

## INTRODUCTION

This message is a continuation of the message I started last week. Last week I talked about "Repentance for Dummies" and I explained the ABC's of repentance. It is **A**dmitting you have sinned; **B**eing Sorry for your failure; and then **C**hanging your direction. I want us to go back to "B" and talk more about what it means to have godly sorrow for your sin.

Sometimes it's hard to say, "I'm sorry." To quote the famous theologian, Sir Elton John, who said: "It's sad, so sad; It's a sad, sad situation; And it's getting more and more absurd; It's sad, so sad; Why can't we talk it over; Oh it seems to me; That sorry seems to be the hardest word."

The context of this passage is that Paul had written a harsh letter to the congregation at Corinth. Most scholars don't believe this was 1 Corinthians, rather it was a very severe letter Paul wrote specifically criticizing the church for allowing some kind of obvious sin to exist. We don't have this painful letter, but as a result of it, the members of the church repented. Paul used this letter that confronted their sinful behavior as an example to teach us some general principles about how godly sorrow leads to repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:10-16. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you. I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. I am glad I can have complete confidence in you."

Sorrow is never a pleasant experience, but neither was castor oil as a kid, but my mom gave that to me sometimes! Like castor oil, sorrow is bitter, but it can make us better! Ray Stedman makes an important point about the value of sorrow: "All through scripture we are told that through suffering and sorrow comes strength of character. We read of the Lord Jesus, 'Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.' (Hebrews 5:8) There were things the Lord Jesus had to learn through times of suffering and sorrow. If he was not exempt, why should we expect to be?"

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 'There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Now all of us would rather spend our time laughing and dancing instead of weeping and mourning, but there are some things we can learn only when our heart is broken. For years I've quoted a little poem that says: "I walked a mile with Laughter; She chatted all the way; But I was none the wiser; For all she had to say. I walked a while with

Sorrow; And not a word said she; But, oh, the things I learned; When Sorrow walked with me."

I want to share with four specific ways in which you can find strength through sorrow over your sin. Let's start by understanding just what godly sorrow is.

## **1. GODLY SORROW IS NOT SADNESS OVER A LOSS; IT IS GRIEF OVER MY SIN**

In the Message paraphrase we get another insight into the meaning of godly sorrow. "I know I distressed you greatly with my letter. The letter upset you, but only for a while. Now I'm glad—not that you were upset, but that you were jarred into turning things around." (2 Corinthians 7:8 *The Message*)

Don't confuse godly sorrow with the general sorrow that comes whenever we face the sadness over the loss of someone or something we love. For instance, we grieve whenever we go through the experience of the death of a friend or family member. We also experience grief when we lose a job, or have to move to a new city or a new school. This kind of sorrow isn't the same as the godly sorrow mentioned in our text. There's one obvious difference. General sorrow or grief that comes when we experience a loss usually occurs from outward circumstances over which we have no control. Godly sorrow comes from internal realization of sin we have committed.

Is your heart broken over your sin, or are you still hard-hearted? I want to take the next few minutes to see I can make you feel good and guilty. You may say, "But Pastor, I thought you wanted us to focus on grace and forgiveness, and to feel good about God's love for us." I do, and it's possible to feel both good *and* guilty.

The word "sin" in the Bible means "to miss the mark." And as much as we desire to hit God's mark, we miss it most of the time, or at least I do! Maybe you've never thought about it, but there are two kinds of sin of which we're guilty. There are what you might call "objective sins." These are sins where we do the wrong thing. There have been times when we've stolen, lied, and lost our temper and said nasty things we knew were wrong. Personally, I've never killed anyone, but I've probably had malicious thoughts that equaled murder—and Jesus said it's the same thing. So we're all guilty of objective sins. You might call these sins of commission.

But worse than that, we're also guilty of subjective sins, or sins of omission. These are sins where we *didn't* do the right thing. James 4:17 says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." Frankly, I'm a lot more guilty in my subjective sins than in my objective sins. There have been thousands of times when I didn't love someone the way I should; when I didn't share my faith when I had an opportunity; when I didn't make that phone call or that visit, or write that note when the Holy Spirit prompted me to do it. In fact, if you piled up all my sins, I would have to say my objective sins are only about 20% of my guilt, and my subjective sins comprise at least 80% of my guilt. Is it the same for you? Are you feeling guilty? Good.

Now you're beginning to understand the depth of God's grace and mercy to those of us who are the chief of sinners. So, how do I feel about my sin? It breaks my heart. I am ashamed. The devil, the accuser of the brothers, often creeps up to my ear and says, "How can you stand and preach

before these people? You’re no good; you’re no good, you’re no good, baby, you’re no good. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!” And my reply is, “I AM ashamed of myself, but I am not ashamed of the good news of Jesus Christ! For it is the power of God unto salvation!” I have come to understand and cherish the fact that the blood of Jesus Christ has covered all my sins—past, present, and future. Both the objective sins of where I have disobeyed God and the subjective sins where I have failed to obey God. Have you come to place where your heart has been truly broken over your sins? That’s a prerequisite for repentance and forgiveness.

## **2. GODLY SORROW MAKES ME HATE MY SIN**

When we experience godly sorrow, it doesn’t just cause us grief, it creates in us a distaste and hatred for our sin. The Bible says, “See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm ...” (2 Corinthians 7:11 NIV)

That word “indignation” means to be angry. We should never direct our anger toward another person, but indignation, or anger, toward sin is a good outlet for our anger. The word “alarm” is a good one. If you’re in bed at night and your house alarm goes off, it will get your attention in a hurry. When there is sin in our lives, it should set off an internal alarm. It should cause us to hate and loathe anything in our lives that disrupts our fellowship with God.

As Baptists we often run from the word “catechism” but it’s a good word that just means to reinforce a particular Christian teaching by repeating it. There are other Christian groups who have done a better job than us in teaching basic truths by having believers memorize certain doctrinal statements. I think we should all memorize this statement from the Baltimore Catechism: “Sorrow for sin, is a hatred of sin and a true grief of the soul for having offended God, with a firm purpose of sinning no more. We should hate and avoid sin as one hates and avoids a poison that almost caused his death.”

In 1980, beautiful teenager Cari Lightner was killed by a drunk driver. The guilty driver was a repeat offender with multiple DUIs. Cari’s mom, Candy Lightner was devastated. Candy hated the crime of drunk driving so much that she did something about it. Rather than allowing this tragedy to consume her with bitterness, she got good and mad. She started a movement called Mother’s Against Drunk Driving. Today, thousands of people have joined MADD to raise awareness against underage drinking and drunk driving.

Candy hates drunk driving because it killed her child. How much do you think God hates sin? It wasn’t the nails, or the crown of thorns, or the spear in the side that killed Jesus. It was my sin and your sin that killed him. Only when we start hating sin the way God hates sin will we get serious about sin in our lives. As long as we only see sin as something that wounds us, we won’t take action. But when we see our sin as that which killed the precious Son of God will we make changes. Godly sorrow makes us hate sin.

## **3. GODLY SORROW CREATES IN ME A DESIRE FOR PURITY**

Beyond grief over my sin and a hatred for my sin, godly sorrow also creates a desire in my heart

to live a life of purity. Again, our text says, "And now, isn't it wonderful all the ways in which this distress has goaded you closer to God? You're more alive, more concerned, more sensitive, more reverent, more human, more passionate, more responsible. Looked at from any angle, you've come out of this with purity of heart." (2 Corinthians 7:11-12 *The Message*)

All Christians sin, but we can't use that as an excuse to continue in sin. Our desire should be to live pure lives. Paul wrote to the Christians in Galatia that they should "put to death" (the KJV word is "mortify") the sinful nature that leads to things like, "hatred, discord, envy, drunkenness, and sexual immorality." These were NOT lost people; these were Christians who were still practicing those sins. He said, "Put them to death!"

It's April. April showers bring May flowers—so what do Mayflowers bring? Pilgrims. Of course, we've all heard of the pilgrims who sailed to our shores on the Mayflower. We remember them every Thanksgiving. But what you may not know is that these and many other settlers of colonial America were called "puritans." That simply means that the main desire of their lives was not to just believe the Bible, but to live a life of purity. I admire the Puritans. In today's churches you don't hear much about purity. You hear a lot more about how to be happy instead of how to be holy. God's goal for your life is not your happiness, but your holiness.

The entire philosophy of the puritans can be summarized in a quote from one of the great Puritan preachers, John Owen. In his book *The Mortification of Sin in Believers* he wrote: "Be killing sin; or sin will be killing you." That's still good advice today. Godly sorrow will not only make you grieve, it will make you hate sin, and it will create in you a desire to live a life of purity.

#### **4. GODLY SORROW DRIVES ME TO SEEK GOD'S FORGIVENESS**

So how can we find strength from godly sorrow? It's when we allow this sorrow to drive us back to our Father's grace and forgiveness. That's what Paul meant when he wrote, "You let the distress bring you to God, not drive you from him. The result was all gain, no loss." (2 Corinthians 7:9 *The Message*).

There are thousands of people who live around us who are carrying a toxic level of guilt and bitterness. They know they've messed up, they just don't know where to go to find forgiveness for their guilt.

A few years ago there was a pretty good movie called "The Shawshank Redemption" starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman. Morgan played an convicted murderer named "Red" who had been in prison for many years. He helped Tim Robbins learn the ropes of prison life. Every few years Red was called before the parole board to answer whether or not he had been properly "rehabilitated." For years he had said, "yes sir, I've been rehabilitated." But he was never released. Finally, when he's an old man, he appears before the parole board again. A member asks Red, "Do you even KNOW what the word 'rehabilitated' means?" An older, wiser Red answered this way: "Rehabilitated? Well now, let me see. You know, I don't have any idea what that means...I know what you *think* it means. To me, it's just a made-up word, a politician's word so that young fellas like yourself can wear a suit and a tie and have a job. What do you really want to know? Am I sorry for what I did?...There's not a day goes by I don't feel regret. And not

because I'm in here or because you think I should. I look back on the way I was then. A young, stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I want to talk to him. I want to try and talk some sense to him. Tell him the way things are. But I can't. That kid's long gone. This old man is all that's left. I gotta live with that."

Finally, Red expressed true sorrow for what he had done, but he came up short because he also believed he would have to live with his guilt every day for the rest of his life. Most of us may not be murderers, but we have offended the holiness of God by our disobedience and by our lack of obedience. But the truth is we don't have to live with the guilt every day of our lives. God offers us a full and free pardon!

## CONCLUSION

Last week, I concluded the message on repentance with Jesus' story about how a Loving Father ran to embrace his son who had wandered away and come back. Phillip Yancey (What's So Amazing about Grace) relates the modern story of what could be called "a prodigal daughter." She grew among the cherry trees of Traverse City, Michigan. She thought her parents were old-fashioned because they overreacted to her nose ring and the music she listened to. They grounded her a few times and she always ended up seething inside. One evening after being sent to her room her father knocked on her door and she screamed, "I hate you! Leave me alone!" That night she hatched a plan to run away.

She had visited Detroit once before on a bus trip with her church youth group to watch the Tigers play baseball. The newspaper in Traverse City reported constantly about the gangs, drugs, and violence in Detroit, so she concludes her parents won't search for her there—California or Florida maybe, but not Detroit. So one night she slips out and buys a bus ticket to Detroit.

She's hungry and scared, but the second day there she meets a man who drives the biggest car she's ever seen, and he's nice to her. He buys her lunch and arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she's ever felt before. He told her she was smart to leave her parents—they had been keeping her from all this fun.

Her good life continues for a month or two, and then six. She calls the man with the big car "Boss" and he continues to give her pills and takes care of her. He also teaches her to do things that men like. Suddenly she is living in a nice apartment making more money than she thought possible. Whenever she thinks about her folks back home, she thinks how boring life is back there. She had a brief scare one morning when she saw her picture printed on the back of milk carton with the headline, "Have you seen this child?" But by now she has blonde hair, and with the makeup and additional body piercings, nobody would mistake her for a child.

After a year, the first signs of illness appear in her face and skin. She is amazed at how fast her boss turns against her, and before she knows it she's out on the street with no place to live. She still has a few bucks, but all the money goes to support her drug habit. When winter blows in she finds herself sleeping on the sidewalk beside the metal grate of a department store. "Sleeping" isn't the right word, because a teenage girl can never relax in downtown Detroit. Soon dark bands circle her eyes, and her sickness worsens until her thin body shakes with each hacking

cough.

One evening she realizes her life is a mess. She begins to whimper. She no longer feels like a woman of the world, instead she feels like a little girl lost in a big, scary city. She’s hungry, she’s cold, she’s broke, and she needs a fix. She huddles underneath the newspaper and suddenly a vision fills her mind—it’s May in Traverse City and the cherry trees are in bloom, and she can see her Golden Retriever chasing a tennis ball among the blossoms.

She sees her mistake and her heart breaks. She cries, “God, why did I leave? How stupid I’ve been. My dog back home eats better than I do now, and he stays warmer.” As she sobs, she realizes that more than anything else in the world she wants to go home.

She visits a row of phone booths until she finds one with change left in the slot. She makes three straight phone calls and gets the answering machine three times. She hangs up the first two times without leaving a message, but the third time she says, “Dad, Mom, it’s me. I was wondering about coming home. I think I can borrow money from a girl I know, so I’ll be catching a bus up your way. It will get there tomorrow at midnight. If you’re not there, well, I guess I’ll just stay on the bus until it reaches Canada.”

It takes seven hours for the bus to make all the stops between Detroit and Traverse City, and during that time she realizes her plan might have flaws. What if her parents are out of town and never got the message? Shouldn’t she have waited until she could have talked to them? Even if they’re home, they might have already written her off as dead.

As these and other thoughts trouble her, she rehearses the speech she’ll give IF anyone is there. “Dad, I’m sorry. I know I was wrong. It’s not your fault, it’s all mine. Dad, can you forgive me?” As she says every word over and over again, her throat tightens with sorrow—she hadn’t apologized to anyone in years.

It’s a snowy evening, and the bus is late, so it’s almost 1am when it finally pulls into the bus stop in Traverse City. The bus driver announces over the microphone, “Fifteen minutes folks, that’s all the time we have here.” She thinks, “Fifteen minutes to decide my life.” She nervously looks at her face in her compact and smooths down her hair and licks the lipstick off her teeth. She looks at the cigarette stains on her finger and wonders if anyone can tell.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect, and what she sees is none of the possible scenarios she had rehearsed. There in the concrete wall bus station of Traverse City, Michigan stands 40 of her family members—brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, a grandmother, and a great-grandmother to boot. And they are all wearing silly plastic party hats and are blowing plastic noise makers. There’s a large sign taped to the concrete wall that says, “WELCOME HOME.”

Out of the crowd her dad rushes to her embrace her. Through her tears she begins her speech, “Dad, I’m so sorry. ....” But he interrupts her, “Hush child. We’ve got no time for that. You’ll be late for your party. A celebration’s waiting for you at home.”

And so it is, that when we experience true sorrow for our sins and we repent and return to our Father, He is always there to embrace us and welcome us home with His forgiveness. And that's why His grace is so AMAZING!

There's a wonderful song entitled, "Godly Sorrow." It's written by Stephen K. Jones and sung by Felicia Sorensen. I want to conclude the message with these lyrics: "Once my sorrow was for the pain; Of all I stood to lose, and yet my sin remained. This sorrow borne of my pain; Kept my heart from turning back to Him again. Now my sorrow is for the sin; that gives offense to God; and stains my soul within; This sorrow of godly pain hopes I never give offense to Him again. Sorrow for my sin; brings my soul such pain; yet this pain I know can lead my soul I know .. Back to Him again."

Will you allow your godly sorrow to drive you back into the arms of your Father?

## OUTLINE

### GODLY SORROW...

#### 1. IS NOT SADNESS OVER A LOSS; IT IS GRIEF OVER MY SIN

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes