God Is More Eager to Forgive Than We Are to Ask
Selections from Psalm 51
February 18, 2026 (Ash Wednesday)
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<u>Psalm 51:1-2, 6-7, 10-12, 17</u>

Have mercy on me, O God,
   according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
   blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
   and cleanse me from my sin.
You desire truth in the inward being;
   therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
   wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
   and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
   and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
   and sustain in me a willing spirit.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
   a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Meditation

As I was thinking about Ash Wednesday, I began to wonder if Ash Wednesday is just a day to beat up on ourselves about everything we've gotten wrong (as if many of us don't do this on a regular basis anyway.)

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Season of Lent – a 40-day (not including Sundays) journey in which we devote ourselves to prayer, self-examination, and repentance of sin as we prepare for the remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection. Ash Wednesday is a day when we can be marked with ashes on our foreheads, with ashes being a symbol of sorrow over our sin and the frailty of life in general.

But is this simply a day to beat up on ourselves? No. Throughout my life I have heard and spoken these words: "God is more eager to forgive us than we are to ask for forgiveness." God is eager to forgive us of our sins. God is eager to bring healing where we have been sinned against by others. God is enthusiastic about forgiving us. God is excited to forgive us and to set us free from anything that holds us down.

So, why are we reluctant to ask? Why is God more eager to forgive us than we are to ask for the forgiveness? I suppose part of the problem is that we don't see this eagerness to forgive among many people and somehow assume it's the same with God. We are not always quick to forgive. We struggle to forgive. We withhold forgiveness. But not God. God delights in forgiving us. God rejoices in forgiving us. God longs to "return to us the joy of salvation." Sometimes we are not eager to ask for forgiveness because we are too proud. Sometimes we are unaware of our sin. Sometimes we are not eager to ask because we know we have no intention of changing what God wants us to change.

Now this does <u>not</u> mean that we should be all the more eager to sin in light of God's eagerness to forgive us. Of course not. May it never be. But this does not mean that even on Ash Wednesday, even during Lent when we are particularly focused on repentance, that we are to spend our days beating ourselves up.

The gift of being able to go to God in prayer at any time to express our sadness over our sin, our brokenness due to the sin of the world and individuals or groups who have sinned against us and others is meant to free us from beating ourselves up. It is meant to give us a way to fall into the arms of our God who is not reluctant, but eager and excited to embrace us in love and grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

You see the problem with beating ourselves up is that it keeps us wounded, it makes us small, it diminishes us in our own eyes. God wants us to be honest about ourselves. God wants us to be honest about our brokenness. God wants us to be honest about the sin of the world and its brokenness. God wants us to take sin seriously, but not for the purpose of condemnation. God wants us to take sin seriously so that we will come to him for grace and healing mercies. In this we acknowledge our complete reliance on God's saving grace in Jesus. In this we receive a clean slate, a clean heart, and a renewed spirit. The joy that we have as beloved children of God is renewed. We are empowered to praise God and tell of God's love.

Today is not a day to beat yourself up. Today is a day to take sin seriously – to receive ashes on your head. Today is a day to remember that the ashes are placed in the sign of the cross on your forehead. The cross is love. It is the symbol of God's amazing love and grace in sending his only son Jesus to die for us so that we don't have to beat ourselves up. God is more eager to forgive us than we usually are to ask for the forgiveness. God is eager. Let's be eager to ask for God's forgiveness, eager to receive it, eager to live in the joy of our salvation, and then . . . more eager to forgive others.