Without Pretense

Phil EuBank · Repentance For the Rest Of Us · Psalm 51:6; Psalm 51:10-12; Psalm 51:13-15; Psalm 51:16-17

AT A GLANCE

In the final installment of Repentance For the Rest Of Us, returning after a weekend celebrating what God has done across the church's campuses, Phil EuBank reads Psalm 51 as the last step of living as a repenting people: dropping the mask. God has never met the fake you, so pretense only exhausts and isolates, while honest dependence frees us to be thoughtful witnesses whose struggles, not successes, point others to him.

- Pretense is exhausting because we were not made for it; a divided life of managed images drains joy and costs real relationships.
- God delights in truth in the inward being; a mask before him is invisible, and his love for the real you changes you.
- Witness grows from restored sinners, not polished ones: our honest stories of struggle create hope where our success stories only create admiration.

> *"That's what grace does. It doesn't make you impressive. It just makes you free. It makes you honest."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

Psalm 51:6 — You want me to be completely loyal, so put true wisdom deep inside of me. (ERV)

Psalm 51:10-12 — [10]God, create a pure heart in me, and make my spirit strong again. [11]Don't push me away or take your Holy Spirit from me. [12]Your help made me so happy. Give me that joy again. Make my spirit strong and ready to obey you. (ERV)

Psalm 51:13-15 — [13]I will teach the guilty how you want them to live, and the sinners will come back to you. [14]God, spare me from the punishment of death. My God, you are the one who saves me! Let me sing about all the good things you do for me! [15]My Lord, I will open my mouth and sing your praises! (ERV)

Psalm 51:16-17 — [16]You don't really want sacrifices, or I would give them to you. [17]The sacrifice that God wants is a humble spirit. God, you will not turn away someone who comes with a humble heart

> and is willing to obey you. (ERV)

The argument

Pretense Is a Debt That Compounds — Masks cost energy, joy, and the closeness they were meant to protect

Phil EuBank opens with our fluency in faked vulnerability: by his report, researchers found that one in eight photos tagged "no filter" carried one, and those drew more likes and comments. "It turned out fake had fans." David is the older case. EuBank notes the psalm's heading, about Nathan and Bathsheba, is "not inaccurate, just incomplete": behind it lies a king who staged cover stories for nearly a year. Nathan's "you are the man" meant "you're the one you're mad at." Masks "never fit as well over time," and Psalm 32 shows the cost inside. "Some of today's exhaustion is less about our calendars being full and more about our hearts being divided." Beneath it runs one fear: if people saw the real me, they'd leave.

> **Insight —** *The filtered self may win admiration from a distance, but it loses the nearness it was built to secure, and it quietly drains the one who maintains it.*

God Has Never Met the Fake You — Psalm 51:6 and the mask that is invisible to him

Psalm 51:6 turns the fear around: "You delight in the truth in the inward being." Phil EuBank observes that people know us from the outside in, by slow discovery, while God starts with the actual you, because he made you. So pretense before God is wasted effort: "If you go to him with a mask on, it's invisible to him." The fear is as old as Genesis 3, where Adam hides and God's "Where are you?" seeks honesty, not information; God answers by clothing them himself. Romans 5:8 says the same: Christ died while we were still sinners. EuBank's early preaching voice, coached out of him, and our prayer voices are versions of the same performance; God's wish list is "a broken and contrite heart."

> **Insight —** *Because God already knows and loves the real you, the energy spent presenting a better version to him is spent on no one.*

Love That Accepts You Also Remakes You — David asks God to create, not to help him manage

Phil EuBank guards against a pendulum swing: God loves you as you are, "and he loves you way too much to leave you unchanged." In verse 10 David asks God to "create" a pure heart; EuBank says this is the Genesis 1 word, ex nihilo, so David is confessing "I can't generate this." Heart, in Hebrew, is the center, the decision-making centerpiece; the "right spirit" is steadfastness, the opposite of pretense's unsteadiness, which breeds a critical spirit toward people and bitterness toward God. David's fear of being cast away echoes Saul and Eden, yet he has "no confidence in himself and full confidence in God's love." He asks for the joy of his salvation back, not salvation itself, because filtered living goes after joy first. Jesus, who never wore a mask, was

treated as though he wore ours.

> **Insight —** *Honesty before God is not the end of the work but its beginning, since only the Creator can make a heart new.*

Witness Flows From the Restored, Not the Polished — In verse 13, the "then" puts honest repentance before any ministry

David's qualification to teach is that he is a sinner: "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you." Phil EuBank stresses the "then": "not before, not after." The witness comes out of a restored person, "not a polished one." The word "return" is the repentance word, a U-turn, so "David's repentance becomes the occasion for other people's repentance." Success stories create admiration and separation; struggle stories, even incomplete ones, create hope. The woman at the well had a whole testimony in her exposure; Paul calls himself chief of sinners and counts his resume as loss. Being a thoughtful witness doesn't mean oversharing, but it does mean you don't "edit grace down to something small, something manageable, something polite."

> **Insight —** *People are drawn not by our strengths but by evidence that God shows up for someone like us.*

Repentance Is a Mirror Before It Is a Weapon — The series closes by asking whether you want to be admired or known

Closing the series, Phil EuBank warns that we will be tempted to package it up or forward it to someone else, turning it into "a weapon that we point at other people rather than a mirror." With election season ahead, we build filters for others too, caricatures built from the angriest clip; but if God has never met the fake you, "he's never met the fake them either." His portable question for every room: "Am I trying to be admired or known?" It might sound like "I don't know," "I was wrong," "I need help," or "that hurt," and it needs at least one real friend, not a chatbot, since relationships are reciprocal. He previews the next series, Beyond the Ballot.

> **Insight —** *Before repentance is asked of anyone else, it is a mirror held to oneself, and the people we dismiss are as real to God as we are.*

Cross-references

- Psalm 32:3 — David's own description of bones wasting away while he kept silent
- 2 Samuel 12:7 — Nathan's "you are the man" read as "you're the one you're mad at"
- Genesis 3:8-10 — Adam hides in fear, and God asks where he is to draw out honesty
- Genesis 3:21 — God replaces their fig leaves with clothing he made
- Romans 5:8 — God shows his love while we were still sinners, before we clean up
- 1 Samuel 16:7 — Man looks at the outside, God looks at the heart

- Matthew 27:46 — Jesus, who never wore a mask, is cast out so we never have to be
- John 4:28-29 — The woman at the well whose exposure became her witness
- Philippians 3:7-8 — Paul counts his impressive resume as loss compared to knowing Christ
- John 8:32 — The truth sets free those bound to a managed image

DEVOTIONAL

Take the photograph that was meant to look as though it simply happened. Somewhere behind it are all the attempts that did not make the cut, and the quiet labor of keeping them out of view. David knew that labor. A king, a secret, a year of managing it, and a body that groaned all day long beneath the calm. Then a prophet's story, and a finger: you are the one. What follows in Psalm 51 is not a better performance. It is the end of performing. David does not offer sacrifices he could arrange; he offers a broken spirit, the one thing God will not despise. He does not ask to be coached toward a pure heart. He asks to have one made, as only the Maker of things from nothing can. Behind him stands an older scene: two people in a garden, stitching leaves, and a voice walking toward them asking not for information but for them. Where are you? And the Maker, instead of leaving them to their needlework, makes them clothes. The mask has never fooled him. That is the severity of it and the whole mercy of it. What we labor to hide he already knows, and he has already moved toward it with a cross. So the real self, the one with no fans, is not the liability we thought. It is the only one he has ever spoken to. Perhaps the first honest sentence of the day is enough: open my lips. Then, only then, others may hear what mercy sounds like in a voice that has stopped pretending.

Reflection

- In which rooms this week are you most likely to reach for admiration rather than being known, and what exactly are you protecting there?
- Which story of your own struggle, perhaps one still unresolved, have you kept polished or untold, and who might find hope in hearing it?
- Which of the phrases "I don't know," "I was wrong," "I need help," or "that hurt" is hardest for you to say aloud, and who could hear it?

Closing prayer

God, we come before you as needy people who do not have it all figured out. Nothing we have done has separated us from your love or made the hope in your Son Jesus unavailable to us. Give us boldness to bring the darkest parts of our mind, soul, and story out into the light, with you and with someone else. Help us trust your love, perhaps for the first time, and stop pouring energy into a version of us that does not exist. Let us test honesty and vulnerability, and live in your abundant, free life. In Jesus'

name. Amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Before you point repentance at anyone else, hold the mirror up to yourself; God loves the real version of them as much as the real you.

This week

This week, when you tell someone a story from your past, include the ugly parts and leave an unresolved ending unresolved. Before the conversation, pray, "O Lord, open my lips," and afterward notice whether you spoke to be admired or to be known.

Return to **Psalm 51:15**