

What's the most unique thing you've decorated your bedroom with? Unique pictures? Art? Sculptures? Shiplap? What about Ancient Near East poetry that talks about sin, repentance, and God's chastisement and mercy? That's the style preference of the great theologian Augustine of Hippo, or St. Augustine or, as one of my seminary professors called him, Auggie the Big Fat Doggie. He decorated his room with Psalm 32. But not just anywhere. He hung it above his bed so that it was the very first thing he saw every day. Now why would he do that? Augustine has been quoted in saying "The beginning of understanding is to know thyself a sinner." He knew himself, what he was capable of, and how much he needed God, both to stay on the righteous path and to get help when he strayed from it. Psalm 32 was his daily reminder that we all sin and fall short of God's glory, but we worship a gracious and loving and forgiving God who wants to come to him when we've fallen short, tell him about it, and allow him to restore us and reorient our lives around him. And what's good for Augustine is good for all of us.

This morning we wrap up our short series in Psalm 32 called *Weight Lifting*. We are discussing the centrality of the spiritual discipline of confession and repentance. Last week we saw God's heart to forgive and restore our relationship with him. This week, though, I want us to see it's not just about looking back. For many of us, we hear "confession" and think of it as a retrospective once-in-awhile-when-I've-messed-up-really-bad-and-need-to-get-right-with-God thing. It is that, praise be to God. But if we truly want to live the full life Jesus has for us, repentance and confession is a way of life to come before God regularly, offer up where we've fallen short, and ask him to point us back in the right direction. Confession allows God to course-correct our lives. In fact, I'd be willing to say that those I know and those in Scripture who have the fullest, richest relationship with God are those who have the most robust prayer life of repentance and confession. If that's not you, I want to encourage you to think about how your life would be different, better, fuller, if this became a discipline you practiced regularly. God invites us again to it today.

[Psalm 32:6-7] 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.

David begins with "Therefore". He laid out his sin and silence, God's pressure, his confession, and God's blessed forgiveness in vv 1-5. Now he encourages us to do the same. He addresses it to "everyone who is godly", those mindful of God who want to live their lives with and for him. **Confession is for those who are serious about God.** And David says we are to have a sense of urgency about it. He uses the interesting phrase "at a time when you may when you may be found" and speaks of a rush of great waters that threaten someone. In OT culture, water was a place of chaos. David is warning us to change course while we can, pursue the Lord with confession, and avoid the suffering that will come either through the consequences of our sin or the chastisement of God. It's like a doctor saying, "Good news. We caught it early. We can do something about it." David is telling us to catch our sin early and run to God immediately so that he can forgive, restore, **and redirect us.**

For us to get that we have to understand what sin is and its consequences. Sin is disobedience, unfaithfulness, rebellion, and wickedness. It comes between us and God, and confession asks God to forgive us and restore that relationship. But there is also a practical aspect of our obedience and disobedience, and it all goes back to who knows best for us.

I have put this chart together to help make sense of it, comparing when we obey and when we sin. When we sin, we basically act like the lord of our lives. We believe we know what's best for us, put ourselves under our own wisdom and protection, and experience the outcomes or consequences of self-rule. **Sin leaves us on our own, and God will let you go there if you so choose.** The more we go our own way, the more we invite those waters of chaos in.

But repentance and confession turn us back. It **agrees** that God knows best, and we don't, it **restores** the broken fellowship with God, and it asks God to **reorient** our lives according to his authority, wisdom, and will. And that's the best place to be...just look at the smiley face!

Look how it impacts David. The one hiding from God in vv 3-4 now calls God his hiding place, where God can preserve and protect him. He recognized that on his own, he was exposed, and he was going to experience the negative consequences of his sin. But he runs to God and puts himself back under his protection and direction.

Many of you are dissatisfied with your life. You wonder why it's a mess, why there is pain, why you are unfulfilled, why you feel far from God. Could it be that you are living under your own authority, doing your own thing, and experiencing the consequences of it? God doesn't promise a pain-free life if you remain obedient. We live in a broken world. But God loves you so much he's going to tell you what's best for you. If you reject that and keep it hidden from him, you are hiding from God yourself. But if you uncover your sin, you are now hiding in God, and that's the best place to be. Where are you living your life on your own? How's that going for you? Offer that to God in confession, come back under his protection, and see how things change.

Now, I can make all this sound easy, but it's not. We need help. Let's keep reading.

[Psalm 32:8-9] 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 or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

David takes on the role of teacher, pastor, and friend. He's saying "I've been there, done it wrong, done it right, now let me help you get on the right path. Don't be stubborn. Don't invite God's gracious heavy hand to weigh you down. Go to him and let him make it right." David models for us one of the most important ministries we have for each other. We see this Psalm as pages and words in a book. But the truth is it's a public confession, and David gives it to get the help of his brothers and sisters and to encourage us to do the same. James says it this way: **[James 5:16a] ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.**

You and I are in a spiritual battle. If you have put your faith in Jesus, your sins have been forgiven, you have been made new, and you can now live your life for God. But, in his

providence, God left our flesh remaining, that package of sinful desires we do battle with every day. When we lose that battle, we have to be restored. But God has given us one another to help with that fight and to lead each other to the freedom and forgiveness God gives when we mess up. Every Ukrainian soldier is more effective in their fight when they have a fellow countryman by their side. It's the same for us in our spiritual battle.

I've never heard anyone say "Well, I got victory over my sin by bearing down and trying harder." Most say "I was far from God and some wonderful people reminded me of the Gospel, encouraged my confession, pointed me to God, and have helped me stay on the righteous path since." My walk over the last 21 years includes Martha and a couple of friends who know my heart, know my flesh, and help me live righteously and point me to God when I sin. We all need someone in our lives to tell our sin and struggles, ask for their help in finding God and his restoration, and give them permission to call us to repentance when they see us drifting. Could be a Life Group, accountability group, married couples, friends, mentors. You will struggle to do this alone. You need someone.

But I recognize it's a daunting prospect to confess your sins to someone else. What if they judge me? What if they reject me? What if they can't believe what I've done? The truth is, if we understand sin, we shouldn't be surprised by anything someone confesses. But I want to encourage you.

I need to confess to the Lord recent sin, and I confess to you because I want you in the battle with me. I have been harboring bitter resentment towards someone. It ebbs and flows, but it was present this week, and I need God to help me be free of it. I self-medicated with food this week.

Additionally, my prayer life includes "preemptive confession". I am old enough and have sinned enough to know where my flesh is weak, where I am most vulnerable, and where I need God's grace to stay faithful to him. Daily, I pray the following: Lord, I confess my gluttony. Help me to find true satisfaction only in you. Lord, I confess my fear of failure. Forgive my striving and my need for approval. Remind me of my identity in you. Lord, I confess my impatience and anger that comes from it. Give me grace and mercy to give to others. And Lord, I confess my idolatry. Keep my mind and eyes from worthless things.

I believe God hears me every time I pray that prayer and faithfully pours out his grace on me in answering it. But I know it's so much easier to carry that load when I have someone by my side to help. I don't know what your list is, but we all have them...**and they are heavy!** Don't try to carry them on your own. Call in reinforcements. Take a risk. Trust the Lord. Prayer rooms, Life Groups, Gather and Connects. There is someone in this church who wants to bear the weight with you and help you stay on the righteous path and hidden in God. It's so important that we all do because I want you to see what's at stake.

[Psalm 32:10-11] 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!

We are often tempted to believe that true happiness is found in doing whatever we want. But if those desires are far from God's will, most of us have found that's just not true. The most

disobedient part of my life was also the most miserable time of my life. I tried to get filled up by anything but him, and the results were terrible. David knows this himself, and that's why he says disobedience is the path towards sorrow.

So what's the alternative? Being right in the middle of God's love. Now, you might hear that and think emotion, or think God stops loving us when we sin. That's not what David is saying. God's love does and says what is in our best interest. He expressed that love by sending his Son to die for us, and he expresses that love by telling us what is best for us. And when we rest in that, you know what the result is? Joy. **The obedient life is the joyful life.** It's there where we are closest to God and living the full life he makes possible. And because none of us will it perfectly, our loving God has given us the gift of confession to get right and get right back in the middle of his love again. He does not want you weighed down by your sin. He wants to lift it from you to draw you close to him once again and set you free into the incredible life he has for you.

Confess to the cross. Between now and Easter, make 30 minutes of time two times/week to be still before the Lord, ask him to search your heart and show you where you are living apart from him, and confess and repent from it. An old saint by the name of Alphonsus Liguori, said a "good" confession had three parts: 1) A prayerful examination of conscience, 2) sorrow, and 3) a determination to avoid sin going forward. This may be the first time you will practice this and, as I told you last week, God is leaning in and eager to show you, hear you, forgive you, and restore you. There is nothing to fear. **Confession is a place where you will be surrounded by God's love.**

What happens if we become a church that practices this regularly? Imagine the intimacy and joy we will have with God and with each other. Imagine how compelling our witness will be when we are living the full life God makes available. God has given us this gift. Let's all accept it and put it into practice...starting now. I'd like you to stand and, together, I want to pray a modified version of an old Puritan corporate confession:

I have sinned times without number, and been guilty of pride and unbelief, of failure to find your mind in your Word, of neglect to seek you in my daily life.

My transgressions and shortcomings present me with a list of accusations, but I bless you that they will not stand against me, for all have been laid on Christ.

Go on to conquer my corruptions and grant me grace to live above them. Let not the passions of my flesh, nor lustings of my mind bring my spirit into subjection, but rule over me in liberty and power. Purge from me every false desire, every base aspiration, everything contrary to your rule.

I thank you for your wisdom and your love, for all the acts of discipline to which I am subject, for sometimes putting me into the furnace to refine my gold and remove my dross.

Deliver me from every evil habit, everything that dims the brightness of your grace in me, everything that prevents me from taking delight in you. Then shall I bless you, my God and my Savior, for helping me be upright. Amen.

You know what we can know when we say something like that? **32:1-2] 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.**

God is good. God is faithful. God is merciful and gracious. And God wants you to come to him.