

Psalm 51

For the choir director. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

- ¹ Be gracious to me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness (*chesed*)
According to Your great mercy (*rachum*)
Blot out my transgressions (*pasha*).
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity (*avon*)
And cleanse me from my sin (*chatta'ah*).
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against You, You only, I have sinned (*chata*)
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.
- ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Behold, You desire truth (*emet*) in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
- ⁷ Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Make me to hear **joy** and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken (crushed) rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide Your **face** (*aph*) from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast (firm) spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your **presence** (*aph*)
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the **joy** of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
the God of my salvation;
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
That my mouth may declare Your praise.
- ¹⁶ For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
- ¹⁸ By Your favor do good to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices,
In burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Meeting God on the Mountain: David is thinking about Moses going up Mount Sinai,¹ and hearing God say this, which became a creed for Israel:

- ⁶ The Lord, the Lord God,
merciful (*rachum*) and gracious (*channun*),
slow to anger (*aph*), and
abounding in lovingkindness (*chesed*) and
truth (*emet*);
⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands,
who forgives iniquity (*avon*),
and transgression (*pasha*)
and sin (*chatta'ah*);
yet by no means clearing the guilty,
visiting the iniquity (*avon*) of fathers
on the children and on the grandchildren
to the third and fourth generations.”
(Ex.34:6 – 7)

As Moses ascended, God purified him in some sense. Moses descended with face shining with glory (Ex.34:29 – 35). David is hoping for something similar from God.

David's Bloodguiltiness (v.14): David's guilt of bloodshed was similar to Cain's guilt for murdering his brother Abel. Cain corrupted himself, shown by Cain not being able to bring forth life from the land (Gen.4:11). David's guilt was not "in God's mind" but a corruption *in David*.

¹ Special thanks to Ryan W. Camp for pointing this out to me, and for assistance in discerning the chiasmic structure, below.

Historical and Cultural Background

David's Sin: David “saw” then “took” what was not his (2 Sam.11:2 – 4), like Adam and Eve did (Gen.3:6). To cover it up, David killed a brother “in the field” (2 Sam.11:23), like Cain did (Gen.4:8).

Adam, Eve, Cain	David
“When the woman saw that the tree was... a delight to the eyes , ... she took ...” (Gen.3:6).	² ...from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance . ³ So David sent servants and inquired about the woman. And someone said, “Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” ⁴ Then David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he slept with her.” (2 Sam.11:2 – 4)
“And it came about when they were in the field , that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” (Gen.4:8)	²³ The messenger said to David, “The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field ... ²⁴ so some of the king’s servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead.” (2 Sam.11:23 – 24)

David's Repentance: The prophet Nathan got David to judge an anonymous man that wound up being himself. Both of David’s offenses called for his execution under Jewish law (Ex.21:12; Lev.20:10). David subsequently repented and wrote Psalm 51.

Holy Mountains – Eden, Sinai, Zion: These three mountains were connected literarily and theologically. God encountered people on mountains, from which rivers of life flowed.

- Eden: Israel longed for a return to Eden, which was a mountain (Ezk.28:13 – 14) from which rivers of water flowed so that humans could spread the garden over the land (Gen.2:10).
- Sinai: Mount Sinai was a temporary retelling of Mount Eden. Water flowed from its rock (Ex.17:1 – 7). Moses went up to the top, was purified by God as he did so that his face shone with light (Ex.34).
- Zion: Mount Zion became a retelling of both Mount Sinai and Mount Eden, from which rivers of the life-blood of purity flowed.

Righteous Sacrifices at Zion: David’s prayer that God wash/cleanse him (v.2) is mirrored by his prayer that God cleanse the garden land (v.19). The sacrifices and offerings were not meaningful in themselves (Ps.51:16 – 17) but they were meaningful (“righteous sacrifices”) based on the heart and posture of the person offering them (Ps.51:18 – 19). Through the sacrificial system, God acted like a modern dialysis machine. Israel gave God their impurity, and God gave back purity: the purifying life-blood of the animals, so God could make the land fruitful (e.g. Mal.3:8 – 12) and re-gift the garden land to Israel in the jubilee year (Lev.25). When David brought the ark of the covenant, the throne of God, to the city of Jerusalem on Mount Zion (2 Sam.6), the sacrificial system was restarted in the temple.

Chiastic Structure: Psalm 51 is organized in a literary pattern. See below. A chiasm is a literary structure that is an inverted parallel. The first point matches the last point. The second point matches the second to last point. And so on, until you get to the central point. The main point, or the point of emphasis, is the central point. This is one way that we can know the author’s intention.

Psalm 51: Chiastic Structure

Introduction

¹ Be gracious to me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness (*chesed*)
According to Your great mercy (*rachum*),
blot out my transgressions (*pasha*).

Be gracious to me
Your lovingkindness
Your mercy
Blot out my transgressions

Main Body

² **Wash me** thoroughly from my iniquity (*avon*)
And **cleanse me** from my sin (*chatta'ah*).

Purify me

³ For I know my **transgressions**,
And my **sin** is ever before me.

I broke boundaries

⁴ Against You, You only, **I have sinned** (*chata*)
And **done what is evil** in Your sight,
So that You are justified when **You speak**
And blameless when **You judge**.

I did evil

⁵ Behold, **I was brought forth** in iniquity,
And in sin my mother **conceived** me.

When God speaks

⁶ Behold, You desire **truth (*emet*) in the innermost being,**
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.

I came from fallen humans

⁷ Purify me with hyssop, and **I shall be clean**;
Wash me, and **I shall be whiter than snow**.

Human inward reality

⁸ Make me to hear **joy** and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken **rejoice**.

Purify me, I shall be clean

⁹ Hide **Your face** (*aph*) from my sins
And blot out all **my iniquities**.

Joy

¹⁰ Create **in me a clean heart**, O God,
And renew **a steadfast spirit within me**.

Your face away from sin
Remove my iniquities

¹¹ Do not cast me away from **Your presence** (*aph*)
And do not take **Your Holy Spirit** from me.

Clean heart in me
Firm spirit in me

¹² Restore to me the **joy** of Your salvation
And sustain me with a **willing spirit**.

Remove me not
Your face toward me

¹³ Then **I will teach transgressors** Your ways,
And **sinner will be converted** to You.

Joy

¹⁴ Deliver me from **bloodguiltiness**, O God, the God of my salvation;
Then **my tongue will joyfully sing** of Your righteousness.

I will teach others

¹⁵ O Lord, **open my lips**,
That **my mouth may declare** Your praise.

I will speak

¹⁶ For **You do not delight** in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.

Praise will come from me

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are **a broken spirit**;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

God's inward reality

¹⁸ By Your favor do **good** to Zion;
Build the **walls** of Jerusalem.

I am sorry

¹⁹ Then You will delight in **righteous sacrifices**, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then young bulls will be offered on **Your altar**.

You build boundaries

Purify land and people

Questions

1. Starter question: When we do harm to others, or do something wrong, what do we do emotionally? Some possibilities (leader, be ready to resonate with one or more of these, and illustrate personally):
 - a. Fix It Mode: Try to fix things right away
 - b. Deny, Deny, Deny: try to hide the harm or mistake
 - c. Fight: double down on why we feel justified
 - d. Elicit Pity: get people to feel sorry for us so that they won't punish us, by saying, "It's not my fault"
 - e. Shut Down: numb ourselves, get drunk, distract ourselves so we don't have to think about it
 - f. Freeze: panic because we don't know what to do
 - g. Flight: escape, run away

2. What was David's sin? Read the background notes and summarize.
 - a. Lusting, coveting
 - b. Rape, adultery, and abuse of power
 - c. Lying, denial
 - d. Murder of Uriah and other Israelite soldiers because David made his general, Joab, do something stupid on the battlefield just so Uriah would die (2 Sam.11:21, 24).
 - e. David's sin is portrayed as cataclysmic, because it's a replay of Adam and Eve, and then Cain.

3. David turned back to God – he repented – because the prophet Nathan confronted him. How did David understand what his sin did to himself? Look for words and phrases in Psalm 51.
 - a. David said he "did evil" (v.4). Adam and Eve "saw" then "took" into themselves the power and desire to define good and evil for themselves. They "did what was right in their own eyes" (a phrase from Judges 21:25). David acknowledges God's sight/perspective instead.
 - b. David said he had "bloodguilt" (v.14). He acknowledges he's a murderer.
 - c. David believed he damaged and polluted himself: v.2 – 3, 6 – 10.
 - d. David confirmed that he came from other damaged, polluted, fallen parents: v.5
 - e. David damaged and polluted his spiritual witness: v.13 – 14
 - f. David damaged his apparent loss of ability to teach, lead others to God, lead others in worship.
 - g. David jeopardized his vocation as a leader, he wrecked a family in his own neighborhood, and he betrayed the military men who served him.
 - h. Ultimately, he betrayed both the God of Israel, the Creator and Redeemer of the world, and he endangered the whole people of Israel.

4. Did David actually ask God for forgiveness? Is he asking God to redirect His anger or change His mind? Or to change something else?
 - a. Well, it's implied that David asked God for forgiveness. But specifically because he damaged himself. That's different than if David just thought God was mad, and menacing him with some punishment just around the corner, like a cosmic spanking.
 - b. At first, it can sound like David is minimizing the damage that he did to Bathsheba, Uriah, and others. In the U.S., people say things like, "Only God can judge me" in order to avoid accountability from others, even if they are speeding on the road or doing lots of wrong things. But let's see how David is not doing that.
 - c. In verse 5, what does David say about his human nature?
 - i. Imagine having fetal alcohol syndrome. David was born with something worse: the sin-sickness (v.5), and he made it worse by doing evil (v.4, 14). The sin-sickness is not like getting a bruise or a cut. It's much more embedded in us.
 - ii. What other diseases or problems involve self-harm?
 1. Alcoholism or some other addiction with substances, including sugar. We can give ourselves Type 2 Diabetes. Etc.
 - iii. It's like David damaged a work of art that God loved, and that work of art was himself.
 1. In Genesis 2, God took Adam's human nature and formed Eve with it. So Adam's human nature existed in his own person and in someone else. From that point, it becomes clear that we are linked by our human nature. So what we do to other people is intrinsically related to what we do to ourselves.

2. Illus: In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, if you kill someone else, you tear your own soul.
 3. David recognizes the harm he did to Bathsheba and Uriah and the other soldiers (v.4, 14). So it's not as if he was blind to all that. But he also recognizes that when he lusted, murdered, hid, lied, covered up these sins, he did something to himself that was fundamentally different. It's like God will heal Bathsheba and Uriah and the soldiers, because those wounds were done to them by David. But there is a deeper wound that David did to himself that can only be undone by David's participation with God as the Great Physician.
 - iv. Application: So we learn more about what sin is, here. Considering question #1, and all the ways we could respond that are *against God*, and the ways David could have responded that were *against God*, Psalm 51 is amazing.
 - d. When we traumatize others, we also traumatize ourselves. David recognizes how much he had internalized sexual and physical violence and lies for days, weeks, months.
 - i. When you do evil and do not repent of it, how does that make it easier to do the evil again?
 1. Stealing money from my parents' wallet/purse when I was a kid made it easier to steal from other people, too
 2. Does physically fighting other people make it easier to increase your own violence?
 3. Does indulging in "sexual freedom" more and more make it easier to be unfaithful to others, as if it shouldn't be "such a big deal"?
 4. The "seared conscience" phenomenon is real.
 5. "Virtue ethics" is the paradigm where virtue or vice become "second nature."
 - ii. Reflection: How does that strike you?
 - e. (optional) In the New Testament, the apostle Peter said that the consequence for sinning is desiring to sin more (2 Peter 2). It no longer comes externally, like floods and fires. It is fully internal. The punishment for sinning is the desire to sin even more.
 - i. There is a "punishment" under which the unrighteous are kept "until the day of judgment, especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Pet.2:9 – 10). It is the very process of becoming less human and more animalistic. They are becoming, and in some cases, perhaps have already become, "slaves of corruption" (2 Pet.2:19). It is self-blinding, such that they will experience "utter darkness" (2 Pet.2:17), though all around them be the light of Jesus' purified and transfigured humanity (2 Pet.1:16 – 18), and the bright light of divine fire which will burn away the dross of corruption from the good creation, loosing it and setting it free (2 Pet.3:10).
 - ii. Peter also says that humans are becoming animals or animal-like. The dog and pig who return to their own vomit (2 Pet.2:22) are those false teachers or their disciples (2 Pet.2:1 – 3). Not in Noah's day, nor in Lot's, were humans becoming less human, and more like "irrational animals, creatures of instinct" (2 Pet.2:12), which eventuates in them becoming vomit-eating animals v.22. Not of Noah's generation, nor of Lot's, does Peter say, "For if, after they escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are entangled again in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Pet.2:20 – 21).
 - iii. For Jewish-Christian followers of Jesus who know the human-animal boundaries from Genesis 1, and how King Nebuchadnezzar became like an animal for a bit (Dan.3), and how the Gentile empires were portrayed as terrifying animals with mixed body parts (Dan.7), to say that humans are in danger of becoming animals, is a terrifying negative destiny for the journey of human being – human becoming.
5. David pictures himself like Moses, going up the mountain to meet with God, and the literary connections are shown in the column on the right. What does David hope in God for?
 - a. The general idea of ascending a mountain is a powerful image by itself. It takes determination and work, but the vista is rewarding. The particular biblical story of Moses going up Mount Sinai,

- passing through the divine fire, and hearing God declare what He is like (Ex.34) adds to the power.
- b. The specifics of God’s character and Moses’ experience are really, really important. David recognizes that he has sinned, and uses lots of words for that. David knows God “by no means clear[s] the guilty.” But David is also hoping and praying that God will cleanse him, like God cleansed Moses, and made Moses’ face shine with divine light.
 - c. (optional) What was God doing through Israel? How did David understand that?
 - i. David affirms a theological and spiritual connection between God and human sin in general, and what God was doing through Israel in particular.
 - ii. He demonstrates that the Sinai covenant that God made with Israel is designed to undo the sin-sickness that Adam and Eve inflicted on human nature.
 - iii. He confirms that the Pentateuch as a literature already saw the role of Israel that way.
 - d. Although David did try to hide his sin at first, he repented “boldly” later. Would you call David “bold” in his repentance? Why do you think David can be so “bold” (or straightforward, or something else) with God? (This can lead you into the next question.)
6. Use the chiasmic structure to consider the relationship between what is “within” David and what David says, which is what comes “out” of him.
- a. Reflection: Consider what we do verbally to cover up a sin or mistake. We double down. We deny, deny, deny. Think of an abuser who denied being an abuser. What happened? And unfortunately, the abuser abuses another person.
 - b. Application: Have you ever suffered a loss of credibility or authority when you sinned?
 - c. Discussion: Jesus later said, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45) and said that what is inside us will be heard and seen outside us (e.g. Matthew 15:18 – 20; Mark 7:18 – 23). It will come out. You won’t be able to hide *anything*. How do you feel about that?
 - d. In the Old Testament, there is an unbroken pattern that when God acts, God speaks first (Gen.1; Amos 3:7; etc.). God says what He does and does what He says. And Jesus is the absolute union of God’s heart, God’s Word and God’s action. Then, Jesus says to us, let our “yes be yes and no be no” (Matthew 5:33 – 37). In other words, Jesus wants our words and deeds to be integrated.
7. Look at how God has desires “within” Himself, and how that affects what God says.
- a. God does not delight in ceremonial, performative gestures (v.16 – 17).
 - b. God delights in what the inner reality is, in us. He delights in repentance, and when truth and wisdom is in the innermost part of the person. Meaning when we have internalized God’s truth into ourselves.
 - c. God declares and judges based on the truth that is in Himself (v.4 – 5).
 - d. Application: God is not “satisfied” by getting some anger out of Himself. God cares more about how we actually are. David can be “bold” with God in repentance because he knows that God cares more about how David is, than how God “feels.”
 - e. It’s striking that the apostle Paul in Romans 7:14 – 25, reflecting on his experience as a Jewish person under the Sinai covenant and before Jesus, found that God helped him tell the difference between the “I myself” and the “sin which indwells me, the flesh.” That is very similar to King David here in Psalm 51.
8. Ultimately, David prays that God would make for him a clean heart and steadfast (firm) spirit (v.10). Does God forgive us without purifying us? How does God clean our hearts and purify us?
- a. When we confess our sin/sins. How important is confession of sin here?
 - i. Absolutely important! Without confession of sin, is our repentance real? John says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” (1 John 1:9 – 10). As they say, “Daylight is the best disinfectant.”
 - ii. When we confess sin, we are interpreting ourselves so that other people don’t get the wrong idea.

- iii. When we confess sin, we strengthen the godly desires within us. And we bring back a kind of unity and integrity between what we most desire in us and what we say about ourselves.
- b. Ultimately, Jesus cleaned and completed the heart human, or human nature, through his own human obedience (Hebrews 1:3; 5:7 – 10; 12:1 – 2). And he shares himself with us by his Spirit.
- c. So God is like a good doctor. He has the antibodies and even the organ transplant and healthy blood that we need. But we need to agree, participate, and actively receive God's treatment.

Appendix A: Sample Sermon

The War Is Over

When a violent, rival gang leader experienced Christ, he made sure I knew about it.
By Danny D. as told to John Stahlman

I've been a member and leader of Chicago's Maniac Latin Disciples for 25 years. I can't say that it's been an empowering experience, though. Twenty-two of those years have been spent in and out of jails and prisons. That's half my life wasted behind bars because of my gangbanging, dope-dealin', violence, and general intimidation. I guess I always knew in my heart that I was on a fast track to hell. But I never knew how to get off. That was until three years ago.

The man I wanted dead

January 2001 wasn't only the beginning of a new millennium; it offered a new calendar to this aging and weary criminal. I had, with the help of a shrewd attorney, attempted one last legal maneuver to gain my freedom. But my plans backfired. Because of my reputation and the ability of my gang organization to corrupt the Cook County courts, my case was moved to suburban DuPage County, where my internal connections were useless. On my first day in that jail, I discovered what fear really felt like. An unknown judge and some strangers on a jury had control of my future. Sure, I had been afraid before, but no one but I knew it. On the outside, I was always a cool dude—even if in my soul I was dancing on hot coals. In the county jail, I was in a group with five other guys, all with lengthy records and no chance of catching a break. We were each in one-man cells. At lunchtime our food was brought to a small table just outside our cells, and the six of us were taken there to eat. Outside my cell at lunchtime, I started casing the surroundings for the sake of my own security. As I looked over the five other guys coming toward the table, my eyes locked on one guy, a Vice Lords chief. We had tried to kill each other more than once. For 13 years, he and I had been mortal enemies, doing all we could to get rid of each other for more turf. As I looked in my adversary's eyes, instead of the expected rage and hatred, I saw peace and calm—maybe even contentment. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. There had to be a reason. I assumed he was high on weed to be that mellow in this place. When he recognized me, he approached with an outstretched hand. I thought, What's goin' on here? What's he gonna try? Responding with a hesitant handshake, I expected to feel the cold, sweaty palm of a guy struggling with fear. Instead, his hand was cool and dry, maybe even friendly. I guess he sensed my bewilderment, because he said, 'Hey man, the war is over. I'm no longer lost. I'm different.' I yanked my hand back suspiciously, certain he was trying to catch me off guard. I kept my distance for the next few days. I didn't want to let down my defenses until I figured out his game. I watched him across the deck through the glass wall of our cells and saw him drop to his knees three or four times a day. He would stay on his knees for 45 minutes or more at a time. Maybe he's gone crazy, I thought. What is he doing on his knees for so long? There ain't that much prayin' going on in the whole world. Later that day, he was let out of his cell and he came to mine carrying a Bible. Again, the look of peace was all over his face. Opening his Bible and shoving it under my cell door, he said, 'Read this.' It was Psalm 51. I read the whole thing slowly and carefully, to make sure I wasn't being set up somehow. Finding nothing of the sort, I shoved the Bible back under the door and said, 'Hey, that's deep.' He closed the book and shoved it back to me. Confused, I asked him, 'What kind of high are you on?' He smiled at me and said, 'Jesus.' With that, he told me to keep the Bible. I had been blindsided, just what I didn't want. 'Thanks,' I said and threw the Bible on my bunk. I was focused on my court appearance, not Jesus. At court, because my legal motions were denied, my attorney had gotten a 60-day continuance. Things weren't going well for me and I was angry—at the world, with the judge, with the district attorney, with my own lawyer.

Drawn to the Book

Returning from the courthouse to the jail one day, I took out my anger on the guards. For my little physical and emotional outburst, I was put on lockdown. Locked in my cell for the next 29 days, I had never felt so lost and alone. I could have no visitors—no one to talk to, no one to lash out against. Bored, I looked at the cover of the book that the Vice Lords chief had left with me. 'The Living Bible,' read the words on the cover. I opened the pages to where my adversary had marked it—Psalm 51. I read it again and again, hoping I would understand why a Vice Lords gang-banger wanted me to see that particular passage. After reading it several times, it dawned on me that the words could have been my own:

... For I recognize my shameful deeds—
they haunt me day and night.

Against you, and you alone,
have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.
You will be proved right in what you say,
and your judgment against me is just.

... Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt. ...
Create in me a clean heart, O God.
Renew a right spirit within me.

How could a book written before I was born know me so well? How could it describe me and yet be so positive? Intrigued by what I read, I started reading the whole Bible, beginning to end. Seventeen days into my lockdown, I realized I wasn't so angry anymore. That horrible feeling of being isolated had disappeared. The nights were not so lonely. Something strange was happening to me. I even reached the point where I got on my knees and talked to a Person I couldn't see. Somehow, alone in a stark jail cell, I felt a presence. I felt safe and comfortable; feelings I had never experienced before. It amazed me that as the days passed, I worried less. All of this was so strange to me. Maybe I was a maniac. If I were as I had been, I would have been ranting and raging. Instead, I began to think that maybe jail was God's plan for me.

Not by chance

Now, three years later, I have the same peace I found in the DuPage County jail. I'm still trying to grasp God's will for my life, but my hold on it isn't yet solid. Throughout my transformation, I have come to believe that none of my experiences in the DuPage County jail was a result of chance. A gang chief turned Christian, a Bible, a particular psalm, and a 29-day lockdown had set the stage. After I lost my case in court and was sent to the state correctional center, I finally quit running from God and myself. For the first time, I didn't like my past and all the wrongs I had done. I wanted something different, and I got it. I asked Jesus to forgive me ... and He did. Today, I want to be God's man, not the main man. I have a long way to go, but I know I'm on the right road, going in the right direction.

John Stahlman is a writer living in Springfield, Illinois.

Editor's Note: Danny D. (who asked that his full name not be used) is still serving time in an Illinois state penitentiary, but instead of leading a gang, he is taking Bible correspondence courses, attending chapel activities, and praying. Says writer John Stahlman, who interviewed Danny for this article, 'I have seen with my own eyes how Danny's attitude of violence has become an attitude of peace. He's now a new man, God's man.'