

A Contrite Heart

Why a Contrite Spirit Is Necessary

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The biblical word 'contrite' is almost meaningless to most people today. It has lost most of its use in daily speech. However, this obscure word signifies an important condition that is necessary for our overall growth.

A contrite heart is so necessary in our spiritual development that the person who has never had one may not be prepared for God's Kingdom.

In the Bible, the words contrite or broken (in reference to the heart or mind) occur relatively few times. However the biblical concept of humility and acceptance of divine providence, which result from trials, is very common, as you are very well aware of.

This theme of humility and acceptance is repeated throughout Scripture. The contrite person enjoys special care from God.

We may feel emotionally scarred by the tragic events we have experienced, but God finds pleasure in the humility which results from this brokenness. I mentioned that in my last sermon.

In Isaiah 57, we find a qualification for receiving spiritual healing. This condition was required of physical Israel before God would heal the nation. It is also required of spiritual Israel (that is, the church) for spiritual damage to be healed.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Although God is all-powerful and unlimited in His existence and perfection, He is the most involved and loving of all beings. In reviving the spirit of the

humble, He 'makes them alive' as it translates literally. The sense here is that He provides spiritual life and comfort. Spiritually, God is to the contrite what refreshing rains, the warm sun, and cool dew are physically to a drooping plant. It revives us when we are in that condition.

I have a small tree in my office called a Ming Aralias. It has fragile feather-like leaves, which have a parsley look to them. When I let it dry out too much it wilts. Because the leaves are thin and hold very little moisture it droops as if it has lost its lifeblood. Very quickly at that point it begins to drop its leaves as if to have given up on life.

When I soak the soil, it very slowly perks up. It comes alive again, the remaining leaves stiffen up and it is ready to face the world again, in a manner speaking. We feel that way, and then when God revives us we perk up as well.

But the leaves that have fallen very quickly dry to a crisp. When you pick them up they crumble and turn to powder in your hand.

In verse 15, the first use of the word "contrite" (in the phrase "a contrite and humble spirit") is translated from a Hebrew word whose root is 'daka,' but the word here is specifically 'dakka.' 'Dakka,' the word used here in verse 15, basically means crushed (literally into powder)—in a word: pulverized! This could very easily read, "I (God) dwell in the spirit realm with those whose pride has been pulverized and as a result are humbled through and through."

Similar to the fallen feather-like leaves of the Ming Aralias, which turn to powder without water, pride must be pulverized—turned to dust. But God revives the heart of the contrite and humble spirit, as water revives the tree.

The second word, "contrite" in verse 15, in the phrase "the contrite ones," is the root word 'daka.' It also implies "to crush." But depending on the context its meaning includes to crumble, or to bruise (literally or figuratively). It is used to describe those who are devastated by an action.

In Scripture, the Greek word 'daka' is translated into the English words or phrases: beat to pieces, break in pieces, broken, bruise, contrite, crush, destroy, humble, oppress, and smite—to name a few.

Let us look at another example of how the word 'daka' is used in context.

In Job 5, Eliphaz, Job's friend describes the difficulty of the fool's devastated children and how the fool is the cause of their crushed state.

Job 5:1-7 "Call now, if there be any that will answer you; and to which of the saints will you turn? For wrath kills the foolish man, and envy slays the silly one. I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. His harvest the hungry eats up and takes it even out of the thorns, and the robber swallows up their substance. Although affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

That is an apt description of the average human's life. Trouble comes just like the sparks fly out of the fire, there are too many to count.

The crushing or devastation of the sons, in verse 4, is an action that bruises them without disabling them. They are not necessarily harmed physically; although, it appears their food is stolen. So harm would eventually reach them in the form of famine and possibly starvation. They are not totally out of the woods after they have been crushed, but it is a little farther off.

The crushing here refers to their being made powerless to prevent their own tragedy. Negatively speaking, the contrite are bruised and injured. This is positive, as it is their pride that gets irreversibly crushed. However, the crushing events of life do not automatically make us contrite. It is possible for the result to be either of two extremes—bitterness or genuine contrition. That is the critical point when a person is struck with an injury or a sickness or whatever it may be. What direction will that person take?

Some allow bitterness, resentment, and anger to be the result in their broken state. Anger can very easily become sinful when it is causeless, excessive, or prolonged. In contrast, genuine contrition does not leave a humble person immobilized, hardened, or embittered.

Some of the biblical synonyms used for "contrite" are penitent, regretful, remorseful, repentant, sorry, apologetic, and ashamed. We can get a more thorough understanding of contrition by looking at four of these synonyms. These very similar terms help provide a clearer picture of the attitude involved here.

Penitence is sorrow for sins or faults. It implies sad and humble realization of, and regret for, one's misdeeds. The feeling that no sin is beyond forgiveness if it is followed by true penitence.

Regret implies a painful sting of conscience, especially for contemplated wrongdoing. It is the feeling of being sharply bothered by one's own action accompanied with a sense of guilt.

Remorse suggests prolonged and insistent self-reproach and mental anguish for past wrongs, and especially for those whose consequences cannot be remedied. It is the feeling of walking on thorns.

Repentance adds the implication of a resolve to change. It bears good fruit.

In this light, contrition stresses the sorrowful regret that constitutes true penitence. It is the feeling of remorse that brings tears to the eyes and leads to repentance.

David's appeal to God, in Psalm 51, is a prayer of repentance. After he had gone in to Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet went to confront him—you know the story. When he realized the severity of his own sin and the judgment he was willing to pass on someone who was guilty of a similar, lesser crime, David expressed his overwhelming feeling of regret.

His distraught emotional state made him feel like his gut had been wrenched out of him. This motivated him to plead for forgiveness from God with intense sincerity.

Psalm 51:1-7 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine 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 might be justified when You speak, and be clear when You judge. Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, You desire truth in my inward parts; in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

In verse 1, David wrote, "Have mercy upon me, O God." He was in a crushed and broken state that resulted from his consciousness or realization of his sin. He was in a contrite state of mind.

He made no attempt to excuse his sin; he made no effort to defend his conduct; he did not complain about the righteousness of God's law for condemning him. He felt "guilty"—because he *was* guilty and it faced him squarely.

When a person sins, his only hope when crushed with the consciousness of sin is the mercy of God; and that mercy will be earnestly pleaded for deeply and sincerely. This was the emotion flowing from David as he realized his sin.

Psalm 51:8-14 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 mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be

converted unto You. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, You God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

The word contrite does not differ significantly from the word "broken." The two together produce an intense expression of repentance. In Psalm 51, in addition to a contrite heart, David uses the related image of being brokenhearted. Repentance is a defining characteristic of the brokenhearted.

In some contexts, a broken person is one who responds to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in repentance, as in Isaiah 57:15, regarding who God wants to dwell with.

Psalm 51:15-16 O Lord, open You my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You desire not sacrifice, else would I give it; You delight not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You wilt not despise.

The phrase here, "*else I would give it,*" is an interesting phrase in that it expresses David's willingness to make an acceptable sacrificial offering if it was required. While at the same time there is the implied statement that it would be valueless without a right and humble attitude. Pretty much the same as giving an offering on the holy days, that it is valueless no matter what the quantity is unless it is done in a right, humble and a joyful attitude.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You wilt not despise.

The word rendered 'contrite' means to be broken or crushed, as when the bones are broken. It is used to describe the mind or heart that is crushed or broken by the weight of guilt. God will not treat the person with a contrite heart with contempt or disregard. He looks on them with favor and grants His blessing. So there is great encouragement and hopefulness in this.

The idea here is that any mere external offering, however precious or expensive it might be, was not what God required for repentance. The sinner cannot buy his way out of the sin. What God does demand though, is the

expression of deep and sincere repentance, which is the sacrifice of a contrite heart and of a broken spirit.

No offering without this is acceptable. God finds no pleasure in mere outward sacrifices, unaccompanied by the expression of genuine repentance and contrition.

Psalm 51 is one of the many passages in the Old Testament which show that the external offerings of the law were valueless unless accompanied by a heartfelt, humble genuineness. Offerings to God must be given with a pure heart—one washed clean—to be acceptable to God.

David knew that the sacrifices God desires and approves; the sacrifices without which no other offering would be acceptable was what was demanded in his case.

He had grievously sinned. The blood of animals offered in sacrifice could not put away his sin, nor could anything remove it unless his heart was repentant and remorseful.

The same thing is true now. Even though Jesus Christ gave the most perfect sacrifice in every way acceptable to God for human guilt, it will not benefit us unless we are truly repentant, unless we come before God with a contrite and humble heart.

A "broken" spirit, as mentioned in verse 17, is a mind that is broken or crushed under the weight of conscious guilt. The idea is that of a burden laid on the heart until it is crushed. The idea of 'crushed' represents self-control of crude human tendencies. What is being crushed is pride and other human tendencies.

A broken-hearted person is the opposite of the self-made, hardhearted person. The fundamental difference between these two types of individuals is most evident in their reaction to being confronted with their own sins.

David and Saul are obvious examples of opposite reactions to correction. David, the contrite person, repented and was humble. In contrast, Saul was bitter, resentful, and angry, becoming even more hardhearted as time went on.

I Samuel 18:6-12 And it came to pass as they came, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands. And what can he have more but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. And it came to pass on the morrow that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house. And David played with his hand, as at other times. And there was a javelin in Saul's hand; and Saul cast the javelin, for he said, "I will smite David even to the wall with it." And David escaped out of his presence twice. And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him and had departed from Saul.

So here is King Saul, who because of his anger could not control himself. He allowed his hatred to drive his actions. Even knowing that God was backing David—Saul still tried to kill him in raging fury. Earlier in his kingship, Saul disobeyed God regarding the Amalekites, which began a chain of events that would replace Saul with David.

Long before the time of Saul, in the days of the wilderness wandering, Israel had been savagely attacked from the rear by the Amalekites—a deed that God had promised to avenge someday.

During Saul's reign the time had come to follow God's command regarding the Amalekites. So Samuel commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites totally, entirely, and completely.

However, Saul was to spare the Kenites since they had shown kindness to Israel in the wilderness wandering. Saul proceeded to carry out God's command through Samuel. The problem was that Saul did not follow God's instruction exactly and entirely. When Saul saw the abundance and healthiness of the Amalekite sheep and cattle that God had told him to destroy, he justified his decision and disregarded God's instructions that he heard from Samuel.

When Saul considered that his own prestige would be greatly enhanced by bringing back Agag, king of Amalek, as prisoner, he could not resist returning them as public exhibits of his leadership. So there was pride involved. His response to what God told him through Samuel was rebelliousness. Part of Saul's problem was that he ignored what he had heard God say through Samuel and refused to respond properly to God's word.

I Samuel 15:10-15 Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, "I repent that I have set up Saul to be king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried unto the LORD all night. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set him up a place, and has gone about and passed on and gone down to Gilgal." And Samuel came to Saul; and Saul said unto him, "Blessed be you of the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD." And Samuel said, "What means then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice unto the LORD Your God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

He puts all the blame on the people that he was leading and claims that he listened to God.

I Samuel 15:16-26 Then Samuel said unto Saul, "Stay, and I will tell you what the LORD has said to me this night." And he said unto him, "Say on." And Samuel said, "When you were little in your own sight, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and

the LORD anointed you king over Israel? And the LORD sent you on a journey and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but did leap upon the spoil and did evil in the sight of the LORD?" And Saul said unto Samuel, "Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD Your God in Gilgal." And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king." And Saul said unto Samuel, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and Your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray you, pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD." And Samuel said unto Saul, "I will not return with you; for you has rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel."

So we see there that one of the main things that Saul did not do is that He did not hear God when God spoke and he did not respond properly.

Samuel responded to Saul's excuses with a statement of principle that is timeless in its application: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams." In addition to disobeying, Saul was guilty of rebellion, arrogance, and rejecting God's Word.

The result for Saul was God's rejection of him as king, symbolized by Saul's tearing of Samuel's robe mentioned in verses 27-28. This repudiation of Saul and selection of David as a replacement did not mean that God had misled Samuel or even changed His mind.

Rather, God had from the beginning chosen another, one who would be a man "after His own heart." Saul was still recognized by the people as their king for about fifteen more years, but for all practical purposes God deposed him right then.

The humble and contrite are able to hear God and tremble at His Word. There is no mocking from the humble and contrite. Who does God look out for?

In Isaiah 66:1-2, God is pictured as sitting on a throne with the earth as His footstool. Because of His magnificence and sovereignty no one can build a house for Him to dwell in; He is the Creator. He values humble and contrite people above the rest of His creation. He values those who follow His Word above any object. In one way or another, this has been Isaiah's message throughout this book. God wants His people to follow the truth as He has revealed it to them.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the LORD, "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you build unto Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things has Mine hand made, and all those things have been," says the LORD. "But to this man will I look: even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My word.

The next few verses go on to talk about people who choose their own ways and through their abominable actions mock God.

In verse 2, 'poor' would be better rendered 'humble.' This word in the original is not associated with how much property one owns, but refers to one who is downtrodden, crushed, afflicted, or oppressed.

Contrite spirit here carries the same meaning as in other scriptures—it is a spirit that is broken, crushed, or deeply affected by sin. It contrasts the spirit that is proud, arrogant, conceited, and self-righteous. This is a hardhearted spirit. On the other hand, the contrite and humble can be trusted not to distort the Word of God to his own personal benefit. Paul clearly links humility and hearing God when he writes about his thorn in the flesh:

II Corinthians 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing, I besought the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I glory rather in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in privations, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Here, Paul gives us a major reason for why his fellow saints are not always healed of their infirmities. Our infirmities help make us contrite and humble by putting us in the right and humble frame of mind.

How is contrition produced? True contrition is reached in several of ways:

It can be produced by an awareness of weakness, failure, or sin.

David stands as an example of someone broken by sin, as does Nebuchadnezzar—David because of the sin of adultery; and Nebuchadnezzar because of pride and arrogance.

Daniel 4:28-30 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spoke and said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?"

So obviously it is all his in his mind.

Daniel 4:31-33 While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you. And they shall drive you from men, and Your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make you to eat grass as oxen. And seven times

shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will." The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and ate grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs had grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

When Nebuchadnezzar had (at least in some basic form) begun to fear God, he had found the clue to wisdom an inestimable benefit of his seven-year chastisement. It qualified him for renewed leadership.

The patience of his loyal subjects in caring for their demented king was finally rewarded. No other leader had qualified to succeed him during the long interval. No one else could command the loyalty of the troops he had so often led to victory.

When Nebuchadnezzar had gotten back his reason, it electrified the court and the army commanders, and they thronged to congratulate him and once more hail him as their sovereign. He ended his humiliation in genuine contrition after he regained his sanity.

Daniel 4:34-37 "And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me. And I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay His hand or say unto Him, 'What do You?' At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and brightness returned unto me. And my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways judgment. And those that walk in pride He is able to abase."

The person broken in the right place is bruised or crushed in a way that results in true humility as it did with Nebuchadnezzar. The contrite person does not carry the anger or fear of punishment that characterizes the bitter person. Hardship or a heightened awareness of sin can result in a stripping away of pride, leaving a tender and contrite heart.

This tremendously important principle had to be established in the minds of the captive Jews serving out their years of bondage in Babylon. They might well have wondered whether the God of Abraham, Moses, and Elijah was truly alive and able to stand before the triumphant Gentile nations that had reduced His holy city, Jerusalem, to rubble and His holy Temple to ashes.

It would be easy for them to conclude, as all the pagan observers assumed, that the Hebrew nation had been so completely crushed and uprooted from their native land because their God was too weak to defend them from the might of the gods of Babylon.

The Israelites were given clear warnings from God, which are recorded in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, that God would cast His people out of the Land of Promise should they ever prove unfaithful.

However, now they needed a series of remarkable miracles to sustain their fading faith and renew their waning courage as they waited for their deliverance from exile. The captive Jews needed to know that even the apparently limitless power of Nebuchadnezzar was under the control of the Lord God Almighty, who still cared for them and had a great future for them in their land.

It is interesting that the first 6 chapters of Daniel conclude with a triumphant demonstration of God's sovereignty, faithfulness, and His ability to crush the pride of unconverted mankind.

This direct encounter leads to the next point.

True contrition can be produced from a direct encounter with God.

Isaiah 6 emphasizes the extreme wickedness of the nation of Judah, especially in contrast with God's holiness. Isaiah also emphasized that the people lacked spiritual insight and would not turn from their sinful condition.

Isaiah ministered during King Uzziah's reign; and before his direct encounter with the Sovereign God of the Universe he was feeling frustrated and exhausted by the spiritual state of the nation.

Isaiah 6:1-5 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried unto another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, "Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

He cried out, "Woe is me!" because he was so overwhelmingly affected by the greatness of God, and his realization of his own human weakness. He was contrite—he felt crushed by the reality of the awesomeness of God. He felt his sins exposed openly to his Creator.

Receiving the cleansing of God, he was able to hear and respond to the call of God upon his life. He said with enthusiasm, "Here I am; send me." His ministry followed his heightened awareness of the holiness of God and his own sin.

Another very familiar direct encounter involved Saul, who later became known as Paul. You remember what happened on the road to Damascus. I am not going to get into the story, other than to say that the proud Pharisee was led blind and defenseless into the city that he was previously prepared to enter with power and authority. Instead of people fearing him, through a crushed pride, he was led to fear God.

True contrition can be produced by providential events beyond our control that reveal to us that we are not in control of our own lives.

In a state of contrition, a person feels like there are no alternatives and he feels boxed in, cornered, with nowhere to go, nowhere to turn. Contrition may be the result of an affliction or failure; but, if the person is humble and relinquishes control of his life to God, He will listen to him and give him the strength to endure.

Job sensed this when he lost all and sat in despair, but he recovered after an encounter with God, which revealed to him the awesomeness of God. His words are recorded in

Job 42:3-5 Who is he that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered what I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech you, and I will speak; I will question you, and declare you unto Me. I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye sees You.

This tells us that Job had reached that point of genuine humbleness and contrition.

Job's experience of addressing God directly exceeded his previous knowledge, like seeing compared with hearing. This awe-inspiring view of God was probably more spiritual insight than physical vision, which deepened his perspective and appreciation of God.

What Job came to understand of God was incomparable to his preconceived ideas, which were actually based on ignorance. This personal confrontation with God silenced his arguing and deepened his awe.

When Job finally gained insight into God's ways and character—His creative power and genius, His sovereign control, and His providential care and love—he confessed his own unworthiness and repented. But look what God had to put Job through for him to reach that point of contrition.

He said, "I despise myself." He rejected his former accusations of God spoken in pride. God had already rebuked Job for indicting, faulting, and

discrediting Him. Job then repented in dust and ashes, a way of expressing his self-contempt. He was crushed and broken, and finally of the right mind and attitude.

True contrition can be produced by the feeling of separation from God.

At times God withdraws from His people. Contrition is produced by the realization that we cannot control God. Many people try to, and they do it by trying to form their own religion. They try to pigeon hole Him into their own creation of Him. People with severe trials, sicknesses, and depression often feel abandoned by God, but this feeling of abandonment can be used by God to move us toward humility through contrition.

Psalms 22 and 88, include cases of crying out to God and experiencing His silence. This is a prophecy put to music about the sufferings of Christ.

Psalm 22:1-2 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You hear not; and in the night season I am not silent.

It is interesting that we suffer from anxiety and stress in our lives, and that is a humanly natural thing to do. Even Christ did the same thing. He felt the stress and He felt the anxiety with what He had to go through.

Psalm 88:12-15 Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But unto You have I cried, O LORD, and in the morning shall my prayer come before You. LORD, why cast You off my soul? Why hide You Your face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer Your terrors I am distraught.

As I mentioned earlier, Paul related how he sought God about a problem that he termed his "thorn in the flesh" and found that God would not remove it because God wanted Paul to have a humble attitude. He allowed him to suffer with the affliction for the rest of his life. If that is what it takes for us to be put right with God, then that is what God has to allow us to go through.

Paul expressed this succinctly by recording God's answer to his request in his letter to the Corinthians in II Corinthians 12:9, which we read earlier, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

A contrite person has a unique access to God. Because God listens to and delights in the prayers of the humble, those who come without ulterior motives or in violation of his explicit commands, are as children to a loving parent.

True contrition can be produced by godly sorrow.

Contrition is a broken condition of our heart that drives us to earnest repentance resulting in true humility.

II Corinthians 7:8-11 For though I caused you sorrow with a letter, I do not now repent, though I did repent; for I perceive that the same epistle has caused you sorrow, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorrowful in a godly manner, that you might receive injury from us in nothing. For godly sorrow is not to be repented of, but works repentance unto salvation; but the sorrow of the world works death. For behold this selfsame thing, when you sorrowed in a godly manner: what earnest concern it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what requital! In all these things you have proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

The phrase "godly sorrow" implies here at least three things:

Godly sorrow comes from viewing sin as God views it. It is compliant to His will because He approves of it. Sorrow must be in accordance with God's will; it is revealed through His Word.

Godly sorrow arises from seeing that sin is committed against the holy and just God. This sorrow is not focused on the penalty of sin being pain and death; but it focuses on sin being an offense against the Supreme God of heaven and earth. Matthew 26 records the example of Peter's godly sorrow for denying Jesus.

Matthew 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' Then he went out and wept bitterly.

We know, from Peter's total commitment to God later in his life that his sorrow was genuine godly sorrow because it produced good fruit. Godly sorrow is not repentance but it produces repentance. That is how we know that it was genuine and it was a result of contrition.

Godly sorrow is not repentance, but it *produces* repentance.

II Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted, [Goodspeed's The New Testament: An American Translation translates this phrase as:] For the pain that God approves, results in a repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets.

Matthew 27:3 says that Judas "was remorseful." Though remorse or sorrow always accompanies repentance, it is not always accompanied by repentance. A person may sorrow and not repent, as Judas apparently sorrowed but did not bother to change his ways.

We read in II Corinthians 7:11 of the impact that godly sorrow can have on us.

II Corinthians 7:11 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.

Paraphrased, using a combination of Goodspeed, Phillips and Conybeare translations, this could easily read:

You can look back now and see how the hand of God was in that sorrow. Look how seriously it made you think; how eager it made you to prove your innocence; how you righted the wrong done.

Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. [This is true because it stirs us to action!]

Mourning because we committed sin that is against God, and seeking His forgiveness, is godly sorrow, which produces repentance; the effect of this kind of repentance is permanent changes in our lives.

Merely grieving because we have committed a sin at which we have been caught leads to disgrace and shame, not genuine repentance of the sin. This type of sorrow is not 'of God' but is 'of the world.' Only when we see a sin as committed against God and repent of it does it lead to a lasting change in our character.

Godly sorrow produces true repentance, and true repentance demonstrates its sorrow by its deeds. Contrition in this context is sorrowful regret for sins and faults.

In Psalm 38, the psalmist expresses this sorrow as the result of 'a broken and a contrite heart.' It contains many of the points on how contrition is reached. This passage is a reconciliation prayer asking for healing of a serious crippling disease.

The psalmist feels a deep sense of guilt and abandonment. And he urgently requests a renewed relationship with God. Sin separates us from God. Apparently the psalmist here feels separated from his Creator.

Actually, anyone who has had or is having a serious sickness or injury can relate to this passage. He suffers from a sickness that just will not heal; and in his mind his recovery is long overdue. The whole time that he has waited for God's intervention he has experienced what he perceives as God's

correction. It is not known what this sickness was. It is thought that it was possibly the disease of leprosy, but no one knows for sure. Whatever it was, it was consuming him.

Psalm 38:1-4 O LORD, rebuke me not in Your wrath, neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure! For Your arrows stick fast in me, and Your hand presses me sorely. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of Your anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

Obviously, the psalmist sees God's sovereignty in his life. He understands cause and effect—what we reap we sow. Not all disease results from individual sin, but in this case he knows that he is guilty of sin and God is angry. He feels God's rebuke so deeply that it brings him down and he begins to develop a contrite heart.

The intensity of God's correction affects the psalmist to the point where he can no longer enjoy life. He has come to the breaking point because he feels so overwhelmed. It is the feeling a person has in a flood where nothing will hold back the rush and force of the water until it has destroyed and drowned everything in its path.

Psalm 38:5-7 My wounds are foul and corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease, and there is no soundness in my flesh.

The psalmist has found that physical pain is terrible. So terrible that it carries over into mental and spiritual anguish and pain. The resulting stress and anxiety is overwhelming. This is when the actual sickness seems to be less important compared with the anguish of recognizing that a fault or sin has been committed against God. Sin is sin, but when it is done consciously or knowingly it is foolishness.

Psalm 38:8 I am feeble and sorely broken; I have groaned because of the disquiet of my heart.

The psalmist has reached the point of contrition here. He has what feels like a broken heart. He has no joy left, he is bowed down and grieving, partially because of his pain, but also because of the stress of his mental state. Just before repentance begins to take shape, he feels hopeless. This throws him into a deeper depression so that he is paralyzed from doing anything. All he can do is groan within himself.

In this depressed condition, it is not easy to express ourselves easily. With this type of anxiety our thoughts are not coherent. Our emotions, our actions, and our words are fused together into a groan. We are incapacitated.

Then, in the following verses, the psalmist looks up to God with the hope that He would understand his groaning. Even though God did not seem to be responding, he knew that nothing is hidden from God's eyes, and here we see the hope entering in.

Psalm 38:9-11 Lord, all my desires are known to You; and my groaning is not hidden from You. My heart pants, my strength fails me; as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my sore, and my kinsmen stand afar off.

So he was not receiving any relief from having the little pleasures of life, or in sharing experiences with friends. Even his family had abandoned him. His feeling of abandonment was aggravated because he was being shunned, and friends would have nothing to do with him either. Also in his distraught and awful condition neither did he have any help. Even though he is weak he wants to do something about his situation but he cannot. The psalmist is confused and he no longer has the proper perspective, and he says, "Even the light had gone from my eyes."

Psalm 38:12-14 They also that seek after my life lay snares for me; and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and devise deceits all the day long. But I, as a deaf man, heard not; and I was as a dumb man that opens not his mouth. Thus I was as a man that hears not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs.

He feels isolated from the world, partly because of his desire to be alone in his depression, and because he is being shunned. He has nothing to say, and he is not interested in defending his innocence. He was like Job except that the psalmist knew that he had sinned, and Job made a great effort to defend himself. The psalmist was silently absorbed in his suffering whereas Job was anxious to protest against his friends, and to try to justify himself with God. The psalmist knows that he has sinned and he waits in submission for God to initiate reconciliation. When we reach the point of contrition we completely abandon ourselves for Him.

Psalm 38:15-16 For in YOU, O LORD, do I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God. For I said, "Hear me, lest otherwise they should rejoice over me; when my foot slips, they magnify themselves against me."

We see the psalmist's contrite heart when he has no other hope left than waiting for God. Not much time is left, he is close to death, and his adversaries are taking every opportunity to harass him with their strength and remind him of his weakness. He feels like his life is slipping away. Then with what feels like his last breath he calls on God for justice, and justice is not only important for himself but also for others.

Psalm 38:17 For I am ready for halting, and my sorrow is continually before me.

We can see the godly sorrow that has come about here and the contrition continues. His contrite heart is getting stronger.

Psalm 38:18-22 For I will declare my iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin. But my enemies are alive and they are strong; and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries, because I follow the thing that is good. Forsake me not, O LORD; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!

The psalmist confessed his sin again, because he was still troubled by guilt and the consequences of sin; but he still clung to God for his assurance. Even

though he may have sinned in other areas, he was innocent of any wrongdoing against his accusers who gloated over his hardship.

Simply put, biblical contrition is the feeling of regrets and sorrow for a fault or sin, which leads to repentance.

Psalm 34 is very encouraging. The ears of the Lord hear the cry of the righteous. He is close to His needy church members, who are brokenhearted and crushed with personal trials and affliction.

Psalm 34:15-18 The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saves such as are of a contrite spirit.

We often feel overcome by our troubles, but we do not have to feel this way. God is fully aware of our limitations as we walk before Him. We see here that the righteous do not always escape trouble. Walking with God in the way of wisdom assures us that God is present, even when we suffer often and severely.

God promises that if we trust Him and call on Him, He will see us through our troubles and make them a blessing to us and through us to others. He is also able to help us with our emotions of despair and depression.

Remember verse 18, "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit."

God assures us that He is near us when our hearts are broken and our spirits are crushed, whether we feel like it or not. This is not a promise with conditions attached to it; it is just a simple and eternal fact.