

SESSION 5

Recovering from a Fall into Temptation



QUESTION 1:

When has a fresh set of eyes really changed your perspective?

THE POINT

Return to God for forgiveness and restoration.

THE PASSAGE

Psalm 32:1-7

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Anyone who has ever purchased a home knows there can be a big difference in what the buyer or seller sees and what a certified home inspector sees. We may try to look beyond the things that appeal to us—the layout of the house, the size of bedrooms, and so forth—and see a crack in a ceiling or a door that doesn't shut well, but the inspector doesn't stop there. He'll investigate why the ceiling is cracked. He'll crawl under a house and see problems we don't. His trained eye sees things we can't with our limited view.

We can also have a limited view of God. For example, the way you deal with sin says a lot about what you believe about God. If you think God will forgive your sin because it's no big deal, your view of God is too small. If you think God will not forgive your sin because He is a harsh and angry God, your view of God is too small. Let's discover the right view of God, one that will move us to run to Him when we sin.

Psalm 32:1-2

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

The message of Psalm 32 is that there is greater joy in uncovering our sin and finding forgiveness than in trying to cover it up. And a right view of God allows us to do just that. But to understand and experience the joy and blessing of God's forgiveness, we not only have to understand who God is, we also must understand the nature of sin. David used three words that help us with this.

- 1. Transgression.** This is an act of rebellion against God. It's like drawing a line in the sand and saying, "Don't cross this," but the rebellious person crosses the line just to be defiant. Our culture lives in defiance against God. It shakes its fist at His moral law. And that rebellious streak is in our sin nature.
- 2. Sin.** This is a general term that refers to missing the mark. We miss the mark of God's will. Whether it is intentional or unintentional, we fall short, and that's sin.
- 3. Iniquity.** Iniquity indicates crookedness, a wrong act, and a conscious disregard for God's will. Iniquity is willful, planned sin.

Only when we understand the nature of sin do we see the need for God's forgiveness. And only when we understand the seriousness of our sin will we seek the joy of forgiveness.

Notice how David describes the source of his joy. Transgression was forgiven; the guilt was removed and carried away. Sin was covered; atonement was made, and the sin was dealt with. Iniquity was not counted against him; instead, he was counted righteous before God.

The joy and blessing of forgiveness is granted to all persons who come before God with humility, not hiding their sin. David described such an individual as one “in whose spirit there is no guile.” This person does not try to be deceptive about his sin; he “comes clean” and confesses his sin.

One of Satan’s great lies is that God will not forgive us. Satan wants us to believe that God is a harsh judge. If we believe those lies, we will run away from God when we sin. We will try to cover up our sin. There is nothing “freeing” about hiding our sin; we cannot escape the burden of our guilt. But when we admit our sin and turn from it, we experience immense joy when our sin is forgiven, covered, and not counted against us.

God can forgive us in this way because He has dealt with our sin through His Son. Jesus is the one who has not sinned; He never sinned. And God “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Our transgressions were carried away because they were nailed to the cross of Jesus; our sin was covered with the blood of Christ, and our iniquity is not charged against us because it was charged against Jesus.

When we understand who God is and what He has done for us in Jesus, we can run to Him when we sin and confess. The joy and blessing of forgiveness far outweigh any guilt or shame we may have over our sin. The joy and blessing of forgiveness eclipse any reputation or power we think we will retain if we cover up our sin instead. The joy and blessing of forgiveness far surpass any temporary pleasure sin provides.

QUESTION 2:

What good news do you see in these verses?

Psalm 32:3-5

3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. *Selah.*

5 I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. *Selah.*

David penned this psalm after confessing to his most well-known sins. In 2 Samuel 11, David took advantage of Bathsheba and committed adultery with her. He sought to cover up his sin by calling her husband Uriah home from the front lines of battle in hopes he would spend intimate time with his wife. When that didn't work, David sought to get Uriah drunk so he would go to her. When that didn't work, David had Uriah murdered. It wasn't until the prophet Nathan confronted him that David confessed his sin.

David's description of the effects of sin presents a powerful image. Covering up our sin makes us miserable. We think of sin as a spiritual issue, but sin affected David down to his bones. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. . . . my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

Elsewhere in Scripture we see the connection between sin and our physical bodies. When warning the Corinthian Christians about how they were abusing the Lord's Supper, Paul said, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). James connected confession of sin to overcoming illness.

The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed (Jas. 5:15-16).

Unconfessed sin can make us emotionally depressed. I don't mean to imply that clinical depression is due to unconfessed sin; there is depression that is connected to mental illness and calls for medical attention. But David helps us understand that unconfessed sin can lead to being depressed or despondent. His emotions were wrapped up in "roaring all the day long."

For the believer, our sin does not destroy our relationship to God our Father, but it does harm our fellowship with Him. When we sin and don't confess it, we begin to feel distant from God. But because we are His children, He will not let us go. One of the ways He pursues us—"For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me"—by convicting us of our sin and allowing us to become miserable in unconfessed sin. David understood that God was doing just that because it was God's hand that was heavy on him.

It's an act of love when God's hand is heavy on us because of our sin. In His mercy, grace, and love, God seeks to pull us back from sin and back into a strong relationship with Him. David's son, Solomon, recognized this truth and wrote: "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Prov. 3:11-12). Jesus told the church of Laodicea, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

The good news is that with confession and repentance comes forgiveness. In verse 5, David used the same three words he had used earlier—transgression, sin, iniquity—but in reverse order. David held nothing back in what he confessed! There is no sin that our God will not forgive when we confess it. There is no guilt He will not take away when we reveal it.

QUESTION 3:

Why is confession such an important step in our journey back to God?

Psalm 32:6-7

6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

7 Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. *Selah*.

The great irony of Psalm 32 is that when we sin, we try to cover it up. But God invites us to run to Him and uncover our sin. When we do, He covers our sin in the blood of His Son. What a glorious gospel! God wants to do the very thing we want done: cover our sin. When we turn from our sin to Christ, He forgives us and our fellowship with Him is restored.

The concept of forgiveness comes from the financial world. When someone incurs a debt, he or she must pay the debt in full. Likewise, our sin incurs a debt, except it is a debt we cannot pay. God, in His mercy, provides a way for our debt to be forgiven through the death of His Son on the cross. Jesus shed His blood to pay our debt. Now, all who confess their sins and turn to God will find forgiveness. God, then, is the only one we can come to and find forgiveness. Because only God can forgive our sin, He is the only one we can run to for forgiveness. “For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found.” There is good news in that statement, because it applies to everyone. It is an offer to anyone and everyone who recognizes their sin and comes to God.

DIGGING DEEPER

OUR FORGIVING GOD

The truth that God forgives His people when they sin against Him

made the faith of Judaism unique among ancient religions. For further explanation, see the article on pages 132-135.

God forgives the sin of those who are faithful. In the immediate context, this points to the one who is faithful to the covenant God made with Israel on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19–24). Even when the people of Israel so quickly sinned against God after receiving the covenant (Ex. 32), God did not abandon them. Instead, He renewed the covenant. As He did so, He reminded Moses that He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (34:6-7). Essentially, the one who believes in God and is faithful to the covenant will receive forgiveness as often as he or she comes to God and confesses their sin.

Hear the urgency in this passage. We are to seek God and pray immediately. When we sin, we’re tempted to run and hide from God. David knew from personal experience that the best thing to do was run to God immediately and lay his sin before Him.

It’s far easier to do that when we know and understand who God is. David described God as our refuge, a fortress we run to in times of trouble (Ps. 46:1). David called God “my hiding place.” Throughout Scripture, floods represent chaos and judgment, and in verse 7 we have a beautiful reminder that when we run to God and give Him our sin, the floodwaters of chaos and judgment will not reach us. God is our hiding place, keeping us from getting caught up and drowning in the flood of turmoil and judgment. When we run to God and confess our sin, He protects us from trouble.

QUESTION 4:

How have you experienced God as your hiding place?

When we see God in His graciousness, mercy, and love, not only will we run to Him when we sin, we will also want to avoid sinning against Him again. Love draws us to worship Him and please Him. Let’s praise this wonderful God who surrounds us with joyful shouts of deliverance!

How can our group help one another recover from temptation when we fall?

On the graph below, with 1 = hide it and 10 = confess immediately, mark what describes your tendencies in regard to confessing sin.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Hide it</i>							<i>Confess immediately</i>		

If you rated yourself less than 10, pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you not only the gravity of sin but also the goodness of God's grace.

LIVE IT OUT

When you return to God, you will receive forgiveness and restoration. Here are some ways you can apply this truth from Psalm 32 to your life:

- ▶ **Confess.** If you are still groaning under the weight of your sin, make Psalm 32:5 your prayer. Confess your sin to God and embrace His forgiveness.
- ▶ **Rejoice.** Write a note or prayer, rejoicing in God's forgiveness. Consider God's goodness and mercy, and express to Him your thankfulness.
- ▶ **Talk.** If you struggle with continuing pangs of guilt, talk to your pastor or a trusted Christian friend. Seek support and assurance in discovering the truth and reality that, when God says He forgives, He forgives completely.





Capernaum, as viewed from the Sea of Galilee. At Capernaum, Simon Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive a brother.

OUR FORGIVING GOD

By Blakeley Winslow

Psalm 32 highlights that the ancient Jews envisioned their God's forgiving nature in a markedly different manner from their Near-Eastern peers. Its message mirrors one of the distinctive and revolutionary concepts of ancient Judaism: God desires a personal relationship with His children. As part of this relationship, we, like David, must frankly confess our flaws in God's presence, while trusting in the forgiving power of His boundless mercy.

IN OTHER RELIGIONS

The foundational teaching that "Yahweh is one" clearly demarcated Judaism from the elaborate polytheistic hierarchies of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines, and Canaanites. Yahweh thus related to His people on a unique ethical plane, to which other ancient Near-Eastern belief systems offer no clear parallel. The ancient Israelites had God alone, and with Him alone did they contend when they sinned.¹ By contrast, when these other ancient peoples sought forgiveness, they had to contend with a whole host of deities.

Many of ancient Israel's contemporaries honored their gods for whatever prosperity or wealth he or she could bestow in return. Forgiveness often entailed regaining the favor of the gods rather than truly repenting from wrongdoing. Ancient Egyptians believed their gods showed mercy because the people provided care for the likenesses of the deities. Egyptians believed their gods' "existence was ultimately dependent upon the existence of mortals."² In contrast, the Old Testament prophets constantly stressed that people should worship God for His inherent nature—and not merely for a material blessing He might grant. Furthermore, Yahweh demanded ethical living. Genuine worship and ethical living were far more important to Him than sacrifices (Amos 5:21-24). Egyptian prayers often took the form of spiritual bartering in which priests would make offerings to the gods in exchange for tangible favors.³ As a result, Egyptians were usually more interested either in gaining material treasures from the gods or avoiding divine punishment, rather than receiving the purely spiritual gifts of forgiveness and restoration, for which David longed in Psalm 32.

Like their Jewish neighbors, Canaanites at times employed a system of animal sacrifices to atone for sin. But their penitential practices also included the occasional child

sacrifice, something Yahweh abhorred and Scripture expressly forbade (Lev. 18:21). The Canaanites made their offerings both in hopes of gaining forgiveness and of obtaining material boons including good harvests and fortune in war. The Canaanites possessed a cyclical belief system, inherently tied to the changing seasons and unexplainable occurrences in nature, while the Jews worshiped a profoundly historical God, who stood above nature and over all human affairs. Other ancient Mesopotamian religions employed different methods for dealing with sin,⁴ including rituals similar to exorcisms, intended solely to alleviate divine anger and requiring neither confession of wrongdoing nor repentance.

PSALM 32

Turning to Psalm 32, we find that the soul-cleansing forgiveness God offers requires only a true and heartfelt spirit of repentance. Psalm 32 is one of the 13 Maschil psalms, Maschil being a Hebrew word that implies both meditation for the author and instruction for the readers.⁵ As we analyze these verses, both the confessional and instructional aims become apparent. In verse 1, David proclaimed, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."⁶ The Hebrew verb *nasa* means "to forgive," but further connotes "to be lifted up."⁷ The vivid image the psalm gives



In Amman, Jordan, ruins of a Byzantine church, which was constructed inside what had been the citadel at ancient Ammon. Uriah was killed while storming the citadel. The earliest fortifications here date to 1800 BC.

is of a person with his head bowed in sorrow at the recognition of sin, who is then able to lift it up—or have God lift it up—in recognition of the forgiveness He granted. By seeking pardon for our shortcomings, we are fully able to become ourselves again in God’s presence. Verse 2 reminds that the blessed man will be the one “in whose spirit there is no guile.” The key to asking for forgiveness is to admit fully all the wrong we have

done and to refuse to withhold, conceal, or minimize any sin, no matter how grievous.

Psalm 32 further emphasizes that deceiving God about one’s sinfulness will only cause further grief. Verses 3 and 4 speak of the negative consequences that ensue from such unacknowledged sin. The vivid Hebrew verb employed in verse 3 is a form of *balah*, meaning “to become old and worn out.”⁸ David experienced the

reality that delaying one's repentance hurts a person not only spiritually but also emotionally and physically. If Psalm 32 is connected to Psalm 51, as some believe, then David's direct acknowledgment of sin in 32:5 could refer not only to his confession to God but also to the personal confession he made before the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 12.⁹

This reminds us that confession of sin, before both God and others whom we might have wronged, is a way of life that must be practiced daily. The psalm then encourages the confession of sins and repentance at the outset, lest our wrongdoings should accumulate like a flood and eventually overtake the unwary. Indeed this Maschil psalm gives us insights into the writer's deeply personal confession to God and also charges the reader likewise to confess and repent in order to experience the healing grace that ensues when we display complete honesty before the Almighty.

IN REPENTANCE

Psalm 32 ultimately teaches us much about divine forgiveness. The Old Testament Law does not represent a mere list of obligations that persons should meet in order to appease God. Instead, it involves a comprehensive code of ethical teachings, which address all possible dimensions of life.¹⁰ Thus the ancient Jews engaged

the question of sin and forgiveness in a much more thorough and systematic way than did any of their peers.

While the Old Testament prophets always featured as a central theme fidelity to the Law, they were equally concerned that an inward spirit of repentance accompanied the outward rituals related to seeking forgiveness.¹¹ Thus to say the forgiving God of the Old Testament is unique is to confirm the singular nature of the Jewish Law, which as Christians we can recognize and respect as part of our religious heritage. Judaism established a revolutionary concept of a personal accountability to God. The forgiveness the Old Testament Jews sought through diligent and continual adherence to the Law is now offered to all through the once-for-all sacrifice of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ.¹²

1. Hence, David's confession: "Against You, You only, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4, NKJV).

2. Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin, *Ancient Egypt* (London: Anness Publishing, 2003), 323. The ancient Egyptians practiced a literal form of idolatry, in which temple priests cleaned, dressed, and fed images of the gods daily. Jeremiah 10 mocks such devotion to powerless, man-made statues.

3. *Ibid.*, 372.

4. Ronald de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 434.

5. Martin S. Rozenberg and Bernard M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation and Commentary* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1999), 181-83. The authors explain that Jews traditionally read Psalm 32 in synagogues as part of the observances.

6. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

7. "af'n" (nasa, lift) in Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1906; repr. Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 669.

8. "hl'B" (balah, to become old and worn out) in *ibid.*, 115.

9. Avrohom Chaim Feuer, *Tehillim: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1985), 383.

10. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 149. 11. *Ibid.*, 454-55.

12. See Hebrews 4:14-16.

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