

What to Do When Your Sin Brings Overwhelming Guilt

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This man was in *big* trouble!

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!
O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy! (Psalm 130:1-2)

How did he get into such a predicament? Listen closely:

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared. (vv. 3-4)

He was in “the depths” *because of his own sin*. Have you ever experienced deep, seemingly unending guilt because of your sin?

The Way Out of the Depths

The psalmist shows us what we must do initially when we are experiencing this kind of overwhelming guilt: ***Cry out to God for help!*** Assumed within this plea for mercy is a repentant heart.



If our sins are counted against us, we should only expect to be bombarded by God’s wrath (v. 3). But within the psalmist’s humble cry we hear an amazing reality: “But with you there is forgiveness.” Psalm 130 is “A Song of Ascents.” Israelites sang these psalms on the way up to Jerusalem for their religious festivals that included animal sacrifices aimed at securing the forgiveness of God. But those sacrifices could not finally deal with sin and guilt: “(I)t is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4).

But the psalmist was telling the truth — Yahweh *is* a forgiving God. We must read the Psalms with a “Christological” lens, and here’s what we know: God’s forgiveness is demonstrated supremely in his Son Jesus Christ who “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26b). Jesus’ death on the cross atoned for sin and satisfied God’s wrath for any who turn from their sin and rely on him for deliverance. The constant state of the believer is described by this word: forgiven! Here, then, is another step toward salvation from the depths: ***Rest in God’s forgiveness, found ultimately in the sacrifice of his Son.***

Upon acknowledging the forgiving disposition of the Lord, the psalmist does something else in coming out of the depths:

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning. (vv. 5-6)

What was he waiting for? Perhaps renewed fellowship with the Lord. Or, it might be, in his old covenant experience, that he was simply waiting for an announcement of forgiveness (cf. Leviticus 4:21). Most likely, he was yearning for the promised redemption that God would provide for his people (through the Son of David; cf. vv.7-8). He was so confident in God’s word that he “waited” for the Lord “more than watchmen for the morning.”

When dealing with our own sin and guilt, we also must ***wait for the Lord***. We are not waiting for the Lord’s forgiveness which, as stated above, is already ours in Christ. So what might we be waiting for? Possibly for the Lord to deliver us from feelings of guilt and despair, or to restore us to warm communion with him. And we should always eagerly anticipate Christ’s promised return when our experience with sin will be over forever.

Psalm 130 assures us that we don’t have to live the rest of our lives in the depths because of our sin and guilt. There is a way out: Cry out to God for help; Rest in God’s forgiveness, found ultimately in the sacrifice of his Son; wait for the Lord.

While You Wait

And what shall you do while you wait on the Lord? First of all, fear him. Forgiveness shouldn’t lead to lawlessness, but reverence (v.4b). And second, invite others to experience the Lord’s mercy. As I heard one man say, this man went from misery to ministry. Notice the psalmist’s plea at the end:

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities. (vv. 7-8)

You don’t think God’s merciful interventions in your life are meant to be kept to yourself, do you?