



LENTEN DEVOTIONAL MARCH 8, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 51

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence

and blameless when you pass judgment.

5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right 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 in me a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

15 O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

DEVOTIONAL

The Rev. Dr. Franklin Tanner Capps, Director of the Miller Summer Youth Institute

Psalms 51 is a well-known passage because of verses 10-12—three short lines that are often sung in liturgical settings following a confession of sin. These verses are part of an extended petition that, among other things, finds the psalmist begging God for mercy and deliverance due to guilt borne of some unspecified transgression. Although the psalm closes with a word of hope that God will rebuild and renew that which has been broken, its tone is sober, rooted in a profound sense of the frailty and fragmentation of life. This life in fragments issues from grief over sin—*dis-ease* over what has been done and that which has been left undone.

“Sin is despair,” says one Danish writer. “Sin itself is severance from the good, but despair over sin is the second severance.” Another way of putting this is to say that sin, and the despair that follows, is shattering. The psalmist says as much. In a moment of severe introspection, they declare that their life has become like bones reduced to pieces (v 8). But rather than ask that their life be knit back together, they ask God to bring a shout of joy from that which has been crushed. Zion will be established, Jerusalem rebuilt, and rejoicing will rise from the dust. This is the kernel of hope.

And herein lies the difficult teaching: to believe that rejoicing can come *not after* but *from within* the devastation. God’s power makes this possible.

PRAYER

Lord God, like the psalmist, our lives often feel like shattered bones. Help us find our voice in the midst of this undoing. And may our spirit, however frail, reverberate with joy this season. Amen.

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Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
616 North Highland Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
Phone: 412-362-5610



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