STREAMS OF MERCY

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION AND CELEBRATION

BARBARA R. DUGUID

EDITED BY IAIN M. DUGUID

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To my son Jamie,
who floods my life with friendship, mercy, kindness, and love,
and who teaches me many wonderful things.

Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of thy redeeming love.
—Robert Robinson, 1759

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PREFACE

As I wrote in my foreword to *Prone to Wander*, "Confession is good for the soul."* That remains true for all of us. We are deeply sinful creatures, even after we have been redeemed by God. Our thoughts, our words, and our deeds are often shaped by our idolatries far more than they are by the gospel. We think, say, and do things that we ought not to think, say, and do. And often we don't think, say, and do the things we should. Indeed, even when we are doing the very best things—reading our Bibles, praying, serving our families and our churches—our motives are shaded by all kinds of self-interest and self-promotion. In his letter "Man in his Fallen Estate," John Newton details at length the sad state of our fallen condition, not merely before our conversion but after it, and not merely in the worst of people but in the very best.†

That is why the Bible tells us not to pretend that we are practically perfect, but instead to confess our sins, remembering that God is faithful and just and will forgive all our sins for the sake of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:8–9). Our firm hope of salvation rests not on our own progress toward holiness, which is always far less than it should be, but rather on Christ's death, which atoned for every one of our sins, and on his perfect righteousness, which now clothes us like a spotless festival garment (see Zech. 3).

Historic church liturgies therefore always featured corporate confession as a central element.‡ Yet we live in a therapeutic culture that is uncomfortable with acknowledging and owning the fact that we ourselves are unclean, as is the community around us

* Barbara R. Duguid and Wayne Duguid Houk, *Prone to Wander: Prayers of Confession and Celebration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), 11.

† See "Man in His Fallen Estate (1)," in *Select Letters of John Newton* (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011) 117–23.

‡ See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 89.

(see Isa. 6). Even in our private prayers, we have often neglected the teaching of Jesus' model prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12), or we repeat those words verbatim as a mindless slogan, never reflecting on what our own specific personal debts might be.

It is for these reasons that Barb and our son Wayne began writing corporate prayers of confession for each Sunday's service at Christ Presbyterian Church in Grove City, Pennsylvania—a practice that Barb has continued more recently at Christ Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. These prayers are built around the theme of the Scripture passage for each week's sermon, and they seek to expose the specifics of our own struggles with sin. In that way, we are regularly pointed back to the good news of the gospel and we may hear afresh the affirmation of our own forgiveness through God's grace to us in Jesus Christ.

The structure of these confessions is straightforward. We begin with a scriptural call to confession, which roots and grounds our confession in God's Word. We want to be clear that the actions and attitudes we are calling people to confess are genuinely sinful, not simply breaches in the traditions and rules of men (see Mark 7:5–13). The Bible is to be our sole rule of faith and practice, and the scriptural call to confession underlines that reality. In most cases, the prayers are explicitly Trinitarian, confessing our many failings to the Father, giving thanks to the Son for his death on the cross as well as for his perfect (and specific) obedience in our place, which is credited to us by faith, and asking the Holy Spirit to strengthen us to pursue lives of new obedience.

The purpose of confessing our sins is always to remind us of what a great Savior we have. We confess that "there is no health in us" in order that our hearts may be drawn afresh to the Great Physician of our souls, who has provided for our desperate need for cleansing in the gospel. For that reason, we always follow each prayer of confession with a scriptural assurance of pardon: God's authoritative declaration that each and every one of the sins of his people is forgiven in Jesus Christ. This is our only hope in

life and death. These assurances, too, we have endeavored to make specific, providing gospel encouragement that is tailored to our particular failings and that points us afresh to the new life that is ours in Christ.

These prayers may be used as an aid in private devotions or as a help to those who lead God's people in worship. We have supplied indexes of themes, of Scriptures cited, and of the sermon passages that originally gave us the focus for these particular prayers when we shared them with our congregations. There is also an index of hymns and songs, which lists some of the music that went with the prayers in their original worship context, as well as allusions to hymns and songs within the prayers themselves. We give permission for people to adapt and adopt this material for such use in corporate worship services as will bless the church.

Our debt to others in this compilation is not hard to see. Arthur Bennett's *The Valley of Vision** was a model for us, in both its scope and its rich and evocative language of devotion. We are also indebted to the team at P&R for many hours of hard work in helping us bring this material to its final form.

It is our prayer that God will continue to use these prayers in the lives of many people, so that we may once again rediscover that, as Martin Luther put it in the first of his ninety-five theses, "the entire Christian life is to be one of repentance."

Iain M. Duguid

* Arthur G. Bennett, *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975).

THE HEART

✥ CALL TO CONFESSION: GENESIS 6:5–6; JOEL 2:12–14

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

✥✥✥

"Yet even now," declares the LORD,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments."
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD your God?

✥ PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Mighty God,

Your Word penetrates our hearts and exposes the truth about our thoughts and intentions. It uncovers our self-confidence and self-centeredness, as well as the secret sins that we hide so successfully from one another. The truth is that we cherish and love many evil thoughts in our hearts, even when outwardly we pretend to be full of spiritual desires. We harbor hatred and anger for those around us, along with jealousy and pride. We judge and condemn others in our hearts, or we envy them and lust after them. Even our good deeds are deeply stained by wrong motives. We often wait to serve others until people are watching us, so that we may be admired and glorified. We speak your

truth impatiently and harshly in order to prove ourselves. Father, forgive us not just for our sinful actions but for our corrupt and perverse hearts.

Jesus, thank you that you came to deliver us from our sinful self-centeredness. Your heart was always perfectly aligned with the Father's Word. Your thoughts as well as your actions were always pure and undefiled, filled with love for those around you and compassion for lost people. You worked hard in the Father's service, but you also rested confidently in the Father's power. Even though you are the Lord of Glory and eternally deserving of praise, you never glorified yourself. Instead, you laid aside your glory and became a humble servant, defeating the forces of Satan through your own death and winning victory in our place.

Holy Spirit, teach us not to trust in ourselves or in earthly sources of power and strength. Enable us to trust completely in Jesus, our great High Priest, who faithfully intercedes for us. Help us not to be unduly discouraged by the heavy load of guilt that so easily clings to our hearts. Instead, whenever we see clearly the sins of our hearts, enable us to fly to the Scriptural truth that in Christ the penalty of those sins has been paid for, once for all. Remind us that we are now clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness, and that therefore there can be no condemnation left for us. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

✣ ASSURANCE OF PARDON: JEREMIAH 32:39–41; ROMANS 6:17–18

"I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul."

✣✣✣

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to

which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

✠ HYMNS

"God, Be Merciful to Me"
"Nothing That My Hands Can Do"

NO OTHER GODS (COMMANDMENT 1)

✥ CALL TO CONFESSION: EXODUS 20:1–3; DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9

And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me."

✥✥✥

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

✥ PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Eternal Father,

Your kindness and love are beyond all thought, far exceeding our wildest dreams. But, Lord, we are not like you. Our lips may confess our devotion to you, but our hearts are slow to follow our words, and we are reluctant to obey you with our lives. We confess to you our adulterous and idolatrous hearts. We cherish many things far more than we love you, and we spend hours each day worshiping at the feet of other gods. Instead of treasuring you and your Word, we lavish the best of our time on our false gods, hoping that they will bless us and reward us for our efforts. Meanwhile, we are content to give you the leftovers of our attention. O God, have mercy on us and forgive us for our persistent blindness and false worship.

Holy Spirit, give us grace to hate and grieve the many moments we have spent lost in worship before our other lovers. We have turned your good gifts into false gods and have given ourselves to them. Even though they use and abuse us, still we run after them and sell our souls to them. Please work in us continual repentance, turning our wandering hearts back to our perfect Savior. Teach us to love your Word, which reminds us that he has loved us and given himself for us; he traded all of the glory of heaven in order to live with us and be obedient for us.

Make Christ beautiful to us. Satisfy our minds with true knowledge of him, and set our hearts on fire with profound love for him. Let us love him with every part of ourselves: with emotions that delight in him and long for him; with minds that are full of thoughts of him and bodies that are eager to serve him. Draw us back to the cross, where his love was poured out for the salvation of our souls. Remind us that even death will never part us from you, but can only be the bright and joyful completion of your eternal story of love and redemption. In Jesus' beautiful name we pray, amen.

✥ ASSURANCE OF PARDON: 1 JOHN 3:1; 4:9–10

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

✥✥✥

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

✥ HYMNS

"Here Is Love Vast as the Ocean"
"My Jesus, I Love Thee"

NO IDOLS (COMMANDMENT 2)

✣ CALL TO CONFESSION: EXODUS 20:4–6; ROMANS 1:22–25

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

✣✣✣

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

✣ PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving heavenly Father,

You have created us to worship you alone. Fashioned by your hand and kept alive each moment by your will and your decree, we depend on you for each breath that we take. You have dealt kindly and patiently with us, and we should worship you alone, with joy and gratitude, every moment of every day. Your Word should delight us and your law should motivate us to obedience, all day every day. Yet, Lord, we are great sinners who wander and run from you often. We regularly exchange your truth for lies, because we don't want to worship and obey you. Rather, we want to be our own gods. Many times each day we turn from

you toward the idols that enchant us, bowing before them and hoping that they will make peace for us. We desire sinful things and sell our souls to get them. We treasure your gifts instead of treasuring you, feeling that we can't live without the good things you have given us. Father, forgive us; have mercy on us, for we are weak and guilty of worshiping many false gods.

Thank you for Jesus, who paid the price for all our sin and who worshiped you alone throughout his earthly life. When tempted to bow before Satan and to pursue the glittering jewels of fame, power, and wealth, he stood firm and prized you and obedience to you above all things. Knowing that we would desperately need his righteousness to cover our shame, he persevered, and now you have given us all his goodness. Father, thank you that you have given us a mighty Redeemer, and that you have left your Holy Spirit within us until your work on earth is done.

Holy Spirit, show us our idolatry and grant us sweet conviction and joyful repentance. Make Christ more beautiful to us than all other things, and help us to desire him above the trinkets and positions of power that we crave. Grant us a growing hope and faith in Christ alone, until the day when we bow before our victorious King, rescued by his strong arm and dressed in his righteousness alone. In his mighty name we pray, amen.

✠ ASSURANCE OF PARDON: EZEKIEL 37:23, 26

"They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

. . . I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore."

✠ HYMNS

"Jesus, Be My All (How Sad Our State)"
"There Is a Redeemer"

GOD'S NAME (COMMANDMENT 3)

✣ CALL TO CONFESSION: EXODUS 20:7; GENESIS 11:4; ISAIAH 42:8

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

✣✣✣

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

✣✣✣

"I am the LORD; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to carved idols."

✣ PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Mighty and majestic God,

We come to you as deeply self-centered people. You have been so much better to us than we deserve, faithfully fulfilling your commitment to give us good things in Christ, and you deserve all glory and honor to be given to your name. Yet we want the glory to accrue to our names instead. We quickly forget all the wonderful gifts that you have given us, and we act as if our achievements were the result of our own efforts while our failures belonged to someone else. Instead of remembering our utter dependence upon you and running to you daily as our shield of refuge, we prefer to give ourselves over to our idols because we love our sins and it seems too costly to fight against them. We are overconfident in our own strength, and we doubt your goodness and power many times each day. Father, forgive us.

Jesus, thank you for your humble obedience on our behalf. You worshiped your Father and glorified his name daily, with unwavering faith and unshakeable hope in his goodness. Cherishing

the Father's unchangeable character, you submitted to his perfect wisdom and trusted him completely in all of the circumstances of your life, even when it was most painful. You took refuge in him often in your times of need and never turned toward false gods or sought your own comfort and glory. Now your name encourages us to hope in the midst of continuing weakness, confident that you will continue to advocate our cause as our heavenly high priest. We have no other name in which to trust, nor do we need one.

Holy Spirit, we need your power at work in us to stir up our weak faith. Help us to know and worship our God as he truly is: the unchangeable, sovereign, wise King who has sworn by himself to save us in spite of our foolishness. Cause us to know the certainty of God's great love for us, until we are transformed into people who love him deeply and are able to run the race of obedience humbly, with strong confidence and joyful hope in Christ. Open our lips to join the heavenly worship service as we look forward to the return of our heavenly King. Amen.

✣ ASSURANCE OF PARDON: ACTS 4:11–12; ROMANS 10:9–10, 12–13

"This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

✣✣✣

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. . . . For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

✣ HYMNS

"Depth of Mercy"
"O for a Thousand Tongues"

SABBATH (COMMANDMENT 4)

✣ CALL TO CONFESSION: EXODUS 20:8–11; ISAIAH 58:13–14

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

✣✣✣

"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

✣ PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Creator God,

At the beginning of time you created a day of rest, a sign pointing forward to the eternal rest that we will share with you forever. You now ask your people to set aside one day in seven—to rest and to worship; to remember our deliverance from bondage to sin; to know that all our needs come from your hands. We thank you for this precious gift, yet we misuse it in so many ways. For some of us it is a day to keep rules, impress

others with our piety, and parade our righteousness instead of needing yours. We dress our bodies for church while our hearts are cold, filled with pride and self-sufficiency. We display our spiritual victories for others to admire, yet we don't confess the sinfulness we struggle with moment by moment. We memorize Scripture and catechisms, we lift our hands in prayer, and we serve energetically, relying on our own goodness as though it could ever satisfy you. Father, forgive us.

For some of us, Sunday is a day like any other day: a day to catch up on work, to play and recreate with no thought of you and no desire to make worship and fellowship a priority. We foolishly believe that we can love you well on our own, without the brothers and sisters with whom you have called us to walk through life. We feel little awe and reverence for you or gratitude for all you have done. Our appetite for your Word is small, while our belief in our own understanding looms large. We are wise in our own eyes, and we fail to see the consequences of our selfish and immature behavior. Lord, have mercy on us in our weakness and sin.

Jesus, you loved your Father above all and delighted to worship and study in his house. From your childhood, you were a careful scholar, dedicating yourself to studying and teaching others. You loved to pray and withdrew often to meditate and speak with your heavenly Father. Your heart was never cold, but always warmly devoted to living in gratitude, faith, and obedience. Jesus, thank you for honoring the Sabbath for us, in your heart and with your body. You courageously faced every temptation to misuse it, standing firm because you knew we would need your goodness to stand before a holy God. Thank you, precious Savior.

Holy Spirit, correct our thinking and strengthen our souls. We are blind and deceived by our own wisdom; open our eyes and show us our hearts. Remind us of the love of Christ until our hearts are humbly drawn to hunger for God's Word preached faithfully. Help us to understand your Word and to know what you ask of us. Help us to believe that you are loving and that all your commands are good for us and are meant for our joy and

growth. Holy Spirit, help us to worship wholeheartedly, and strengthen us with the body and blood of Christ at the Lord's Table. Enable us to love other believers, even when it feels uncomfortable to be in church. May all other things seem small and insignificant compared to loving and obeying you well, as we look forward to worshiping you forever, gathered with all the saints around your throne. Amen.

✠ ASSURANCE OF PARDON: MATTHEW 11:28–30

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

✠ HYMNS

"I'll Rest in Christ"
"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"
"Jesus, I am Resting, Resting"
"Loved with Everlasting Love"