

Where is my joy?

1. Lost joy is restored in forgiveness
2. Joyful service flows from a contrite heart

Psalm 51:10- 19

¹⁰ *Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
¹¹ *Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.*
¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*
¹³ *Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.*
¹⁴ *Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*
¹⁵ *O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*
¹⁶ *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.*
¹⁷ *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.*
¹⁸ *In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.*
¹⁹ *Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.*

Introduction

They say that absence makes the heart grow fonder. A recent study at Cornell University confirmed that this can be true in long distance relationships among college students. With the technology available today such as free long distance calling, Skype and FaceTime, it's easier than ever to have meaningful, relationship building conversations from across the country. The couples felt closer than those who saw each other every day because their conversations tended to be deeper when they did talk. Of course, it's also easier to stay "fond" of someone when you don't have to see them at their lowest lows. It's easier to idealize the situation.

Have you been in a long distance relationship? It can work if both parties are invested and communication happens. But if one disengages, the relationship crumbles. In a way our relationship with God is long distance – we don't see him. But worship, his word and sacraments bring us closer to him, and in prayer we get to talk back and communicate with him. But what happens when we disengage from the relationship? Have you done that before, are you doing that now? When we are not connected with God, may start to miss him, you may long for the times when you found joy in

salvation. Absence from God might make the heart grow fonder, but avoiding God can't make your relationship stronger.

People disengage for different reasons, independence, lack of interest or time, changing priorities, and often because of Guilt. I remember well driving with my friend in high school when he told me – “I don't feel like I can pray to God anymore. I enjoying going out and drinking and partying, and I have no intention in stopping. If I just don't care about how God wants me to live, how can I also pray to him?” I didn't have an answer for him. Maybe God's Word can help us today.

1. Lost joy is restored in salvation

King David's sins also drew him away from God. Instead of confessing his sins or repenting of them, David kept covering them up. David kept up the deception all through Bathsheba's pregnancy, he stubbornly refused to admit his guilt to God. David wasn't a weak Christian struggling with his sins; he had given up the struggle. He didn't want God or his forgiveness. He had no true joy.

What robbed David of his joy? He really robbed himself didn't he? He thought that he could just keep covering up his sin and going on with his life as King of Israel. No one would talk back to him, no one would call him out.

Have you been there? Have you tried to cover something up? Are you too proud to ask for forgiveness when you hurt your friend or your spouse or your child? Do we get comfortable with our sins? Are there some that you have stopped struggling against? In the end David realized that every sin against another person is ultimately and finally a sin against God. Sinning against God demands a punishment of being cast from his presence. Ultimately that's hell isn't it? Being separated from God's love, his mercy and his forgiveness. The one thing David needed was someone to point out how he was sinning against God, but who would confront a king?

God sent man, a prophet, a friend of David. Nathan. Nathan came in to talk to the king – remember this is almost a year after David's immense fall into sin – and he tells him a story.

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

David burned with anger because he saw something terrible happen, how could the rich man who had so much take the lamb from the poor man? *This man deserves to die!* Then Nathan brought the story home – *You are the man.* And everything came rushing back to David, he had everything and yet he took Uriah's wife, had him killed, and went about his life as if nothing had happened. God knew, and God cared. David had sinned against God. And God sent his pastor to call him back. God took the heart

than David had hardened, and he broke it and crushed it. And David confessed – “*I have sinned against the LORD.*” And immediately Nathan responded “*the LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.*”

Look how David responds the severity of God’s law and especially to the overwhelming, inexplicable, undeserved, unfailing love that he receives in forgiveness. *Create in me pure heart, O God!* In this beautiful song of confession and thanksgiving, David asks for something that only God can give. – create in me pure heart. Create. Think of God in the beginning of time, creating, creating all things new and perfect and wonderful and pure. This word – create – is only used with God as the subject. Only God can make our sinful hearts pure and clean and forgiven.

And he does. When Adam and Eve – his perfect creation, fell into sin, they knew how far from God they had fallen, and all creation since then has inherited their guilt. Hearts that don’t beat in time with God’s. And so God creates new pure hearts in his people. By giving us Christ’s beating heart. A heart that is pure and without sin, beating in perfect harmony with God. And Christ took our sins to the cross, where the spear in his side would prove that his pure heart had stopped beating. But God raised Jesus to life with a heart that will never again stop, a pure heart that he promises to create in us through faith. One day our hearts too will stop beating, but since they have been cleansed by the blood of Christ they are pure in the eyes of the Father, and they will beat anew in heaven forever.

Transition: David gets it – he once again experiences the joy of salvation and from that joy flows a desire to serve God. Listen to how this shines through in his song:

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Now that he has found joy in forgiveness, God is also giving him the desire to serve willingly and generously.

David knows that he has nothing that he can offer God. In fact *the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* God will not despise a broken and contrite heart, in fact, it’s the greatest sacrifice and gift that we can bring to God. A contrite heart is a heart that recognizes its sinfulness. A heart that has been crushed by the reality of guilt before God. We cry out to God with nothing to offer, no strings attached, just a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart. – but yet a pure heart, a restored heart, a forgiven heart, a heart that has been resuscitated by God himself, a heart that clings to Christ. *O God, you will not despise.* God does not despise us or our contrite hearts. Instead he embraces us and points to a Jesus once crushed, once despised, but now glorious and ever victorious. Because God has accepted us through Jesus, he does take pleasure in our service, our joyful service.

David includes in his prayer how he intends to serve God. Verse 13 says *Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you.* How did David do that? – ruling justly, leading God’s people, fighting against idol worship, writing Psalms that we learn from today.

How do we do turn sinners back to God? Maybe now we have an answer for my friend who didn’t feel like he could pray to God, who didn’t care about his sin. Maybe we have a story for him, a story about a man who stopped caring about God, a story about a man who lost his joy. Any maybe with tears we ask

– where is your joy? Is this where you find your true joy? We can encourage him to not give up the struggle. We can share how we struggle with sin living inside of us too. But we can also point him to another man, the man we saw in our gospel lesson. A shepherd who loses just one sheep out of hundred, and that shepherd searches relentlessly for that one lost sheep, through the mountains and valleys. And when Jesus finds that sheep who strayed away, he lifts him up on his shoulders and carries him home with great joy. And all of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. There is joy in Christ and joy in heaven that is so much greater than the joy we can find away from God.

David says that he is *saved from guilt and his tongue will sing of your righteousness*. He sings of the righteousness that is ours through Christ. God knows that we have nothing to offer him, so he gave us Christ, our righteous, sinless substitute, who gives his righteousness to us, his pure heart.

David sings: *O Lord open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings*. God doesn't want us to just show up – he wants our hearts. True service flows from a forgiven heart not from an obligated or a guilty heart.

David prays that the whole church would offer these righteous sacrifices of service to the Lord. *In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar*. That prayer is for us too, the new Jerusalem. That we would be built up, that we would be secure and strong in the Lord. David's people brought their best sacrifices to God, bulls were offered on his altar. How can you give your very best sacrifice to God? In Christ, we offer our worship and our praise. As the body of Christ, we serve God and serve each other. As forgiven children of God, we find our joy in his salvation.

Conclusion: So does absence make the heart grow fonder? Our relationship with God sometimes seems like long distance. But he will never disengage from us. He is always near us, drawing us back to him when we stray, proving his love in daily forgiveness. Touching our hearts and our mouths in the Lord's Supper. And so we wait patiently, serving him joyfully, and one day we will join him in heaven where we will serve in perfect joy and gladness with our heart purified and beating in perfect harmony with his.