

a Hymn of Remorse

part
two



Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast 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 me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.
Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
the God of my salvation;
Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your
righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
That my mouth may declare Your praise.
For You do not delight in sacrifice,
otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You
will not despise.

Psalms 51:10-17

WE ALL WANT A SECOND CHANCE. We all would like to have "do-overs." We all would like to be able to roll back the clock, to have the opportunity to expunge our record of the really stupid things we have done.

God's version of this is called "grace."

Grace was not invented for the Lord Jesus. God's longsuffering and forgiveness had been demonstrated, in myriad ways, long before the Son of God became man and gave Himself as the one and final sacrifice for our sins.

As powerful and eternal as God's kind of grace is, however, it is not cast from the same insipid, malleable mold used by today's societal mores. For even in His forgiveness and forgetting God teaches through the inevitable scars.

confrontation

One day I stupidly began cutting through a length of reinforcing bar with a hacksaw without protecting with a leather glove the hand holding it. It took only seconds for the saw to skip out of its shallow groove to cut a brand new groove deep into my thumb. The doctor stitched me up, and my thumb eventually healed. But a scar remains—as well

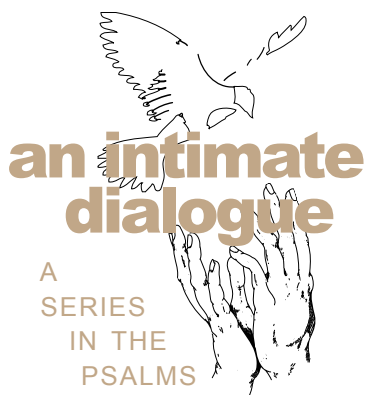
as the memory of the pain I needlessly inflicted on myself.

Shortly after David's great sins of adultery and murder, he is paid a visit by the prophet Nathan, who poses the following to the king:

"There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb Which he bought and nourished; And it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, And was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

His discernment numbed by the calculus of his rebellion, David (thinking that Nathan was giving him a news report, rather than a life-lesson in parable form), returns a heated response.

Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who



has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."

What follows is one of Scripture's most dramatic—even operatic—moments.

Nathan then said to David, "You are the man!"

Nathan the prophet then proceeds to detail the "scars" that would be left on David as a result of his sin—lingering effects that would impact not just his life, but generations to come, starting with the death of the child born out of his adultery. Even so, after David confesses his guilt,

Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die."

2 Samuel 12: 1b-4, 5-6, 7a, 13b

God forgave David's sin. The record (if not the aftereffects) was expunged.

a restored communion

As it is with followers of Christ Jesus, sin had not irreparably severed David's relationship with God. That is grace. But the sin had done injury, for the moment at least, to that relationship. That, too, is grace—God's version of grace. And because he was a "man after God's own heart," David did not complain, for he knew he deserved far worse than that. Instead, he immediately set to repairing his relationship with God. The second half of Psalm 51 expresses his yearning to revive the sweet communion with his Lord that his sin had short-circuited.

Let us begin again, O God. Fashion for me a new heart, a pure heart. And repair my broken spirit; make it strong again, and aligned with Yours.

I could not bear it if I never again saw Your face. I could not live if You removed from me Your Spirit.

O God, I long to once again know the deep gladness, the inexpressible joy of living in Your arms. Please, by Your grace, let me know it again. And let me once again rest upon—and be uplifted by—Your Spirit.

gratitude

Confession followed by God's forgiveness invariably quickens gratitude in the believer's heart, and David the king now becomes David the evangelist. He longs to tell others about the righteousness and grace of His forgiving God.

When You do this, Lord, I will pay my vows by sharing Your way of life with those who have rejected it. My purpose? That they will turn away from their wrong-headed sin, and turn back to You.

I ask again for Your forgiveness. Remove from me the millstone of guilt I carry over the innocent blood I have shed. When You do, I will go about the land joyfully declaring Your righteousness.

O God, grant me freedom of speech, so that I might stand boldly in the public square and announce Your praise.

realignment

As he nears the end of his hymn, David shows that the experience through which he has just passed has changed not only his heart, but his outlook. With revived communion comes a realigned perspective. His craving inward gaze has been replaced by a deeper, more accurate insight into what God desires in his life: a servant's heart that is broken and obedient before his Lord.

I understand now that this—my obedience, my heartfelt praise—will be more pleasing to You than the blood of a thousand bulls sacrificed upon the altar. If it were not so, then I would sacrifice ten thousand bulls to You. But You, O Lord, are not satisfied by burnt offerings.

Instead of the stench of burning flesh, You, O Lord, are pleased by the sacrifice of a spirit that has been broken by repentance, and a heart that is crushed over its sin. Yes, Lord, the sacrifice that is acceptable to You is true, authentic sorrow over committed sin.

*Now I have found the ground wherein
Sure my soul's anchor may remain,
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin
Before the world's foundation slain;
Whose mercy shall unshaken stay,
When heaven and earth are fled away.*

*Father, Thine everlasting grace
Our scanty thought surpasses far:
Thy heart still melts with tenderness.
Thy arms of love still open are,
Returning sinners to receive,
That mercy they may taste and live.*

*O Love, Thou bottomless abyss,
My sins are swallowed up in Thee!
Covered is my unrighteousness,
Nor spot of guilt remains on me,
While Jesus' blood, through earth and skies,
Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries.*

*With faith I plunge me in this sea;
Here is my hope, my joy, my rest;
Hither, when hell assails, I flee,
I look into my Saviour's breast;
Away, sad doubt, and anxious fear!
Mercy is all that's written there.*

*Though waves and storms go o'er my head,
Though strength, and health, and friends be gone,
Though joys be withered all and dead,
Though every comfort be withdrawn,
On this my steadfast soul relies,—
Father, Thy mercy never dies.*

*Fixed on this ground will I remain,
Though my heart fail, and flesh decay;
This anchor shall my soul sustain,
When earth's foundations melt away;
Mercy's full power I then shall prove,
Loved with an everlasting love.*

Johann Andreas Rothe

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