

# Songs of Life

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## Repentance Praise

What do you think the Vatican would give for the Pope's name? Well apparently a man called Roger Cadenhead decided to try and find out. When Pope John Paul died, he bought a Domain name on the internet: [www.BenedictXVI.com](http://www.BenedictXVI.com) and of course he did it before the name of the new Pope was announced. Roger Cadenhead beat the Vatican to it – he had the name before they knew they needed it. People will pay a lot of money for a domain name - someone else managed to sell their domain name: [www.popebenedictXVI.com](http://www.popebenedictXVI.com) for \$16,000 on e-bay. Roger Cadenhead didn't want money for his domain name. He was a Catholic – and he was happy for the Catholic Church to have his domain name and he didn't want to anger 1.1 billion Catholics by keeping it for himself!

He did, however, want something in return for handing it over. He wanted three things:

1. One of those hats.
2. A free stay at the Vatican.
3. Complete absolution, no questions asked, for the third week of March 1987.<sup>1</sup>

I know what you are thinking: what happened in the third week of March 1987?

Perhaps this reminds you of a week of your own – we all have one... or more... don't we? If there was a box of DVD's containing every second of your life, which ones would you destroy? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once wrote to ten prominent men. He wrote something along the lines of: "I know your secret!" within 24 hours, all ten had left the country.

David's week lasted more like a year, and remember David is the only man in the Bible who is described as a man after God's own heart. Yet he had a "week in

March 1987.” David was probably about 50 years old, he’s been king for about 20 years. He has distinguished himself as a man of God, as a composer of Psalms, as a faithful shepherd, as a valiant and courageous soldier on the battlefield and as a leader of his people, and he’s proven himself to be a man of honour.

And yet David had his “week in March 1987”. Some of us want to shake our heads and point the finger in dismay. But the wise among us know no-one is immune, the humble among us know that the truth is we are all vulnerable. David didn’t crack suddenly – he’d already let his guard slip. Although he had God’s abundant blessing, he had begun to drift: “Meanwhile David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, after he came to Hebron; and more sons and daughters were born to David.” (2 Samuel 5 v 13) He did this in direct contradiction to God’s command given in Deuteronomy 17, and by the time of “a week in March 1987” David is not where he is supposed to be. 2 Samuel 11 v 1 tells us: “In the spring, at the time Kings go off to war.... David remained in Jerusalem.” He was not doing what he should have been doing. How about you?

My best guess: some of us are looking back to our “week in March 1987” – maybe more than one. Some of us are still walking towards it, and the truth is you probably know it – because it’s a process. But it won’t happen if you do what you know is right. Make no mistake – you are vulnerable. David is not doing what he should be doing and then he sees Bathsheba. The Bible is the master of the understatement. It describes Bathsheba as very beautiful – rarely does the Bible include the word “very”. Truth is she’s a knockout, and David doesn’t see a wife, a subject, a child of God. He sees her curves, his conquest.... He seduces; she cooperates; she gets pregnant; he deceives his general, murders her husband, and marries her, and it’s all an elaborate cover-up!

To anyone looking in from the outside there’s no cause for concern. David has a new, very beautiful wife who is with child – and he is happy. But all is not well in David’s heart. And guilt simmers. And we know all about that don’t we?! We are the master of the cover-up, and there’s no escape when we keep up the pretence. The time of cover-up is not a time of enjoyment.

David is the author of Psalm 32. There he writes about the effect his guilt over Bathsheba had on him – when everyone else thought things were just fine!

When I keep silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. (Verses 3 and 4)

Keeping up the cover doesn't do us any good. I sometimes wonder why God waited so long before he sent Nathan. Perhaps in truth, David wouldn't have been ready to listen – he would still have been masterminding his cover-up. But God will not always be silent – and now he is silent no more and he sends Nathan to confront David. Nathan is a wise, Godly man who tells David a story and David doesn't see it coming. He is angered by the rich man taking the only lamb of the poor man rather than slaughtering one of his own to play host to a traveller. And then the truth. "David you are the man!" (2 Samuel 12 v 7)

Literally translated Proverbs 26 v 6 reads: "Trustworthy are the bruises caused by the wounding of one who loves you."

Friends, we all need a Nathan. Perhaps right now God is calling you to be Nathan to someone. Heed the warning: Nathan was humble, gentle, loyal and he was right: he told the truth. Friends, before you can be Nathan you must know the truth – you cannot act on hearsay or rumour, and you must do it in the right way – with humility gentleness and great skill. David you are the man!

Could it be that right now the Holy Spirit is saying that to you: You are the man! You are the woman? What will you do?

David faces his "week of March 1987" for the first time and he says: "I have sinned against the Lord." David has been exposed. He has done wrong and God makes it abundantly clear that he will have to live with the devastating consequences of his actions: "Now therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." (2 Samuel 12 v 10)

Nathan leaves – and David is left alone. Perhaps it is then that David pens Psalm 51.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;  
According to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.  
Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.  
So that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.  
Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.  
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.  
Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.  
Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.  
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.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.

In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.  
Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then the bull will be offered  
on your altar.

As David writes these words we can sense his utter relief: his secret is out, he doesn't have to cover-up or live in pretence any more, and what has been eating away at him from the inside and slowly destroying him can be dealt with and taken away. David recognises that although his sin was immense, God's grace is bigger, that although he will have to live with the consequences he will not have to be crippled and destroyed by guilt. Friends, sin is immense and we are full of it. We don't like to think of it that way, but that is the truth. And there is only one way to deal with sin and that is to confess it: "Have mercy on me O God... and cleanse me from my sin." David admits his deepening awareness of the depth

and ramifications of his sinfulness and he falls on the mercy of God as the only place he can go to be clean. You want to be clean, to be free from the guilt that is slowly destroying you? David knows the truth of forgiveness “cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”

Whatever was going on in David before Nathan confronted him, he has now got to the heart of the issue - that the problem of sin is deep within him ... and us. So David's prayer is essentially: “Create in me a pure heart; O God.” What's your prayer... What's your song?

David has realised that in his sin he had deceived himself – so he pleads for truth deep within (v 6). He recognises that he is unclean and so he asks for purity of mind and motive (v10). He recognises he has been unreliable so he asks for a spirit that will keep him controlled, steadfast, committed, reliable. Perhaps David just came to rely on his own strength – his power and success perhaps went to his head! But now he asks not to be deprived of the Holy Spirit – he knows full well where his success really comes from. The truth is the Spirit has never left him – he has stayed with him throughout but he gently backed off because he will not force himself on anyone. But here David asks for God's powerful, close presence that he knows he needs to live real life.

David's pretence is unravelling and he is now ready to be broken open, to be vulnerable. This is the song of a broken heart. In his honesty, openness and vulnerability he has grasped a deep truth: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God you will not despise.”

Perhaps there is an echo to the words of Jesus: “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” We are not blessed because we are poor; David was not blessed because he sinned! We are blessed when we have a broken heart as was David after being confronted by Nathan, because here we meet the richness of God's grace. Because we are in a place where we can know the miracle and richness of forgiveness. Because we are in a place where we can exchange a hard heart full of pride and arrogance, for a soft and responsive one turned towards God not away from him. Because we are in the place where we can enjoy again, and delight in, the powerful presence of God, because we can know again that we are right with

God: clean, washed white as snow. We are blessed because we will be able to praise God again.

Church should be a place where we sing God's praise with great enthusiasm! But that's not always what I see as I stand here and I sometimes wonder why. Well perhaps now I know... and so do you!

We are blessed because when we have known and experienced the riches of God's grace, we want to tell others of the truth we have found. Friends, we are blessed because with humility and vulnerability we come together – knowing our frailty but knowing too the power of Gods transforming grace. We come together not to judge one another, not to laugh or mock what others do, not to make ourselves feel better, but we come to build the community of the people of God.

If you want to know the joy of your salvation – then Psalm 51 is your song. You have a choice – two songs. You can sing the cover-up version – which of course is not the real thing. Or you can sing the song of repentance praise.

1. Quoted in Max Lucado : *"Facing your Giants,"* Thomas Nelson 2006 pg 141-142

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church by Rev Ian Phillips on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2009.