

# Psalm 51: Our R Rate

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could this morning and with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Psalms and Psalm 51.

The book of Psalms and Psalm 51. And if we just read again at verse 1, where David says, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.

According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Over the past few weeks, as you know, we've heard a lot about the R-rate of the coronavirus.

And that's because our government has set out five tests that must be met before we can begin to lift the lockdown. And one of the tests is known as the R-rate, the reproduction rate, which is the rate at which an infection spreads.

Because the R-rate, we're told, it's measured by the average number of people that one infected person passes the virus onto. Now, as you can well expect, I'm not an expert on these, but what I've learned or what I've read about is that all viruses have an R-rate.

[ 1 : 20 ] The flu has an R-rate between 1 and 2. The measles has an R-rate of 14. Smallpox has an R-rate of about 16.

And thankfully, we have vaccinations for these viruses. But as you know, and as yet, there's no known vaccine for the coronavirus. But in March, only two months ago, we began to live in lockdown because the R-rate of the coronavirus was 3.

Which means that each person with the coronavirus, they would pass it on to at least another three people, either before they themselves recovered or, in some tragic cases, they died.

And each of those people who received the coronavirus or contracted the coronavirus, they passed it on to a further three people and they passed it on to another three people. And these coronavirus cases had this ripple effect.

But as you know, after living in lockdown for the past two months and faithfully exercising social distancing from family and friends and from work colleagues, the R-rate in our nation, we're told, has now fallen to below 1.

[ 2 : 31 ] And over the coming weeks, our government is going to keep a very close eye and keep monitoring the R-rate carefully. Because if the R-rate goes above 1, then the virus is spreading.

But if the R-rate is below 1, the virus is shrinking. And with the R-rate below 1, we're told that the rate of infection can be controlled.

The spread of the virus can now be traced. And the goal, the long-term goal, is that the virus is stopped. And as you know, our government, they've recently changed its catchy slogan, which we'd all now become familiar with.

But as we move into this new phase of the pandemic, they've changed the slogan from Stay at Home, Protect the NHS and Save Lives. They've changed it to Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives.

Stay Alert, Control the Virus and Save Lives. But as you know, controlling the virus or controlling the coronavirus is going to be very difficult because the coronavirus is a crown poison.

[ 3 : 43 ] The coronavirus is a crown poison. That's what the word coronavirus means. It means crown poison. And as we are discovering in our nation, it's very hard to control.

And in a similar way, that's what we are being reminded here in Psalm 51. We've been reminded that the crown poison which the Bible speaks of, this crown poison is unable to be controlled or curtailed by human hands because no amount of hand washing or social distancing or self-isolating or even PPE wearing, none of these things can prevent the spread of this coronavirus because this coronavirus that the Bible speaks of, this crown poison is our sin.

This crown poison is our sin. And that's what David is speaking about here in Psalm 51. He's speaking about his crown poison. He's speaking about his sin and he's saying that his sin is out of control.

It was so out of control that it caused chaos in his life and it also spread to cause chaos in the lives of others. And you know, there are three things that I'd just like us to consider from Psalm 51 this morning.

I want us to see, first of all, David's sin, then David's silence, and then David's sacrifice. And there are three headings. David's sin, David's silence, and David's sacrifice.

[ 5 : 13 ] So first of all, David's sin. David says in verse 1, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Psalm 51 is a penitential psalm. It's a psalm of repentance. It's a psalm of confession of sin. And there are seven penitential psalms in the Psalter. Psalm 6, 32, 38, this psalm 51, Psalm 102, Psalm 130, and Psalm 143.

They're all penitential psalms. But what's interesting is that five out of the seven penitential psalms were written by the hand of David, which should immediately highlight to us that David was a man who struggled with sin.

David was a man who struggled with sin. And, you know, even as we come to Psalm 51, we should never forget that David wrote Psalm 51 as a Christian.

[ 6 : 25 ] David wasn't a man who was unconverted when he wrote this psalm. He wasn't graceless and godless when he wrote Psalm 51. No, David was a Christian when he wrote Psalm 51.

And he had been a Christian for many years. In fact, it had been a long time since David had confessed and claimed the Lord as his shepherd in Psalm 23.

And the sobering fact of Psalm 51 is that it was written when David was the king in Israel. It was written when he was married. It was written when David was in his 50s.

It was written when David was an established and even an experienced Christian. He was a seasoned Christian who had walked with the Lord for many years in his life.

But, you know, Psalm 51, it tells us that something went horribly wrong in David's personal life, which had this effect upon those around him in his public life.

[ 7 : 27 ] And I'm sure that we're familiar with the context to Psalm 51, where David was at the height of his ministry, you could say.

David was at the height or the peak of his career. He was the king in Israel. He was a man after God's own heart. He was the one with whom God had made this everlasting covenant.

But more than that, David had brought peace between Israel and the surrounding nations. Because unlike his predecessor, Saul, who had only killed his thousands, David had killed his 10,000.

And, you know, looking on at David's life, as someone who was standing back and looking at David, you would think that all seemed to be going well for him. Everything seemed to be on the up.

Everything was in its place and everything was going so well for David. That was, we're told, until it happened. Until it happened.

[ 8 : 28 ] And that's how the Bible describes it. David had reached this great height as the king of Israel. Until it happened. Until he fell into sin.

Because, you know, without David realising, Satan got in. And without David seeing it, temptation crept up on him. And, you know, when David should have had his armour on and been out in the battlefield with his army, instead, David was living in isolation.

And he was watching Bathsheba in the bathtub. And, you know, that one stare, it led to lust. And it advanced to adultery. And it got lost in lies.

And it ended up in this messy murder of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. And, you know, you read the context to Psalm 51, and you'd honestly think it was something from the script of EastEnders or Coronation Street.

And yet it's here in the Bible. The ugliness of sin is raising its head and revealing its true colours.

And, you know, even looking at it, the R rate of David's crown poison, the R rate of David's sin, was very high.

[ 9 : 47 ] Because David's sin, it not only affected himself, it also affected Bathsheba. And then it affected Bathsheba's husband, Uriah. It also affected the child, this child that was to be born because of the affair that David and Bathsheba had.

But more than that, David's sin, it affected his own family. It affected his reign as the king of Israel. It affected his position as the leader of Israel's army. It affected his people and his nation.

But more importantly, David's sin affected his relationship with God. My friend, the consequences of David's sin was that it had this ripple effect where it not only affected David personally, but it also affected everyone around him.

The consequences of David's sin caused chaos in his life. And it caused chaos in the lives of others. And you know, it should be a reminder to us that sin is never isolated.

Sin is never isolated. Because our sin, it not only affects us and our relationship with the Lord, our sin also affects those around us.

[ 11 : 01 ] Our sin impacts those closest to us and those whom we love and those whom we cherish and those whom we even want to protect. My friend, our sin is a crown poison and it's able to infect and affect any and every area in our lives.

That's why we need to be aware of it. That's why we need to guard against it. That's why we need to run to Jesus with it. Because you know, it's Jesus who warns us in the gospel.

He says, from out of your heart come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these things, says Jesus, they come from within. And they are what defile a person. And you know, let's not think that we're immune to any of these sins because they're all in our heart and we could succumb to any one of them at any time.

Because you know, if David's experience should teach us anything, it should teach us the solemn warning to take heed lest we fall. Take heed lest we fall.

[ 12 : 24 ] But you know, the beauty of Psalm 51 is that David, he isn't glorying in the grime of his sin. No, he's glorying in the grace of his saviour.

Because Psalm 51, it literally opens with the words, gracious God. That's how David begins. He begins Psalm 51 with the words, gracious God.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

David describes God in these opening verses as gracious, merciful and loving. Gracious, merciful and loving. And as you know, to be gracious is to receive what you don't deserve.

And what David didn't deserve was forgiveness. To be merciful is not to receive what you do deserve. That is punishment. And to be loving is to be dealt with unconditionally.

[ 13 : 31 ] And you know, David, he knew who God is, that he knew that God is gracious, merciful and loving. But David, he also knew who he was and what he had done.

Because David says that he had transgressed God's holy law. He says that he had this crookedness and perverseness of iniquity in his heart. And he says that he had completely fallen short of the glory of God.

He had fallen short of the mark with his sin. David knew that he was a man of transgression, iniquity and sin. But he also knew that his sin not only affected all his horizontal relationships with others, he knew that his sin had affected his vertical relationship with God.

That's because David says in verse 4, he says, against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. David not only acknowledged that he was born in sin, but he also says that he has made this blunder in sin and he needs the Lord's forgiveness.

[ 14 : 49 ] And that's why David is coming and asking his gracious, merciful and loving God to blot out his transgressions, to wash him from his iniquity and to cleanse him from his sin.

That's why David pleads, as he goes on to say in verse 7, purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

You know, when David asks to be purified with hyssop, he's drawing attention to how a leper was purified and how a leper was declared clean.

because as you know, a leper, well, they had a high R rate, which meant that they were not only to self-isolate and exercise social distancing, but as a leper, as a leper moved throughout their community, they were always to cry, unclean, unclean, unclean.

And you know, that's what David is saying here. He's saying that he's unclean. And you know, that's what we need to say as well. We need to come to our gracious, merciful and loving God and

confess our sin.

[16:03] We need to acknowledge that our sin is like leprosy. It has this high R rate because it infects and affects every area of our life.

Our sin, my friend, it has created debt. It has created defilement. And it's an awful disease. And like David, we need to come to the Lord crying, I'm unclean.

I'm unclean. I'm unclean. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

That's how we need to come to the Lord. Come, we need to come to the Lord this morning saying, I'm unclean. Wash me and make me as white as snow.

But you know, David, he wasn't always so forthcoming with his confession of sin. Because in Psalm 51, David not only confesses his sin, he confesses his silence.

[17:06] And that's what we see secondly, David's silence. So David's sin and David's silence.

And we'll look at verse 8. David says, You know, Psalm 51, it was written nearly a year after David had fallen into the temptation trap of lust, lies, adultery and murder.

And the reason there was this gap of nearly a year between David's sin and David's sorrow, sorry, it was all because of David's silence. Because for those nine months while Bathsheba carried David's child in her womb, David said nothing.

In fact, David only made it worse by sending Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, he sent him to his death in the battlefield. And for nearly a year there was no sorry in David's heart.

There was only silence. And you know, instead of acknowledging his sin and admitting his wrongdoing, David covered, cloaked and concealed his sin. For nearly a year, David tried to carry on.

He tried to carry on living as if nothing had happened. David continued this charade of being the man after God's own heart. He continued the facade of being the great king of Israel while all the time David was denying, defying, and disowning his sin.

[18:54] But you know, David's silence about his sin, it had an effect upon him. And it had an effect upon him spiritually, mentally, and physically. In verse 11, David says that he's concerned that the Holy Spirit will be taken from him.

He has this spiritual concern. Now, when he says he's worried about the Holy Spirit being taken from him, it doesn't mean that David was worried that he'll no longer be a Christian. No, the Holy Spirit was in David as a Christian.

But the Holy Spirit was upon David as the king of Israel. The Holy Spirit was in David as a sinner, but upon him as a servant of the Lord.

And David, he was concerned that the Holy Spirit would be taken from being upon him as the king of Israel. Because as the king of Israel, the Holy Spirit came upon David in order to lead God's people and to direct God's people to worship the Lord.

Because one of the roles of the king of Israel was, in many ways, to be like a minister. Because he was to direct the Lord's people to worship the Lord.

[20:10] But David's great fear was that if he came clean and if he removed this charade of being the man after God's own heart, David's fear was that if he came clean about his sin, he would lose his position and have to abdicate the throne.

And you know, actually, when you read the narrative, in many ways, that's what happened because after David's sin, we don't hear much more about his reign until his death. But as we said, David's silence about his sin, it not only affected him spiritually, it also affected him mentally.

David said in verse 8 that his bones feel crushed. And then in verses 14 and 15, David says his tongue is silent and his mouth is closed.

So during that year of silence, David, you could say, he was unable to pray and praise the Lord.

And this was all because he spent his energy trying to silence his guilty conscience.

You know, is that not what the Bible reminds us? That if we regard sin in our heart, the Lord will not hear us. If we stay silent about our secret sins, the Lord will not accept our adoration.

[21:31] My friend, if we have unconfessed sin in our lives, and if we're trying to silence our guilty conscience, then the Bible says that our prayers and our praise will be hindered.

And you know, trying to silence a guilty conscience, it must take a lot of energy and effort because unconfessed sin will always be gnawing away at you.

And you know, we can see that from David's life because his silence about his secret sins, they not only affected him spiritually and mentally, but it also affected him physically. Because during those months of being mute with his conscience always bothering him, David stopped eating.

David lost weight. David became thin and gaunt looking and he couldn't sleep. David says in Psalm 32, which was written immediately after Psalm 51, David says in Psalm 32, When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was dried up like the heat of summer. My friend, David's silence about his sin, it affected him spiritually, mentally and physically.

[ 22 : 56 ] And you know, this is something Paul also reminded the church in Corinth when they were coming to the Lord's table as those who were divided and drunk.

Paul addressed divided and drunk Christians and he says to the Corinthians that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

Paul was saying that whoever partakes in the Lord's supper with unconfessed secret sins will eat and drink judgment to themselves. And Paul, he goes on to say, this is why so many of you are weak.

This is why so many of you are ill. This is why some of you have even died. Your sin has affected you, he says. It has affected you spiritually, mentally and physically.

And it's all because you've silenced your secret sins, you've ignored your guilty conscience and you've continued this charade of being a saint when you're actually a sinner.

[ 24 : 00 ] Therefore, says Paul, let a person examine himself or herself so that they would eat of the bread and drink of the cup because in doing so they show forth the Lord's death until he comes.

You know, sadly, David's silence, it refused a self-examination of his secret sin. David's silence refused to have a self-examination.

That was until Nathan the prophet went to speak to David. And you know, as a prophet, Nathan's role was to call the people of Israel to repentance. But I wonder if Nathan ever thought that he'd have to go to David, the man after God's own heart.

Did he ever think that he would have to go to Israel's king and call him to repentance? But that's what Nathan did. As we are told in the title, Psalm 51 was written after Nathan the prophet went to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

After those months of silence, Nathan goes to David and tells David that his hour rate of sin has had a catastrophic effect upon his kingship and also his kingdom.

[ 25 : 19 ] And with that, when you read the narrative in 2 Samuel we're told that David he finally comes clean and he confesses to Nathan and he says, I have sinned. I have sinned.

I have sinned. I'm sure you've heard of the phrase confession is good for the soul or open confession is good for the soul.

And that was certainly true of David's experience because true repentance comes from the soul. true repentance comes from the soul because our soul, it consists of our mind, our emotions and our will.

And when it comes to sin, we can either have regret, remorse or repentance. When it comes to sin, we can either have regret, remorse or repentance.

repentance. But regret is only an act of the mind. Remorse is an act of the mind and the will. But repentance is an act of our mind, our emotions and our will.

[ 26 : 30 ] Repentance is an act of the soul. True repentance is an act of the soul because, you know, we can have regret, but regret is only an act of our mind where we acknowledge that we've done wrong or we acknowledge that we got caught and we have to put up our hands.

But remorse it goes a wee bit further than that. Remorse is an act of our mind and our emotions where we acknowledge our wrongdoing and we might even get upset because of our sin.

But that's all. True repentance my friend. Repentance is an act of our mind, our emotions and our will. True repentance is an act of the mind, emotions and will, where we acknowledge our sin, we're upset because of our sin, and then we willfully turn from our sin and turn to the Lord in forgiveness.

That's why open confession is good for the soul, because true repentance comes from the soul.

True repentance comes from the soul.

And you know my friend, that's why repentance is not only the first step of the Christian, it's the daily step of the Christian. Because repentance, it's not just this one-time act that we perform at

conversion where we repent and believe in the gospel.

[ 27 : 54 ] No, repentance is key to our daily growth and grace. In fact, repentance is non-negotiable because the Bible emphasizes to us that if there's no repentance, there's no redemption.

If there's no repentance, there's no redemption. And so my friend, open confession is good for the soul because true repentance comes from the soul.

Open confession is good for the soul because true repentance comes from the soul. And you know, that's what we see lastly and briefly in this psalm.

we see David's sacrifice. We've seen David's sin, David's silence and David's sacrifice. David's sacrifice, look with me at verse 16.

David says, for you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.

[ 28 : 58 ] O God, you will not despise. Do good to Zion in your good pleasure. Build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings.

Then bulls will be offered on your altar. One commentator describes Psalm 51 as the prayer of a broken heart.

The prayer of a broken heart. And that's because David knew that nothing would be acceptable to God except a broken and contrite heart.

The reality was that there was no suitable sacrifice which could be offered to God in order to make atonement for David's sin. Because according to the Old Testament sacrificial system, there was no sacrificial provision for the sin of adultery or murder.

And as you know and as David confesses, David says that he's guilty on both accounts of adultery and murder. And the penalty for such sins was condemnation and death.

[ 30 : 06 ] Because David, he should have been stoned to death for his adultery with Bathsheba.

And David should have been executed for his murder of Uriah. My friend, David's sins should have brought him condemnation and death.

But instead, what Psalm 51 assures us is that David's sin was met with forgiveness and life. David says in verse 17, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

David knew that nothing would be acceptable to God except the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart. That's why Psalm 51 is the prayer of a broken heart.

it's the prayer of a broken heart. But as you know, David was forgiven not just on the basis of his broken and contrite heart.

David, of course, he was forgiven on the basis of Christ's broken body and shed blood on the cross. David was forgiven because of Christ's broken body and shed blood on the cross.

[ 31 : 22 ] And you know, my friend, Psalm 51, in many ways, it's a solemn psalm because it says to us that biblical statement, be sure your sins will find you out.

Be sure your sins will find you out because, you know, the nature of our sin is such that whether or not we expose our sin, our sin will expose us.

And no matter how much we try, we can't run from our sin, we can't silence our sin, we can't even control our sin, which means that we shouldn't play with sin and we shouldn't toy with sin because as we said earlier, our sin is a deadly crown poison.

Our sin is like a coronavirus. Our sin is unable to be controlled and curtailed by human hands because our sin, it can't be tamed or outrun or shaken off no matter how strong or safe we think we are.

And my friend, the Bible is reminding us today, be sure your sin will find you out. And it'll either find you out in this life or it'll find you out when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account.

[ 32 : 35 ] Be sure your sin will find you out. And you know, that's why we need to come to Jesus and that's why we need to keep coming to Jesus with this prayer of a broken heart because the only way to experience the blessing of no condemnation and no separation is to be found sheltering under the blood of Jesus Christ.

Is that not what the gospel assures us today? That if we confess our sin, our gracious, merciful and loving God, he will forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And why will he do it? Why will he do it? It's not because of our reformed religion. It's not because of our good living or our good works. It's not because of our baptism or our Bible reading.

No, God will forgive us for all our sins all because the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. It's the blood of Christ, my friend, that cleanses us from all sin.

And the gospel assures us this morning that there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

[ 33 : 55 ] We need to come this morning, my friend, saying like David, I'm unclean. Wash me as white as snow. Cleanse me from my sin.

because, my friend, we have this wonderful promise that it's the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin. As many of you know, Psalm 51 is my favourite psalm because this psalm is a psalm which has had a huge impact upon my life.

Verse 1 was my mother's prayer that I would be converted. After thy loving kindness, Lord, have mercy upon me. Verse 10 was my prayer when I was seeking the Lord.

I was praying, create a clean heart, Lord, renew a right spirit within me. And then verse 13 was my call to the ministry. Then will I teach thy ways unto those that transgressors be, and those that sinners are shall then be turned unto thee.

And so you can see why Psalm 51 is my favourite psalm. But you know, my unconverted friend, I tell you this not because I want to talk about myself.

[ 35 : 16 ] I tell you this to assure you that our gracious, merciful, and loving God really does save sinners. And he's able to save you this morning.

He's able to save you this morning. I can testify to that fact. He's able to save you. But my friend, you need to come to him.

And you need to come to him on bended knee with true repentance. And you need to come to him with the prayer of a broken heart. You need to come pleading like David, create in me a clean heart, O God.

Create in me a clean heart, O God. My friend, make sure you come to this Christ, because in him there is full and free forgiveness.

You come to him, and you come pleading, create within me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

[ 36 : 25 ] Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the wonder of the gospel, a gospel that assures us that Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

And we marvel, Lord, that it is his blood, his blood that is able to make us as white as snow, that even though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they are able to be made like wool.

And Lord, help us then to come to him, and to keep coming to him, to come to this Jesus, who is able to forgive all transgression, iniquity and sin. He is able to present us faultless before his glory with exceeding joy.

But Lord, we pray that we would have a broken heart, a broken and a contrite heart before thee, for that is the promise that thou wilt not despise. O Lord, hear us then, we pray.

Bless us, we ask, help us to keep pleading the promises of God, promises, Lord, that assure us that the Lord, one who is faithful and just, to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[ 37 : 43 ] Go before us then, we pray, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of that psalm, in Psalm 51, and we're going to sing from the Sing-Sams version, and we're going to sing from verse 7 down to the verse marked 15.

Psalm 51, in the Sing-Sams version, at verse 7, where David, as we were saying earlier, he's saying, I'm unclean, I'm unclean, I'm unclean, and he says in verse 7, cleanse with hyssop, purify me, I'll be whiter than the snow, let the bones you crush be joyful, may I joy and gladness know, from my failure hide your face, blot out all my wickedness.

We'll sing on down to the verse marked 15 of Psalm 51, to God's praise. sing from hummud's priests theme in the Oz and madness know.

From my failure I knew grace blotters of my wickedness.

Lord, we eat a new heart in me and a steadfast mind renew.

[ 39 : 49 ] Do not take your spirit from me, cast me not away from you.

Give me back the joy I die, keep my willing spirit light.

Then I'll teach you ways to sinners, rebels will turn back to you.  
Free me from what killed my Savior, God most merciful and true.  
then I'll praise your righteousness, teach my lips your name to bless.  
[ 41 : 12 ] my my grace. Don't examine me have ■ to your strength