

GODLY SORROW: KEY TO REPENTANCE

From *Godly Sorrow Produces Repentance*

by David Ferguson



CRY OUT TO THE LORD

Lord, I cry out to You today. I ask that You would break my heart with what breaks Yours. I want to know the things about my life that bring sorrow to Your heart. Your Word says that godly sorrow produces repentance, so I pray that You would produce godly sorrow within me for my sinful ways. Let godly sorrow produce a deep and lasting repentance in me.

PREFACE

It's a certain promise, a bold declaration: Godly sorrow produces repentance. In a day when true life change seems elusive and any Christlike distinction seems lost in our culture, this is good news indeed. In the midst of continuing to do the very things we don't want to do, the promise regarding repentance is refreshing (Romans 7:15).

In 2 Corinthians we read about Paul's burden for the Corinthians. It is not the outcome of repentance that grips the apostle's heart, but rather the godly sorrow that produces, prompts, and brings forth this genuine repentance. He writes, "For the sorrow

that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10–11, NASB).

Before there is evidence of a changed life, there must be an internal work of godly sorrow. A deep, emotional work of the heart must precede a change of behavior, attitude, and action. In his first letter, Paul challenged the Corinthians to a brokenness of heart. In the second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle rejoiced with the believers over the positive changes in their lives. Godly sorrow must have done its work in the lives of this early church!

In contrast to the sorrow of the world, godly sorrow is timeless and eternal. In this world, we experience tribulation and trials; struggles and losses take their toll. We constantly deal with the reality of rejection, regrets, disappointments, and pain. The Good News is that we’re not left alone in this journey. We have a Great High Priest who has gone before us (Hebrews 4:15), who was Himself acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3) and is even sitting at the right hand of God interceding for us now (Hebrews 7:25). Additionally, through the provision of divine comfort we can experience blessing in the midst of our sorrows when we receive comfort from God and other people (Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:2–4). Still, this sorrow, as deep and penetrating as it is, can’t compare to the power of godly sorrow.

So what’s the difference between godly sorrow and the sorrow we experience in our world? First, godly sorrow is His sorrow. This kind of sorrow belongs to God, but it can be revealed, shared, and imparted to the attentive hearts of His children.

THE REASON FOR GODLY SORROW

Godly sorrow speaks of His pain; God's heart actually feels sorrow. You may never have considered it before, but our God has experienced the emotion of sorrow. Remember the pain of our heavenly Father as He was rejected by His created hosts (Isaiah 14:12–14)? Recall how our God was betrayed in the garden by the “very good” of His creation (Genesis 3). Remember how God was repeatedly forsaken and abandoned by His people (Exodus 32:7–10)? Surely there was a sorrow-filled heart behind these words: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Genesis 6:5–6 NASB).

To experience godly sorrow means to share in the Father's pain; the pain of a loving Father who for us would:

- Watch Him who knew no sin become sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Allow the perfect One to be wounded, bruised and chastised (Isaiah 53:4–5).
- Hear His only Son utter these words, “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?” (Matthew 27:46).

As we consider God's experiences of sorrow, it ought to soften our heart with compassion and bring us to quiet brokenness. After all, *why* did God allow all of the experiences described above? Gratefully, it was for a relationship with you and me. God watched His son beaten and crucified and chose this great sorrow for our salvation. But then we must ask the question: *Why* did God have to send His Son to die and experience this great sorrow? It

was for our sin that Christ had to die. And therefore it was our sin that contributed to God's sorrow. Our sin hurt Jesus and it is our sin that has broken the heart of God. What a contrast? The world's sorrow focuses on *our* grief and what *we've* experienced. Godly sorrow shatters this self-focus, and challenges a heart to ponder: What have I done to the Father and His Son?



LEARN to Encounter Jesus

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death. (Philippians 3:10)

Quietly meditate on the words "suffer with Him." Bring your mind and heart to focus upon Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to center your heart on Him. It was Jesus who became *your* sin. He was bruised for *you*; He was beaten for *you*. Ask the Holy Spirit to soften your heart and to move you with compassion for His sufferings.

Lord Jesus, You took my penalty; You suffered for me. I have a fresh perspective of how my sin hurt You. Heavenly Father, I see also that my sin hurt You. Because I needed redemption, Your heart was filled with sorrow. My heart is now moved with _____ . I am heartbroken that I was a part of God's sorrow and Christ's suffering. Bring this image to my mind often. I want to share in this suffering.

THE RECEIVING OF GODLY SORROW

The Father is ready to vulnerably reveal His heart and His pain, but He only trusts His sorrow-filled heart to those who can be still enough to know Him. Those who are busy or pre-occupied will miss Him. Those who are cavalier or think light of their sin won't

hear Him. Sorrow is not a rational concept that's to be dissected, discussed, and debated as doctrine. It's a personal experience between a Father and a loved one, a tender issue of the heart, an emotional issue of the soul.

Godly sorrow comes by way of the Spirit's conviction and my confession. Only the Spirit can convict (John 16:8), and only I can confess (1 John 1:9; James 5:16). The Holy Spirit will fulfill His role of convicting me of selfishness, pride, disrespect or other specific offenses toward God and others. And then comes our part: genuine confession. We must say the same thing about our selfishness, pride, or disrespect that the Father says. We must say more than a mere intellectual agreement of wrong doing or a volitional voicing of regret. Confession is our *emotional expression* of godly sorrow. With a humble spirit and a contrite heart, we voice our agreement with the Father's sorrow:

- God, it was Your Son who was wounded for my transgressions, my selfishness and pride.
- It was Your Son who was bruised for my iniquities, my criticalness and disrespect.
- God, against You and You only have I sinned.
- It was because of my sin that You had to hear those soul-piercing words, "My God, My God, why have You abandoned Me?"

Confession from this kind of heart ushers in godly sorrow. No longer is there self-defense, pretense, or posturing, only a broken and contrite heart.

PRAY and Experience Scripture

For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance... (2 Corinthians 7:10, NASB)

It's the Father's sorrowed heart and He can share it with you. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how your sin has contributed to the Father's sorrow.

Holy Spirit, touch me with a broken and contrite heart, especially as I consider my sin of _____ . In a fresh way, show me how this has saddened Your heart. Remind me often of how my sin hurt Jesus and my sin hurts You. Change me, because I love You and don't want to hurt You in this way any longer.

THE RESULTS OF GODLY SORROW

The results of this kind of frequent encounter with God bring both internal and external changes. We no longer have to grit our teeth and try to be different. Change comes gently and supernaturally because the love of Christ starts to control or constrain our lives (2 Corinthians 5:14). It's these loving encounters with a God who's experienced sorrow that produces the power to change us. A grateful rejoicing occurs when we experience true, godly sorrow because our confession frees us of guilt. Godly sorrow also produces a joy in being forgiven and grateful thanksgiving ushers me into worship.

Godly sorrow produces repentance—changes that make me more and more like Christ. An experience with God's sorrow makes a lasting impression on our lives because we have been *with Him*. Having entered into the fellowship of His sufferings, having shared intimately with Him in His sorrow, we can never be the same again!



SHARE with Others in Community

Now that you have reflected on your experience of godly sorrow, can you serve the Lord with the gladness of your heart (Psalm 100:2)? Pause quietly in worship, and take time to tell God about the gladness of your heart and your gratitude for how He has forgiven you of your sins. Make plans to share this with a friend, mentor, or a small group.

God, I am grateful for Your grace and undeserved favor. Thank You that Your sorrow has broken my heart and will bring about change deep within me. I can't wait to look more like Jesus, so I can live a life that pleases You and brings glory to Your name.

Plan to talk about this experience with a friend, mentor, or small group. Your words might begin like this: "I've come to know God in a fresh way. I've experienced the sorrow of God's heart and how He hurt because of my _____."



LOVE Others in Community

Ask God to give you an opportunity to talk about the changes He is making in your life. Look for times to talk about the power of godly sorrow and how it brings about repentance. Your words might sound something like this: "I have so many things that need to change about my life, but I'm hopeful because God really is changing me. I recently discovered how my wrong choices hurt God. This experience changed something in me." Then go on to share about your experience.