

THE
Joy
OF
BEING FORGIVEN

ANDREW MURRAY



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All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible.

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THE JOY OF BEING FORGIVEN

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INTRODUCTION

*To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David,
when Nathan the prophet came unto him,
after he had gone in to Bathsheba.*

—Psalm 51:1

A Psalm of David for the Chief Musician

The book of Psalms is the innermost sanctuary. It is the Holy Place of the sanctuary of the Bible. In the rest of the Bible we receive instruction from God on the way to draw near to Him. In the Psalms, God opens the door of His secret dwelling place. He shows us how His believing people come to Him, speak with Him, and enjoy fellowship with Him. There we see the throne of grace surrounded with petitioners. There we learn to pray. There the grace of God is manifested in the most glorious way.

Praying with God's Words

To use another analogy, the book of Psalms is like the beginning class of a nursery school. In the more advanced classes, the teacher tells the children what they have to learn. They know how to work independently and need the teacher's help only from time to time. But with the youngest class, who are learning the ABCs, a different

method is needed. Every letter must be pronounced and dictated to them. The teacher must put the sounds for the letters in their mouths, until they learn to pronounce and know them for themselves. This is the way the Lord God deals with us in the Psalms. He comes as the Faithful One, nearer to us than in the rest of the Bible. He gives us the very words we need in order to come to Him. He is aware that we do not know how to pray. Therefore, He comes and tells us what we ought to pray for.

When we speak His words, it is with the desire to understand them so that we can feel and pray as He has expressed them. Then He gives us His blessing, and His Spirit makes the words living and powerful in our souls. In these precious psalms, God's Holy Spirit Himself teaches us to pray.

Prayers That Meet Our Needs

This book of the Bible will become more precious to you when you consider the way the Lord God has dictated the words so that you can pray them. Has He sent directions from heaven for prayer as if He had ordained them there for us? If that were the case, they would not be truly human, nor would they be relevant to our situations on the earth. The Holy Spirit has taught us to speak in the language of men, with the feelings of men, and from the hearts of men. The Lord has used men with passions like ours; they are sinners like us, who have experienced every possible condition of human need and sorrow.

God has taught these men by His Holy Spirit to speak these prayers and commit them to

writing. Now He offers them to us as a prayer book adapted to our needs. They are adapted to our needs because they come from His Spirit; therefore, they are divine. Yet they are just as human, because they come from those who are our flesh and blood and are in every way like us. For this reason the book of Psalms has been precious to sinners who are concerned about their salvation. Each psalm will also become precious to you if you earnestly desire to seek after God.

In other books of the Bible, much is written about sin and conversion and the conflict of believers. In the book of Psalms, you can see and hear the believers themselves—you have the key to their inner thoughts. You can see them in their fellowship with God. You hear how they confess sin and ask for forgiveness. You can see how they praise God for His grace and pour out their hearts before Him. You can kneel down and pray with them. Your heart will be kindled by their repentance and their faith.

Alone with God in the light of His presence, the writers of the Psalms lay their whole lives before Him. Like looking in a mirror, you can see your life reflected in the concerns, problems, and joys expressed in the Psalms. You can see the hidden conflict coming from the sense of guilt, as well as conversion and faith. You can see what it is like for a soul to be influenced by the working of God's grace.

You will never learn to know sin, especially your own, until you have learned to agree with the deep confession of the writers of the Psalms. Moreover, when you have learned to give praise and thanks with the poets of the Psalms, you will learn to glory in God and rejoice in His grace.

For this reason seekers of salvation have always loved the Psalms. For this reason many of the most distinguished saints of God have said that the Psalms become more precious to them the longer they read and experience their truths.

Think of the Son of God. He taught us to use the Psalms and sanctified them for us. When He was in the heaviest stress of His conflict He cried, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Matt. 27:46). Were these words of the Twenty-second Psalm written to meet His condition? When dying, Jesus cried, *“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit”* (Luke 23:46). Was that not a word from Psalm 31:5? If Christ Jesus needed the words of the Psalms to comfort and strengthen Him in prayer to His Father, how much more must you and I rely upon these divine prayers to draw near to God?

Praying with the Psalmist

The blessings that come from using these words are abundant. Whenever we take God’s words and express them, a way is prepared for the Word to get from the mouth to the heart. *“The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart”* (Rom. 10:8). Through the mouth the Word comes into the heart. You will see that the words of God are the living seeds that germinate, shoot out roots, spring upward, and bear fruit. Your heart is the soil. All you have to do is open it. Then you will see that it is the Word of God that works mightily in the believer.

I invite you to meditate with me on the Fifty-first Psalm. Let us learn to pray this psalm. Let

A Psalm of David for the Chief Musician

us think about it verse by verse. Learn it by heart and receive it into your spirit; then speak it before God on your knees. For David this psalm was the way out of the depths of sin to the joy of forgiveness. It was his way to a rich experience of the grace of God. Psalm 51 can also bring you and me into this blessing, if we use and follow it faithfully. Prepare yourself to memorize and to pray this psalm. The blessings it will bring you are beyond your present comprehension.

When Nathan Came to David

*To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when
Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had
gone in to Bathsheba.*

—Psalm 51:1

We find different kinds of psalms in the Psalter of David. There are psalms of thanksgiving for praising and thanking the Lord. There are psalms of instruction to teach us one portion or another of divine truth. There are petitioning psalms where God's help is asked for in the midst of distress or sorrow. And there are repentant psalms where, after confession of sin and guilt, request is made for forgiveness and redemption.

Why David Wrote This Psalm

The Fifty-first is one of the seven repentant psalms. Indeed, it is the greatest of them all. To understand this particular psalm, we must pay

special attention to the situation David was in when he wrote it. The introduction to this psalm gives us some information. David had deeply fallen into sin. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. Then he had tried to conceal his sin. When he did not succeed, he had Uriah put to death. Even this was not the worst aspect of his situation. If he had really confessed his sin, everything might have worked out. Instead, for a whole year his heart remained hardened. Finally, after the birth of David's child, God sent the prophet Nathan to him, and David realized the true nature of his sin. Nathan had drawn from him a sentence of condemnation against a rich man who had robbed a poor man of his only pet lamb. After David himself condemned the man, Nathan exclaimed, "*Thou art the man*" (2 Sam. 12:7). Then David humbled himself and acknowledged, "*I have sinned against the LORD*" (v. 13).

The prophet spoke to him in the name of God: "*The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die*" (v. 13). This, however, was not enough for David. He was so grieved about what he had done that he went to the Lord in deep humility to confess his sin. David begged God to give him divine grace for the forgiveness of sin and to renew his heart. This psalm was written to confess his sin and express his need for forgiveness.

I want you to understand this psalm because its lessons are of such great value. There are three elements in the spiritual life that we must know if we are to live and die as believers. First, we must know how great our sins are; second,

we must know how we can be delivered from our sins; third, we must understand how we should live in thankfulness to God for this deliverance.

These lessons concerning our sinful nature, deliverance, and thankfulness are most clearly explained in this psalm. Let us ask God to open our hearts and impress these lessons on our spirits.

The Magnitude of Our Sins

The first lesson we must learn is how terrible and wretched our sins are. Think for a moment who David was. He was the man after God's own heart. (See Acts 13:22.) He was *"the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel"* (2 Sam. 23:1). Think of the wonderful things God did through him and for him. He had been purified through many difficult trials. God had highly honored him, and David had gloriously praised God.

Yet look what became of him whenever God gave him over to the desires of his own heart. He fell into intense sin and remained hardened in it for a long time. Nothing but the Word of God by the prophet could bring David to his senses.

I am afraid that there are many among us who do not know what their sins are. Until they know their sins, they cannot really come to the confession of their guilt or experience mercy. They will die in their sins. When it is too late—in eternity itself—they will see what sin was. This is the reason I present this psalm to you. I want to show you the sin of David and, like Nathan, say to you, *"Thou art the man"* (2 Sam. 12:7).

I want to show you how corrupt the nature of man is. I want to show you how your heart is the source of all sin and makes you capable of all sin. I especially want to show you how the power of sin can blind a person. You are not aware of your sin until the Spirit of God teaches you to know it. You do not know the real nature, the ugliness, and the curse of sin until God makes it known to you. Therefore, come and listen to the prayer of David, a man of God. You will learn what you still do not know about sin and the misery it brings.

Deliverance from Our Sins

You must also learn what glorious deliverance is available from God. In this psalm you will see that great things must be done in you. David felt that he must be washed by God from his sin, and that his transgressions must be blotted out. He also asked that he be purified within and renewed in his heart; he prayed that the Spirit of God would dwell in him always.

Come with me, and you will hear from David what must take place in you. No matter how sinful and helpless you may feel, you have access in prayer to a God who can and will work in you. David's prayer is designed by the Spirit of God to teach you how you must come to God, and what you can expect and receive from Him.

Gratitude from Our Hearts

You must also learn what it means to live a life of thankfulness to God. You will understand

in this psalm how one who is redeemed feels united with God. It is the believer's desire to praise and serve God. It is a joy to tell others what God has done for him. This is not a burden upon him, but a work of love that his heart needs, and that the grace of God makes possible.

Grace will sanctify not only the hidden life of the heart, but also the outward life, conversation, and walk. The redeemed soul is known as one who has become an entirely new person. Therefore, you will also understand how this transformation is brought about by grace and given to a sinner who has the same feelings and problems as you. Yes, in this psalm you will see a man confessing his sin with the deepest sorrow and anxiety. Then, under the working of the grace of God, he receives redemption. Finally, he glorifies God as a redeemed and emancipated soul.

I want you to join me in the study of this psalm, so that you can see how God forgives, saves, and sanctifies souls. You will see how God accomplishes everything you need. You will see that God demands nothing that He does not first give. The service to which He calls you is a blessed, joyful service of willing love. This love is awakened by His love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 5:5.)

PART ONE

THE GREAT PETITION

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

—Psalm 51:1-2

Chapter One

The Mercy of God

*Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy lovingkindness.*
—Psalm 51:1

In this first verse is the key to Psalm 51. During the long period before David was brought to humiliation by the Spirit of God, he could not pray this simple prayer. Only the person who has been brought to an awareness of sin by God Himself is in a position to use this word in prayer with his whole heart. Only the person who prays it from the heart can truly understand it. David learned to pray this prayer on his knees, with a broken heart and in bitter sorrow for his sin. This prayer must be spoken upon the knees with humility and to God. Then it can become a blessing to us, and we can make this psalm our own.

There Is Mercy with God

“Have mercy upon me, O God.” We must believe that there is mercy with God. The greatest

wonder of His divine being is that with God there is mercy.

Here on earth we give little thought to this great wonder of God's mercy. However, those in heaven are humbled by the thought of it and never cease to adore and thank God for His mercy. There God is known as the Holy One, and He comes against sin as "*a consuming fire*" (Heb. 12:29). In heaven, sin is known for what it is: the shameful rejection of the Perfect One—a denial of His law and love. It is known that man deserves to be rejected by God. Therefore, it is in this mercy of God that glory is seen.

Angels are amazed that He could have compassion for our fallen race and that He Himself has paid the ransom for our sins at the cost of the blood of His own Son. The idea that He longs after the ungodly, forgives them everything, and receives them as His children is so great that the angels cannot marvel enough over such mercy. David heard that there was mercy with God; therefore, he drew near to Him with this prayer. We also must try to understand and believe that there is mercy with God.

We Need God's Mercy

"Have mercy upon me, O God." We, too, must feel that we need mercy. Mercy is something that is entirely undeserved. David felt that his sin was so shameful, and it made him so guilty in the eyes of the holy God that he deserved to be condemned. It was not God alone who condemned him. He condemned himself. He felt that he was entirely deserving of the judgment of God. His sin

showed how he had withdrawn from God in spite of all the goodness of God toward him. He felt that mercy would be marvelous if he would be considered worthy to be made a friend of God. Yes, the true petitioner felt that he needed mercy. Nothing but free grace could be his hope.

We Must Seek God's Mercy

"Have mercy upon me, O God." We must desire for mercy to be shown to us. David knew that there is mercy, and he felt that he needed mercy, yet this was not enough. He wanted God to show that His mercy was intended for him. He knew that the showing of mercy must be a personal action of God toward each person. "I know that God is merciful," he cried. "The fact that there is mercy for everyone does not satisfy me. I need to know that God is merciful to *me*. Be merciful to me, O God of mercy!"

This longing for mercy is in harmony with what God's Word teaches us on these points. The Word always speaks of *finding* mercy, *obtaining* mercy, *receiving* mercy, *partaking of* mercy, and *having* mercy. From God's side it is called *giving* mercy or *showing* mercy. Sin is a personal offense committed against God. Conversion is coming to God to receive redemption from Him so that He can show mercy to us by taking away sin.

Many people have mistaken ideas about God's mercy. They comfort themselves with the thought that God is merciful. They have, however, no idea how this truth will personally affect them. Mercy must be given to them by God and

must be experienced in the soul. They forget that there is a work that mercy does for the soul. They forget that God is the Righteous One as well as the Merciful One. Before His righteousness can liberate a single soul, His holy law must be fulfilled. The sinner must partake of the righteousness of Christ and the acquittal of God. Even with the word of mercy on their lips, many go on to meet destruction. This does not happen because there is no mercy with God for them, but because they have never personally experienced the work of divine grace.

Let us review these thoughts concerning mercy. First of all, remember that there is mercy with God. Let your soul be filled with the thought that with God there is mercy, and that the highest joy of His heart is to show mercy. Furthermore, you need mercy. Without mercy you will be eternally miserable. Especially remember that you must have a personal experience of this mercy. You must have mercy. Without this you cannot rest contentedly. God must do something for you. He must show you mercy. Let God's great mercy and your great misery be the two arguments that cause you to pray this prayer more earnestly. Pray, *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness,"* until you receive God's mercy.