

8.25.24 It's a Blessing to Have Our Sins Forgiven Psalm 32:1-5
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What's the heaviest thing you've ever carried? How much did it weigh? 25 pounds? 50? 200? How long did you have to lift or carry it? If you go to a gym, you might see people lift several hundred pounds, but they don't lift it for long. Sometimes it's not how heavy something is, but how long you carry it that wears you out. Of course, the most difficult and painful thing is to carry something that's heavy for a long period of time. I think one of the heaviest things to carry is unconfessed sin.

Our scripture today is Psalm 32 which is the second of seven penitential psalms (Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Penitential psalms teach the value and benefit of the practice of penitence or confessing and turning from sin with integrity and without deceit. The title or superscription to Psalm 32 says it is "Of David." Many of the Psalms are attributed to David. David's a complex person who's described in 1 Samuel 13:14 as a man after God's own heart, yet he's also a sinner who committed adultery and murder. Psalms 32, 40, and 51 reveal how heavily David's sin weighed on him because he knew he had disappointed and grieved the Lord. He also pleaded for forgiveness. David's prayers of repentance show us what to do when we violate our commitment to God's standards in our life and want to restore our relationship with the Lord or someone else. **Psalm 32:1-5, Of David. A Maskil.**

**Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
 whose sin is covered.**

Happy are those to whom the LORD **imputes no iniquity,**
 and in whose spirit there is **no deceit.**

While I kept silence, my body wasted away
 through my groaning all day long.

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

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
 and **I did not hide my iniquity;**

I said, "I will confess my **transgressions to the LORD,"**
 and **you forgave** the **guilt of my sin.**

If you think about how much life has changed in the last 50 years one of the things that has had a huge influence is the change in phones. Many years ago, before cell phones, you had a land line in your house and there were telephone booths in various locations. If you watch a movie from the 1970's, you're likely to see one. Before there were cell phones, Lillian Pearsall was a telephone operator, and she told a story about a customer who talked overtime on a long-distance call from a telephone booth. She said, "Even with my friendly reminders, he refused to deposit his overtime coins. Instead, he slammed down the phone, irate and verbally abusive. A few seconds later, he was back on my line – somewhat calmer. *"Operator, please let me out of the phone booth – I'll pay, I'll pay, just let me out."* The customer mistakenly thought I had control of the phone booth's doors and had locked him in! He gladly paid the overtime charge and with my advice gave the booth door a hefty kick to free himself."

There's a sense in which we feel trapped by guilt when we've wronged someone else. If we want to be free from guilt it requires admitting our wrong, paying or making restitution if possible, and then going on our way, hopefully a little wiser and humbler from the experience.

We live in a time when there is little shame, remorse, or even understanding of what is right or wrong. This is partially due to people subscribing to the idea: *"You do your thing I'll do mine. There are no truths that apply in all times and places. Believe whatever you want."* People go on television or YouTube and say and do things that would make a sailor blush and not only do people not feel guilty about it, they almost seem proud. The idea that, *"What I do is my own business, that it only impacts and concerns me, and not other people,"* is simply not true. Most of our good and most of our sin involves, influences, and impacts other people and it indirectly influences many more. Not only that, but the scriptures teach that when we wrong another person, we not only wrong them, we wrong God.

Numbers 5:5-7 says, *"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites: **When a man or a woman wrongs another, breaking faith with the LORD, that person incurs guilt and shall confess the sin that has been committed. The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one-fifth to it, and giving it to the one who was wronged.**"*

There are some people who are so selfish, ignorant, or evil they have no sense of shame or remorse no matter what they do. They don't believe they need to confess any sin or to ask for forgiveness. These verses from Numbers describe what happens in a person with at least a little bit of conscience, who is open to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. **First**, Numbers says when we wrong another person, we not only wrong them, we wrong God, we *"break faith with the Lord."* As a result, we **are** guilty before God, and we may **feel** guilty ourselves. The solution involves two steps. **First, confess the sin that has been committed.** I liked the comic *Calvin and Hobbes* about a boy and his stuffed tiger friend. In *The Essential Calvin & Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, Calvin says to Hobbes, *"I feel bad that I called Susie names and hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did it."* Hobbes suggests, *"Maybe you should apologize to her,"* Calvin ponders that for a moment and replies, ***"I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution."*** When we need to restore a relationship that we've harmed, with God or another person, the obvious solution is confessing our wrong or failure.

Secondly, as far as possible, we make restitution to the person we've wronged. A shoplifter wrote to a department store, *"I just became a Christian and I can't sleep at night because I feel guilty. So, here's the \$100 I owe you."* He signed his name and then added a PS: *"If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest of the money."*

Guilt isn't good if we all do is wallow in it or try half-heartedly to make amends. Guilt can be good if it leads us to whole-hearted confession, repentance, and restitution. Several of the steps of AA and other recovery programs are built upon this process from Numbers 5. In fact, Steps 5 through 10 are all based on the same principles. Step 5 is we *"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."* Step 8 is we *"Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."* These are good steps for anyone to take when we have wronged someone else and need to confess our sin. One person going through Step 5 wrote, *"Because God and I have an understanding, I am free to bring my shortcomings to my Spiritual Friend. When I admit my imperfections to myself, I give myself a chance to make room for new attitudes and directions. My willingness to look beyond my defensive view, or my real or imagined hurts, gives me release from the job of **carrying them around.** If I can search them out and look at them, **I can put them down.**"*

*Learning to trust and confide in another person means ridding myself of the prejudices I'd acquired. My sponsor listened, just listened. **What a relief it gave me to unburden myself and what a sense of freedom I felt.***"

Confession relieves us from the crushing and destructive weight of guilt.

That's what Psalm 32 makes clear. Psalm 32 begins by stating a Beatitude, "*Happy,*" or "*Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*" It feels good to be forgiven as the result of having confessed our sin. In verses 3-4, psalm 32 describes the physical symptoms of one who is carrying around unconfessed sin, "*While I kept silence, **my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.***" If you've ever sinned and known it and not confessed and asked for forgiveness, you know what these verses are describing. Release, relief, restoration come when we do what verse 5 says, "*Then **I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.***" The rest of the Psalm goes on to affirm God's caring protection, deliverance, and steadfast love that "*surrounds those who trust in the Lord.*" Rather than living with the torment of unconfessed sin and guilt, like the Psalmist, we can confess, be forgiven and as verse 11 states, "*Be glad in the Lord and rejoice...and shout for joy....*"

Sometimes when we've made a mistake, our tendency is to beat ourselves up over it, rather than confessing it and moving on. That isn't good for us or for anyone else. It's not healthy or helpful. Some people may wonder what harm there is in not confessing our sins. One result can be that powerful, pent-up emotions of guilt, fear, shame, or anger can come out in negative ways that harm us or hurt other people, sometimes even total strangers or family members who had nothing to do with our real issue, all because we won't face up to our own responsibility.

If we refuse to confess our sins and choose instead to bury our guilt or our bitterness thinking no one else will be at risk, we're deceiving ourselves. Psalm 32 contrasts the difference between, "*When I kept silent,*" with " I said, "***I will confess my transgressions...***" When we've wronged a spouse, a family member, a friend, or neighbor anyone with whom we have a relationship, and we refuse to acknowledge it, to

put the wrong into words so it can be dealt with, then that wrong stays in us and with us and starts to become part of our identity. It weighs upon us, hardens, and harms us and our relationships. Just as Adam and Eve couldn't hide themselves from God after they had done wrong, neither can we. Our failure to confess and acknowledge our sin, failure, or mistake prevents us from experiencing the forgiveness and grace of God.

Many of the songs we sing speak of the cross and Jesus' death on our behalf. We can't run from the cost of the sins we need to confess. Some people don't like to think about the terrible death Jesus endured and for good reason; it was awful, painful, and humiliating. God is faithful and just and doesn't sit idly by while humanity damages and destroys itself. The Creator provided an alternative conceived in the heart of God. God takes our sin and wrongdoing that seriously. Jesus' blood, shed on our behalf, can free us from the burden of sin, relieving the crushing weight of guilt, and restoring our relationship with God and other people.

Proverbs 28:13 declares, ***“No one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”*** In the early church, confession and repentance was an involved process. Sin wasn't seen as a private matter but as something that destroyed the unity of the church. People would fast and pray for the forgiveness of their sins, appeared before the church to make a public confession, and were barred from the Lord's Supper until they gave evidence of a change of heart and were absolved. The only exception was for individuals facing persecution. They were readmitted to the Lord's Supper so they could receive strength. In the first century, the Lord's Supper included not only the bread and the cup, but an entire meal. As part of the meal, neighbors who quarreled made peace again.¹

Finally, **confessing our sins to God is confessing our faith in God.** **Psalm 32:9** says don't be like a horse or a mule without understanding, faith understands we are sinners and God is gracious. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and our own expectations, yet many people seem much quicker to identify and name the sins of others, often those seen as opponents, rather than naming and confessing their own. We all have failures and shortcomings, and the church is a fellowship of sinners who are seeking to be forgiven and to grow in living Christ-centered, Christ-like

¹ “Worship in the Early Church,” *Christian History*, Issue 37.

lives. I pray that we all will confess to God any secret or hidden sin we're carrying today. May we be free from our sins including the delusion that our sins aren't hurting anybody else when they're hurting ourselves, God, and others. All of us who follow Jesus have the ministry of bringing God's forgiveness to one another (John 20:23).

If you're feeling led to speak with someone and to confess and repent, how should you do it? In four ways: 1. **"I was wrong."** Accept responsibility with no evasion. 2. **"I'm sorry."** Express remorse, realizing the damage done. 3. **"It won't happen again."** We begin the process of rebuilding trust for the future by changing our behavior. 4. **"Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?"** Perform deeds in keeping with repentance (Acts 26:20; Matt. 3:8).

1 John 1:8-10 sums up the truth about sin and confession. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."*

1 John 4:9-11 tells us of God's love in forgiving our sins. *"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another."*

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Have you ever felt weighed down by guilt after having wronged someone else? How did confessing your sin or what you did wrong help you move forward with God and in that relationship?
2. What harm can come from not confessing our sins?
3. What blessing comes from being forgiven?
4. How would you describe the relationship between confession, repentance, and forgiveness?
5. Why do you think some people find it easier to "confess their neighbor's sins" rather than their own? Why don't we focus on what we need to confess and

repent of rather than talking about or obsessing about the sins of other people; sins sometimes that we're less likely to commit?

6. Read Luke 18:9-14. How can we cultivate a humble and penitent spirit like that of the tax collector who recognizes his own sinfulness, rather than a self-righteous, condescending spirit such as the Pharisee?
7. Read Jeremiah 31:34, "*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*" Share or reflect on how it makes you feel to know that the Lord says he will not remember your sins anymore.