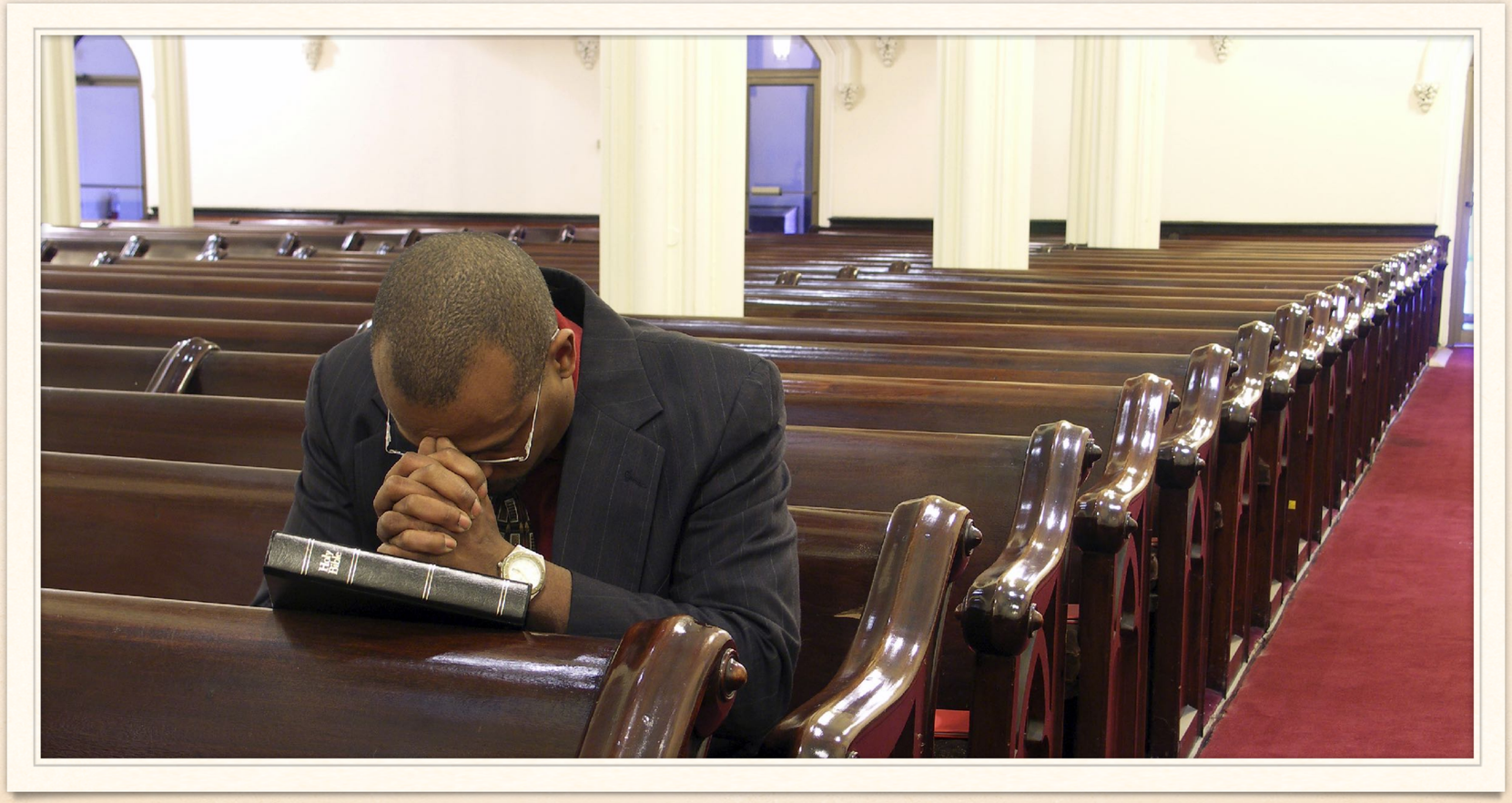
HAVE MERCY UPON ME, O GOD

Psalm 51



Psalm 51 is a psalm by David composed in remorse after his great sin with Bath-sheba. It is an expression of his "repentance, when the message of reproof came to him from God," intended "to be sung in the public assemblies of his people, … that others might be instructed by the sad history of his fall" (*PP* 724, 725). It is a prayer for forgiveness and for sanctification through the Holy Spirit. Accompanying the petition are vows of gratitude for God's mercy and promises for the future. Perhaps no other OT passage draws so clear a picture of the truly repentant sinner trusting in God's power to forgive and restore, as this portrait of David's experience of transgression. The psalm should be studied in the light of 2 Samuel 12:1–13 and Psalm 32. (*SDA BC*)

As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to conform his will entirely to God's will and keep in a state of repentance and contrition, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

Pardon and justification are one and the same thing. (*FW* 103.1, .2)

- Transgressions—*pesha*—Psalm 32:1; 51:3; 65:3; Isaiah 43:25; 53:5

- *Pesha* signifies willful deviation from and rebellion against the path of godly living. Such a rebellion can be done against another man: "... Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?" (Genesis 31:36). A nation can *pesha* against another nation: "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four ... because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron" (Amos 1:3). Usually, however, *pesha* has immediate reference to one's relationship to God.

- Amos 2:4: "For three transgressions (*pesha*) of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked."

- Iniquity— *ʿāwōn*—This noun is collective and represents the totality of one's sins; *ʿāwōn* represents the iniquity, the guilt, or the punishment.

- It denotes both the deed and its punishment. In Hebrew thought, these two are bound together. Both ideas are present in *ʿāwōn*, but sometimes the focus is on the deed, at other times on the outcome of the deed, or the punishment, and sometimes on the place between the deed and its consequence, i.e. the guilt. Guilt is felt in the inner man.

- In the Bible, punishment does not have to follow *ʿāwōn*. There is a way to escape it —through prayer and supplication to God, repentance and confession and asking forgiveness. (Gen 44:16; Lev 16:21; Neh 9:2; Ps 32:5; 38:18), (Ex 34:9; Num 14:19; Job 7:21; Ps 25:11). We must also change our way of life (Ezk 18:30; 36:31), and most importantly a substitute is offered in man's stead (Isa 53:6, 11).

- Forgiveness of our iniquity is both promised and is an actuality (Num 14:18; Ps 65:3; 78:38; 103:3; Prov 16:6; Isa 6:7; Jer 32:18; Dan 9:24; Mic 7:18–19; Zech 3:4, 9; cf. David's act of forgiveness by kissing, II Sam 14:32). In three places the divine act of cleansing is stressed (Ps 51:4; Jer 33:8; Ezk 36:33).

- Sin—*ḥaṭṭāʾt*—an act or acts; not a general word for sin but a specific sin(s). An offense against man: And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What *is* my trespass? what *is* my sin (*ḥaṭṭāʾt*), that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? (Genesis 31:36)

- But used most often as an offense against God: And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, *and* ground *it* very small, *even* until it was as small as dust: and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount. (Deuteronomy 9:21)

Blot out—*māḥâ*—wipe clean, erase

I, *even* I, *am* he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out (*māḥâ*—wipe clean, wipe out) my transgressions. (Psalm 51:1)

And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive (*nāśā᾽*—lift, carry, take) their sin—; and if not, blot (*māḥâ*) me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out (*māḥâ*) of my book. (Exodus 32:31–33)

At the time appointed for the judgment—the close of the 2300 days, in 1844—began the work of investigation and blotting out of sins. All who have ever taken upon themselves the name of Christ must pass its searching scrutiny. Both the living and the dead are to be judged "out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." (*GC* 486.1)

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. (Revelation 22:12)

"And, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away." Daniel 7:13, 14. The coming of Christ here described is not His second coming to the earth. He comes to the Ancient of Days in heaven to receive dominion and glory and a kingdom, which will be given Him at the close of His work as a mediator. It is this coming, and not His second advent to the earth, that was foretold in prophecy to take place at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844. Attended by heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of His ministration in behalf of man—to perform the work of investigative judgment and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits. (*CIHS* 172.2)

Sins that have not been repented of and forsaken will not be pardoned and blotted out of the books of record, but will stand to witness against the sinner in the day of God. He may have committed his evil deeds in the light of day or in the darkness of night; but they were open and manifest before Him with whom we have to do. Angels of God witnessed each sin and registered it in the unerring records. Sin may be concealed, denied, covered up from father, mother, wife, children, and associates; no one but the guilty actors may cherish the least suspicion of the wrong; but it is laid bare before the intelligences of heaven. The darkness of the darkest night, the secrecy of all deceptive arts, is not sufficient to veil one thought from the knowledge of the Eternal. God has an exact record of every unjust account and every unfair dealing. He is not deceived by appearances of piety. He makes no mistakes in His estimation of character. Men may be deceived by those who are corrupt in heart, but God pierces all disguises and reads the inner life. (*GC* 486.2)

Jesus has left us word, “Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.” [Mark 13:35–37] We are waiting and watching for the Master’s return, who is to bring the morning, lest coming suddenly he find us sleeping. What time is here referred to? Not the revelation of Christ in the clouds of heaven to find a people asleep. No; but his return from his ministration in the most holy, laying off his priestly attire, and clothing himself with garments of vengeance, when the mandate goes forth, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” (*T16* 93.1)

Solemn are the scenes connected with the closing work of the atonement. Momentous are the interests involved therein. The judgment is now passing in the sanctuary above. For many years this work has been in progress. Soon—none know how soon—it will pass to the cases of the living. In the awful presence of God our lives are to come up in review. At this time above all others it behooves every soul to heed the Saviour's admonition: "Watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." Mark 13:33. "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." Revelation 3:3. (*CIHS* 188.1)

In heaven it is said by the ministering angels: The ministry which we have been commissioned to perform we have done. We pressed back the army of evil angels. We sent brightness and light into the souls of men, quickening their memory of the love of God expressed in Jesus. We attracted their eyes to the cross of Christ. Their hearts were deeply moved by a sense of the sin that crucified the Son of God. They were convicted. They saw the steps to be taken in conversion; they felt the power of the gospel; their hearts were made tender as they saw the sweetness of the love of God. They beheld the beauty of the character of Christ. But with the many it was all in vain. They would not surrender their own habits and character. They would not put off the garments of earth in order to be clothed with the robe of heaven. Their hearts were given to covetousness. They loved the associations of the world more than they loved their God. (*COL* 318.1)

True sanctification is harmony with God, oneness with Him in character. It is received through obedience to those principles that are the transcript of His character. And the Sabbath is the sign of obedience. He who from the heart obeys the fourth commandment will obey the whole law. He is sanctified through obedience. (*CCh* 261.4)

I was shapen in iniquity— David recognized that children inherit natures with propensities to evil. He did not seek to excuse his sin but sought to stress the still greater need of God's mercy because of his inborn tendency to do evil (see *PP* 64).

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." It is inevitable that children should suffer from the consequences of parental wrongdoing, but they are not punished for the parents' guilt, except as they participate in their sins. It is usually the case, however, that children walk in the steps of their parents. By inheritance and example the sons become partakers of the father's sin. Wrong tendencies, perverted appetites, and debased morals, as well as physical disease and degeneracy, are transmitted as a legacy from father to son, to the third and fourth generation. This fearful truth should have a solemn power to restrain men from following a course of sin. (*PP* 306)

Vs.6—**Inward parts**—*ṭūḥôt*—The primary meaning of *ṭūḥôt* is to cover over one item with another. It is used to describe the silverplating of temple stones (I Chronicles 29:4) and the process of cleansing a house infected with a plague (Leviticus 14:42–48). The priests remove the infected plaster and stones which harbored the disease and repair the house with new stones and plaster. False prophets use *ṭûaḥ* figuratively to "cover-up" God's truth (Ezekiel 13:10–15) or politicians' wickedness (Ezekiel 22:28). (*TWOT*)

- ***Purge.*** Heb. *chata'*, the simple form of which means "to sin," in the sense of missing the mark. The form employed here means, "to make atonement." (*SDA BC*)

- Exodus 12:22—hyssop at Passover

- I saw four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and were on their way to accomplish it. Jesus was clothed with priestly garments. He gazed in pity on the remnant, then raised His hands, and with a voice of deep pity cried, "*My blood, Father, My blood, My blood, My blood*!" Then I saw an exceeding bright light come from God, who sat upon the great white throne, and was shed all about Jesus. Then I saw an angel with a commission from Jesus, swiftly flying to the four angels who had a work to do on the earth, and waving something up and down in his hand, and crying with a loud voice, "*Hold! Hold! Hold! Hold*! until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads." (*EW* 38.1)

Solemn will be the day of final decision. In prophetic vision the apostle John describes it: “I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” Revelation 20:11, 12. (*COL* 318.2)

Sad will be the retrospect in that day when men stand face to face with eternity. The whole life will present itself just as it has been. The world's pleasures, riches, and honors will not then seem so important. Men will then see that the righteousness they despised is alone of value. They will see that they have fashioned their characters under the deceptive allurements of Satan. The garments they have chosen are the badge of their allegiance to the first great apostate. Then they will see the results of their choice. They will have a knowledge of what it means to transgress the commandments of God. (*COL* 318.3)

There will be no future probation in which to prepare for eternity. It is in this life that we are to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. This is our only opportunity to form characters for the home which Christ has made ready for those who obey His commandments. (*COL* 319.1)

The days of our probation are fast closing. The end is near. To us the warning is given, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.” Luke 21:34. Beware lest it find you unready. Take heed lest you be found at the King’s feast without a wedding garment.

“In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” “Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” Matthew 24:44; Revelation 16:15. (*COL* 319.2, .3)

The great day of the execution of God's judgment seemed to have come. Ten thousand times ten thousand were assembled before a large throne, upon which was seated a person of majestic appearance. Several books were before him, and upon the covers of each was written in letters of gold, which seemed like a burning flame of fire, "Ledger of Heaven." One of these books containing the names of those who claimed to believe the truth was then opened. Immediately I lost sight of the countless millions about the throne, and only those who were professedly children of the light and of the truth engaged my attention. As these persons were named, one by one, and their good deeds mentioned, their countenances would light up with a holy joy that was reflected in every direction. But this did not seem to rest upon my mind with the greatest force. (*PH043* 1.2)

Another book was opened, wherein were recorded the *sins* of those who professed the truth. Under the general heading of selfishness came every other sin. There were also headings over every column, and underneath these, opposite each name, were recorded in their respective columns the lesser sins. Under covetousness came falsehood, theft, robbery, fraud, and avariciousness; under ambition came pride and extravagance; jealousy stood at the head of malice, envy, hatred; and intemperance headed a long list of fearful crimes, such as lasciviousness, adultery, indulgence of animal passions, etc. As I beheld, I was filled with inexpressible anguish, and exclaimed, Who can be saved? who will stand justified before God? whose robes are spotless? who are faultless in the sight of a pure and holy God?

(*PH043* 2.1)

As the Holy One upon the throne slowly turned the leaves of the Ledger, and his eyes rested for a moment upon individuals, his glance seemed to burn into their very souls, and at the same moment every word and action of their lives passed before their minds as clearly as if traced before their vision in letters of fire. Trembling seized them, and their faces turned pale. Their first appearance when around the throne was that of careless indifference. But how changed their appearance now! The feeling of security is gone, and in its place is a nameless terror. A dread is upon every soul lest he shall be found among those who are wanting. Every eye is riveted upon the face of the One upon the throne; and as his solemn, searching eye sweeps over that company, there is a quaking of heart, for they are self-condemned without one word being uttered. In anguish of soul each declares his own guilt, and with terrible vividness sees that by sinning he has thrown away the precious boon of eternal life. (*PH043* 3.1)

The names of all who professed the truth were mentioned. Some were reproved for their unbelief, others for having been slothful servants. They allowed others to do the work in the Master's vineyard, and to bear the heaviest responsibilities, while they were selfishly serving their own temporal interests. By cultivating the abilities God had given them, they could have been reliable burden-bearers, working for the interest of the Master. Said the Judge, All will be justified by their faith, and judged by their works. How vivid then appeared their neglect, and how wise the arrangement of God in giving to every man a work to do to promote the cause and save his fellow-men. Each was to demonstrate a living faith, in his family and in his neighborhood, by showing kindness to the poor, sympathizing with the afflicted, engaging in missionary labor, and by aiding the cause of God with his means. But like Meroz, the curse of God rested upon them for what they did not do. They loved that work which would bring the greatest profit in this life; and opposite their names in the Ledger devoted to good works, there was a mournful blank. (*PH043* 5.1)

The words spoken to these were most solemn: You are weighed in the balances, and found wanting. You have neglected spiritual responsibilities because of busy activity in temporal matters, while your very position of trust made it necessary that you should have more than human wisdom and greater than finite judgment. This you needed in order to perform even the mechanical part of your labor; and when you disconnected God and his glory from your business, you turned from his blessing. (*PH043* 6.1)

The question was then asked, Why have you not washed your robes of character and made them white in the blood of the Lamb? God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through him it might be saved. My love for you has been more self-denying than a mother's love. It was that I might blot out your dark record of iniquity; and put the cup of salvation to your lips, that I suffered the death of the cross, bearing the weight and curse of your guilt. The pangs of death, and the horrors of the darkness of the tomb, I endured that I might conquer him who had the power of death, unbar the prison-house, and open for you the gates of life. I submitted to shame and agony because I loved you with an infinite love, and would bring back my wayward, wandering sheep to the paradise of God, to the tree of life. That life of bliss which I purchased for you at such a cost, you have disregarded. Shame, reproach, and ignominy, such as your Master bore for you, you have shunned. The privileges he died to bring within your reach have not been appreciated. You would not be partaker of his sufferings, and you cannot now be partaker with him of his glory. (*PH043* 6.2)

They became indifferent and careless, as though his coming was yet in the distance. While their interest was buried up in their worldly gains, the work closed in the heavenly sanctuary, and they were unprepared. If they had only known that the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary would close so soon, how differently would they have conducted! How earnestly would they have watched! The Master anticipated all this, and gave them timely warning in the command to watch. He distinctly states the suddenness of his coming. He does not measure the time, lest we shall neglect a momentary preparation, and in our indolence look ahead to the time when we think he will come, and defer the preparation. "Watch ye therefore; for ye know not." Yet this uncertainty, and the suddenness at last, foretold, fails to quicken our watchfulness, and arouse us from stupidity to earnest wakefulness, for our expected Master. Those not found waiting and watching, are finally surprised in their unfaithfulness. The Master has come, and instead of their being ready to open unto him immediately, they are locked in a worldly slumber, and are lost at last. (*T16* 94.1)

A company was presented before me in contrast to the one described. They were waiting and watching. Their eyes were directed heavenward, and the words of their Master were upon their lips, “What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.” “Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.” The Lord intimates a delay before the morning finally dawns. He would not have them give way to weariness, nor relax their earnest watchfulness, because the morning does not open upon them as soon as they expected. (*T16* 95.1)

The waiting ones were represented to me as looking upward. They were encouraging one another, repeating these words, “The first and second watches are past. We are in the third watch, waiting and watching for the Master’s return. There remains but a little period of watching now,” I saw some becoming weary, their eyes were directed downward, and they were engrossed with earthly things, and were unfaithful in watching. They were saying, In the first watch we expected our Master, but were disappointed. We thought surely he would come in the second watch, but that passed, and he came not. We may be again disappointed. We need not be so particular. He may not come in the following watch. We are in the third watch, and now we think it best to lay up our treasure on the earth, that we may be secure against want. Many were sleeping, stupefied with the cares of this life, allured, by the deceitfulness of riches, from their waiting, watching position. (*T16* 95.1)

Watch after watch, I saw, was in the past. Because of this, should there be a lack of vigilance? Oh! no. There is the greater necessity of unceasing watchfulness, for now the moments are fewer than before the passing of the first watch. Now the period of time for the waiting is necessarily shorter than at first. If we watched with unabated vigilance then, how much more need of double watchfulness in the second watch. The passing of the second watch has brought us to the third, and now it is inexcusable to relax our watching. The third watch calls for threefold earnestness. To become impatient now, would be a loss of all our earnest, persevering watching heretofore. The long night of gloom is trying, but the morning is deferred in mercy, because if the Master should come, so many would be found unready. (*T16* 97.1)

God's unwillingness to have his people perish, has been the reason of so long delay. But the time of the coming of the morning to the faithful, and the night to the unfaithful, is right upon us. By thus waiting and watching, God's people are to manifest their peculiar, separate character from worldlings. By our watching positions, we are to show how truly we are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. The difference between the lovers of the world and those who love Christ, is so plain as to be unmistakable. The world, all earnestness, interest, and ambition, to secure earthly treasure, while God's people are not conformed to the world, but transformed, showing by their earnest, watching, waiting position, that their home is not in this world. They are seeking a better country, even an heavenly. (*T16* 97.1)

The desire of our Lord is that we should be so watching, that when he cometh and knocketh, we may open to him immediately. A blessing is pronounced upon those servants that he finds watching. “He will gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” Who among us in these last days will be thus especially honored by the Master of assemblies? Are we prepared without delay to open to him immediately and welcome the Master? Watch, watch, watch. This watching and waiting, ready, all ready to welcome our Lord, has ceased with nearly all. We are not ready to open to him immediately. The love of the world has occupied our thoughts, and so filled our minds that our eyes are turned downward to the earth, but not upward. (*T16* 99.1)

I have been shown that God's people who profess to believe present truth, are not in a waiting, watching position. They are increasing in riches, and laying up their treasures upon the earth. They are becoming rich in worldly things, but not rich toward God. They do not believe in the shortness of time. They do not believe that the end of all things is at hand. They do not believe that Christ is at the door. They will act out all the faith that they really possess. They may profess much faith but deceive their own souls. Their works show the character of their faith. Many testify to those around them, by their works, that the coming of Christ is not to be in this generation. According to their faith will be their works. Their preparations are being made to remain in this world. They are adding house to house, and land to land, and are citizens of this world. The condition of poor Lazarus feeding upon the crumbs from the rich man's table is preferable to these. (*T16* 101.1)

If they possessed genuine faith, instead of increasing their treasures upon the earth they would be selling off, freeing themselves from the cumbersome things of earth, and transferring their treasure before them to Heaven. Then their interest and hearts will be where their treasure is. The heart of man is where is his greatest treasure. The most of those who profess to believe the truth testify that that which they value the most, is in this world. For this they have care, wearing anxiety and labor. To preserve and add to their treasure is the study of their lives. They have transferred so little to Heaven that their interest is not especially exercised in that better country. They have taken so little stock in the heavenly treasure that their minds are not attracted in that direction. Their investments have been made in the things of this world. They have taken large stock in the enterprises of this earth, and these matters involve the interest, and like the magnet draw down their souls from the heavenly and imperishable to the earthly and corruptible. Where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Selfishness girds them about as with iron bands. It is my farm, my goods, my trade, my merchandise. (*T16* 101.1)

Even the claims of common humanity by many are disregarded. Men and women professing to be waiting and loving the appearing of their Lord, are shut up to self. The noble, the godlike, they have parted with. The love of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, have so fastened upon men and women that they are blinded. They are corrupted by the world, and discern it not. They talk of love to God, but their fruits show not the love they express. They rob him in tithes and offerings, and the withering curse of God is upon them. The truth has been illuminating their pathway on every side. God has wrought wonderfully in the salvation of souls in their own households, but where are their offerings, presented to God in grateful thanks for all his tokens of mercy to them? Many of them are as unthankful as the brute creation. The sacrifice for man was infinite, beyond the comprehension of the strongest intellect. Yet, men who claim to be partakers of these heavenly benefits, which were brought to them with so much cost, are too thoroughly selfish to make any real sacrifice for God. The world, the world, the world, their minds are upon. (*T16* 101.1)

David repented of his sin in dust and ashes. He entreated the forgiveness of God, and concealed not his repentance from the great men, and even servants of his kingdom. He composed a penitential Psalm, recounting his sin and repentance, which Psalm he knew would be sung by after generations. He wished others to be instructed by the sad history of his life.

The songs which David composed were sung by all Israel, especially in the presence of the assembled court, and before priests, elders and lords. He knew that the confession of his guilt would bring his sins to the notice of other generations. He presents his case, showing in whom was his trust and hope for pardon. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according to the multitude of thy mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.” (*4aSG* 88.2–.3)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive (*aphiemi* —let go, send away, dismiss or release) us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

And forgive (*aphiemi*) us our debts, as we forgive (*aphiemi*) our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

For if ye forgive (*aphiemi*) men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive (*aphiemi*) you: But if ye forgive (*aphiemi*) not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive (*aphiemi*) your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14–15)

And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing (admitting, agreeing) their sins (*harmartia*). (Matthew 3:6)

According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out (*māḥâ*–wipe clean, wipe out) my transgressions. (Psalm 51:1)

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins (*hamartia*—sin, an act that transgresses), they shall be forgiven him. Confess *your* (the) faults (*paraptoma*—transgression, sin) one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:15–16)

Says the apostle: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” This scripture has been interpreted to sustain the practice of going to the priest for absolution; but it has no such application. Confess your sins to God, who only can forgive them, and your faults to one another. If you have given offense to your friend or neighbor you are to acknowledge your wrong, and it is his duty freely to forgive you. Then you are to seek the forgiveness of God because the brother whom you wounded is the property of God, and in injuring him you sinned against his Creator and Redeemer. The case is not brought before the priest at all, but before the only true mediator, our great High Priest, who “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,” and who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” and is able to cleanse from every stain of iniquity. (*5T* 639.1)