

RUF Bible Study – Songs of Ascents
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Psalm 120 – Repentance

1) *In my distress I called to the Lord,
And he answered me.*
2) *Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips,
From a deceitful tongue.*
3) *What shall be given to you, and what more shall
be done to you, you deceitful tongue?*
4) *A warrior's sharp arrows
with glowing coals of the broom tree!*
5) *Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!*
6) *Too long have I had my dwellings
among those who hate peace.*
7) *I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war!*
English Standard Version

*I'm in trouble. I cry to God,
desperate for an answer:
"Deliver me from the liars, O God!
They smile so sweetly but lie through their teeth."
Do you know what's next, can you see what's
coming, all you barefaced liars?
Pointed arrows and burning coals
Will be your reward.
I'm doomed to live in Meshech,
Cursed with a home in Kedar.
My whole life lived camping
Among quarreling neighbors.
I'm all for peace, but the minute
I tell them so, they go to war!*
The Message

Have you been to New York? Have you seen the Statue of Liberty? Have you visited Ellis Island? I'm sure that most of you know that these places are the first sights, sounds and spots that millions of immigrants experienced when immigrating to America. But you saw them as tourists. Could imagine seeing them, experiencing them, as your new home?

When Julie and I spent the summer in Sweden helping with a church plant in 1999, I read Vilhem Moberg's *The Emigrants*. Here is the copy from the back cover: *The Emigrants introduces Karl Oskar and Kristina Nilsson, their three young children, and eleven others who make up a resolute party of Swedes fleeing the poverty, religious persecution, and social oppression of Smaland. The Nilssons leave a farm too small and stony to support them. Kristina's uncle Danjel Andreasson seeks religious freedom for himself, his wife and four children. .Ulrika of Vastergohl, once the town whore, is determined to live with her daughter where no one knows her past. Karl Okar's brother, Robert, travels with his friend, Arvid Petersson to escape their lot as farmhands. And Jonas Petter Albrektsson decides to desert his shrewish wife. For then long weeks they suffer the cramped, filthy quarters of the sailing vessel that finally brings them to New York City.*

I'll bet some of your grandparents or great-grandparents immigrated to our country. If you've heard these stories, either reading of them in books, watching them on the History channel, or even better, hearing them from the person who experienced it, you have some comprehension of how amazing these narratives are.

Could you imagine how things would have to get for you to leave your home here? To leave your family and travel over the ocean to a place where you don't speak the language, know the culture, and where your skills are not wanted or needed? Could you land on the shores of Sweden, find work and a place to live, save money and come back after years to bring your family to your new home?

Such a person compelled to go on such a trip isn't a tourist. He's a pilgrim. He's on a journey, a journey looking forward to something better, looking back at something worse, and making his way knowing the sacrifice.

I'm beginning an intermittent series on the fifteen psalms from Psalm 120-134. Whenever I am asked to preach here at Christ the King church, I'll turn to the next of these psalms and we'll work through them that way.

If you'll look in your Bibles, you'll see that each of these psalms has the designation A Song of Ascents. What does this mean? To ascend is to go up. The most probable explanation is that these songs were sung on the pilgrimage toward worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem.² Jerusalem resides at the highest point in the region, so the walkers would sing these psalms to give words to their experience as they hiked up the paths toward the city. "Topographically Jerusalem was the highest city in Palestine, and so all who traveled there spent much of their time ascending. But the ascent was not only literal, it was also a metaphor: the trip to Jerusalem acted out a life lived upward to God, an existence that advanced from one level to another in developing maturity – what Paul described as 'the goal, where God is beckoning us onward – to Jesus' (Phil 3:14)." (Peterson, 18)³

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² "The series of songs arranged by David became the Pilgrim Psalms, and were chanted by the Lord's people as they went up to the temple. They are 'Songs of the Going Up.'" Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*,

³ All designations at the end of quotes that are from Peterson will merely have the page number from *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1980, 2000).

The faithful Hebrew would make this trip three times a year – at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. “They refreshed their memories of God’s saving ways at the Feast of Passover in the spring; they renewed their commitments as God’s covenantal people at the Feast of Pentecost in early summer; they responded as a blessed community to the best that God had for them in the Feast of Tabernacles in the autumn. They were a redeemed people, a commanded people, a blessed people.”(19) These psalms gave a voice and a context to the path they were taking. These psalms oriented them along the way. Some would have traveled only down the road, walking for an hour or two. Others would take days or even weeks and would repeat these psalms over and over as they looked out on the terrain, wondering if they would ever reach the destination.

These psalms “...are marked by a kind of plaintive note, by a mild sadness.”⁴ If so, it is appropriate for those who were on their way to God’s city but had not reached it yet. It is this note of sadness that makes these songs so descriptive of the Christian’s similarly hard and upward pilgrimage through this dark world toward heaven.”⁵

So why do I want to look at them? Why preach through these psalms? Why are they still applicable for the church, considering we no longer travel this path toward the temple?

I wish I could open your brain and heart and simply import the book by Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. In fact, in his commentary on the psalms, none other than James Boice quotes at length from Peterson’s book. That’s because it’s absolutely brilliant and profound. I read it on the recommendation of a campus minister and have been thinking about it for months now. I am trying to resist opening the book and reading page after page to you, which seems like a better idea in some respects. Peterson’s thoughts on these psalms have captured my imagination, and I want to think further about these things.

Here’s why:

We forget we’re pilgrims. We live in a fast food society and act like tourists. As Peterson says, “We assume if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently.”(16)

He continues: “It is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim.”(16)

“Religion is understood to visit an attractive site to be made when we have adequate leisure. For some it is a weekly jaunt to church; for others, occasional visits to special service. Some, with a bent for religious entertainment and sacred diversion, plain their lives around special events like retreats, rallies and conferences... We’ll try anything – until something else comes along.”(16)

Everyone is in a hurry. The persons I lead in worship, among whom I counsel, visit and pray, preach and teach, want shortcuts. They want me to help them fill out the form that will get them instant credit (in eternity). They are impatient for results. They have adopted the lifestyle of a tourist and only want the high points. But a pastor is not a tour guide. I have no interest in telling apocryphal religious stories at and around dubiously identified sacred sites. The Christian life cannot mature under such conditions and in such ways.”(17)

Peterson believes that two of the most operative words of Christianity are the words “disciple” and “pilgrim.”

I hear a lot about the word “disciple.” People ask me to disciple them. People want to be disciples of Christ, even naming denominations that way. “*Disciple* says we are people who spend our lives apprenticed to our master, Jesus Christ. We are in a growing-learning relationship, always. A disciple is a learner, but not in an academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the work site of the craftsman. We do not acquire information about God, but skills in faith.

I think of Josh Spears and Justin Donathon working for PJ at Alpha Omega Woodworks. They are learning by doing what it means to build good cabinets for people. They are disciples of PJ’s in that sense.

But what about the word “pilgrim,” what does it have to say for us? “*Pilgrim* tells us we are people who spend our lives going someplace, going to God, and whose path for getting there is the way, Jesus Christ.” (17) Along these fifteen psalms we’re going to talk about aspects of this pilgrimage – Repentance, Providence, Worship, Service, Help, Security, Joy, Work, Happiness, Perseverance, Hope, Humility, Obedience, Community and Blessing will be our themes.

After that long introduction, today we begin with repentance. Psalm 120 isn’t a beautiful song at all. It begins with “In my distress” and ends with “war.” “This psalm seems sharply personal, although in a pilgrim context it voices very well the homesickness of those who have settled among strangers and enemies.”⁶

But this is the psalm that gets us going on our journey, that moves us from the place we reside to take up the path of the road toward someplace.

We Have to Hate the Lies

What has to happen to actually bring about action is to finally wake up to the lies that are all around us, the things the world tells us that aren’t true. We believe these lies, are captured by them, and want the desperately to be true. Until they are unmasked, we won’t start the journey, we won’t be on the path to God.

The psalmist writes, “*In my distress, I called to the Lord and he answered me. Deliver me, O Lord from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, o deceitful tongue? A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!*”

What are these lies? And are we ready to see them for what they are so we can go a different direction?

⁴ Leopold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 863

⁵ Boice, 1070

⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1973), 430.

“A person has to be thoroughly disgusted with the way things are to find the motivation to set out on the Christian way. As long as we think the next election might eliminate crime and establish justice or another scientific breakthrough might save the environment or another pay raise might push us over the edge of anxiety into a life of tranquility, we are not likely to risk the arduous uncertainties of the life of faith. A person has to get fed up with the ways of the world before he, before she, acquires an appetite for the world of grace.” (25)

“Christian consciousness begins in the painful realization that what we had assumed was the truth was in fact a lie. Prayer is immediate: “Deliver me from the liars, O God! They smile so sweetly but lie through their teeth.” Rescue me from the lies of the advertisers who claim to know what I need and what I desire, from the lies of entertainers who promise a cheap way to joy, from the lies of politicians who pretend to instruct me in power and morality, from the lies of psychologists who offer to shape my behavior and my morals so that I will live long, happily and successfully, from the lies of religionists who ‘heal the wounds of this people lightly,’ from the lies of the moralists who pretend to promote me to the office of the captain of my fate, from the lies of pastors who ‘get rid of God’s command so you won’t have to be inconvenienced in following the religious fashions!’ (Matt. 7:8) Rescue me from the person who tells me of life and omits Christ, who is wise in the ways of the world and ignores the movement of the Spirit.” (27)

Peterson puts us onto thinking about the lies we’ve been believing. There are others: That someone will meet all our needs. That the next thing we buy will make us happy. That intimacy without commitment won’t really harm us. That we can put our lives together on the outside without having to be real or expose the inside. That we can lie without being caught. That we can perform to a high enough standard to be accepted. That our loneliness will be solved, or at least soothed, by more time online. That the things that happen to us that we don’t like are someone else’s fault. That if “this person” were gone, if she moved away, if he weren’t in charge, everything would be better. That it’s okay to have some reason for ceasing to honor your parents. That you are excused from serving and loving others because your husband has died.

One last lie exposed by Psalm 120 is that we are a peaceful people. We like to think that everyone is basically good and that the problems in the world are the result of this inherent goodness being oppressed and not allowed to come out. If we have this approach, we appeal to people to “look within yourself,” we promote self-esteem and connection with your “inner child.”

People are beginning to wonder if this is really a good message. In fact, one of the groups with the best self-esteem appears to be criminals.⁷

Are we a peaceful people who merely need better education and resources? Surely we do need education and opportunities, but that doesn’t explain the evil and wrong in the world. We have exited the bloodiest century in human history. Boice writes says “Nothing has more characterized the human race in history than war.” Jared Diamond, author of *The Fifth Chimpanzee* would say agree with Boice, and points out that genocide is one of the defining characteristics of humanity. We kill each other in massive quantities.

But that’s a large scale issue. What about us? What about here?

Some of you thought that the PCA, that Christ the King Presbyterian Church, that RUF at OU would solve your problems. You thought you were creating, or joining, or attending the perfect church. You thought that you had joined a denomination that was without worries, that epitomized everything good and right. You felt that calling an ordained pastor who is committed to the Westminster Confession, who rejects fundamentalism and easy evangelicalism, who baptizes babies because he believes in covenantal theology, who isn’t swayed by megachurch methodology – would *help you*. No, not that it would help you, that it would *save you*. That it would protect you, change you, and you could be safe.

Of course, to some respect you were right or else I wouldn’t be here, and we wouldn’t have any hope for change. But, if you forget about Jesus, about the fundamental fact that we are sinners in need of grace, that we have agendas and sin not dealt with, if you forget that this is a journey, if you pitch tents in Meshach and Kedar, you have left out the gospel. You have replaced one sort of idolatry for another.

Are we for peace? Or do we love war? What does this peace look like as we journey together on the pilgrimage of faith?

We Have to Love the Truth

This psalm exposes the lies, but what about the truth? It’s found in three places here.

The first place is in the text – “*What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals in the broom tree!*” Peterson puts this in more contemporary language when he writes: “*Do you know what’s next, can you see what’s coming, all you barefaced liars? Pointed arrows and burning coals Will be your reward.*” In the first place, loving the truth means that we allow God to deal with the lies, especially when we have been slandered and misrepresented.

“See the wonderful advantage of trouble. It makes us call on God.” (JW Burgon, 1859)⁸ Charles Spurgeon spends most of his time on this aspect of this psalm. And rightly so, because we all hate to be lied about. It has always stuck in my head one of Covey’s points in the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* – seek first to understand and then to be understood. A great principle. But what happens when you’re misunderstood? What about when you’re slandered? When someone tells things about you that aren’t true? What then?

The trouble with slander is that it’s so difficult to combat. Where is the enemy? The words are already out there; the false accusations are already taking root, a life of their own. “We could ward off the strokes from a cutlass, but we have no shield

⁷ These thoughts come from Paul Miller’s *Learning to Love Like Jesus* study, which I’ve been teaching in our Sunday School hour.

⁸ Found in *Treasury of David*, p. 1275

against the tongue of a liar.”⁹ “In short, the answer is that the liar, wounding though his weapons are, will be destroyed with far more potent shafts than lies: God’s *arrows* of truth and *coals* of judgment.”¹⁰

Johnny Pesky lived with this for a lifetime. Pesky played for the 1949 Boston Red Sox in the World Series against the St. Louis Cardinals. It was the seventh and deciding game, and the score was tied 3-3. Dom Dimaggio hurt his hamstring in the top of inning and had to be replaced by a seldom used player in center field. With Enos Slaughter, a terror on the basepaths, on first, the batter hit the ball right where Dom would have been playing. The fielder was slow to the ball, and when he got there, he threw a weak lob to Pesky. Slaughter tore around third and headed for home. The whole stadium roared, so no one could hear anything, and Pesky didn’t know Slaughter was trying to score. So he turned, took a second to find Slaughter, and then threw off-line to home. Slaughter made it without even a play to home. Dom later said he thought, if he had still been in the game, he would have been able to throw Slaughter out – at third.

But this was the last World Series not on television. And the reporters had been fooled by the play as well. They had missed what had happened. Someone seized on Pesky as the goat, and that’s what was reported around the nation. Pesky figured he could take it, following the sportsmen’s rule that you don’t blame your teammates.

But it wasn’t true. Pesky didn’t lose the World Series. But he lived with that misunderstanding for his lifetime. Setting the record straight didn’t seem like the highest importance to him.

“In this distress, we need not hesitate to cry to the Lord. Silence to man and prayer to God are the best cures for the evil of slander. ‘I cried to the Lord.’ This is the wisest course to follow. It is of little use to appeal to friends about slander. The more we stir it, the more it spreads. Appealing to the honor of the slanderer is useless, for they have none. Even the sorrowful demands of justice only increase the malice of slanderers and encourages fresh insults. You might as well plead with panthers and wolves as with black-hearted slanderers.”¹¹

This kills us. We hate this. But it is wisdom. Remember God says, “Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.”

The second way we learn to love the truth is when we realize that God exposes it to us. That is the fact of revelation, which we remember by seeing Psalm 120 in our Bibles. He invades our world and speaks to us. Peterson writes, “God, revealed in his creative and redemptive work, exposes all the lies. The moment the word *God* is uttered, the world’s towering falsehood is exposed – we see the truth. The truth about me is that God made me. The truth about those sitting beside me is that God made them and loves them, and each one is therefore my neighbor. The truth about the world is that God rules and provides for it. The truth about what is wrong with the world is that I and the neighbor sitting beside me have sinned in refusing to let God be for us, over us and in us. The truth about what is at the center of our lives and of our history is that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross for our sins and raised from the tomb for our salvation and that we can participate in new life as we believe in him, accept his mercy, respond to his love, attend to his commands.” (28)

As we know, this is the word made flesh, dwelling among us. Jesus Christ is the representation of God. He speaks to us, calls to us, shows us the truth of God in our lives.

The third way we see God revealing the truth to us, that which we should believe is when we remember that this is a Song of Ascent, the first one, the one that gets us going. This third way of loving the truth is an action, specifically the action of repentance, and also our third point.

Repentance Gets Us Going On the Journey

Repentance is a no that is a yes – it is a renunciation of the lies of the world. “It is always and everywhere the first word in the Christian life.” (29) Repent and believe is the refrain over and over again as people are called to faith.

Again hear Peterson: “Repentance is not an emotion. It is not feeling sorry for your sins. It is a decision. It is deciding that you have been wrong in supposing that you could manage your own life and be your own god; it is deciding that you were wrong in thinking that you had, or could get, the strength, education and training to make it on your own; it is deciding that you have been told a pack of lies about yourself and your neighbors and your world. And it is deciding that God in Jesus Christ is telling you the truth. Repentance is a realization that what God wants from you and what you want from God are not going to be achieved by doing the same old things, thinking the same old thoughts. Repentance is a decision to follow Jesus Christ and become his pilgrim in the path of grace. Repentance is the most practical of all words and the most practical of all acts.” (29-30)

But, lest we romanticize this most practical of all acts, we must remember that repentance involves pain. “Whenever we say no to one way of life that we have long been used to, there is pain. But when the way of life is in fact a way of death, a way of war, the quicker we leave it the better.” (30)

In this sense, “God’s arrows are judgments aimed at provoking repentance... Any hurt is worth it that puts it on the path of peace, setting us free for the pursuit, in Christ, of eternal life.” (30) In other words, not only are the arrows and coals of judgment brought into the lives of others, they also find their target in our own lives. We often pray for judgment for others and seek mercy for ourselves. God’s discipline of those he loves should be a regular prayer in our own lives.

Repentance also often involves being misunderstood. Think of the rejection of Mesopotamia by Abram as he set off to a different place and a different land. Think of the rejection of Egypt in the days of Moses. Both of these cultures were at the height of technology, religion and government of the day. Yet, they were not the home of the pilgrim once he set off. He went ahead to a

⁹ Spurgeon, *TOD*, 1276

¹⁰ Kidner, 430

¹¹ Spurgeon, *TOD*, 1276

place that wasn't known. God didn't tell Abraham where he going until long after he had left. The Israelites were extremely unsure if leaving Egypt had been a good idea after all.

"We know that Israel, in saying no, did not miraculously return to Eden and live in primitive innocence, or mystically inhabit a heavenly city and live in supernatural ecstasy. They worked and played, suffered and sinned in the world as everyone else did, and as Christians still do. But they were now going someplace – they were going to God. The truth of God explained their lives, the grace of God filled their lives, the forgiveness of God renewed their lives, the love of God blessed their lives. The judgment of God invoked against a people of Meshech and Kedar was, in fact, a sharply worded invitation to repentance, asking them to join in the journey.

How might you begin this pilgrimage of repentance? How can we start?

If you've been following along, you'll remember that you first have to see that you need help; you have to wake up to the fact that you've believed the lies. It's like the younger brother, the prodigal son, the one in the pigsty, who looks comes to his senses and then takes off in a new direction. You have to see that there is another way, be sick of living where you are. And you have to believe there is a differing truth. You may not fully understand it, but you have to give up your understanding of the way things are or the way things should work and give over to someone else to make this fit for you.

You have to stop thinking that dating non-Christians is okay. You have to stop believing that more money will equal more happiness. You have to stop acting like you have your life put together. You have to stop pretending that you aren't hurting. You have to cease believing that if you were in charge, everything would be better. You have to forget the lie that you deserve to have your physical desires met outside of marriage. You have to give up some of the control you so desperately want in your life. You have to die to your reputation and allow God to work for justice.

And I sincerely think you have to tell someone. It doesn't have to me, although it could be. It doesn't have to be the session of the church, although that would be great. It needs to be someone. You need to talk about it, to let someone in. That's a big risk. Our self-preservation mechanisms will kick in. But you have to tell someone what is going on.

Let me tell you something that is happening in our church. It's something that affects all of you, and it's this: I don't love my wife nearly like I should. Now you may laugh. But it's serious.

You know here, and if you don't, you should. She is the most amazing person I know – beautiful, talented, smart, funny, caring, encouraging. She is a wonderful wife, mother, question-asker, friend and caretaker of our home. She loves me with an undying love.

And yet, I am suspicious of her. At times I think she is out to destroy me. I know that is irrational, but how else can I account for my defensive attitude. You see, I don't really believe the gospel like I should. I don't believe, deep down believe in a way that affects me behavior in a holistic way, that anyone can be unconditionally loved in a way not based on behavior. So when my behavior is attacked, or gently pointed out to be off course, I feel as if I'm being called a bad person, not worth living or loving.

Lest you think this is all hypothetical, I assure you it is not. I have numerous examples of this in the past month, of my overreaction and defensiveness to the gospel as expressed through Julie. And this bleeds into the life of the church and into the life of RUF.

I combat the desire to control RUF, to validate my existence based on performance and success, which usually translates into numbers, conversions, great conversations, people leaving other ministries to join ours. I try to manipulate conversations to make myself look good. I don't believe that God is actually at work.

What I believe is that a marriage, a ministry, a church can exist and function without Jesus, without repentance. And that is so much easier than dealing with someone who calls me to repentance.

To play off of the pilgrim idea and imagery, we think that the path to glory is followed in a single-file line. Now, of course, don't hear me swerve off into liberalism and relativism. I'm not saying you can get to God any ol' way you wish. If you want to get to Panama City, you need to know where it is and how to get there. You cannot get there by going west from here. But you can get there by taking the interstate the whole way. Or you can take the back roads. You can stop every hour along the way or drive straight through. You can go through Hattiesburg Mississippi, which keeps you on a more northern course, or you can keep to the south early and stay down by the coast all the way.

What is "the right" way? I'm not sure. There was only one place to worship God at the temple. You had to get to the temple, not just anywhere. But you could mapquest and take the most scenic route or the most direct route. You could run through the field now and then, or you could cut the corners and save a few steps along the way.

You didn't have to walk single file to Jerusalem. We have to be careful of a Jesus-less church, a Jesus-less orthodoxy, a Jesus-less community that promotes doing everything the "right way" without repentance, without the gospel, without

You see what is happening here? We all want glory without the cross. We all want the resurrection without the crucifixion. We all want to live in the Promised Land without leaving Egypt and traveling through the wilderness.

And that won't work. Jesus leads us to death.

When is the last time you told someone what is going on with you? When is the last time you went to a brother or sister and confessed your sin? When was the last time you saw yourself as a sinner in need of the gospel, suspicious of even your motives. When was the last time you were unsure of your own opinions? That you cried out, "God have mercy on me, a sinner"?

Friends, let me insert here that this is not all of the story. Indeed, if we are redeemed, we are sons and daughters of the King, we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, we are bringers of peace, justice and righteousness on this earth. We don't only think of heaven, but we enjoy the good gifts of this world. But that is not what this psalm is about. It's not in here. This is a psalm of repentance, and that is where we are right now.

Don't seek relief too soon. Don't cry peace, peace when there is no peace.

I'm reading the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* to my kids. In this Narnian tale, CS Lewis introduces a cousin of the Pevensies. His name is Eustace, and he is a supremely bratty boy. He reinterprets everything to his warped point of view; he sees everything through his own skewed perspective; he blames everyone else for the lack of his comfort.

At one point, he wanders off from the group because he doesn't want to spend the day working. He plans on taking a nap, but gets lost, finds a dragon's lair and eventually turns into a dragon himself. While a dragon, he runs into Aslan, the lion, and the very strong Christ figure.

Aslan tells Eustace that he must get undressed before bathing in the well, and Eustace understands that he must shed his dragon skin. He rips off the first three layers of dragon skin himself, but keeps finding more layers underneath. He later tells the story to Edmond.

"I looked up and saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly toward me. And one queer thing was that there was no moon last night, but there was moonlight where the lion was. So it came nearer and nearer. I was terribly afraid of it. You may think that, being a dragon, I could have knocked any lion out easily enough. But it wasn't that kind of fear. I wasn't afraid of it eating me, I was just afraid of it -- if you can understand. Well, it came close up to me and looked straight into my eyes. And I shut my eyes tight. But that wasn't any good because it told me to follow it."

"You mean it spoke?"

"I don't know. Now that you mention it, I don't think it did. But it told me all the same. And I knew I'd have to do what it told me, so I got up and followed it. And it led me a long way into the mountains. And there was always this moonlight over and round the lion wherever we went. So at last when we came to the top of a mountain I'd never seen before and on the top of this mountain there was a garden - trees and fruit and everything. In the middle of it there was a well. . . .

"Then the lion said -- but I don't know if it spoke -- 'You will have to let me undress you.' I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

"The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know -- if you've ever picked the scab off a sore place. It hurts like billy -- oh but it is such fun to see it coming away"

"I know exactly what you mean," said Edmund.

"Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off -- just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt -- and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobly-looking than the others had been. And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me -- I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on -- and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again." [115-116]

Lewis isn't the Bible. He's not inspired. But he understand so much of the nature of things.

Are you pretty desperate now?

Have you tried three times already to shed the thing you wish to get rid of?

Have you considered that the issue is deeper than that?

Will you allow a tear so deep that you think it might go right to the heart?

Are you okay with a hurt that heals? Do you long for the pleasure of being rid of it?

May we be a church, a people, friends, spouses, family members, workers, CHRISTIANS who say we're sorry. Who ask for forgiveness. Who seek, model and pray for repentance in our lives.

That gets us going, keeps us going on the road of the pilgrim.

I Repent, by Derek Webb

i repent of my pursuit of America's dream
i repent of living like i deserve anything
my house, my fence, my kids, and my wife
in our suburb where we're safe and white
i am wrong and of these things i repent

i repent of parading my liberty
i repent of paying for what i get for free

the way i believe that i am living right
by trading sins for others that are easier to hide
i am wrong and of these things i repent

i repent judging by a law that even i can't keep
wearin righteousness like a disguise to see through
the planks in my own eyes

i repent of trading truth for false unity
i repent of confusing peace and idolatry
of caring more of what they think than what i know of what they need
and domesticating You until You look just like me
i am wrong and of these things i repent