

Brokenness and repentance

Psalm 51:16-17 (NLT)

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.

You do not want a burnt offering.

17The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.

You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Background

- Psalm 51 was written by King David, who was chosen by God to be king of Israel. He was known as a man after God's heart.
- However, he was not perfect. He committed adultery and got the woman pregnant, and when he couldn't cover it up, he organised her husband's murder so that he could marry her (this story is told in 2 Samuel 11).
- When David was confronted by the prophet Nathan about this he realised that he had sinned (2 Samuel 12). God had given him everything that he could want and yet he forgot about that and did and took what he wanted anyway thus dishonouring God. David was sorry for it, knowing that he had wronged God, and wanted to be clean again in his eyes. He then wrote this psalm.
- David starts off by asking God for mercy. He acknowledges that his sin was not just against the people he wronged, but against God. He speaks of God's great love and mercy, and God's ability to cleanse him from wrong.
- This psalm is about repentance, which means being sorry for something and not wanting to do it again.
- It talks about sin a lot, which is anything that goes against God's law, but it is also described as anything that separates you from God.

Verse 16 – *You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering.*

- To understand this statement, we need to look back at King Saul, whom God rejected and replaced with King David.
 - On the surface it didn't look like King Saul had really done much wrong, he prepared and sacrificed a burnt offering to God, which was only lawful for the priest to do (1 Samuel 13).
 - And later he disobeyed God by keeping livestock as spoils of war that God had asked him to destroy, and then Saul planned to sacrifice some to God to justify it (1 Samuel 15).
 - Saul did both these things knowing that it was wrong for him to do so. Then both times when Samuel confronted him with what he had done wrong, he tried to justify it instead of repenting.
 - 1 Samuel 15:22-23a *"What is more pleasing to the Lord: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. 23Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols."*
 - Thus, God considers purposely sinning when we know better and refusing to repent very serious.
 - Because King Saul was disobedient and refused to repent, the spirit of God ended up leaving him.
- David had seen from this that sacrifices offered with the wrong motive are not pleasing to God.
- Similarly, we can't make our sins go away by just doing good things and hope that they will be cancelled out or ignored.
 - Ephesians 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*
- We see in this passage that it is God's grace that saves us, it is not anything that we can do. Therefore, the good works should not come out of a desperate attempt to save ourselves, as Jesus has already done that work for us, but out of gratitude to God.
- In other words, using the terminology of Psalm 51:16, our sacrifices or burnt offerings will not save us, only Jesus will. These should be kept for honouring God.

Consequences for our actions

- David knew there were consequences for his sin and this included being separated from God. David had seen how Saul's unrepentance had led to God taking his holy spirit from him.
 - Psalm 51: 11-12 *Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*
 - Because of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross, he paid for our sins and if we accept this we no longer have to have separation from God. When we repent of our sins and accept God's salvation we are able to again be filled with joy and with God's help try to live in a way that glorifies him.
- Unfortunately, there were far reaching consequences of David's adultery and act of murder in the behaviour of his family for generations to come. These are predicted by Nathan when he confronted David with his sin (2 Samuel 12:10-12).
 - These consequences included one of his sons not controlling his sexual desires and taking his half sister, which David never dealt with. This then led to her full brother retaliating with murder and then trying to take over the kingdom causing civil war. Within 2 generations the whole country split in 2 and never reunited.
 - This is because David's children saw his behaviour and learned from it.
 - When we sin, it can have far reaching consequences in our families. The things that we struggle with have often been the things that our parents or grandparents have struggled with and if we are not careful the following generations will too. We need to break the cycle and make sure it ends with us.
- The other consequence of David's adultery was that the child that was conceived from this died.
 - Sometimes our sins can cause suffering in our families.
 - It can cause us to lose family members, often through damaged relationships.

So what does God want?

Verse 17 – *The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*

- David was grieved by what he had done. In verse 8, he cries, *'Oh give me back my joy again; you have broken me'*. He had reached the point where he was broken and knew that something had to change for his joy to be restored.
 - He knew he had sinned against God, in verse 4 he says, *'against you, and you alone, have I sinned'*. He didn't try to justify what he had done.
 - David also realised that he had always been a sinner, it wasn't just these recent sins that had been brought to his attention by Nathan. In verse 5 he says, *'For I was born a sinner'*.
 - David repented and confessed that he needed God's help to live in a way that pleases him. In verse 10 he asks, *'Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.'*
 - Some versions say a steadfast spirit instead of a loyal heart.
 - When we are broken and understand that we can't be purified without God's help, we can ask him to renew our desire to please him. To again be a loyal and steadfast follower of Christ, putting him first in our lives.
 - Then God can restore and maintain our joy by helping us to continue to be willing for him to work in our lives.
 - As David has said in verse 12, *'Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me'*.

- In my life, it wasn't until I was completely broken with no joy or hope left, that I knew things had to change, and I wanted them to. I had been relying on my own strength, and I had come to the end of that and had nothing left. I had to let go of the situation and let God help me.
 - And when I started crying out for God's help instead of just trying to tough it out, it allowed him to work in my life to find a way out of my situation.
 - It didn't happen overnight, like it did with David. It started with God showing me the truth of my situation, by a friend sending me information on abuse, and then once I could accept and understand that, he showed me that my husband was cheating on me, which gave me a way out of my situation.
 - Then through my brother, God showed me that he loves me unconditionally and that his grace is enough to cover all my shortfalls.
 - Then he started to show me the things that I needed to change in myself, that were stopping me living a life that honours him. I had to stop justifying myself, the way Saul had done, and confess the things that I had done that had led to my being trapped in the life that I was in and repent of this.
 - Philippians 2:13 *For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*
 - I decided that I never wanted to go back to living outside of God's will or plan for my life and chose instead to say that my life is no longer mine, but his. Because I know that when I tried things my way, everything went to custard. But when I trust in God, and try to follow him, things go a lot better.
 - God is still convicting me of things that I need to change and work on in my life, I just have to listen and take them seriously, not try to justify them.
 - I wish I could say that I never sin anymore, but as I spend more time with God, he will make me more like him.
 - 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 *But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*
 - The Holy Spirit has the power to set us free from anything that keeps us captive.

- When we are broken and weak, and we know that we can't do it on our own, we are more likely to ask God for help. And when we ask for his help, knowing that we don't deserve it, and let him take control of our lives, he is able to do great things.
 - 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*
 - I haven't got to the point where I delight in my weaknesses or difficulties, or even feel like it is ok to have them. Instead I still try to cover them up and pretend that they don't exist. But that's something God is working on in me, so hopefully one day I will.
 - But I know that everything goes better in my life when I admit to my weaknesses and allow God to work in me and through me instead of trying to do it on my own.
- If we submit to God, he will help us overcome our natural inclination to sin.
 - James 4:7-10 *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*
 - I love this promise that when we draw near to God, he will come near to us. But, when we are not fully committed to giving up our lifestyles or sins, we are being double minded. We need to be ready to purify our hearts and draw near to God for his help. We need to acknowledge that we can't do this on our own, only with his help.
 - When we are broken up over our sins, admit that we have a problem that we can't solve and humble ourselves before God, he will lift us up and set us free.
 - Romans 6:5-11 *5Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. 6We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. 7For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. 8And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. 9We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. 10When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. 11So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.*
 - This means that not only are our sins forgiven because of Jesus's sacrifice, but he has also taken away their power to enslave us.

- Be encouraged and persevere, knowing that Jesus has taken away the power of sin over us. We will not become perfect overnight, but if we keep working on it with God's help, we will be ever closer to perfection.
 - The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:12-14 *12I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.*
- If we focus on God and put him first, he will provide a way for us to live a life honouring to him. We no longer need to worry about our future.
 - Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*
- It's important to learn from the past, and not make the same mistakes.
 - The memory of being in that place of complete brokenness has helped me to want to change.
 - When I look how far I have come, it has made me extremely grateful for all that God has done in my life, and all that he continues to do.
 - This makes me want to share this with others, to show them that God can help them too and how life is much better with him at the centre of it.
 - David says in this psalm 51:13-15 *Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. 14Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. 15Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.*
 - When God cleanses us it makes it easier to worship and praise him.

Conclusion

- God doesn't want meaningless gestures and he values obedience and repentance more than sacrifices.
- God wants us to be grieved for our sins and to understand that we are wronging him.
- We need to understand that there are consequences for sin.
- If we repent of our sin, God can cleanse us of it, and help us to live a better life. We do not need to be separated from God.
- We don't have to struggle on our own. When we come to God with our weaknesses and admit that we can't do it on our own, he will strengthen us.
- It is important to remember and praise God for what he has done in our lives. Learning from the past can help us move forward, and sharing our story can help others.
- We need to strive for perfection and persevere until the end.