



Sermon Transcript February 7, 2021

Psalms of Encouragement Confession: A Way of Life Psalm 32

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on February 7, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text
Psalm 32

Blessed Are the Forgiven
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 the 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 of 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!

Introduction

We discover at the very outset of Psalm 32 that this psalm is written by David. The heading of Psalm 32 reads like this, “A Maskil (a musical term) of David.” David begins this psalm by celebrating the blessing of what it is like to know that your sin is forgiven. The title given to Psalm 32 is “*Blessed are the Forgiven*” Psalm 32 opens up with this wonderful declaration: “*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity.*”

This psalm, Psalm 32, is often coupled together with another psalm written by David—Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is David’s confession of his own sin. It is a deeply personal psalm of confession. It is a window and an open book into the dirty laundry of David’s life.

The sin of David that brought about the confession of Psalm 51 has been well told. To briefly recap what brought about this prayer of confession, David had a one night stand with another man’s wife. We don’t know if the woman involved, Bathsheba, was complicit or not, but in today’s vernacular this would have been the stuff of the “Me Too Movement;” men abusing their power to gratify their sexual desires. David was the king. He summoned her to the palace. And then when he was done with her, he sent her back home, only to find out later that she had become pregnant. Her husband had been out to battle, fighting for David. In fact her husband was no ordinary soldier in David’s army. He was one of David’s “mighty men” - one of the “Navy Seals” of David’s army. He was known for his valor, his integrity and—of all things, no less—his loyalty to David. And so the cover up begins when David gives Uriah a leave of absence from the war in hopes that he would go into his wife so that no one would know the true identity of the father. But Uriah was so noble that he did not feel he should go into his wife while his fellow soldiers were in battle. And so long story short, David arranges for Uriah to be killed in battle and he proceeds to take Bathsheba for his wife. Right when it looks like these terrible sins have been neatly concealed and covered up, in walks Nathan the prophet and he confronts David over his sin. How did Nathan know? Nothing is hidden from God’s sight. David acknowledges this in Psalm 51:4, he has “*done what is evil in your [God’s] sight.*” God knows your sin.

Psalm 51 is David’s genuine sorrow and repentance and confession over his sin. He makes note at the end of Psalm 51 that “*a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart*” is the kind of confession that God will “*not despise.*” God forgives the humble confession of the godly sinner. David’s own personal testimony is that he has experienced the forgiveness of God. He can testify from personal experience what he says at the

beginning of Psalm 32, *“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity.”*

As a result of his own experience in tasting the forgiveness of God, he says in Psalm 51 that he will teach others how they too can know what it is like to be forgiven and set free from their sin. He says in Psalm 51:13, *“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”* In other words, this experience of forgiveness is too good to keep to himself. He will tell others how they too can experience the forgiveness of God so that *sinners will return to God*. And so, Psalm 32 is written after Psalm 51 and it is here where David is making good on what he said he would do in Psalm 51. In Psalm 32 he is *teaching transgressors God’s ways.*”

Consequently, Psalm 32 is considered a “wisdom psalm” that imparts wisdom on how to live life to the fullest. You can see David’s intent in writing this psalm in Psalm 32:8 where he says, *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”* In other words, from his experience with God’s forgiveness he is imparting godly wisdom to anyone who wants to hear. And what is that wisdom he is teaching us? He makes his point in verse 6, *“Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.”* And what is that prayer we are to offer? It is the prayer of confession. David’s point is simple here. **Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner.** Why is that? Because confession is the only way we taste the blessing of the forgiveness of our sin.

Proverbs 28:13 says this: *“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”* That is what David is saying in this psalm as well. He is telling us that there really are only two options when it comes to dealing with your sin. You either remain silent or you confess. And it is only through confession that you experience the blessing that he speaks about at the beginning of the psalm. So the main point this morning is that **confession is the way of life for the godly sinner.** Confession of sin is a normal part of our Christian life. Confession is a necessary part of our Christian life.

Do you regularly confess your sin? Leaning on the wisdom of David, I want to encourage us to embrace the confession of our sin as a normal way of life. As humbling and as difficult as it may seem, it is the key to experiencing the joy that Jesus offers us. Look how Psalm 32 ends. *“Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”* This is what awaits the godly sinner who makes confession a way of life.

The PRINCIPLE of Confession

David begins this psalm by stating a universal principle that you can bank on and trust. He begins with two “beatitudes.” He begins by telling you what it really means to be “blessed” in this world. When we talk about “beatitudes” our minds often go directly to Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount where we hear Jesus say in somewhat rapid fire—eight times, “*Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . . Blessed are . . .*” The “beatitudes” are revealing to us what it really means to be “blessed” in this life. Some people translate the word “beatitude” with the word “happy.” They call them “happy-tudes.” In my mind, that is helpful, but not the complete picture of what is being conveyed in a “beatitude.” I like how one author defines a “beatitude.” “A beatitude describes a person who experiences life optimally, as God intended.”

How do you think most people would define what it means to be “happy” or “to live life to the optimum?” I feel like I have been to those seminars too many times and I have seen those infomercials telling me how I can grab the brass ring and squeeze the most enjoyment out of life I possibly can. But here David provides a counter-cultural way to find what everyone is looking for. It is the humble posture of confession. It is the same thing Jesus says at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*” that is the one who knows their sinful state. And then, the next “beatitude” follows naturally behind it, “*Blessed are those who mourn,*” those who what David expressed in Psalm 51 as having “*a broken and contrite heart.*” Blessed are those who confess their sin.

The word “*blessed*” is the first word in the book of Psalms. Psalm 1:1 begins like this, “*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*” At the very outset of the book of Psalms we see that the key to living life to the ultimate the way God designed is to walk in God’s ways, to keep his commandments. But what we know to be true, we fail to do. Can’t you relate to Paul’s words in Romans 7. “*For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing.*” If that is the case, how I can I experience the blessing of God?

Along comes Psalm 32 to tell us that all hope is not lost. There is blessing for the “law-breaker” - for you and for me. “*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*” Paul quotes these two verses in Romans 4

when he is making the case that the only way we can experience this blessing from God is by God's grace and through humble faith. We can't earn it. The pathway to experiencing life to the optimum is through humble confession of our sin.

David uses three words to describe our sin in the first two verses of Psalm 32. He uses the words: *transgression*, *sin* and *iniquity*. They each bring their own shade of meaning to help us understand the state of our hearts before God. This is important to understand. Psalm 32 was a favorite psalm of St. Augustine who wrote the now famous book called *Confessions*. In this book he recounts his own personal journey to Christ and like David he airs some of his dirty laundry under the promise of God's grace. He argued that we can't really know who we are without knowing God. With God as the starting point to knowing ourselves, we come to know what is true about ourselves. We are sinners in need of a Redeemer.

When David refers to our *transgressions* he is talking about the willful acts of disobedience that we do in defiance of what we know is right. David knew it wasn't right to take another man's wife, but he did it nonetheless. But we too do what we know we shouldn't do. We have our own daily lists of *transgressions* that mark us. The word *sin* is the word that describes the offence we commit against others. When David confesses to God, "*against you and you only have I sinned*" he wasn't denying that his sin had impacted others. Instead, he was acknowledging that when he sins against others, he sins against God. The third word he uses is *iniquity* and this is the word that implies *guilt*. It is the *guilt* we all live under as a result of our *transgression* and *sin*. At this point I can hear the cry of Paul at the end of Romans 7, "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*"

But David says that there is hope. *Transgression is forgiven*, that means it is sent away. *Sin is covered*, hidden from the judgment of God. *Iniquity* is not counted against us, we are no longer seen as guilty. That is what it means to be *blessed* because it brings us to God, who is life itself. Jesus said in John 17:3, "*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*" That is living life to the optimum and it is fruit of being forgiven. It is knowing God.

I love how this principle is open to anyone and everyone. David says generally and broadly that this is for *THE ONE whose transgression is forgiven, WHOSE sin is covered . . . THE MAN against whom the LORD counts no iniquity.*" In other words, there is no one here who can not know the blessing that David is talking about in

these two verses. It is a universal principle that John mentions in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* **Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner** because this is the key to living life to the fullest. This is what it means to be *blessed*. I am forgiven!

The PRACTICE of Confession

After affirming the universal principle of confession that leads to the blessing of being forgiven, David champions the practice of confession. Because confession leads to forgiveness he says in verse 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.”* It makes sense. Why wouldn't I readily confess my sin if I know that God stands ready to forgive? And yet, I feel like it is a practice that has been lost to us a bit. I think David is championing the practice of confession that should be the normal and daily part of the Christian life. Notice in verse 7 who this practice applies to— *“Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.”* Confession is the common practice of the godly.

He basically says here that we have one of two options when it comes to dealing with our transgressions, our sins and our guilt. One thing we can do is remain silent and keep it to ourself. David tried that. Looking back on his experience of covering things up he says in verses 3-4, *“For when I kept silent, my bones 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 the summer. Selah”* It takes a lot of energy to keep these things hidden from God and others. When we live with unconfessed sin it saps us of spiritual strength. The more we hide it the more it eats us up. Like the proverb says, there is no prosperity in concealing our sin. And furthermore, it is a suppressing of the truth.

The other option is to confess your sin. Here the promise is so compelling. After he said that he acknowledged his sin and didn't cover it up but confessed his transgression to the LORD, he said *“you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”* What a great statement that encourages us to confess our sin.

But if this is true, why then is it so hard to confess our sin? Our pride gets in the way. Our own righteousness can make excuses for what we do and blame others for our own sin. And quite honestly it can be painful to confess because we may feel some of the shame we talked about last Sunday when we looked at Psalm 31. I

learned this week that some think that originally Psalm 31 and 32 were one psalm and not two. They sure go well together. The hope of overcoming our shame is to know that God receives our confession and forgives us. While initially it may be painful, it sets you free. It is like you need to go through the pain of surgery before you can experience healing. Or as St. Augustine puts it, “the act of confession was for making the truth.” It is living the truth. That is why at the end of verse 2 it says that this person is one *in whose spirit there is no deceit*. The truth will set you free.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Life Together*, writes, “You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; he does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; he wants you alone. . . . You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before him. He wants to see you as you are, he wants to be gracious to you.” **Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner** because it is the only way we receive the promise of God’s mercy and blessing.

The PLEA for Confession

This is what leads us to the wisdom David wishes to impart to us from this psalm. Recognizing that the practice of confession leads to the promise of God’s mercy and blessing, David pleads with us to make confession our way of life. He brings his teaching point home in verse 8, “*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*” Remember, he is making good on what he said he would do when he experienced the blessing of God’s forgiveness through humble confession so that sinners like you and me would turn to God.

The *Didache* is an ancient writing of the early church, many feel that it is tied closely to the Apostles themselves. It was a primer used to make disciples in the early church, teaching them how to live in the way of Christ. Here is what it said about confession. “Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life . . . On the Lord’s Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure.”

This brings out the fact that the practice of confession has several dimensions. First, we confess our sin to God. It is part of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray to our Heavenly Father, “*forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*” Only God can forgive sin. Jesus has atoned for sin through his death on the cross. Therefore, God is able to cover our sin when we confess our sin and humbly turn in faith to Jesus.

But confession has a horizontal dimension as well. We are to confess our sin to one another. There are two ways we do that. First of all, when we gather to worship, part of what we do is we confess our sin. The historic worship of the church always included the communal and public confession of our sin. Week in and week out the people of God would come before God in worship and would confess their failures and faults, the sins they committed and the things they failed to do. That confession would be followed with a word of absolution—an announcement of the good news that, in Jesus Christ, they were forgiven. It was a regular way of life in the weekly worship of God’s people. And because this was the habit of the people and the prayer was a simple and common prayer week after week, it became imbedded in their hearts and it was repeated throughout the week. This confession shaped them. This way of life—regular corporate confession—was a gift and a habit that shaped the heart of the church.

But there is another way this horizontal dimension of confession is lived out. James tells us in James 5:16 that we are to confess our sins to one another. *“Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”* Obviously, part of our confession of sin is to confess to the one we have sinned against. But there is also this sense of having someone you can come clean to. Ray Ortland put it this way, “Confession to God alone often does not lift us into the freedom we desire. With God alone, confession can be too easy. It is too easy to save face, and there is no healing, no release, in saving face, however earnest the confession to God might seem to be. Confession to God alone *can* be a way of not really facing ourselves and our sins.” But when we confess to each other, we bring things out into the open and we become accountable and are able to pray for each other. In fact, there is this sense of release when you are able to bring your sin into the light and to a trusted brother or sister who prays with you.

Ortland observes that in some churches no one admits anything. In that kind of a setting, confession would be foolhardy because it would be used as evidence against you and not for you. But when confession becomes a genuine way of life in the life of a church, there is healing and freedom. It is like being born again—again. That is what we want to be as a church. **Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner** and so it becomes the way of life in our corporate life together.

The Praise from Confession

This psalm ends on the same high note with which it began. David writes, *“Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”* Isn’t

that interesting. Who is the one doing the rejoicing? It is *the upright in heart*.

The *upright in heart*? How can the sinner who is continually in need of confession be considered upright? It is because God does not count his iniquity against him. Through faith in Jesus, we have a righteousness that is freely given to us. That is the point of this psalm. This is a psalm about God's grace, and about our being made right with God apart from anything we do, but only by the mercy of our Lord that comes to us through humble confession and faith. This becomes the fountain of our praise and our worship and our joy.

As I mentioned earlier, this was a favorite psalm of St. Augustine. I learned this week that while he was laying on his death bed, he had this psalm put on the wall next to his bed so that he could keep the blessing and the hope of this psalm in front of him to meditate on as he was passing into the presence of God. This was his hope. **Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner** because it brings about the deepest note of joy. We are forgiven by God and he remembers our sin no more. Hallelujah!

Conclusion

Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner because this is the key to living life to the fullest.

Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner because it is the only way we receive the promise of God's mercy and blessing.

Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner and so it becomes the way of life in our corporate life together.

Confession is a way of life for the godly sinner because it brings about the deepest note of joy.

Let us not be afraid to confess our sin to God. Let us not be afraid to corporately confess our sin together. Let us not be afraid to confess our sin to a trusted brother and sister in Christ. For there is healing in our confession of sin because there is healing in Jesus.

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What does your practice of confession of sin look like?
2. What do you find to be the hardest part of confession?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Psalm 32:1-2. What does it mean to “be blessed”? How do we find this blessing in life? How is this counter to the way the world defines what it means to be blessed?
4. Read Psalm 32:3-7. One way to deal with our sin is to remain silent. What does that look like and how does that impact you? Can you think of a personal example?

The other way to deal with sin is to confess it. Psalm 32:5 describes what confession looks like. What do you think ought to be part of genuine confession of sin?

5. Read Psalm 32:8-10. What is the lesson David is wanting us to learn? What steps can you take to make confession (private and corporate) a way of life?
6. Read Psalm 32:11. Why do you think a psalm on confession ends with such a high note of praise and joy? To what extent is your life characterized by this joy? How can you enter into this joy?

Taking It Home

7. What is one thing you are taking from your study?
8. What is one step you want to take to make confession a way of life?