

The Cleansing
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PSALM 32:1-11

We're told that, *"Noel Coward, a well-known British playwright and comedian in the 20th century, once played a prank on ten famous men in London. He sent each of these distinguished men the same note, which read: "We know what you have done. If you don't want to be exposed, leave town." Within six months all ten men had moved out of London."*¹ If the story is true, these men were dealing with some serious guilt about something

Opening question: **How does it feel to feel guilty? What words describe the feelings of guilt? Let's turn it around, how does it feel to feel forgiven?**

June Hunt says,

*"[Guilt] can be a farsighted friend or a formidable foe... True guilt can lead to freedom, while false guilt leads to emotional bondage... God always uses guilt for the good—to convict, correct, and conform your character to Christ's, and never to condemn. The Bible says, ¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10 - ESV)"*²

Some of you are saying, "Hold on! We talked about guilt last week in Psalm 51." Rest assured this isn't a rehash it's a sequel. After David received forgiveness for his sins of adultery, murder, and deception he wrote another Psalm to teach others how to find their own freedom and cleansing through God's forgiveness.

Big Idea: *"Forgiveness brings true joy. Only when we ask God to forgive our sins will he give us real happiness and relief from guilt."*³

Psalm 32 (ESV)

32 A Maskil of David.

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no
iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should
go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

¹¹ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

- Every year hundreds of "self help" articles and books are written. David's Psalm 32 could be the outline for a best seller! The title: "How to Live the Happy, Guilt-Free Life!" (Would that intrigue you?)

- o Verses 1-2: The premise – your guilt can be removed.
- o Verses 3-4: The author's own story of sadness, guilt, and struggle.
- o Verse 5: How the author was freed from his prison of guilt.
- o Verses 6 and 7: How you can be freed too!
- o Verses 8-9: A warning about refusing instruction on how to be free.
- o Verse 10: The promised outcome - a life surrounded by everlasting LOVE and happiness.
- o Verse 11: A final encouragement to celebrate this way of living the HAPPY LIFE of those who are forgiven!
- Before we read the beautiful words of verse one, David notes this is a “maskil.” Scholars don’t know the meaning of that Hebrew word but “*its apparent root meaning of ‘understand’ or ‘ponder,’*”⁴ indicates this is a psalm of instruction. David wants us to learn from his experience.
- Verses one and two describe the blessings of a life free from guilt.
- **What does the word blessed mean? Last week we looked at the words, SIN, TRANSGRESSION, and INIQUITY. Do you remember the different meanings of each?**
- John MacArthur defines those three words as “rebellion, failure, and perversion.”⁵
- The verbs in verses one and two are important. **forgiven**—literally, “taken away,” opposed to *retain* (Jn 20:23). **covered**—so that God no longer regards the sin (Ps 85:3).⁶
- Our lesson writer comments: “*In The Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan referred to the forgiveness of the main character, Christian, in that way. When Christian came to Christ in faith, his burden loosed from his shoulders, fell off his back, tumbled down a hill, fell into a grave, and was never seen again. What Bunyan described happens to all Christians. God lifts our sins from us and no longer remembers them against us (see Isa. 43:25).*”⁷[Remember my illustration of a heavy, stinky sack of sin?]

- Verse two: The Lord no longer “counts” or “imputes” our iniquity against us. **How does that work?**
- Forgiveness brings happiness because our Lord covers and blots out our sin. Even better than that, because Jesus died on the cross in our place, He takes our sin and gives us His righteousness in exchange.
- Verses three and four describe the effects of unconfessed sin and guilt: (From the NLT) ³ *When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.* ⁴ *Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.*
- Who would be foolish enough to sit outside on the pavement on a one hundred degree day when there is air-conditioned comfort just inside?
- **What are the dangers of refusing to confess or trying to ignore our transgressions? What keeps people from admitting a sin when the impact of doing so can be freeing?**
- Feelings of guilt are a sickness that drains us of the joy of living, but we can be FREE and CLEAN because of Jesus! Verse five is the prescription: (NLT) ⁵ *Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.*
- Verses six and seven tell us we can have that same release from guilt.
- **What do you think David means: “Offer a prayer [to God] while [He] may be found?”**
- *“A Jewish legend says that a student asked, ‘Rabbi, when is the best time to repent?’ The rabbi replied, ‘The best time to repent is the day before you die.’ ‘But rabbi, I don’t know when I will die.’ ‘Then repent today,’ the rabbi said, ‘so you will be ready to die.’ We will not be alive on earth forever, and we may not be alive tomorrow, so we should sense an urgency to turn from sin and seek God today. It we do not ask for God’s forgiveness today, the suffering may grow more acute or our sense of urgency for forgiveness will pass, or even worse we may learn to live with our sin and*

*guilt and never experience the joys of forgiveness (Isa. 55:6-7; 2 Cor. 6:2)."*⁸

- Verse six: **What does "the rush of great waters" describe?**
- When we feel like we are drowning in a sea of guilt, our Heavenly Father's strong arms will lift us to safety. Our hiding place is just a prayer away.
- In verses eight and nine, David talks to us like a stern teacher. Scholars debate if these are David's words or God's words. Either way, they come from God. *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go."*
- **What does verse nine mean when it talks about horses and mules?**
- Our loving Heavenly Father longs to instruct us in how to live a life filled with freedom and joy. We can be a star student or a stubborn mule.
- We can follow the instruction of God's word, confess our sins, change in repentance, and live in harmony with Him. Or, He will strap on that "bit and bridle" and use divine discipline to move us in the right direction. Star student or stubborn mule -- the choice is ours.
- Verse ten explains the two different outcomes based on how we choose:

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

- Does that mean God's children will never have sorrow or hardship. Of course not! But it DOES mean we can have joy in the midst of hardships because we're surrounded by His steadfast love and forgiveness!

So, What's the Takeaway?

- *"Forgiveness brings true joy. Only when we ask God to forgive our sins will he give us real happiness and relief from guilt."*⁹
- How about you and me this week? Hopefully we don't have any "major league" sins to confess like David had.
- Still, ANY sin creates distance between our Lord and us.

- Even small transgressions add up, and unconfessed sin will drain us like sitting on asphalt on a 100-degree day.
- The simple act of confessing our sins to God and asking His forgiveness begins to lift that exhausting load of guilt.
- When we repent and ask Him to help us go in the opposite direction – His direction -- He restores our joy.
- Even when we feel like we're drowning in life's trials, He will lift us up and give us a hiding place if we will only come clean and confess.
- We don't have to wonder what we should or shouldn't do because He promises to instruct us from His word. We can be either a star student or a stubborn mule. He'll teach us the lesson one way or another.
- Thanks to what Jesus did for us on the cross, we can confess, be cleansed, and claim the words of verse eleven as our own:

¹¹ Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Because:

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

¹ <https://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-d-greg-ebie-stories-29803#>

² Hunt, June. *Counseling through Your Bible Handbook*. Harvest House Publishers, 2008.

³ Tyndale. *Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size)* (Kindle Location 35634). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 612). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁵ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Kindle Locations 20960-20961). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 356). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁷ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Leader Guide Psalm 32*.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Location 35634). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.