

a Hymn of Remorse

part
one



Be gracious to me, O God, according to
Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your
compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost
being,
And in the hidden part You will make me
know wisdom.
Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken
rejoice.
Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.

Psalms 51:1-9

WHILE IT MAY BE TRUE that few
of us have experienced the
leadен remorse and guilt that
come after committing the first-cousin
sins of adultery and murder (for adultery
surely "murders" the bright and promis-
ing innocence of what was heretofore
an unsullied union), we "all have sinned
and fall short of the glory of God" (Ro-
mans 3:23). From the days of Eden until
The Day of Christ's return, sin will be
part of the human condition.

The pope has sinned. Billy Graham
has sinned. Mother Teresa sinned. The
apostle Paul sinned. The ("beloved") apos-
tle John sinned. And King David, the
"man after [God's] own heart," sinned.
Egregiously.

Then it happened in the spring, at the
time when kings go out to battle, that
David sent Joab and his servants with him
and all Israel, and they destroyed the sons
of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But
David stayed at Jerusalem.

Now when evening came David arose
from his bed and walked around on the
roof of the king's house, and from the
roof he saw a woman bathing; and the
woman was very beautiful in appearance.
So David sent and inquired about the
woman. And one said, "Is this not Bath-
sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of

Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers
and took her, and when she came to
him, he lay with her; and when she had
purified herself from her uncleanness,
she returned to her house. The woman
conceived; and she sent and told David,
and said, "I am pregnant."

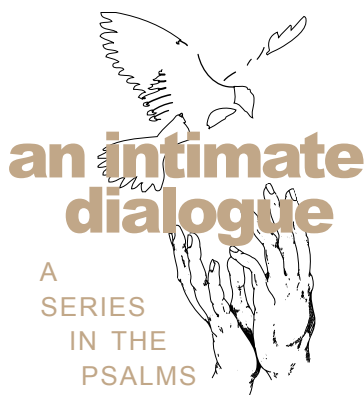
2 Samuel 11:1-5

There are days when one might
wonder why God ever invented sex,
for its abuse permeates every facet of
society. Like a hideous swamp fever, the
illicit use of sex rises from the earth's
bowels to entice, to ensnare, to destroy
anyone in its path. It has brought down
the everyday man, as well as the high
and mighty. It has infected and crushed
the pious, it has devastated families,
churches—whole nations. That which
was created by God for the holy union
and delight of man and woman has
been adulterated, subjugating the spirits
of the profligate, and inflicting untold
misery on the innocent.

evil

Even so, David did not stop there.

Now in the morning David wrote a letter
to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah.
He had written in the letter, saying,



"Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David's servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died.

2 Samuel 11:14-17

Now David had added homicide to his sin of adultery, and "the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord." (11:27)

remorse

The eloquent Psalm 51 is King David's hymn of remorse after this sad and detestable episode. In it his confession is true; it is authentic down to the bone. But along with David's expression of guilt, in its stanzas is, as well, the bright hope of God's restoring grace. Here is not just the whimpering of a chastened cur, but confident faith in a forgiving Lord, and loving Father.

First, however, David must come before his God in abject contrition, confessing his horrible transgression and asking for his Lord's forgiveness.

O God, I plead for You to deal kindly with me, by the standard of Your goodness. From the abundance of Your tender love for me—as tender as a mother for the child within her—please wipe out every trace of my rebellion against You.

Take me down to the banks of Your river and beat me on a rock to wash me completely, from head to toe, of my perversity. Make me clean again after my hateful offense.

In David's confession we have the pattern set. There is no point in lying to God, for He knows everything we have done. The beginning point of confession is to agree with Him that it is necessary.

I would not lie to You. I know full well what I have done. Ever since, I have replayed it, over and over again, in my mind. And the awful scene haunts me.

You, O God, have set the rules. You have determined right from wrong, and by Your judgment I have sinned against You. By Your reckoning I have done what is evil. Therefore I stand before You; I am at Your mercy. Do with me what You will, because Your judgments are faithful and true.

heritage

A relationship with God is a delicate balance between rejoicing in who we are in Him, and acknowledging our heritage of depravity. Even in Christ, we enjoy a sanctified position of brotherhood with Him. But it does us no good to forget that from whence we came—alas, that in which we must still dwell.

In contrast to Your holiness, I began life in pain, in fear, in iniquity. Sin is part of my DNA—as it was part of my mother's.

Even so, You, O God, want me to be truthful with You; You are pleased when I throw open to Your examination every hidden closet of my life. This is why I am confessing my sin to You, openly and honestly. And as You deal with what You find deep within, I will gain wisdom, and a deeper knowledge of Your way.

forgetting

A plea for restoration is another component of confession. For the faithful believer desires more than forgiveness—he wants to be restored to a more spiritually healthy state.

Lord, if You purify me, then I will surely be clean. When You wash me, I will come out whiter than the cleanest snow.

O my God, I remember the unfettered joy and gladness of the praise-procession to Your temple. I want to know that again. Out of Your righteous chastening may I again rejoice in Your presence.

Look no longer upon what I did. By Your grace, remove from Your memory the sins I have committed against You.

*O Lord, I am ashamed to seek Thy Face
As tho' I loved Thee as Thy saints love Thee:
Yet turn from those Thy lovers, look on me,
Disgrace me not with uttermost disgrace;
But pour on me ungracious, pour Thy grace
To purge my heart and bid my will go free,
Till I too taste Thy hidden Sweetness, see
Thy hidden Beauty in the holy place.
O Thou Who callest sinners to repent,
Call me Thy sinner unto penitence,
For many sins grant me the greater love:
Set me above the waterfloods, above
Devil and shifting world and fleshly sense,
Thy Mercy's all-amazing monument.*

Christina Rossetti

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Continued next week in *Part Two*