

God's Forgiveness

SESSION 10

Psalm 32:1-11

Memory Verse: Psalm 32:1

Experiencing God's forgiveness leads to worship.

Apologizing can be tough. Doing something that hurts another person might appear harmless at first, but a guilty conscience usually accompanies a sense of shame. Justifying the action doesn't work either. In time, the need for an apology surfaces, and then it lingers. However, the dread of admitting guilt delays the act of confessing it. But delaying an apology only feeds the agony.

A quick and sincere apology makes better sense. It opens the door to forgiveness and healing. It even can foster a renewed relationship. Similarly, confessing our sin to the Lord gives way to worship and gratitude for His forgiveness. As you dig into David's testimony about confession in Psalm 32, think about how confession has reconnected you with God and others. Take steps to foster that kind of reconciliation again as God leads and be prepared to share about God's forgiveness during the Bible study time.



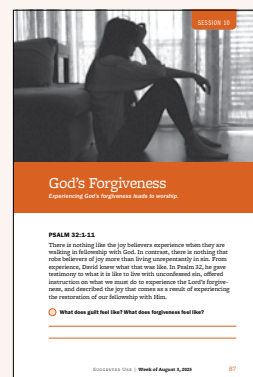
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There is nothing like the joy believers experience when they are walking in fellowship with God. In contrast, there is nothing that robs believers of joy more than living unrepentantly in sin. From experience, David knew what that was like. In Psalm 32, he gave testimony to what it is like to live with unconfessed sin, offered instruction on what we must do to experience the Lord's forgiveness, and described the joy that comes as a result of experiencing the restoration of our fellowship with Him. (PSG, p. 87)

What does guilt feel like? What does forgiveness feel like?



Understand the Context (Psalm 32)

Like Psalm 38, Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm. The psalms in this category develop the theme of confession and forgiveness. Penitential psalms express the remorse of believers who come to grips with their sins. Also, they convey the necessity of confession, the grace of forgiveness, and the joy of a renewed relationship with God.

Interesting details appear in the introduction—or superscription—of Psalm 32 and provide helpful information about its context. First, the word “maskil” means “instruction” in Hebrew. Accordingly, the psalm was probably used to teach God’s people about the value of confession. Second, the phrase “of David” identifies the author. David may have written the psalm after he struggled with sin that he had tried to hide.

David wrote another psalm in which he developed the same theme of confession and forgiveness. Psalm 51 pointed specifically to his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. According to 2 Samuel 11-12, King David tried to hide his sin, but the prophet Nathan exposed his evil behavior.

In response, David confessed his sin to God. Psalm 51 reflects David’s journey from contrition to repentance to forgiveness. It also underscores his eagerness to encourage God’s people so they would follow his example of humility and nourish an intimate walk with the Lord.

With Psalm 32, David struck the same chords of repentance and forgiveness. The beginning of the psalm includes an affirmation of joy over having been forgiven. It lists a series of Hebrew words that described sin, which set the stage for a testimony about the devastating effects of unconfessed sin in a person’s life (Ps. 32:1-2).

David’s words reveal that misery accompanies any attempt to keep sinful behavior a secret. After describing his personal agony in that regard, the psalmist went on to portray the value of coming clean before God through confession and repentance. The grace of God’s forgiveness relieves the burden of guilt that sin inevitably fosters (32:3-5).

Having been forgiven, the psalmist encouraged God’s people not to keep their sins to themselves. They would be wise to avoid the tendency to be stubborn. Such stubbornness prevents people from experiencing the deliverance from sin that comes from confessing sin to God. In addition, genuine confession leads to sincere worship.

Confessing sin also renews one’s relationship with Him. Again, those who experience God’s forgiveness are able to worship Him with hearts filled with joy because He makes them right with Him (32:6-11).

As you read Psalm 32, identify the words and phrases that express the blessing of forgiveness. Identify the words and phrases that express the burden of unforgiven sin. (PSG, p. 88)



PREPARE: Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Authors of the Psalms*) and **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Our Forgiving God*). Hang **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Kingdom of David and Solomon*) on a focal wall.

INTRODUCE: Explain that you are going to say a word aloud and adults should respond with a word that has an opposite meaning. Affirm that there may be more than one correct answer. Share these words: *up, stale, before, serene, sadness*. Note that “happiness” might come to mind for “sadness,” but joy is more powerful than happiness.

DIRECT: Guide the group to the opening paragraph on page 87 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: What does guilt feel like? What does forgiveness feel like?
(PSG, p. 87)

EXPLAIN: Share that today’s session focuses on Psalm 32. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Authors of the Psalms*) and direct adults to identify the human writer of this chapter. (David) Tell the group that in Psalm 32 David expressed great joy in the forgiveness he experienced from God.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Secure a copy of the lyrics for “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” (*Baptist Hymnal*, 2008, No. 13). Enlist three volunteers to each read one stanza of the hymn. Sing the first verse as a group. Highlight the following: “Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the dark of doubt away; Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day.” Share that according to King David in Psalm 32, such joy and gladness are found through the forgiveness that comes when we confess and repent of our sin.

Joy (Ps. 32:1-2)

1 How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! **2** How joyful is a person whom the LORD does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!

(vv. 1-2) How joyful: The Hebrew word for joyful (*‘esher*) has also been translated “blessed” or “happy.” This word appears often in Psalms, and it conveys elation and gratitude for receiving a gracious gift. However, such a blessing from God does not always produce immediate happiness. Rather, David signaled that while God always cares for the ones He blesses the happiness sometimes is delayed.

(v. 1) Transgression: A **•transgression** (*pasa*) implies a rebellion against authority. The Hebrew wording suggests the actions of a disobedient, defiant heart. A transgression could begin with a solitary act of rebellion; but, over time, unchecked rebellion runs the risk of becoming a lifestyle.

Disdainful transgressions involved acts of rebellion against other people. However, the most serious transgressions involve one’s relationship with God. When His people transgress His law, they rebel against Him. The prophets warned about the consequences of transgressions against God (see Isa. 66:24; Hos. 7:13; Amos 1-2).

Key Word

Forgiven

In Hebrew, the word for “forgive” (*nasa*) suggests lifting something up or carrying something off. A most comforting term for portraying forgiveness, it’s used in the Old Testament approximately 650 times. For example, in Genesis 7:17, the word helps to describe how the flood water lifted Noah’s ark. The term also appeared in 2 Samuel 5:21, when David instructed his soldiers to carry away Philistine idols and dispose of them.

The image is similar to how David described God removing sin as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12) and the prophet Micah’s words that He sends sin to the bottom of the sea (Mic. 7:19). The ancient Israelites were commanded to visually represent the removal of sin by sending away a scapegoat as part of the Day of Atonement observance (Lev. 16:6-10).

(v. 1) •Sin: This particular Hebrew word (*chataah*) conveys the idea of aiming at a target but missing the mark or falling short of it. The word first appears in Scripture when God confronted Cain before he killed his brother, Abel. God warned Cain that **sin** crouched “at the door” (Gen. 4:7). Generations later, when God instructed His people regarding the law, He used this word to characterize sin against Him (Lev. 4:14). Paul incorporated the Greek equivalent (*hamartano*) into his statement that everyone had sinned by falling short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23).

David testified that God had **covered** his sin. It’s not that God hid or ignored David’s sin. Rather, He forgave it. Jesus’s blood provides the ultimate covering for our sin.

(v. 2) Does not charge with iniquity: God intended for His people to take the straight path of obedience as they followed Him. But they committed **•iniquity** (Heb. *awon*) against Him. Instead of honoring Him, they took a twisted, perverted path of disobedience and self-satisfaction.

God instructed Aaron to lead His people to confess their iniquities against Him and to guide His people so they could see for themselves that He would not hold them accountable for their sins. David found freedom in confession. The wording around **charge** implies a debt that is forgiven.

(v. 2) No deceit: David recognized that our hearts are the core of the sin problem. Sin starts with a heart that is filled with **deceit**. The prophet Jeremiah stated that the human heart is desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9), and the apostle Paul quoted several Old Testament passages to underscore the incredible depravity of our hearts (Rom. 3:9-18).

In contrast, Jesus affirmed the complete lack of deception in the heart of Nathanael (John 1:47). He was not perfect or sinless, but Jesus recognized a heart inclined toward the things of God rather than a heart overwhelmed by evil.

EXPLORE Psalm 32:1-2

1



APPLICATION POINT: We can celebrate God's forgiveness knowing that He no longer counts our sin against us.

OVERVIEW: Use Understand the Context (PSG, p. 88) to provide background for Psalm 32. Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (Map: Kingdom of David and Solomon) to help set the historical context for the psalm. Share that Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm authored by David.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 32:1-2** as the group listens for what produces genuine joy.

IDENTIFY: Direct adults to work in pairs to identify words with similar meanings. (Examples: *transgressions, sin, iniquity, deceit.*) Encourage them to use the content for verses 1-2 (PSG, p. 89) to identify distinguishing characteristics of each word. Allow time for volunteers to share. Use information from page 104 of the Leader Guide to supplement the conversation.

ASK: What is the source of joy in these verses? What would it take for you to personally experience this joy? (PSG, p. 90)

TRANSITION: David found incredible joy in forgiveness and responded to God with praise and worship. But while he rejoiced in forgiveness, he never forgot how sin had tormented him.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Word Studies

Divide the group into teams of two to four people. Provide a Bible dictionary for each group. Assign each team one of the following words: *transgressions, sin, iniquities*. (NOTE: For larger groups, more than one team can work on the same word. For smaller groups, an individual can be a team.) Instruct each team to use the dictionary to clarify the meaning of its word and to share their research briefly. Point out how these words indicate disobedience toward God. Discuss what Psalm 32:2 means by sin being “covered.”

Forgiveness (Ps. 32:3-5)

3 When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. **4** For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. *Selah* **5** Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

(v. 3) When I kept silent: David reflected on the long, agonizing days and nights when he tried to keep his sin to himself. He remained **silent** in the hope that his sinful behavior would not be exposed. While He said nothing about his sin, his body registered the harsh reaction to his silence. He groaned constantly, and His bones **became brittle**. In contrast, Job wisely asserted that he did not try to hide his sins (Job 31:33).

(v. 4) Your hand was heavy: As long as David tried to keep quiet about his sin, the Lord's **hand** of discipline pressed down hard on him. While the Hebrew word for **heavy** can imply honor (see Ex. 20:12), it also can describe a burden or weight that results from misfortune.

God's heavy hand rested on David's heart, bringing him under deeper conviction (John 16:7-8). The Lord urged him to give up on his futile attempt to cover up his sinful behavior. The spiritual struggle that resulted from this divine conviction took a heavy toll on the psalmist. It **drained** his energy and left him feeling as lifeless as a tender plant shriveling under an intense **summer's heat**.

Key Word

Selah

Bible scholars debate the exact meaning of this word, as well as its usage of the word within the context of Israelite worship. But it's found throughout the book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk 3.

As a worship tool, it could have been used to prompt a moment of silent reflection or a musical interlude. It may also have directed God's people to consider what they had experienced in their time of worship or prompted worshipers to stand, kneel, or shout. Choirs may have used it as a cue to sing louder or softer.

(v. 5) I acknowledged: The Hebrew word for **acknowledged** (*yada*) has also been translated "confessed" (NLT) and suggests making something known. Here, David stopped trying to **conceal** his sin and made it known to the Lord. In the incident with Bathsheba, Nathan advised David to come clean regarding his adultery (2 Sam. 12:13). In the New Testament, the apostle John encouraged believers to confess their sins to the Lord and to find forgiveness in Him (1 John 1:9).

(v. 5) I will confess: Confessing sin always starts with a decision. Instead of burying his sin in his heart, David decided to come clean before the Lord. While it apparently took countless days and nights of sheer misery, he finally reached the point where he could make such a weighty decision. As a result of his honesty, the agony brought on by his silence would end. Once he held nothing back from the Lord, he encountered a God who had been willing to listen long before he was willing to confess.

(v. 5) You forgave: Acknowledging sin opened the door to forgiveness. Using the same Hebrew word for **forgave** (*nasa*) that he had used previously, David testified that the Lord picked up his sin and carried it away, never to be seen again. Just as remarkable, the Lord not only took away the sin, but He also removed the guilt that accompanied it. Therefore, the accountability and the punishment that would result from David's **sin** would be removed too. Jesus said that a believer who had been forgiven so lavishly would love Him just as extravagantly (Luke 7:47).



Thanksgiving Psalms

Bible scholars label Psalm 32 as a thanksgiving psalm. Find out how these reflective psalms draw believers closer to God.

EXPLORE Psalm 32:3-5

2



APPLICATION POINT: We can turn to God when we are burdened by our sins and count on His forgiveness.

READ: Lead the group to read **Psalm 32:3-5** silently, looking for the contrast between living with sin and finding forgiveness for sin.

ASK: Other than deep distress, what indicators let us know that we have sinned? (PSG, p. 91)

RECAP: Guide the group to discuss as pairs how God's heavy hand was actually a blessing for David. Summarize this content from page 90 of the PSG: "God's discipline of David, however, was an expression of His love. While discipline may be difficult to endure, the absence of discipline would be far worse. If God had not disciplined David, David would have proceeded down a spiritually treacherous path. The Lord loved David too much to allow him to continue to stray. So God used His loving, discomforting discipline to turn David around."

ASK: What was the result of David's confession?

SHARE: Emphasize that God is faithful to forgive us when we confess our sin and turn to Him. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Our Forgiving God*). Provide a summary of the article, encouraging the group to read it in more detail after the session.



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Before and After Pictures

Display "Before" and "After" pictures. Explain that advertisers frequently use "before and after" pictures to convince consumers that what they are selling really works. Encourage adults to suggest products that might use "before and after" photos. Briefly discuss how Psalm 32:4-5 reflects a "before and after" experience in David's life. Contrast his suffering before confession and the forgiveness he enjoyed after confession.

Instruction (Ps. 32:6-11)

6 Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to you immediately. When great floodwaters come, they will not reach him. **7** You are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance. *Selah* **8** I will instruct you and show you the way to go; with my eye on you, I will give counsel. **9** Do not be like a horse or mule, without understanding, that must be controlled with bit and bridle or else it will not come near you. **10** Many pains come to the wicked, but the one who trusts in the LORD will have faithful love surrounding him. **11** Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

(v. 6) Pray to you: After David finally confessed his sin, his relationship with the Lord was restored as he experienced the grace of His forgiveness. For that reason, he called on God's people to turn to Him in prayer instead of remaining silent about their sin. Confession promotes spiritual healing, but it also protects believers. Instead of being trapped by overwhelming currents of sin (Ps. 38:4), such **great floodwaters** are kept at bay. Prayers for forgiveness provide security.

Key Doctrine

God's Purpose of Grace

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See Psalm 32:1-5; 1 John 1:7-9.)

(v. 7) My hiding place: Walking with the Lord does not mean that His people aren't met with trouble. But when trouble comes, we can depend on God to see us through any circumstance. God does not leave us by ourselves. Instead, He serves as our **hiding place**, a refuge of protection and deliverance. Centuries later, Paul taught believers to rest in the assurance that they were "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

(v. 8) My eye on you: The Lord reminded David of His watchful **eye** (see Prov. 15:3). His consistent oversight may have been threatening to anyone who rebelled against Him. But for His people, His careful attention offered a sense of assurance. For instance, He assured Joshua that He would watch

over the Israelites as they crossed the Jordan River (Josh. 4:23). Likewise, Peter encouraged believers to remember that the Lord would not let them out of His sight (1 Pet. 3:12).

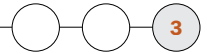
(v. 9) Do not be like a horse or mule: The challenge for God's people is not His involvement in their lives. Instead, the greatest obstacle is their own unwillingness to listen to and obey His instruction. Through David, the Lord warned them about being like a stubborn **horse** or **mule**. These animals require a **bit** in their mouths and a **bridle** around their heads to obey their master's commands. Similarly, believers always run the risk of nurturing stubborn hearts determined to rebel against Him (Jer. 5:23).

(v. 10) Faithful love: The stark contrast between **the wicked** and God's people is seen in the outcomes of their decisions. Those who rebel against the Lord can expect **many pains**. However, the one who trusts will be surrounded by **faithful love**. The Hebrew word used here (*hesed*) can also been translated as "goodness" or "lovingkindness." The Lord had promised His people that His love would never "be removed" (Isa. 54:10)

(v. 11) Be glad: The centerpiece of gladness was the Lord with whom His people had nourished an intimate relationship. As Hannah expressed her gratitude over the birth of Samuel, she testified that she rejoiced "in the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:1). Paul echoed Hannah's testimony when he instructed believers to "boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:11).

For God's people, intimacy with Him began when He made them right with Him. At one time, they were burdened by sin; but they turned to the Lord, confessed their sin, and became upright. Therefore, they could rejoice in Him (Phil. 4:4).

EXPLORE Psalm 32:6-11



APPLICATION POINT: Believers are to tell others how they can experience God's forgiveness.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read **Psalm 32:6-11** as the group listens for how to avoid the trap of sin.

ASK: What should be our first action when recognizing our sin?

EXAMINE: Lead the group to examine Psalm 32:6-11 for specific promises God revealed to David. As they share, record their responses on the board. Highlight any steps faithful people must take to experience these promises in their lives.

ASK: How would you describe God's forgiveness to an unbeliever? (PSG, p. 94)

RECAP: Highlight the images of a horse and mule in verse 9. To explain these images, summarize this content from page 93 of the PSG: "[God] warns [His people] to avoid being like a stubborn horse or mule that has no understanding and therefore needs to be controlled by a bit and bridle. Such stubbornness only leads to misery. Therefore, if necessary, God will prod His stubborn children to return to Him. But God's desire is for believers to turn back to Him willingly out of their yearning for Him—not under compulsion from Him."

SHARE: Note the contrast between the wicked and the righteous. Challenge adults to live in a way that allows them to enjoy God's faithful love rather than exposing themselves to the pain of sin.

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Direct adults to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 94 of the PSG. An important principle of Bible study is that Scripture interprets Scripture. After they have compared the passages as instructed, allow a few volunteers to share what resonated with them. Highlight the common themes of confession and forgiveness. Give adults a few minutes to speak with God silently about an unresolved sin in their lives.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 95 of the *Personal Study Guide*:
- We can celebrate God's forgiveness knowing that He no longer counts our sins against us.
 - We can turn to God when we are burdened by our sins and count on His forgiveness.
 - Believers are to tell others how they can experience God's forgiveness.
- ASK:** **How can and should believers celebrate and express their joy in response to God's forgiveness?** (PSG, p. 95)
- SHARE:** Note that the opposing pictures of the devastation of sin and the joy of forgiveness should challenge us to let others know about what God has done in our lives—and what He can do for them as well.
- PRAY:** Distribute index cards and pencils to each person. Read aloud Psalm 32:5. Describe this verse as a turning point in David's life. Encourage the group to write their own prayer based on this verse. Close the session by sharing your own prayer based on Psalm 32:5 back to God.

After the Session

Text or email an encouraging word to the group to let them know you are praying for them. Encourage them to spend time during the week reading Psalm 32 and reflecting on the key themes in the chapter. Urge them to deal with any unconfessed sin that might be causing them pain or hindering their relationship with God. Let them know that you are available to talk with anyone who is struggling.

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