what we had before.

Using at least two translations, paraphrase David's requests for restoration below (two per verse).

51:7	Cleanse or purify me	Wash me and make me clean again
51:8	Bring back joy and gladness	Let me rejoice again
51:9	Don't let my sin be between us anymore	Blot out or remove the stain of my sin
51:10	Make my heart pure again	Renew my spirit – make it right and steadfast again
51:11	Let me feel and experience your presence again	Let me have your Holy Spirit again
51:12	Give me back the joy that my salvation gives me	Give me again a heart that WANTS to obey you

♥ If you put David's requests for restoration in order of importance for yourself, which one would be at the top and why?

13. David doesn't use the word forgiveness in this Psalm. Consider the following verses and state the one thing that David seems to most desire. **51:1, 2, 7, 9**

Cleansing – being made clean again in God's sight – wanting the "stain" of sin gone

How confident is David that God can do this for him? **51:7**

He knows that if God does this for him – he WILL be clean

Why do you think David places so much value on being clean, not just forgiven?

There are two results of sin: First, it offends God and others and for this we need forgiveness – God and others telling us they won't hold our sin against us. (This is the EXTERNAL)

But sin also has consequences in our hearts and lives. Sin scars us and dirties us. Sin is alive – like a cancer that will grow in our heart. Sin is a condition of the heart. For this we need cleansing and washing. We need the cancer removed! (This is the INTERNAL)

14. Where, according to **51:6 and 10**, does God desire the work of cleansing to begin and what is the significance of this?

Cleansing begins in our inner being, our heart, our spirits. We need to be forgiven, cleansed and changed INSIDE in order to have victory over sinful behavior and patterns that show themselves on the OUTSIDE.

15. In Biblical terms, *create* means to "make something out of nothing" and in Scripture, only God *creates*.

In light of these facts, what is the significance of David's request in **51:10**?

Only God can give us a clean and pure heart and he doesn't do it by refining or sprucing up our old, dirty heart. As a supernatural act, he can place a clean and pure heart in us. We don't get a clean and pure heart by trying harder or promising to never do "it" again. Only God can do this for us.

16. What, specifically, does **Psalm 51** have in common with **1 John 1:9**?

1 John 1:9 is a synopsis or summary statement of Psalm 51. Dave confesses his sin (in detail), he asks for cleansing (renewal, restoration and being made clean again) and thereby he experiences God's forgiveness (God not holding David's sin against him anymore.)

- ♥ How often do we need to make good on God's offer in **1 John 1:9**? **Every time we sin!**
- ♥ Have you ever struggled with a sense that your sin was so great that you could never be fully forgiven? What hope do you find in David's prayer? **No sin is too big or unforgivable for God. If we don't experience forgiveness and cleansing it is usually because we won't forgive ourselves. (Not forgiving ourselves is really PRIDE. It is saying 1) My sin is too big and great to be covered by Jesus' sacrifice. In other words, his death was not enough to pay the penalty for THIS sin. (I'm a special sinner!) 2) Not forgiving ourselves is also PRIDEFUL, because we are saying **my goodness** should have prevented me from committing this sin. But the truth is that we all are capable of **ANY** sin! It is only God's grace that keeps us from horrible and despicable sins, not our own goodness. (There, but for the grace of God, go I.)**

♥ On what basis can you plead and claim God's mercy and forgiveness for your sin?

**Only on the basis of what Jesus did for us on the cross.**

**Romans 3:22-26** We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. **24** Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. **25** For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. **26** And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.

17. Why do you think we are sometimes hesitant to confess our sin, even when we know God will forgive and cleanse us?

**There will probably be several answer to this. It may be because we don't really want to give up our sinful way; it may be because we are afraid we will just sin again; it may be pride that keeps us from confessing and asking for forgiveness. We may also be reluctant because we know God will ask us to "mend fences" with the one we have sinned against.**

18. What positive things did David expect God to bring out of his whole ordeal? **51:13-15**

**Because of what David experienced, he expects that he will be able to use his experiences to teach and help others confess, repent and receive forgiveness and cleansing from God. Also, because of what God has done for him (cleansed and restored him) David has good reason to thank and praise God for who he is! Jesus said that those who are forgiven much, love much!**

♥ What experience have you had with forgiven sin that could help someone else?

♥ How can we help others receive God's grace and return to the Lord?

**By being honest and transparent about our own sin and failures as well as sharing with others how God has forgiven, cleansed and restored us.**

19. Rephrase **Psalm 51:16-17** into contemporary language.

**Have several share.**

**The whole point is that we can't DO anything to earn forgiveness or make up for our sin (good deeds, good behavior). The only thing God wants from us is a humble, broken heart that is truly sorry for our sins. Notice how The Message words these verses.**

♥ What do you consider a *broken and contrite* heart to be? What is your experience with this condition?

♥ When are you likely to come to God with an "offering" for sin instead of a broken and contrite heart? Why?

20. First David says that God *does not* delight in sacrifices (51:16) and then he says that sacrifices *do* delight God (51:19). What makes the difference?

God will accept our "sacrifices" if our heart is in the right place. Pride and arrogance make our sacrifices unacceptable, no matter big or great they are. Humility and godly sorrow make our sacrifices acceptable to God.

### RESPONSE:

21. Does forgiveness and cleansing mean we will not suffer the consequences of our sin? According to **2 Samuel 12:13-23**, what was one consequence of David's sin? Can you think of others?

For starters: David and Bathsheba's son died and Uriah, Bathsheba's husband died.

22. How complete was God's forgiveness and cleansing of David's sin? Consider **2 Samuel 12:23**, **Matthew 1:1** and **6**.

Even though David lost his baby son in this life, he knows he will see him again in eternity. Also, it is through David and Bathsheba line that Jesus, the Messiah, was born!!! This is complete and total forgiveness and restoration along with God using David's failure and working good out of it! God did this ONLY because David was truly repentant for his sin. All God wants is a broken and contrite heart!

23. What do the above truths mean for your own life? Consider **Romans 8:28** in your answer.

No matter how I have failed or how deeply I have sinned, IF I truly repent and give my failure and brokenness to God, he WILL forgive, cleanse and restore me. Not only that, but he will take all the "bad" and work it into something "good and beautiful" in my life. **WHAT A DEAL!** (Isaiah 61:3)