

Psalm Genres (Part Six): Penitential Psalms

Seeking Forgiveness

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Guilt, like bitterness and resentment, can be psychologically corrosive. It can eat a person up from the inside. Many people down through history have come to realize that. More recently—these are quotes from contemporaries—well, Aldous Huxley is not our contemporary anymore, but he feels like it because I remember hearing stuff from him while I was in college. That takes me back.

But Aldous Huxley said, "Chronic remorse, as all the moralists are agreed, is a most undesirable sentiment." The Roman playwright Plautus—he was not a contemporary of mine—said, "Nothing is more wretched than the mind of a man conscious of guilt." Clinical psychologist Dr. Kenneth Wapnick said, "Guilt is the sum total of all the negative feelings we have ever had about ourselves." And author Gretchen Rubin wrote, "Negative emotions like loneliness, envy, and guilt have an important role to play in a happy life. They're big flashing signs that something needs to change." That is very interesting that she put it that way, that it is not only natural for us to feel guilty, but it has an important role to play in our lives as a, you could kind of say, thermostat on our character and if we are full of guilt, that means something needs to change.

We know these things. I think being in the church for as long as many of us have been understand guilt fairly well. And we are here in God's church at least partly due to guilt.

Of course, the main reason why we are a part of God's church is because of God's calling, but He often makes use of guilt to motivate us. He sometimes kind of turns our guilt meter up just a bit, makes us feel really guilty to begin to move us toward change or to seek Him.

Let us look at Luke 5. This is when Jesus was calling His disciples. This vignette here in Luke is a little different from what we see in some of the

other gospel writers about Jesus' calling of the first four, but it is really interesting what he adds in here because he highlights Peter's guilt. We will start in verse 1 and we will read down through verse 8.

Luke 5:1-8 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their nets. Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's [Peter's] and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. Now when He had stopped speaking [which is something I have a hard time doing. Look at the times on my sermons.], He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats so that they began to sink. [That is a lot of fish.] When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Now I do not know how deep Peter's guilt was here; it was pretty deep, but I cannot say specifically because Luke does not tell us what he was feeling guilty about. Maybe he was feeling guilty for kind of pooh-poohing the idea that Jesus would know where to catch fish. You know, underestimating Jesus. Maybe it was his tone of voice, but maybe it was a lot more than that. Maybe what Jesus had done in this miracle made him think of how totally unworthy he was and he just felt dirty.

He felt sinful. He felt all that guilt come to the surface, and he asked Jesus, his Savior, to leave him because it felt so terrible to have all that guilt come down, pressed down upon him after seeing this miracle. I mean, you would think normally that you would see a great miracle like this, just hundreds of fish in this boat, causing them nearly to sink, and you would be, "Oh yeah, that's great. Look at what happened." Not Peter. It was something that stirred in him this feeling of worthlessness that he did not like.

He liked it so little that he wanted the cause of that, which he determined to be Jesus' righteousness and His holiness, to leave him so he could go back to being normal, have these normal feelings of self-worth. "I'm an okay guy." But standing next to Jesus, he knew he was not an okay guy. He was full of sin, and he felt it to his very bones.

So like Peter, we know that we are sinners in need of redemption and forgiveness. We are often full of doubt and unbelief. And that is especially so when we are being called, that we see the grime of our lives, we see how awful we are and how we have been to people and how we have treated God, our very Creator. And that drives us to seek a Savior for the remission of our sins, to pay the penalty in our stead, and remove that guilt that burdens us so much. That is a far better solution than what Peter had. Getting rid of the Savior, you telling Him to go away. That was not the right reaction. But I understand the feeling. I understand how he wanted to feel good about himself, but in Jesus' presence, seeing His holiness come out in this great miracle, he could not stand it.

Now guilt is a bad thing. It is a bad thing because it means we have sinned. It means that we have something to be guilty about. We have transgressed God's holy law, which defines what sin is. And by doing so we have incurred the death penalty and so that adds to the burden. Not only have we sinned and done this terrible thing against God and against our fellow men, but we have only death to look forward to because that is what we deserve for sinning. We have been judged guilty of sin against God, against our loved ones, or whoever we have sinned against, and we are guilty of sin against ourselves.

We do terrible things to ourselves. We treat ourselves awfully by what we see, what we ingest, what we allow ourselves to do. There are literally thousands of destructive things that we could do that will kill us, maim us, or harm us in some way, and not just physically but mentally and psychologically and emotionally. And when you start feeling that guilt, there is no assuaging it except by death. That is how bad guilt is. It is bad because you have sinned, and it is terrible because the only way to get rid of it is death—either yours or your Savior's.

Somebody has got to die because that guilt is not going to go away unless it is covered by death. But there is no forgiveness. I should say we have learned through God's Word that there is no forgiveness or redemption outside of God's calling and our belief and acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. And that is the best way to get rid of guilt—through Him, through His love, His grace, His forgiveness, His redemption. And this is why we say there is only one way to be saved.

The men who were listening to Peter on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection had this dilemma. Go to Acts 2. We will start in verse 22. This is the last part of Peter's sermon that day on Pentecost.

Acts 2:22-24 "Men of Israel [Peter says], hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that He should be held by it."

Let us jump down to verse 36. This section that we just read is Peter pointing the finger at them and saying, "Look, God raised Jesus up to preach a message, to do these signs before you so you would know who He was, and you turned around and killed Him. But that did not stop God because God raised Him up. And now He abides in heaven at the throne of God."

Acts 2:36-37 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ [both Sovereign Lord and Messiah Savior]." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

They just killed their God. Can you imagine the feelings of guilt they felt? They had been out there in the crowd saying, "Barabbas, Barabbas! Crucify Him, crucify Him!" And now Peter turns all that back on them. You guys sinned. It was not just any sin; it was Deicide. Could you imagine?! They

had killed their Savior. They had killed their Messiah, their God and King, whom they thought they worshipped, you know, throughout the Old Testament period. But it came down to them when He appeared, and they killed Him. So their question obviously is logical here. What can we do about this? Is there a way for this to be fixed? What does that mean for us? Are we doomed to death? And luckily (luckily is not the word) Peter had an answer, a good answer, a biblical answer, an answer from God.

Acts 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

There is a way out. You do not have to bear this guilt. You do not have to bear the burden of sin, he says. You need to change. Change your mind. Change your perspective, like Craig said earlier. You need to really know and understand the Word of God and change. Change your behavior, *metanoia* here, repent, change your mind and give yourself to Jesus Christ in baptism, and you will receive the Holy Spirit. And that will help you understand and overcome and bind you to Jesus Christ and the path that He is going to lead you on until you get to the Kingdom of God. That is the way you assuage guilt, through the forgiveness of God and following His Son.

So what do we have here? Often God takes bad things like guilt and makes them serve a good purpose. We could go down here and see that they had 3,000 that day to be baptized. That was a good thing! But it happened; it occurred because of a bad thing, guilt, that was playing upon these men and God through Peter made them own up to it and then go through the process of having their sins forgiven. So He used guilt in this case, that is, God did, to motivate all those people toward repentance.

Is it not wonderful how God does this? Because we live in a world of great evils. There is evil everywhere. But God allows us to live in that and then He makes use of all of those terrible evil things to produce good in us, to produce character.

I mean, He has done this from the beginning. Look at Satan the Devil—an evil character, a rebel against God, an adversary against Him and His people—and what does God do? He uses him like a dupe to make us strong,

Psalm Genres (Part Six): Penitential Psalms by Richard T. Ritenbaugh
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to prepare us for the Kingdom of God. So He can use the most evil person or personality in the universe. He does not change that personality. He will always be evil. He will not repent. But He can use him to make you repent and you to grow and you to form the character of Jesus Christ with His help, with God's help.

So evil never becomes good. Guilt is still bad. But it can play a large part in turning circumstances to a good end. It seems like this is something only God can do well. You can take an evil thing and then use it to produce good in others, in His people.

This sermon may have started out like a Passover sermon, and it is. But it is also a Psalm Genre sermon. This is going to be number 6, or sixth genre of psalms, and these are the psalms of penitence or repentance. In them we will see psalmists crying out to God in their guilt, in their misery, pleading to Him for forgiveness and help because they realize just how wretched they are and how their sins have led to their present horrible situation. And I think it is good to revisit these psalms occasionally to remember how blessed we are that our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Joe did the hymn today, which we will get to, "Turn, O God, and Save Me." That is one of these penitential psalms. And we often sing hymn number 25, "They Are Blessed Who Are Forgiven," and that is kind of the theme of my sermon today.

Now what are penitential psalms? I bet you are wondering. Penitence, a word we do not use a whole lot, is the action of feeling or expressing humble sorrow and regret for our sins or for any error, but it mostly is used in a religious context. So it is remorse for past conduct, and like I said, usually it is of sin before God.

Repentance, you can see they both have 'pen' in them, penitence and repentance, is therefore a close cousin of penitence. And the English definition of repentance is a feeling of regret or remorse for doing wrong or sinning, leading to the action of changing one's behavior. So a little different. We see that penitence is that action or feeling of sorrow and regret for sin. Repentance takes it one step further, and the one step is that it leads to action, changed behavior.

Now the biblical definition (we do not want to get into all that today for lack of time) is heavily weighted toward changing both thinking and conduct. And if you put those two together, repentance in the Bible is oriented toward *overcoming and growing*, not just change for change's sake, or not just changing because you have to, but changing that leads to something better. And that is, of course, having the mind and character of Jesus Christ.

The penitent person is the one who feels guilty for his sins and usually the figure you think of when you think of a penitent person is a person down on his knees, begging for forgiveness. So a penitent person is one who feels guilty for his sins and gets down on his knees to beg forgiveness. If you remember *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, one of the things he had to solve when he was going through the Sikh there in Petra had to do with the penitent man and penitent man gets down on his knees and the blade does not chop off his head. Remember that one? Go watch it. It was a good movie.

So penitential psalms are distinguished by their expression of remorse over sin and spiritual failure. So if you are looking through the Psalms and you want to categorize them by yourself, this is the thing. If the psalm expresses a lot of remorse over sin and spiritual failure, it is probably going to be one of these, although I will tell you right now they are few and far between in the Psalms. But in them, in these penitential psalms, the psalmist acknowledges his wrongdoing and at the same time he recognizes how dependent he is on God's favor and how much only God can forgive him, that only God can bring him out of the terrible place he has fallen to. Only God can lift him up.

And so because of this, because he cannot do anything for himself, because he cannot go down the road and find somebody that will help him, he pleads with God for relief from his profound guilt because he understands not only that God is the only one that can help him, but the enemies that he is fighting at the moment is not an external enemy that he could, you know, kill with a sword or a spear, but it is himself. It is what he is inside. It is an enemy that only God can face and put down, and then turn the sinner around and restore him to a place of grace, if you will. So the guilt is rooted in his spiritual condition, which means that only God can solve the problem for him. And it is through forgiveness, God's mercy.

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Now I have to tell you that most of these psalms are not like Psalm 51. That is an obvious psalm of repentance, a penitential psalm, and it is so clear, and that is why we go to it and we say, this is the emotions of a man who has sinned grievously and he wants God's forgiveness. So he is penitent, he is humble, he is sorrowful for his sins, and he is asking for forgiveness. He is confessing the things that he has done wrong.

But most of the other penitential psalms are not quite that clear. And unlike Psalm 51, they are usually not fully psalms of repentance or psalms of penitence. Sometimes they are just sections of the psalm because the psalm has a wider scope for his psalm, but he needs to make confession and ask God's forgiveness so he can go on to what he further wants to say. And in a lot of these psalms, it looks like the real problem that the psalmist is facing is not necessarily sin but sickness. He has some sort of illness. He has a health problem, and it is dragging him down. And so he is asking God to heal him, not necessarily for forgiveness.

But do not let that fool you. It is a psalm of penitence normally because the illness serves as a metaphor for his sin. The illness is a result, as he sees it in his mind, of sin. That God has given him this sickness because of his sin. And so he dwells on the illness in the literal things—what he writes down in the psalm—but he is really thinking more deeply about the fact that he needs forgiveness for sin. And then God will take the illness away.

So a lot of times in these psalms, the illness is a metaphor, kind of like a cancer in the bones or an ulcer that is causing great pain and he is just devastated. He is lying in his bed; he feels old and weak; he cannot do anything. He has no health. He has no strength. But really the problem behind all this is the fact that he is a sinful man and needs God's forgiveness. So, just look for that when you are going through these penitential psalms, that oftentimes the sickness is actually a kind of a cover for the underlying sinfulness.

I did mention just a couple of minutes ago that the penitential psalms are rare. Well, traditionally, there is only seven of them across all 150 psalms, and I will give them to you. This should not take a long time to list: psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. And there are others like Psalm 25 that could be included, and there are probably several in this list of seven that

commentators would say nope, they are not a penitential psalm, but they have a little penitential section. So, this is actually not a very populous genre among the Psalms.

Now, this genre is based on thematic content, not on structure so I will not give you a structure for these kind of psalms. So it is not a literary format; it is just the content of the psalmist expressing his remorse for sin so the structures can vary. For instance, Psalm 32, which is in that list, is probably actually a thanksgiving psalm, believe it or not. But it has a section in it that is penitential and so it is put in both categories.

Others of the psalms of penitents have structures like psalms of lamentation, and they really do look like lamentations, but they contain a confession of sin, and so they can also be considered penitential psalms.

Let us go to Psalm 51. I do not want to ignore this, but I do not want to get into it either. If you remember, very close to one year ago exactly, I did four sermons on Psalm 51 so I do not want to rehash all of that. But I will give you a bit of a summary of Psalm 51 because it is the most profound expression of contrition and pleading for forgiveness in the Old Testament.

It has got everything right here that we need to understand David's great burden of sin and how he felt about it and what he wanted God to do about it, and not only that, what he would expect of himself to do after he was forgiven. So it is all here. I want to read it just to give you the flavor of it. You all know it; we sing it every once in a while in our hymns, but let us go ahead and read it.

Psalm 51:1-19 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just 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 inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I

shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities.

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 uphold me with Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise. Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

This psalm illustrates authentic contrition and repentance—not just remorse for sin, but moving on to change so that God will be pleased with the person's righteousness. And David does this through five distinct elements which I will give you. I am not going to spend a whole lot of time on them, but they are important for you to at least have in the back of your mind as we go through a couple more of these penitential psalms to see where some of these—well, they are all David—but see where he hits these points in these other psalms. So these five distinct elements illustrating authentic contrition are:

1. He appeals to God's mercy. He knows that there is nothing he can do but appeal and ask God for forgiveness, so it is appealing to God's mercy.
2. He confesses sin. He owns it, you might say, and he makes sure he tells God exactly what he did. And he said, yep, I did it.

3. He requests purification and restoration. He wants to be clean. He wants to be pure again. He feels dirty, and so he asks God to clean him up and restore him to a condition of purity or innocence or righteousness again.

4. He vows to teach others. He is not just going to take this redemption, this forgiveness, and say, "It's all for me, it's all for me." No, he is going to then go forward and he is going to help other people reach the same point and go beyond.

5. He promises thanksgiving to God or he specifically gives thanksgiving to God. He will do this, he will do that. He will praise Him, he will talk with others and talk up God, if you will. He will glorify Him in every way.

So these distinct elements are: appealing to God's mercy; confessing sin; requesting purification and restoration; vowing to teach others God's way; and promising thanksgiving.

Now what makes Psalm 51 so important to Christians? Because a lot of people would just think this is all Old Testament stuff. But we understand that David in this psalm models a New Testament perspective of repentance.

This is not the Old Testament, Old Covenant way of getting rid of sin. They would have taken an animal to the priest and asked them to do a sin offering for them or a trespass offering or wherever their sin fell on the spectrum there. But David here says God is not delighted with those burnt offerings. They are not going to do anything. And so he models how we come before God as person to person and we abase ourselves before Him and ask Him for His grace and help in this time of need.

We want to be clean. We want to be purified. We want to go back—and this is one of the most important parts—we want to go back to a peaceful relationship with Him. Because our sins have driven us apart and we are at odds. And we want God to forgive us so that we can come back in a covenantal relationship with Him in peace and move forward from there.

So David, in this psalm here, minimizes external rituals like public sacrifices and public confessions of sin, as really rituals mean nothing without genuine

internal contrition toward God. And that is what he shows us here. He shows us very starkly, very baldly his internal remorse and desire for forgiveness because he is feeling wretched and he does not want to feel that way anymore. He feels like he has rebelled against God. He feels like he has let Him down, and he wants to be back on a good relationship with Him.

And so he bares his soul to God and just says, "God, it's up to You. I'm willing to change. I want to be forgiven so I can get rid of this great burden of sin and guilt so I can move forward and do what You want me to do, follow Your path."

So he shows us that the contrition is great; it is something that we should do. We should be remorseful and sorrowful about our sins, and we must actively seek forgiveness from God, but then we must translate that into changed behavior. It is not good enough just to be forgiven and then go back into our sins. That is a horrible way to act before God. But that change *must* happen. The change in character, the change in the internal way we look at God, that has to change. We have to be more devout. We have to be more willing to do what He says, more open to His guidance and direction.

It is not just ceasing to do wrong, but it is also actively pursuing good once we have been restored.

We are going to leave Psalm 51 and go on to a couple other penitential psalms. And as I said, the others are not necessarily as focused or comprehensive as Psalm 51. These are great psalms. The two we are going to go over today are both in our hymnal, and we sing them regularly. So, you know, great stuff in them, but they just do not necessarily come up to the comprehensive quality of Psalm 51.

Let us go back to Psalm 6. This is in our hymn hymnal, number 5, "Turn, O God, and Save Me," which we sang earlier. Let us go ahead and read this. It is only ten verses, so should go quickly.

Psalm 6:1-10 O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled; but You, O Lord—how long? Return, O Lord,

deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercy's sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows old because of all my enemies. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer. Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.

This psalm is often classified as an individual lament so it is put in the psalms of lamentations. There are some commentators who have opened up another category. They call this the psalms of sickness. And obviously, this has to do with a sickness, but these commentators do not accept the idea that the sickness is a metaphor for sin. So they make a whole separate category. I do not follow that so I am saying this is a psalm of penitence. And we could also call it a lament, but it ends well, ends quite well.

Now, these commentators call it a psalm of sickness; they say it contains no confession of sin. But when you look at it as the sickness being a metaphor for sin, as illness was generally considered a result of sin, so asking for healing, which he does in verse 2, can be seen as a parallel to seeking God's forgiveness.

If you will just keep your hand there and turn quickly to Psalm 103, we will see that these are in parallel here in the mercies or blessings of God. We will read verses 1 and 3.

Psalm 103:1 Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!

Psalm 103:3 Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.

So they are talked about in parallel here as being similar. And so it is easy to see talking about one's sickness can be a metaphor for talking about one's spiritual sickness in terms of sin. We are going to proceed in Psalm 6 under the assumption that this is the psalmist's intention, that he is going to talk

about sickness, but he is really talking about an underlying sin that has not yet been dealt with.

Psalm 6:1-3 O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled; but You, O Lord—how long?

Now if we look at this with a literary view in mind, we can see that David is hinting that it is not really his sickness that he is talking about. It is something was the matter with his soul, something was the matter inside, something was the matter with his whole being. And I mean, the psalm opens with David pleading for God's mercy because he believes he is suffering under God's wrath. "Do not rebuke me in Your anger," in Your wrath, "nor chasten me [discipline me] in Your hot displeasure."

He is saying, "God, have You noticed? You're mad at me. Why are You mad at me? Why am I suffering like this? I know that something is wrong. My body feels it. I need Your mercy. Please heal me, because obviously You're not pleased with me at all. Otherwise You wouldn't have done this to me. If You were pleased with me, You'd bless me, right?" One would think so.

So obviously, at the least, David is conscience-stricken. He has a sense of sin, that there is some sin that he has not repented of, and it is causing this great chasm, this rift between God and himself. There is some weakness that he has not overcome. He uses that word in verse 2: "for I am weak." He could mean that he was physically weak, or he could mean that he was spiritually weak.

Something—whatever it was—had alienated him from God. And as we go through, we find out that God had allowed his enemies to get the better of him, to rise up against him. Now it could be that he is feeling bad because of sin and that God actually had struck him with an actual life-threatening illness to shake him out of his lethargy and make him repent, force him to repent, or at least force him to look at himself and see the need to repent. God will use whatever means He needs to shake us out of our sinful neglect of Him to turn a person around. And you notice here that these first three verses show that God had not responded to him.

He prayed to God for mercy, you see that obviously in verse 2. But then he says at the end of verse 3, "how long?" How long are You going to leave me like this? Because God obviously had not forgiven him yet. God had not shown mercy yet. "My soul is also greatly troubled; but You, O Lord. . ." He kind of cannot finish the sentence, like maybe he was going to say, "You haven't done anything. You're still far off. Why haven't You responded to me?" And so we get "how long?" How long is it going to be that I am going to have to suffer like this before You are done chastening me in Your wrath?

Let us go on:

Psalm 6:4-5 Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercy's sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?

David is thinking, if I die in this sin, what is going to happen? Verse 4 suggests that David could not sense God in his life. That is why he says "return." He is telling God this: Come back from wherever You have gone. You are not here. Please return to me. Please save me. But He had not come back yet.

And so this made David think, if this goes on any longer and my health continues to deteriorate, how can I repent when I am dead? How can I get forgiveness when I am dead? How can I praise Him and thank Him for His forgiveness if I have died unforgiven? So he needed God's deliverance terribly. He wanted God's lovingkindness, which is here, "for Your mercy's sake." That is *hesed*. He says, "Save me for *hesed's* sake," my covenant loyalty. I am loyal to You, God. Save me and make this covenant work again. I am the guilty party, he is saying. For Your mercy's sake, let us have this covenant relationship mended.

So, we could say that verse 4 especially is a confession in itself. He did not want justice from God. He would surely die then because justice for sin is death, so he asked for mercy. He asked for forgiveness because he wanted the death penalty lifted, and that would have to be by grace.

There was nothing he could do to have that penalty lifted, so he needed for it to be done through mercy. It was unmerited pardon. He knew that he had sinned, but he was asking for it. Judge, give me mercy rather than justice in this situation.

Psalm 6:6-7 I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows old because of my enemies.

This is how he is feeling. It shows the depths of his sorrow and despair over his situation, so he says, I cried all night in prayer to God. I pleaded for relief. And so David demonstrated his remorse for his sins, and it was true remorse, true sorrow for sin. Does not Paul say that godly sorrow produces repentance? That is II Corinthians 7. Let us look at that, just three verses. I am not going to spend a lot of time here, but I want you to note what Paul says this produces. Once God forgives you, once you have repented in dust and ashes and tears and all these things, what actually godly sorrow produces in the person, how it changes from sorrow to something else. So starting in verse 9, Paul writes,

II Corinthians 7:9-11 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. [It led to action. It led to change.] For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. [Oh yeah, you can cry a bucket of tears, and it does not mean anything if you do not change, if you do not turn to God, if you do not become better.] For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

And so this is the kind of thing that David is longing for in Psalm 6. He knows that if he sorrows in a godly way and that he changes, there is going to be a great benefit on the other side, and he wants those things. He wants the clearing. He wants the vindication. He wants the zeal. He wants all of

those things because that is a far better place to be than in this burdensome position where sin is just weighing down on a person.

Verses 8 through 10 here back in Psalm 6:

Psalm 6:8-10 Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer [meaning He will give an answer to him]. Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.

This is the epilogue. What we have seen in the first seven verses is his stress, his remorse, his sorrow, his pleading; all these bad feelings that he has had and his desire for God to forgive him. Well, somewhere between verses 7 and 8, God does forgive him. He feels it. He knows it. And it changes things immediately.

And you know what comes forth for David in this one? Zeal. Interesting. He wants to do something right, so God has given him forgiveness and he says, "I'm going to do what I need to do to make sure that this never happens again." So what did he do? "Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity." The first thing he did as part of his repentance was to stop meeting with, stop conversing with, stop having fun with all those people who were leading him into sin. He got rid of the temptation. He got rid of the situations and the people who were dragging him down into sin all the time.

Remember, Paul also said in I Corinthians 15:33, "Evil company corrupts good habits." He did something immediately. He took himself out of bad company. Or you could just say he took himself out of whatever situations that were making him sin. But he got rid of them. And he did it because God had granted him forgiveness. His faith in God had been rewarded.

And he wanted to make sure that he was always in that situation where he was now seen by God as righteous. He had been cleared. He was free from the debt of sin, from the guilt that he was feeling, and it made him want to be more righteous, to do better the next time. And just like an alcoholic needs to make sure he has no alcohol handy, the person who is on drugs should not have any kind of drugs because it will pull him back down into that same

situation, it goes for sins. Sin is addictive! If you are in the milieu of sin, get out! If there is somebody who is bringing sin in, make him stay away.

But that was the first thing David said or thought to do. He needed to get rid of the workers of iniquity that were tempting him towards sin. And so he did. He did not want this process of feeling so guilty to start up again. And so he did what he could to make sure that he was surrounded by good people—good company, not bad.

So he got rid of the biker gangs. He got rid of the hooligans. He got rid of all the drinkers that were causing him to. . . I am just kidding. But you can understand as a king, there would be all kinds of sycophants and stuff, people like that in the courts who wanted to have his ear, and he just said, "No, I'm not having it anymore."

This ends then with this, "Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly." You know what this reflects? It reflects his confidence that God was on his side again. God was back, and his enemies are going to tremble because God will destroy them. That is how confident he felt now that he had been forgiven, and he just felt great; he felt strong; he felt clean; and he wanted to be the great warrior of God again. So he said, "Watch out, enemies. I'm back. God's back." And that makes all the difference.

Let us go to another. We have a few minutes, or do we? Let us go to Psalm 32. I think you begin to see some of the same things coming out here, but let us read it.

Psalm 32:1-11 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a

Psalm Genres (Part Six): Penitential Psalms by Richard T. Ritenbaugh
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flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

This begins with a joyous beatitude: Blessed are the forgiven. And then the author gives another one in verse 2: Blessed is the man whom God restores to a state of blamelessness and favor. Now I paraphrased those, but that is essentially what they mean. This is markedly different in tone from Psalm 6 and from Psalm 38, which is a lot like Psalm 6. Because this psalm, Psalm 32, is upbeat and joyous, especially at the beginning here, as it is a celebration of being forgiven and restored by God.

This is kind of like stepping right from the end of Psalm 6 and going into Psalm 32 and David is saying, "Oh, what a blessed thing it is to be forgiven!" So it is a penitential psalm, but you can see how some people would think it was a thanksgiving psalm because of the way it begins.

Verses 1 and 2 are the beatitudes, and I will not go into what blessed means and all that. We have had enough sermons and articles and such about the beatitudes and what they mean. Essentially, it is this is the idea of that one is happy, one is blessed, one is prosperous.

And let me just add here that the Hebrew word evokes blessing from a superior to an inferior. So this is what happens when the one who is for you—the one who is your master—gives you something good, and what the something good is here is forgiveness. So David's mind is contented and happy. He is joyful that God has forgiven him, whatever the transgression was, and He has restored him to guiltlessness. He has been cleared by God, and now David has a clear slate, a clean slate. And what is even more amazing is that God treats him—this sinner, a former sinner—as righteous. And they can work together.

I mean, this is how one should feel in the moments after God has granted you forgiveness. When you come off your knees knowing that God has granted you forgiveness and you just are feeling like you can conquer the world because you and God are back together again. By the way, Paul quotes verses 1 and 2 in Romans 4:6-8.

Let us go on to verses 3 through 5. This is very interesting. He is describing what it was like as a kind of a flashback when he was still sinful, before God had forgiven him, and we know this because it starts out with "When I kept silent." And what this means is before I prayed to God, before I made my confession, before I asked for forgiveness, I was in a horrible shape. I felt, David says, sick, lethargic, old, lifeless, and as I mentioned before, dry." Because that is how sin is; sin is a drag, physically and spiritually. It corrupts; it destroys; it does not make one feel better.

You may feel whatever you feel when you sin, but that lasts only that long [*snap!] and then you start feeling terrible because of the guilt, and that lasts a lot longer and it is a lot worse. And so it felt like a sickness to him.

But then he determined that he would own up to his sin and expose his sinfulness to God. He would confess his sinfulness to Him. And then the end of verse 5, it reads like, "I resolved to confess my sin to God, and just like that, He forgave me." I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." It was that simple.

Of course God wanted to see how sorrowful he was and what he was determined to do once he was forgiven, but that is all it takes. God's forgiveness was instantaneous upon that, and he was able then to go forward.

Verses 6 and 7 is a concluding statement. It begins with,

Psalm 32:6-7 For this cause [it could very well have been started with thus or therefore] everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

The gist of it is that because God forgives sin, those who are in a covenant relationship with Him can have true happiness. They can have true blessedness. We can trust; we can have faith that God will forgive us when we fail Him because that is His nature, that is the covenant that we have signed on to. One of the parts of the covenant that He says He will do is forgive our sins. That is part of His role.

And so when we come before Him and ask Him for forgiveness in the right attitude and the right spirit, He is going to do it. So all those who are godly, meaning those who are in the covenant, shall pray to You in a time when You may be found, meaning in their day of salvation, in their opportunity for salvation. And You will hear.

Now this ends with, "surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him." He switches that quick to those who are iniquitous, to the wicked. It does not seem like there is a switch, but actually this flood of great waters is the Flood of Noah he is talking about. He is talking about all those sinful people before the Flood in Noah's day. The Flood came and their time was gone. They could not change. They could not ask forgiveness. It was done.

And he is saying it is not like that with the people who are part of the covenant of God. They can ask God's forgiveness, and He will give it speedily and deliver them.

And in verse 7, I just want to drop this in here. Maybe you can check it out later. But actually he compares God here to a city of refuge. He is a lot better than a city of refuge. You run to God when you have sinned, and He forgives you immediately. You run to a city of refuge after you have sinned, and you have to stay there for years and years before you get a reprieve because you have to stay there until the high priest dies. It could be so long; it could be a generation before the high priest dies. But if you ask God, run to that refuge, it is immediate and you can make something good of your life after that.

Now this is what God says He will do in verses 8 and 9. He will instruct and teach you in the way you should go. He will guide you with His eye. He tells us,

Psalm 32:9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.

What this means is that God is going to instruct him, going to instruct David, now that he has a teachable spirit. Now that they are back in communication, now that David has a clean slate, God finds this is a wonderful time to give him more instruction. But He says, "Do not be stubborn like a mule or a horse, like I have to put a bit on you. No, just do the right thing. Follow My word. I've got My eye on you." I am putting it in the vernacular, but this is basically what verses 8 and 9 say, that God says, "OK, you're clean again. You need to listen to what I say. I'm going to watch you, and I don't want to have to put a bridle on you. I want you to do it yourself."

Now verses 10 and 11 are the conclusion, and verse 10 acts as the lesson of the psalm:

Psalm 32:10-11 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous; and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Let me paraphrase: Sin will burden one with many sorrows, but the Lord will enfold the faithful person in His mercy.

The psalm ends, then, with three appeals to be uplifted, to be joyous, to be optimistic. It says "be glad in the Lord." It says rejoice and "shout for joy!" We have so much that we can be thankful for in God—praising Him for His mercy and forgiveness and for treating us as righteous before Him. It is no wonder that the psalms end with hallelujah.

And I am going to leave it right there.