

I want to begin with a couple stories that will show you what kind of sinner leads this church. As I do, I want you to take notice of the differences between them. They both happened when I was six or seven. The first started in a grocery store. I was obsessed with bubble gum, but gum was a luxury item in our home. So, I stole a pack. It wasn't a skinny pack of Extra. It was a pack of Bubble Yum. It must have weighed two pounds. I snuck it in my front pocket, we went home, and I wound up sitting in my mother's lap. Such a rookie mistake. My mom's hand rested on my pocket, she felt the pack of gum, and asked "What's this?" I was busted! But I wasn't going down that easy. I told her I got it from a friend, but she didn't believe me. First, she knew no seven-year-old was just giving away packs of delicious gum. Second, it just so happened to be the exact same kind I asked her for in the store. So, mom came after me, put the squeeze on me, and made life very difficult. I tried to resist her, but she was relentless, and I begrudgingly sort of admitted I stole. That day ended with a trip back to the store so I could return the pilfered goods and apologize to the manager face-to-face. Not fun.

Not long after, I was walking home from the bus stop one day and noticed this large switch on the back of a building. Curiously, and with a sense I shouldn't, I flipped the switch the other way. Nothing happened, so I left. The next day I walked by the same switch and did the same thing. But, again, nothing happened. The next day, I knew I shouldn't, but I flipped the switch again. Within three seconds some guy came running out of the building to confront me. If I was a good sinner I would have pointed in another direction and said, "the kid ran that way." But I didn't. I, again, was busted. Apparently, I was switching off the power to the entire building. So the guy took all my information down (I told him the truth!), said he was going to call my mom, and sent me on my way. What a stupid thing to do. I felt so guilty. So I walked in the door, my mom looked at me and within half a second she asked "What's wrong?" I immediately burst into tears, ugly cried all the way into her arms, and confessed all I had done. I couldn't bear the weight of it any longer. And you know what happened? My mom forgave me, told me she loved me, and asked that it never happen again. I was so relieved. The weight had been lifted.

You and I are born with a burden. It's the burden of our sin, that birth defect passed down to us from our first ancestors that separates us from God and destines us to eternal death. It's a burden we can't lift away on our own. We need someone to take it from us. Thankfully, Jesus can, and he does. The moment we place our faith in him, all our sins are forgiven; the ones we have committed, are committing, and will commit. All are nailed to the cross and the burden of our sin is lifted. If you've never done that before, I pray today is the day you do. Let's talk.

But how should we handle the sin we commit after we trust in Christ? If it's already forgiven, should we worry about it? The answer is yes. While sin won't separate us from God eternally, it does weigh us down, damages our relationship with him, and compromises our ability to live the full life Jesus has for us. Thankfully, God has given us a way to deal with our sin, but we have to choose to use it, and God is going to pursue us if we don't. When we sin, we basically have the same two choices I had: keep it hidden or confess it. The first option leads to pain. The second to restoration, freedom, and getting back on the right path. But because of pride, indifference, and shame, far too many of us don't practice it. God wants that to change and has an invitation for you in this new series.

This morning we begin a two-week series in Psalm 32 to talk about the spiritual discipline of repentance and confession. My hope is to preach on a discipline several times a year and practice it together as a church. These disciplines are intended to draw us closer to Christ and conform us to his image. In this Lenten season, now is an incredible time to come clean with God as we prepare to celebrate the cross and empty tomb. Through it, my prayer is that you will see God as a good and loving Father who wants to receive your confession and forgive and restore you, and that you would trust him enough to cast your sin upon him once more and experience the grace and freedom that comes when he lifts the weight of your guilt from you. The confession of our sin is not a one-time thing. It is a spiritual practice essential to the Christian life.

To begin, I want to give two definitions of words that we'll use. **Repentance** is the changing of one's mind about one's actions and turning to God for mercy and direction. **Confession** is agreeing with God that your actions violate his will and holiness and you are in need of forgiveness. A life full of those two things is a life lived close to God.

[Psalm 32:1-2] ¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ²Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

David begins with the ideal condition of man, calling him blessed. It's a word that means happy, favored, flourishing. What's the cause? Is it fame, money, stuff, acclaim? No. It's the forgiveness of sins. The wages of sin is death. All of us are born dead in our sins and eternally separated from God, so when those sins are forgiven, we are blessed.

Most think Psalm 32 is written in light of David's sin with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 11 says David has sent his army to war, is standing in his palace, and sees a woman bathing. He summons her, has his way with her, and sends her husband to the front lines to be killed. And for a year he kept it to himself, and it came between him and the Lord.

For us on this side of the cross, we know Jesus solved the problem of sin through his life, death, and resurrection, and it's by faith we receive the eternal life he made possible. Every baptism we celebrate is a person who has experienced that blessing. But when we sin after we have received Christ, it still comes at a cost. We don't lose our salvation any more than me messing up with Martha suddenly renders us unmarried. But sin still has consequences. Our fellowship with God is damaged. It comes between us and the Lord. And if our relationship with God isn't right, our life can't be right, can't be blessed, can't be full. Our sin creates roadblocks to us truly flourishing. And all of us sin so all of us create these roadblocks. Blessed is the man whose sin roadblocks are removed and whose relationship with God restored.

Do you desire to be in that condition? When you are not, can you tell? There was a time in my life when I sinned willfully, knowing my sin was forgiven. What's the difference, right? As I look back now, I see the barriers my sin was putting up between me and God, and I see the life I was living was anything but blessed. In many ways, it was miserable. I regret those times, but I'm so thankful God's grace and mercy didn't quit on me. He restored me and year after year calls me into a deeper relationship with him, and confession is a foundational part of it. Do you so cherish your relationship with God that you recognize how blessed you are and how painful it should be

when that relationship is messed up? God wants you to understand, turn to him, and allow him to restore you. He wants that so much for you that he's not going to leave you alone. Let's see how David dealt with his sin and how God responded.

[Psalm 32:3-4] 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.

For a year David kept his sin to himself. And it's kind of understandable. He's the anointed king, a man after God's own heart, a leader and protector of the people. Yet he stole another man's wife, got her pregnant, and had the man killed. I bet he felt trapped, ashamed, disqualified. It's not until God sends the prophet Nathan to confront him that David finally relents. Do you keep silent? If you do, why? Have you considered it? Think about these reasons and see if you can relate.

Reasons we keep silent:

Shame: This is how our first ancestors handled their original sin. They covered themselves up and hid. They should have gone running to him and asked for his help. But shame causes us to think God can't or won't forgive us, that we are not worthy of his love, that our sin is too big for his grace, or he ultimately says "I've given you enough chances. You're on your own."

Pride: Pride says, "I answer to no one" or "I can take care of it myself." I remember being with a woman who was near death, presenting the Gospel to her, and she refused to accept it. She said no one is going to pay for her sins but her. Pride ultimately says we don't need forgiveness, or we have in ourselves what we need to deal with it.

Lack of intimacy with God: If sin breaks fellowship with God, are you close enough with God to begin with that you actually notice the difference? Our sin should grieve us because it puts distance between us and God. But if we're not that close, we may not notice, and keep quiet.

Take sin lightly: If you don't desire forgiveness, you don't understand sin. We say, "My little sin isn't that big of deal." When we think little of sin we're really thinking little of God. We fail to recognize that any sin, big or small, is **abhorrent** to God and should be to us as well, that every sin, big or small, had to be atoned for and, therefore, nailed Jesus to the cross. There is no such thing as a small sin when our God is holy and perfect.

Convinced a sinful life is more fulfilling than a righteous one: We all struggle to believe our greatest joy and fulfillment can be found in the life God has for us. We've given God 80% of it but keep 20% of it for ourselves. And we justify it, so we keep silent.

Do you see yourself in that list? Can I tell you all of that is rubbish? Sin will sabotage your life, and God doesn't want that for David or for you. So God moves to get David's attention and draw him back to himself. He puts pressure, weight on David, and makes him miserable. It's the glory of guilt. It is the gracious chastisement of God intended to get our attention and make us realize something needs to change. I remember I had acted poorly in a relationship but was stubborn and saying it was all about the other person. God got after me. I was eaten up inside, tied up in knots, couldn't sleep. And I finally repented, confessed to God, apologized to the other person, and

slept like a baby that night. As Warren Weirsbe says, **Guilt is to the conscience what pain is to the body: it tells us that something is wrong and must be made right, or things will get worse.**

Why would God do this? Because he's mean? Vindictive? A masochist? No. IT'S BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU! He doesn't want you weighed down by your sin. He doesn't want sin to sabotage your relationship with him. He knows the cost of unconfessed sin and he wants to get rid of it so you can flourish. Confession isn't a trip to the principal's office. It's not going to your room until your father comes home. It's not an opportunity for God to say, "This is who I always knew you were." That's not God. **The devil condemns. God convicts. Condemnation is intended to take you out. Conviction is intended to bring you in.**

Are you eaten up by guilt right now and trying to hide it or cover it up? Can I tell you that weight might be the grace and mercy of God erupting in your life? Would you listen to him, respond to him, give in to him? **God is not doing it to make you miserable. He's doing it to set you free.** You know how I know? Let's keep reading.

[Psalm 32:5] ⁵I 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.

Finally, David relents and confesses all he's done, and God forgave him. You can almost hear the relief in his words. It was immediate. He didn't have to make up for anything. God didn't say "I'll think about it." He confessed, God forgave.

What he did for David he will do for you. Time and time and time again. You cannot out sin the mercy and grace of God. He will not tire of restoring you to himself and setting you on the path he has for you. He does not want you to bear the burden of your sin alone. He wants to lift it from you. He spared no expense to make that possible, sending his son to die and pay for that sin. If he's willing to do that, he's willing to continue to meet you in your struggles and set you free. God forgives. God forgives. God forgives. And he's ready to hear from you.

'The experience of the psalmist, therefore, as recorded in this psalm, should be full of encouragement to all who are burdened with a sense of sin. Warned by his experience, they should not attempt to conceal their transgressions in their own bosom, but they should go at once, as he was constrained at last to go, and make full and free confession to God. So doing, they will find that God is not slow to pardon them, (but will instead) fill their hearts with peace, and their lips with praise.' -Albert Barnes

We are going to enter a time of confession. You have been given cards with a few prompts on them. I want to invite you to a time of prayer, reflection, and confession. God is leaning in, ready to hear, ready to forgive, ready to restore. He can't wait for you to come to him. Go to him now, Noah will play over you, and I'll come up to close. If this is completely foreign to you, it's ok. God is ready to meet you in this moment.