Heart Health Series:
Create a Clean Heart (Psalm 51:10)

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At A Glance:

I. **Introduction**
II. **The Need for Help**
III. **God Must Create Goodness in Us**
IV. **God Must Create Grit in Us**
V. **Conclusion**

These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Create a Clean Heart

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Lab Work

1. When you are young and you go to the doctor, the process is usually minimal and routine. While the doctor checks for certain problems, it is usually a surprise if anything is found. In general, young people are typically healthy.
2. Eventually, everyone reaches an age when going to the doctor becomes more of a process. Searching for medical problems becomes intentional and real. At one doctor appointment, my information was being reviewed and the doctor said that it had been awhile since I had done any lab work.
3. If I had still been considered young, this would have been no big deal. Lab work would have been unnecessary. However, this time, the doctor recommended that I get my labs done. While sitting at the appointment, the doctor said there was an opening in the lab department. I was instructed to head downstairs and get my labs done then come back up to go through the results with the doctor.
4. When the labs came back, the doctor mentioned a few items that weren't all normal, good numbers. My heart could be a little healthier. A few lifestyle recommendations were offered to help get my numbers back to a better place. By getting some bloodwork done, the health of my heart could be evaluated.

B. We can have our spiritual lab work done to evaluate the health and condition of our heart. Throughout the Bible, there is an emphasis on the importance of what is happening inside us. God cares deeply about the health of our heart. God looks at our heart. He evaluates us at our deepest levels to determine if there is uprightness in us (1 Chr. 28:17, Jer. 11:20, 17:10). God knows the heart of every person (1 Kgs. 8:39), and He instructs us how to improve our heart health.

C. In this eight-week sermon series we will be learning from the prayers of David to learn how our hearts can become healthier. Throughout the Psalms, David regularly asks God to do specific works in his heart. In Psalm 51:10, we will discover two requests made by David that contributed to David being a man after God's own heart.

II. The Need for Help

A. King David is described as a man after God's own heart (Ac. 13:22). This caused him to be held up as a good example for others to follow, both as a leader and as a person who loves God. Jesus used David as a positive example for others, so we have it on good authority that David can and should serve as a source of spiritual instruction (Mt. 12:3. Mk. 2:25, Lk. 6:3). David is a good example of what it means to live with an attitude of trust in God—called faith (Heb. 11:32). The kings that followed David in the history of the nation of Israel were regularly compared to David to determine how good they were as leaders. David was the golden standard. Knowing David's importance, the relationship David had with God, and all the ways God blessed David throughout His lifetime, we will use David as an example of what it means to

live as a person in pursuit of the heart of God. Through David's example and prayers, we will learn and apply what it means to live in pursuit of God and His priorities.

B. As we learn more about what it means to pursue and relate to God the way David did, we are going to get a spiritual checkup to determine the health of our own heart for God. The word of God and David's example will act as our spiritual cardiologist. We want to become a person who is after God's own heart like David was. Through David's example and writings, he is going to show us what it means to be a person in pursuit of the heart of God. We are going to especially focus on the prayers and requests of David found in the Psalms.[1] In these recorded prayers of David, we will discover eight requests that shaped David to become the man he was. These prayers will teach us how David wanted God to work in his life so that we can ask God to do that same work in us.

C. The first prayer communicating what David was asking God to do in him comes from Psalm 51:

> [10] Create in me a clean heart, God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Ps. 51:10)

D. David has a deep understanding of how God works in people's lives, which moves David toward an enduring reliance on God. David knows God must do for him what David can't do for himself. David asks God to create within David qualities that do not yet exist within him ("Create in me", v. 10). To create is to bring something into existence.[2] David does not have in himself what He is going to ask God to produce and provide. David is fully confident that God has the power and ability to create what David is asking for.

E. The reason David prays and acts as He does is because He has a working knowledge of who God is. God is the Creator. If God can create humanity in the first place, certainly God could create the personal qualities David will be asking for (Gen. 1:26-27). If God is the person responsible for creating the world and everything that exists, David can operate with the conviction that God has the capability of transforming him (Gen. 1:1). David's confidence in God is grounded in and produced by a knowledge of who God is. Those who don't know or believe that God has performed the actions described in the word of God—the Bible—will not interact with God the way they should. They will dismiss God as irrelevant, unreliable, or unworthy. However, only God can restore what humanity has damaged.

F. The initial act of God creating something new inside a person is a miracle that happens the moment a person is persuaded that Jesus is reliable and trustworthy (Ezek. 36:26-27, Matthew 19:26). In David's case, like everyone else prior to Jesus, salvation occurred by accepting as reliable the words of God—believing in God was credited as righteousness (Rm. 4:3, Jas. 2:23). In this case, David is asking God to continue that initial work of salvation by changing David's heart (Ps. 51:12). This is not a prayer asking God to make David right with Him in salvation (initial justification), but a prayer asking God to continue His cleansing work in David's life (ongoing sanctification). David is praying for deeper internal change so that he can be good at the depths of his soul. He knows this type of moral goodness is not in him, but must be placed in him by God (Ps. 51:3, 5).

[1] Psalm 119 is not attributed to David but all the others main prayers we will be examining in this series are from David.
[2] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 51:10 "create"

G. Contrary to the modern perspective, David has come to understand his internal impulse to do wrong and acknowledged his moral brokenness. Through life experience, David knows he is not foundationally or "basically good". David is living in the shadow of significant sexual sin through his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-5). He was confronted by the prophet Nathan and was made aware of God's perspective on what David had done and what the consequences were going to be (2 Sam. 12:1-15). David lived with a constant awareness of what he had done (Ps. 51:3). He lived with the heavy weight of guilt, and he is asking God to take that weight off him. Trying to be a good person has led David to the conclusion that he needs God's help to become the good person he wants to be. David, as one of the godliest and most moral people found in the Old Testament period, realized the limits of his own moral goodness. He depended on God to change him. David understood who God wanted him to be on the inside and knew he could not be that person without God's help (Ps. 51:6).

H. Modern day disciples largely don't believe they have a real need for God to create anything within them. A lot of people are convinced we are self-sufficient and we can go through life relying on our own intelligence, abilities, and resources. We insist on deceiving ourselves that we are basically good and we can do all that God tells us to do if we simply try a little harder. The self-help industry is a fifty-to-seventy-billion-dollar market because people falsely believe they have what they need inside them. We would rather blame other people, society, our past trauma, our circumstances, our life disadvantages, or anything other than ourselves for our moral failures.[3] We desperately protect ourselves from the thought that we might be the problem. David's perspective of himself and his need for God's help is not a common one in our current culture. Most people live in denial about the reality of human nature. We do ourselves a great favor when we realize the disoriented life we experience is a result of our own sin.[4]

I. David has learned the valuable lesson that Paul more fully articulates: as human beings, we can't consistently do what we know to be morally good on our own (Rm. 7:18-25). He recognized he did not have what he needed to be the type of person who would consistently do what God wanted and required. Despite David's best efforts, he failed to live the way both he and God wanted him to. David had the word of God and knew how God wanted him to live, but he still couldn't do it. David wanted to please God, but he didn't have the ability to do so. All this motivated David to reach outside of himself to God for help. David realized that God is right and just when He judges humanity as wrongdoers (Ps. 51:4).

J. Have you ever sat in the reality and knowledge of failing God in a significant way? It can be miserable. We can feel the weight of guilt and shame. We can even feel dirty, unlovable, and worthless. Like David, we might realize how deep our moral brokenness goes and that it has negatively affected us our entire lives since birth. We may live with a constant awareness of how badly we act and that our wrongdoing is an ever-present weight on our conscience. We spend our life hiding and looking over our shoulders, hoping not to be caught or found out. God

[3] For more on the most common ways people view themselves morally see chapters 7 and 8 of Frank Turek and Phoenix Hayes, *The War on Reality: Recovering Truth in a World That Celebrates Lies* (Harvest Apologetics, 2026).

[4] Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15–16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 219.

feels like a source of guilt and shame rather than joy and life. This can even be the experience of a disciple who knows they belong to God yet has not learned how to live in the freedom Jesus provides and in the fullness of the resources of God.

K. How do I respond to God if I feel guilty and I know I've failed God? It is common to react like Adam and Eve did by running away and trying to hide—from God and others. We tend to withdraw until our negative emotions pass. A better option would be to respond the way David did and turn toward God instead. We can interact with God as our refuge and source of help. When we are feeling guilty, that is when we need God more than ever because that is the problem only He can fix.

L. It is good for us to train ourselves to respond to our moral failures the same way David did—by praying for God to clean us. We can use Psalm 51:2-3 as our guide. We humbly go to God and ask Him to cleanse us from our present wrongdoing, confidently assuming that God will do it because He's promised to do so for those who are connected to Jesus (1 Jn. 1:9). Developing an attitude of dependence on God, realizing that we can't be the person God wants us to be on the inside, is important for healthy Christian living. God must create moral goodness in us. Like David, we must reach out to Him for help rather than relying on ourselves and our own abilities to do better in the future. This is what is referred to as a righteousness that comes from faith, not our own moral performance (Rm. 3:22, Phil. 3:9).

III. God Must Create Goodness in Us

A. Understanding how spiritual growth works and relying on God to create the right heart within him, David makes his first request of God ("a clean heart", v. 10). David wants God to make David a person who is free from moral impurity.[5] David wants God to clean and change him at his foundation, not just remove his last wrongful act (Ps. 51:1, 9). A Band-Aid is not sufficient for a severed artery. David knows he needs God to change his desires, passions, motivations, dispositions, preferences, and tendencies. David is asking God to transform him to love what is good and hate what is evil (Ps. 45:7, Amos 5:15, Mic. 6:8). It is a prayer that will only be prayed by someone who belongs to God. A person who respects God and wants to please and obey Him is the central characteristic of a clean heart (Ps. 19:9).

B. David is asking God to create moral goodness and purity deep inside him. David's soul needs a deep cleaning from the Spirit of God so David can do the right things from the core of his being (Ps. 51:6).[6] Jesus agrees this is how genuinely good moral behavior is created (Jn. 4:23). This prayer is a means of David watching over and caring for his heart—a critically important feature of a healthy lifestyle (Pr. 4:23). Purity of heart is something a godly person loves (Pr. 22:11). A clean heart is a way that disciples can take on the character of God, as God's heart is so clean that it can't even look at evil—this is a figure of speech to emphasis God's moral cleanness (Hab. 1:13).

C. David came to understand that this internal moral cleanness was still lacking within him. God had opened David's eyes and gave him an awareness of how bad his actions were and how

[5] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 51:10 "clean"

[6] Jesus affirmed this same principle (Mt. 12:35)

poorly David had responded to what he had done. David came to know how much he was lacking the goodness God required.

D. Here is how David concluded the matter of his adultery initially:

> 25 Then David said to the messenger, "This is what you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another; fight with determination against the city and overthrow it'; and *thereby* encourage him." (2 Sam. 11:25)

E. Not only did David do wrong and violate what is good, he didn't respond to what he had done in a good way, either. David's natural reaction to the significant wrong he had done was to simply cover it up and move on ("Do not let this thing displease you", v. 25). David didn't want other people to be bothered by the fact that he committed adultery, then murder, then took another man's wife to be his own. Essentially, David was telling everyone else to get over it. Although the messenger and the commander of the army, Joab, didn't know all that David had done, he didn't want them to be concerned about the death of his adulterer's husband. Since David thought no one knew or would find out what he had done, he moved on and acted like nothing happened.

F. When we do wrong, we often become blinded by it, just as David was. David, deceived by his sin (Heb. 3:13) and self (Gal. 6:3, Jas. 1:26), had to be confronted by the prophet Nathan to fully understand how bad his desires, thoughts, choices, and actions were (2 Sam. 12:1-15). David's own moral sensibilities and standards, when applied to someone else, ended up condemning David when he wasn't in self-protection mode.[7] Nathan confronted David and explained the situation in a way that revealed the depth of David's guilt and the negative impact his actions had on others.

G. Here is how David's own conscience reacted:

> 5 Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this certainly deserves to die! 6 So he must make restitution for the lamb four times over, since he did this thing and had no compassion." 7 Nathan then said to David, "You yourself are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'It is I who anointed you as king over Israel, and it is I who rescued you from the hand of Saul.'" (2 Sam. 12:5-7)

H. When David's own moral standard was applied to him and his actions with Bathsheba, David finally acknowledged how guilty he was: "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13). When all the justifications and cover ups were eliminated, David's own conscience condemned him when he saw his actions for what they were. David, as King and Judge with legal authority, pronounced his own sentence ("the man who has done this certainly deserves to die!", v 5).

I. With all this, David came face to face with his own moral shortcomings. He realized God had to create a deeper moral goodness within him. David knew he was not the good person God expected him to be. Despite all the kindness and favor God had shown David, David abused

[7] Romans 2:1, Matthew 7:2

God's blessings and refused to acknowledge how bad his desires really were until God confronted him.

J. Have you come to acknowledge your need for God to create moral goodness in you? Or are you still blind to how destructive your desires are like David was before God confronted him? The word of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit are critical in the Christian life to help us realize and overcome our spiritual blindness. When we fail God and do wrong, our view of ourselves, our actions, the negative impact of our actions, and even truth and reality, become distorted. We tend to think we are in the right, even when we are not (Pr. 16:2).

K. The more we pay attention to the condition and nature of our own heart, the more we will understand how deeply we need God's help to create goodness within us. There are plenty of times when we don't operate by and act according to the moral standard we expect from others. When we apply our expectations for how we want other people to treat us, we realize that we don't always treat other people that way. No matter how hard we try, we still end up failing and doing wrong. This cycle of failing and needing forgiveness should cause us to realize that we need God's help to make us a good person who is capable of consistently doing what His word tells us to do.

IV. God Must Create Grit in Us

A. David doesn't just ask God to clean him up and his core, he also makes a second request of God ("And renew a steadfast spirit within me", v. 10). Not only does God need to make a person internally good, He must also provide the desire and determination to regularly act on that goodness. Still feeling the sting and shame of his recent failure, David knows God must bring back his previous commitment to do what is good but build that commitment to be stronger. David has just experienced a significant moral failure, and he knows he needs God's help to do better in the future, which is why he asks God to re-establish him on a new and improved basis.[8] While David had previously maintained a desire and attitude to obey God, he still ended up failing. Now, David needs a stronger, more consistent willpower from God.

B. David is not only asking God to change His desires and character through created moral goodness within him, he is also asking God to change his will and decision making capacity. To be steadfast is to be marked by firm determination and resolution—unshakable.[9] David wants God to strengthen his willpower to do what is good and right, even in the face of temptation. Grit is a firmness of mind and attitude that is unyielding, courageous in the face of hardship or danger.[10] David is aware of his past failure and know he needs God's help to do better in the future. A better outcome in the future will not happen because of David's resources, but God's.

C. David further explains what he is praying for:

> [12] Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit.
> (Ps. 51:12)

D. When David was left to his own desires and abilities, he fell to temptation and acted wrongly. David knows that if he is going to keep doing good the next time, God must be continually at

[8] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 51:10 "renew"
[9] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 51:10 "steadfast"
[10] Inc Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003), "grit"

work strengthening him ("And sustain me", v. 12). David is asking God to support him with what is necessary to be disposed or inclined to do good.[11] David needs the power, desire, and openness to do good from God. Based on his personal experience, David is familiar with how frail our human willpower and decision making can be. One moment we may have a strong determination to do what is good, and the next moment we are weak and our willingness to do right is low. The human will, our self-control mechanism, is broken. It has limits. There is a recognition of our human need for God to maintain and strengthen our determination to do good. God must give us what we need to consistently do what is right. David is asking for God to help him be ready and willing to obey the word of God. Strength to overcome temptation comes from the Holy Spirit.

E. We don't always want the right thing, but even when we do, we don't always have the necessary power to do the good we want to do (Mk. 14:38, Rm. 7:19). The problem of willpower is a complex one. Habits, our environment, our values, our support system, and other factors all influence us and make an impact on our willpower. Despite all these complexities, the bottom line is that we need God's help to strengthen and support our willingness to do what is good. The ability to grow in obedience comes only through the power of the Spirit of God working in our soul. Without God's assistance and constant presence, we will inevitably fail, just like David did.

F. Like David, a moment of weakness can permanently impact the rest of our lives. Past spiritual success doesn't guarantee future faithfulness. David learned this lesson the hard way. Despite all the good and faithful actions David had accomplished in the past, when temptation came in a moment David seemed to be taking it easy spiritually and relaxing, David found himself vulnerable. He didn't respond to temptation well. His harmful desires took over and motivated him to sin.

G. Our determination, willpower, and commitment to doing what God says and obeying His word will faulter and fail when we are left to ourselves. A healthy and successful Christian life maintains a continual dependence on the provision and power of God. God's Spirit must supply us with the resources we need to be continually faithful. If we take our eyes off of God and wander for even a brief time, failure is sure to follow, and temptation will quickly overtake us.

V. Conclusion

A. Despite the depth and significance of our moral failings and the large number of wrongdoings we commit, God can clean us to be whiter than snow (Ps. 51:7). Like snow sparkling in the sun, so, too, we can sparkle with the beauty of the character of God.

B. Let's develop a regular habit of asking God in prayer to keep doing His cleansing work in us,

> 7 Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; Cleanse me, and I will be whiter than snow. (Ps. 51:7)

[11] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 51:12 "sustain me with a willing spirit"