

God's
Rebuilding Process
Repent, Return and Rebuild

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CONFESSION IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL

A young man at the candy store told the proprietor, "I want three boxes of candy. I want a \$5.00 box, a \$10.00 box, and a \$20.00 box." The candy store owner said, "What on earth do you want three boxes of candy?" He said, "I've got a date with a young lady this weekend. If she just shakes my hand and says I had a nice time, I'm going to give her a \$5.00 box of candy. If she gives me a big bear hug, I'm going to give her the \$10.00 one. But if she plants a big kiss on me, I'm going to give her a \$20.00 box of candy." Well, come that Friday, he went over to her house, was invited in, and asked if he couldn't stay for supper. The father asked the boy "Would you lead us in prayer for the meal?" That young man led the most eloquent, longest and most beautiful prayer you've ever heard. After it was over, his date whispered over to him, "I didn't know you were so spiritual." He whispered back, "and I didn't know your daddy owned the candy store." The moral of the story is sometimes prayers sound a lot more sincere than they are.

I wonder how many insincere prayers God has heard through the centuries. Particularly as they relate to personal sinfulness. Prayers that oftentimes are well worded and eloquent but are not very authentic, not very heartfelt. Personally, I believe that God has heard many more token prayers than He has broken prayers. Do you know what I mean when I say "a broken prayer"? It's the prayer of one who has been cut to the quick that he or she has offended an all holy, all loving, all faithful God. For example: The prayer David offered after his sin with Bathsheba. After he had been confronted by the prophet Nathan and the truth looked him square in the face. David prayed "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your unfailing love; according to Your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin for I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that You are proved right when You speak and justified when you judge." ... "Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones You have crushed rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:4, 7-10) This prayer flows from a broken heart and only the broken heart is big enough for God to dwell in.

In this lesson we can see the necessity of brokenness because only when we are broke will we face the truth about ourselves. We are sure David felt twinges of guilt for months after his sin with Bathsheba. But there is a difference between feeling guilty and being broken. There have been times in life when we've done things that were wrong and we felt a little bad about it, but that's not being broken over your sins. Only when David was confronted by the stark truth presented by the prophet Nathan, only then did David strip away the Band-Aids of twinges of guilt and come face to face with the moral cancer that was eating away at his soul. Only when he was broken did he face the truth about himself.

The same thing happened to Peter. When he boasted that he would never betray Jesus. Jesus said that all of them would betray Him. Peter said, "Well, maybe all of them, Lord, but not me. No, I'll be faithful to you to death. Lord." Jesus said, "Oh, Peter! Before this very night's over, you'll deny me three times before the cock crows." Sure enough by that campfire it happened the denials came - once, twice and then thrice. The Bible says, "Then Jesus walked by and looked at Peter. When he did Peter knew the truth about himself." The unfaithfulness that filled his heart and it broke the apostle. The Bible said he went out and he wept bitterly. A broken man doesn't make excuses or play the blame-game. He just pleads for mercy.

"On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God." (Nehemiah 9:1-3)

1. Revival is linked to the word of God.

It is that word that acts as the two-edged sword, cutting to the heart, and being cut to the heart. It was time for Israel to face the facts and confess her sins. The result is the longest recorded prayer in the entire Bible. It is a prayer that is spoken by the broken. In this confession and prayer, Israel confesses her sins. She traces her past from Abraham all the way to the present situation. There are two key points stressed over and over again, first, the faithfulness of God, and second, the faithlessness of God's people.

The people pray and recount the covenant that God with them through Abraham, and said, "Oh God, you've been good to us, even when we went down to Egypt in bondage. We prayed for deliverance and you sent a deliverer, Moses. After the plagues, You parted the Red Sea, and we walked across on dry ground. Then you gave our people food and water and you

protected us from the enemies. God, you were good to us." How did those people respond to that goodness? "But they and their forefathers became arrogant and stiff-necked and did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and, in their rebellion, appointed a leader and ordered to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and astounding in love. Therefore, you did not desert them."

The cycle is repeated over and over again in verses 19 through 25. The people pray about how good God was after that. After taking them through the desert, not even allowing their shoes and clothing to wear out. Then when they entered Canaan, you gave them kingdom after kingdom. You gave them wells to drink from that they didn't dig. You gave them vineyards to eat from that they didn't plant. You gave them houses to live in that they did not build. God, you were awesomely good!

But then how did the people respond again? "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They put your law behind their backs; they killed your prophets who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you. They committed awful blasphemies. So you handed them over to their enemies who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed, they cried out to you, from Heaven you heard them and in your great compassion, you gave them deliverers who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them and when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven." (vs. 26-28a) "And in your compassion, you delivered them time after time." (v. 28b)

You see what is happening here? Did you ever try to hug a baby that didn't want to be hugged? Did you ever pick up an infant and have that infant stiffen that back and throw that back in such a way? They didn't want that affection? That is exactly what happened with Israel. No matter how much God tried to show His love and His care, Israel balked and they rebelled. Don't misunderstand. This prayer is not a group of Jews gathering in the 5th century B. C. just offering a laundry list of gripes about their ancestors. No, these broken people were saying, "We are the product of a rebellious and arrogant ancestry and we bear the family resemblance.

Instead of talking about the great-great grandparents, the words we, our, and us come into play. "In all that has happened to us, you have been just, you have acted faithfully while we did wrong." (v. 33) "We are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress." (v. 36)

If you don't remember anything, remember this, your prayer must not be a token prayer but a prayer from a broken and contrite heart and mind. No excuses or alibis just confession and a cry for mercy. It is true the book of Nehemiah is not just about the rebuilding of a wall, oh that's how it started. It is about rebuilding people. Nehemiah, while in Persia heard word of the dilapidated condition of the wall around Jerusalem. He wanted to go there and rebuild it, but what he really wanted to rebuild was a people.

The wall had been rebuilt. The people don't pray "Oh, God, our problem was that we had poor defenses." Instead they prayed "God, our problem was we had poor obedience. God, we understand that we are where we are because we've been who we've been."

These were children of God of the Old Covenant. What is the application of all this to children of God of the New Covenant? Until a person stops making excuses, stops playing the blame-game, and pointing the finger for all of his circumstances and reaches the point of brokenness and says, "I have sinned before God and that's why my life is in a mess" there can be no healing. Just can't!

This prayer is Israel's story. What's your story? Can you be as honest about your story as the Israelites were about theirs? There are a lot of stories. Is your story one of spurning God's gracious offer of salvation for years? Sitting in your own arrogant way, thinking I'll do what I want, when I want, and if I want. Yet God still gives you chance, after chance, after chance. Is that your story? Is your story one of coming back to God in tears? You really were touched when you came back to Him, but as months, weeks, days, and maybe just a few hours later, you wandered away again. As you look back over your life, has your cycle been more repeated than the Israelites? Yet, God was always there the next time you came back. How many of you have lived for years as a chameleon Christian?

Are you going through the motions, praying the token prayers, putting on that big smile but knowing that week after week

you're not even obeying the first commandment? Yet He has never, ever failed you.

You know we've all got a story, every one of us. Let me tell you nobody's story is what it ought to be. The question is why on earth has God put up with us? The reality is, as with the Israelites, even though we've failed Him many, many times, He has never failed us.

You know what sin is? The Hebrew word for sin means "to miss the mark". I think most of us miss the mark in terms of our concept about sin. Most of us think that sin is breaking a rule. We don't feel too bad about that because everybody breaks rules. Rules are made to be broken. Right? No wonder we don't feel guilty about sin. Sin is not primarily breaking a rule. Sin is primarily breaking the heart of the only one who has never turned His back on us, and has never done anything but good for us. When David realized that his heart ached. When Peter saw that he hadn't broken a rule, but a broken heart, that's when he went out and cried. Have you even once ever been genuinely broken before the Lord? Until you are, you don't really know the Lord. Some of you may have many times. Some of you may not have for many years, but if and when that day comes, confess your sins before God and plead for mercy and forgiveness.

2. Assume personal responsibility for your sin.

Come to the Lord pleading and begging "Lord, I am where I am because I've been where I've been. It's my responsibility." I heard a story about an older lady. She had been just kind of a clerical worker all her life and she had saved her money little by little and built a nest egg. Finally, she had got to retirement and lo and behold, a slick salesman came to her door and conned her into investing all of her money in some fly-by-night scheme. He left town, she lost everything she had. Upset about it, she called her accountant, a fellow that she had trusted for years, giving her financial advice she'd always received. He listened to her, and he said, "Why on earth didn't you call me before you made that decision?" She said, "I didn't call you because I was afraid you'd tell me not to do it." You know what? That's us and God. We haven't wandered from God because of ignorance. We know His will. We know His word. We don't want to come to Him because we know that if we do He won't let us have our own way. He wants us to go His way and we don't want to hear that. Let's just admit "God, it's my fault." "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) Square up to it. Don't blame your mother or your father, your boss or someone at church. It's your sin, period! Admit it.

3. Appreciate the goodness and faithfulness of God.

The Jews prayed; "All that has happened to us, you have been just. You have acted faithfully while we did wrong." (Nehemiah 9:33) If you can't pray that prayer, you're not broken. If you can't say, "God, none of this is your fault. You've acted faithfully, we've done wrong." The Israelites said the same thing that David said in Psalm 51, "God, you are right, I'm wrong. You're the faithful one; I'm the one who broke the promise."

4. Ask forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

The problem in our culture is that we think we don't need forgiveness anymore, and if we do, we only need it from ourselves. We sin against God and yet, we assume that we decide how to fix that. That would be like: Let's say you and I got into a heated conversation that turned into an argument. Lo and behold, you got very upset, jumped up and punched me in the nose. I'm stunned that you did this, but in a couple of minutes, you come back and say, "I don't know what came over me. I want you to know that I've forgiven myself and I'm all right now." An observer runs up and says, "I saw that whole thing, and I've forgiven you, too." Now what's the problem with that? I'm the offended one. There's some part I play in all that. But in our modern culture men break God's Word, they break His heart and then seek secular therapy and counseling which says I'm OK, you're OK so let's all just forget about it. Then they wonder why they still feel guilty and empty. The answer is simple: they've never gone to God, the one they offended.

Once a Christian is broken, how does he get forgiveness? "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9) "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2) Admit your sin guilt to God. "I have sinned. Now God I am confessing to you, please, please cleanse me in the blood of Jesus."

Abraham Lincoln was out in the country one day, and a passerby came in his buggy. Lincoln stopped the man and said, "Sir, could you please take my overcoat into town?" The fellow said, "Well, that would be no problem. But how do you intend to get it back?" Lincoln said, "That won't be any problem. I plan to stay in it." If we are going to get to Heaven, we must clothe ourselves with Christ. (Galatians 3:27) If we are going to get to Heaven, we must stay in the robes of Christ.

A Pharisee and tax collector, both Jewish children of God, were praying in the temple. Our Lord said that Pharisees gave a laundry list of why he was such a good guy saying "Lord, aren't you glad I'm on your side?" But that publican, a tax collector smote his breast and said, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus said, "It was the latter who left there justified because he was a broken man." (Luke 18) He was broken! In his brokenness, he claimed the power of Jesus Christ for forgiveness. The Pharisee was far from broken, he was righteous in his own eyes; i.e., self-righteous.

5. Accept God's promise.

This is hard to do because Satan, the old accuser, after we're broken and after we've accepted Christ's forgiveness, is whispering in our ear; "Aw, surely you don't think God will ever really forgive and forget, do you?" What you've got to do is confront those subjective feelings with a clear objective truth of God's word. Look at some of His promises.

The "amnesia promise." "For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34) It's amazing to me that an omniscient God can choose to forget. This is the "amnesia promise".

The "detergent promise." "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are as red as crimson, they will be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

The "distance promise." "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12)

The "depths of the sea promise." "You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins under foot, and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19)

I don't understand all those promises. I don't understand how God can forgive us in the magnitude that He does. But I've learned this, I'm smart enough in life that I use a lot of things I don't understand. I still don't understand how an airplane gets off the ground, but I still use one. I don't understand, how a microwave makes food hot, but I use one every day. I don't understand how God can forgive me but I use it every single day. Steve Flatt Amazing Grace Lesson #1333 September 28, 1997