

Starting Over When You Implode

Psalm 32

Main point: The path of true happiness is for sinners to be aware of their need for forgiveness and to repent.

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!
² How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!
³ When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.
⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. *Selah*.
⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD";
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*.
⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.
⁷ You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*.
⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;
I will counsel you with My eye upon you.
⁹ Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
Otherwise they will not come near to you.
¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.
¹¹ Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

INTRODUCTION:

A modern commercial asks potential consumers who are looking for tummy salvation, "How do you spell relief?" The marketing tagline then goes on to spell out the product they believe is a savior of the stomach from acid reflux: **R-O-L-A-I-D-S**.

Today, many people are looking for relief or absolution from a sickness of the soul far worse than an upset stomach. It is called *the guilt of sin*. By the way, what do you do with your guilt? You know that feeling in the pit of your stomach that won't go away after taking Tums? That restless heart which makes you toss and turn at night and robs you of sleep? That guilt which makes you "snitty" with your family and takes a tremendous toll on your mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being? The bad news is that the sports world, the waterparks, the entertainment business, the Internet, Madison Avenue, Wall Street, and even Main Street have no answer for guilt. You can't buy it at Walmart to wash it away or at the Mall to cover it up. Relief, according to the ancient king, is found in God alone.

Tagged as a "penitential, wisdom, and thanksgiving psalm," Psalm 32 provides a "before-and-after" picture of the psalmist's life. Before confessing the wrongdoing of which he was guilty, that bottling up of guilt took a terrible toll on his life. The title describes Psalm 32 as a **Maskil** or a teaching poem to engage us with valuable teaching. He tucks three "Selahs" ("snow globe" moments) to encourage us to *pause* and *reflect* on what is being taught (vv.4, 5, 7). David aims to instruct us about the unbelievable happiness that comes with being forgiven by God. He maps out the way of emancipation from guilt's destructive power for us.

CONTEXT:

Most scholars connect Psalm 32 with Psalm 51, which describes the tragic failure of David with Bathsheba and the arranged murder of her husband, Uriah. The sordid episode is recorded in 2 Samuel 11-12, which I assume that most of you know if you've been around the church or bible stories at all in your life.

- The quick and skinny of David's great sin is this: God uncovered his cover-up, and David's fall shattered his kingdom, but not God's covenant.

The twisted affair began during a time of *stress* and *war*. David is at home when he should have been at war. He sees the wife and daughter of a member of his elite Thirty warrior corps (2 Sam.23:24, 29), and his heart burns with lust for her body. After a consensual affair, Bathsheba becomes pregnant (2 Sam.11:2-5). David tries to cover up his crime with an elaborate scheme to bring the husband home on leave to be with his wife and make it appear that he fathered the child. When loyal Uriah refused the trap, David gets him drunk, in hopes that the soldier's restraints would slide. But Uriah foiled the plan, and David sends him back to the front lines, where the fighting is fiercest—to be killed in battle. It was a black, sinful, dastardly plan! And it never had a chance of succeeding because *God is holy and sovereign over all of life*.

David's sin had a national dimension. Although David committed adultery in secret, Yahweh would punish him publicly and make the whole nation witness Absalom's incest with David's wives on the roof of his palace (2 Sam.12:11-12). David confesses his sin and repents, and although justice demanded that he be put to death, God's mercy is *greater* than His *judgment* (2 Sam.12:13-15). God nullifies the death sentence, and out of abounding love, grace, and mercy, God forgives David so that all sinners would know He is a God of grace, and we can be turned back to God (Ps.51:13). David's forgiveness is so extraordinary and so exemplary that he pens Psalms 51 and 32 for all Israel to rejoice with uncontrollable gladness.

J.C. Ryle once said, "Men fall in private long before they fall in public." It's called an *implosion*. Implosion is the opposite of an explosion. In a blast, things fly *outward*. With an *implosion*, things collapse on the *inside*.

How do you avoid imploding? David speaks from experience because he had a devastating bout with guilt. If you ignore the erosion of your integrity, you will implode. If you neglect the care of your conscience, you will implode. If you stay silent about the sin in your life, you will implode.

How do you recover when it has happened? The instruction that he gives progresses smoothly from:

- The blessings of forgiveness (vv.1-2), to
- The testimony of repentance (vv.3-5), to
- The lessons of experience (vv.6-10), to
- The call to joyful praise (v.11).

EXPOSITION:

A. THE BLESSINGS OF FORGIVENESS (vv.1-2)

Verses 1-2 are really the conclusion of what David wants to say, brought up, and put in the introduction. It's like a movie that starts at the end with a man and his family, happy and enjoying sweet fellowship together, and then it works backward to show the audience that it was not always this way. Some movies

are designed this way, and this psalm is written this way. The joyous keynote is struck at the beginning, but in terms of his experience, verses 3-4 uncovers the misery he was in while in sin.

The tone of verses 1-2 is that of *ecstasy, bliss, rapture, and overwhelming emotion*, and this tells us that if we truly experience what David personally experienced, there will be happiness, joy, and blessedness in our lives regardless of the circumstances we are in.

- How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!
² How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

The description in verses 1-2 *presupposes* a man who is not *sinless*, but a person who is sinful and who needs forgiveness. And so, if you are listening this morning and you believe you are *sinless* and have no need to be forgiven by God, then I think it is safe to excuse you from the sermon to play in the backyard or do something else, because this psalm *does not apply to perfect people*.

But if you are willing to admit that *you are a sinner* in need of *forgiveness*, then come up close and listen. Before David speaks to us with *the vocabulary of forgiveness*, he instructs us about *the anatomy of sin*.

1. The anatomy of sin

These opening verses give voice to the experience of forgiveness of sin, expressed in a gathering of the four major Old Testament words for sin.

a. Transgression (v.1a)—How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,

The Hebrew term for **"transgression"** (*pasha*) means to *revolt or rebel against God*. This is when you refuse subjection to one who has rightful authority. Sometimes this is an attitude beneath actions. This often slips out in kids when they say, "you're not boss." Or in adults in church, when they say, "Pastor or elder so-and-so is not the Lord."

According to this word picture, *happiness (blessedness) is when you no longer live in rebellion against God.*

b. Sin (v.1b)— Whose sin is covered!

This term for **"sin"** (*hata*) is the most general word for *missing the mark or a turning away from the right path*. The same Hebrew word appears in Judges 20:16, which tells of 700 left-handed marksmen who could *"sling a stone at a hair and not miss."* Sin is *a failure or a coming short of God's intention and requirement*. A sin ignores something required by God's law or character, whether in thought, feeling, speech, or action (*Rom.3:23*).

In the Old Testament days, it was the term shouted out by the archery assistant who observed that the marksman missed the bullseye. And to communicate his failure, and he would shout, "*hata, hata,*" or sin. Today, it's what happens in a basketball game when a person takes a shot and misses everything—they miss the rim, they miss the backboard, and they miss everything! The crowd yells what? "Airball...Airball!" Well, that's what sin is—it is spiritual airball!

According to this picture, happiness (blessedness) is when your life is no longer off course or off-target, but aimed in the right direction at God's will.

- c. **Iniquity** (v.2a)—How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity.

The word here for **"iniquity"** (*awon*) means *bent over, twisted, crooked, warped, distorted, or perverted*. This word is found in Psalm 38:6 where a sick person says, *"I am utterly bowed down and prostrate."* You might see it clearly if you think of a criminal who commits murder or a thief who commits strong-armed robbery of a 7-11 store or snatches a lady's purse. What do we say of this individual? We say, "that's twisted!" Why? Because it shows *an absence of respect for the divine will* of God. We conclude that's "not normal" or the way it should be.

According to this picture, happiness (blessedness) is when you are no longer twisted or bent out of shape, but straightened out.

- d. **Deceit** (v.2b)—And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

"Deceit" (*remiyah*) is that which is *not reliable*, like a weapon that backfires or cannot be depended on. In Hosea 7:16, this word is used of a *"defective bow,"* and therefore, deceit *hides what is true* and *covers what reality is*. It's a sin of a coverup.

According to this picture, happiness (blessedness) is living in a manner that is straightforward, honest, and forthright. Now, what is David seeking to do?

David is NOT seeking to give us a detailed list or picture of sin, but he only traces out these bones in *the anatomy of sin* to show us what great joy he had because of forgiveness.

By implication, David is teaching us that we will never know this blessedness of forgiveness—if we think wrongly about sin.

Sin is not a curse that falls upon the most deviant of people. Sin is complex, multifaceted, and universal. It is a condition that results in high treason against our Creator King! And to know the blessedness of forgiveness, you must see *the crime of sin*; you must see *the failure of sin*, you must see *the twistedness of sin*. You must see *the duplicity of sin*. It is a revolt against the only true King. It is missing the mark of what God requires. It has a *corrupt nature* that is always trying to cover up warts, spots, moles, freckles, and blemishes of sin.

What David IS seeking to teach us is that the person who is truly blessed or happy is the person *who is not rebelling against God, whose life is on track, straightened out, and marked by integrity.*

2. The vocabulary of forgiveness

- a. **Forgiven**—transgression is forgiven

The word **"forgiven"** here means *to lift up and carry away*. This is the relief from a burden. The root of this word takes us back to the "scapegoat" ceremony of the Day of Atonement when the High Priest symbolically put Israel's iniquities, rebellion, and sins on the head of the goat and then released it into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

b. **Covered**—sin is covered!

This is the *hiding of record* (v.5), not glossed over or concealed. And as long as he covered his iniquity, his sin was uncovered before God, but when he revealed his sin, God covered it.

c. **Does not impute**—to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity.

This means the *dismissal of debt*.

How does this relief from a burden, this hiding of record, this dismissal of debt occur?

- **1 Peter 2:24**—and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.
- **Colossian 2:14**—having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
- **Isaiah 53:4-5**—Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.

How do we get beyond the anatomy of sin to the vocabulary of forgiveness? You must be willing to go to God with your sin. It is not confessing that is the cause of forgiveness, but “*You forgave the guilt of my sin.*” Confession is the *condition* for forgiveness, but Yahweh is the cause of forgiveness. *Admitting* is not a cure, but it is a condition. God is the granter. He is thrilled about forgiveness.

- **Psalms 130:4**—But there is forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.
- Blessedness is when life is no longer lived in rebellion against God.
Blessedness is having one’s life headed in the right direction, on course, no longer wrongly aimed off target.
- Blessedness is being no longer twisted or bent out of shape, but straightened out.
- Blessedness is living in a manner that is honest and forthright.

Is this blessedness yours today?

B. THE TESTIMONY OF REPENTANCE (vv.3-5)

- ³ When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.
⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. *Selah*.

The testimony of repentance is a picture of the destructive nature of guilt. However, before seeing the picture, it is critical to understand the unrepentant state before forgiveness is found. In David's testimony, we hear *the misery of guilt* and *the mercy of misery*. Do you see the "**wasting body**," the "**groaning**" conscience, "**the heavy hand**" of God, the "**drained**," dried up life, and thirsty tongue as David suffers under consequences of unrepentant sin?

- When I kept silent *about my sin*

This statement gives us insight into the entire sordid incident. There was a period during which David thought he had "gotten away" with his sins and crimes. He knew it was wrong, and we can be cognizant of our sin, but still silent in it. He would not admit his wrongdoing. Silence is the description of an unrepentant state as opposed to the confession of sin. But in that silence, he suffered *the agony of a guilty conscience*. David unveils three things about guilt that we need to know:

1. **Guilt is wearying. (v.3)**—my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.

The picture David paints us that "his body," or literally his bones, wore out. It's a poetic reference to decreasing *physical resilience*, which comes as a consequence of living with guilt and a stifled conscience. But you may reason, well, that's how I feel after a hard day at work or after a P90X workout, but David helps us see that guilt is much more than sore muscles or a tired brain.

He chooses a theatrical word for "**groaning**" that basically refers to *the roar of a lion* as it pounces on its prey (*Judg.14:5*). Now it's hard to relate to, because most of us have never encountered a wild animal. At best, we've been confronted by a chihuahua or chased down the street by a pit-bull. But just think of the feeling you have when a dog growls as if to say, "I got you now, and there is no use in running." Guilt cornered and terrified David and made him feel weak as if his body was wasting away.

2. **Guilt is weighty. (v.4a)**—For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;

Notice, whose hand was upon David in verse 4—"Your hand was heavy upon me." Not factors or circumstances, but Your hand. The "heavy hand" of God indicates that David was aware of the need for repentance, but for awhile, there was a stubborn refusal to yield to God. The phrase "**day and night**" suggests there was perhaps some insomnia going on, and the verbs indicate that God's hand was weighty.

3. **Guilt is withering. (v.4b)**—My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. *Selah*.

David was sapped! Exhausted! He says in essence, "My vital juices were all gone, and the moisture of my life changed." It was like being in the middle of the Arizona desert in July, and God's hand was like the summer heat: all-consuming and with no relief. It is the picture of the withering guilt of sin that is not acknowledged.

Guilt is not always at the root of our troubles, but sometimes can be. In the 1930s, an older member of Westminster chapel brought a young man to see Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones, the doctor who had become one of England's most influential preachers.

This young man was tall, his hair was messed up, and he seemed to be in great agitation. The doctor invited him in, and they began to talk. He discovered that the man had left a mental health facility where he had been for six weeks, where he had been diagnosed with “religious mania.” Lloyd-Jones says that he was literally “tearing his hair” like he was outside of his skin. Then the story came out as they talked. He had been converted in the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905 and had become an active Christian. As a result, he was delivered from drunkenness. He began to prosper in business.

After some years, he grew careless and spiritual decline set in, and he started to drink again with friends. He began to backslide. Outwardly he continued to be very involved in church and even prospered financially. Suddenly the reality of his position came home to him, and he began to worry about it.

He began to reason to himself, “Before when I was unconverted, I did these things, but I did not know what I was doing at the time, and God forgave me. But now I have sinned openly against the light of God. I knew better, I knew the truth, and now there is no forgiveness for me.”

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones could see his problem immediately. He did not understand the Gospel. He was shown the way to be saved, but not the way to be sanctified or forgiven and brought back into fellowship with God if he sinned.

There is a *misery of guilt*, and dealing with it is as simple as *understanding the Gospel and confessing and repenting of your sin*. But there is also a mercy of misery. Don't miss this...

- There was divine pressure driving him to repentance. Listen: *the misery of sin is a gift of God*. Misery has a way of *flushing out sin*. Sometime God must put pressure on us to produce the right response.

God is so good that He will not allow His people to be comfortable in sin. One writer said, “If you are okay, where you are in sin, then you can be sure that God is leaving you alone in it.”

There is *mercy in misery*, and there is a *misery of guilt*.

Application: We are not the Holy Spirit, so we must be careful here. If someone is in blatant sin, then *we ought to pray that God would make them miserable in it*—remember, sincere prayer is not for the faint-hearted. When friends or family members are obviously ignoring the Lord, we ought to pray like Knox, “*Lord, deal with them as gently as possible and severely as necessary.*”

David's silence, aggravated by God's heavy hand, contributed to the dry cotton-mouthed, tongue curling fatigue that filled his life. And what was the answer for his guilt?

- ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”;
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*.

In his confession, the psalmist uses the same three words that appear in his introduction (sin, iniquity, and transgression). This tells us that David's confession was comprehensive. It was not wholesale, but retail. And the words of confession opened the floodgate of the dam of sin in life. It was like

stagnant waters had piled up behind the dam of his soul, creating immense pressures on the walls of his heart, but as soon as the floodgate opened, the waters subsided, and the pressures diminished.

C. THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE (vv.6-10)

- ⁶Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.
⁷You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah.*
⁸I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.
⁹Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, *Otherwise* they will not come near to you.

As David reflects upon his own emancipation, he summons all the godly to join in prayer for a similar deliverance. We must do a little parsing of terms to get the meat and juice of this section. Verse 6 invites us to ask the question, “who are the godly?”

- ⁶Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;

One of the keywords is the “**godly**” (*hasid*), which is related to the term *hesed*, or God’s lovingkindness or loyal love. The godly here speaks of *the covenant ones*. Alec Motyer classically defines the “godly” as “those whom God loves and who love Him back.” The godly are God’s people—saved individuals. David is saying, “Let every covenant one pray to You...” When?

“In a time when You may be found.” What time is this? Whenever the stress of unrepented sin is experienced, let every Christian know that he/she must turn to God then in a prayer of repentance. Don’t listen to the flesh! Don’t listen to the guilt! Don’t listen to the devil—he is a liar! Come to God in a prayer of repentance, David is saying.

Then he brightens our mind with a metaphor.

- Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

It happened just five days ago—the failures of the Edenville Dam and the Sanford Dam, about 140 miles northwest of Detroit, forced evacuations of thousands of residents. Heavy rainfalls pounded the central Lower Peninsula of Michigan, collapsed the dams, and unleashed a torrent of muddy floodwaters. After Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued an emergency declaration, she urged residents to “Please, get somewhere safe NOW!”

That’s the sense of what David is saying here. “When all hell breaks loose and the dam bursts, the godly will be on high ground, untouched!” You ask, “How so, pastor?”

David says, “Because God Himself will offer you protection and be a victorious deliverer for you.”

- ⁷You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah.*

Two pictures of the kind of protection God gives to those who repent are meant to engender trust:

- God will be like an island hideaway—preserving you from trouble.
- God will throw garlands of hosannas around your neck—so that you sing songs of deliverance because He has given you the victory. Now, what do we do with that revelation?

We pause and meditate—**Selah**.

Now David gets on one knee. If you are a little child, a young adult, or even a seasoned saint, he puts his gentle arm around your shoulder, looks at you with those experienced eyes full of “wearied wisdom” and says,

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

Hear what you should do and be assured of God’s protection—“My eye”—as you follow the divinely ordained path.

What are the lessons of experience?

- ⁹ Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
Otherwise they will not come near to you.

The language of wisdom literature is used. A similar statement is found in Proverbs 26:3,

- A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey,
And a rod for the back of fools.

The godly ones are advised not to be like the ornery, stubborn, unintelligent horses or mules who need bit and bridle to stay on track. Don’t be like that unintelligence creature who always requires something hard to restrain its activities lest it gallops away by itself. Let me make it as plain as David—DON’T STUBBORNLY RESIST CONFESSING AND REPENTING OF SIN. Such resistance only brings guilt and grief. Do you want to be happy? Do you want to be blessed? Let me state it in the positive.

1. Crave unhindered fellowship in prayer. (v.9)

Prayer unhindered by sin and disobedience does not mean that you are *immune* from struggles; it means God will *preserve* you in them. Prayer unhindered by sin and disobedience does not mean that troubles never overtake you; it means that you are not *overwhelmed* by them. Do we really see our need to be in unhindered fellowship with God so that our prayers are heard?

- **1 Peter 3:7**—You husbands, in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

God hears the prayers of husbands who understand and honor their wives!

- **James 5:16**—Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

God restores the fellowship of those who confess their sins and turn from them.

- **Proverbs 28:13**—He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

2. Be sensitive to God's pressure on your conscience. (v.10)

- ¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.

God-defiers are always in trouble, and if not now in this life, it will come suddenly and sweep them away (*Ps.73*). God-trusters will find themselves loved and supported every time they turn around.

D. THE CALL TO JOYFUL PRAISE (v.11)

¹¹ Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

Who are the righteous? Those who trust the Lord. Who is the one who trusts in the Lord? The one who is upright in heart. Who is the upright in heart? The one whose sin is forgiven. What should the forgiven do? RAISE THE ROOF! SING! CELEBRATE GOD!

CONCLUSION:

Psalm 32 was Augustine's favorite psalm. He not only read it frequently but before he died, he had it inscribed on the wall by his sickbed so that he would rehearse its truths and find comfort in its reality. He once said, "The beginning of knowledge is to know oneself to be a sinner."

Do you know yourself to be a sinner? If so, then you know the misery that sin brings, and there is no use in trying to run to the law, good works, or even to religious activities to find relief from its guilt. There is only one *condition*, one *prerequisite*, one divine path to find relief and spiritual health. Confess your sin, agree with God, turn from it, and seek forgiveness from Him through Jesus Christ.

What shape does a God-forgiven, God-directed life take?

- It prays in times of distress. (v.6)
- It trusts God as a safe place to store one's life. (v.7)
- It knows that God's steadfast love surrounds you. (v.10)
- It refuses to stay silent in sin and groaning, but confesses and sings to God in joy and gratitude.

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