

The Joy of Being Forgiven

Psalm 32:1-5

Intro

Harboring deep and painful secrets is damaging spiritually, emotionally, and physically. An article in the April 2017 issue of *Psychology Today* highlights studies that have backed up the Bible's view. As a matter of fact some of the principles in the article are found in the Bible – perhaps without the author being aware. They've been there centuries ago in Scripture.

In the article we read that a wealth of studies from the 1980's to our present time have led to the general conclusion that: "Secret keepers are more likely to suffer from headaches, nausea, and back pain than others, and more cases of hypertension, flu, and cancer occur among those hiding trauma." Also those living with shame and a guilt-ridden conscience.

Other research has uncovered more harmful effects: Dale Larson, of Santa Clara University, did a meta-analysis and found that "secretive people are more depressed, shame-prone, anxious, and sensitive to judgment, which makes them both tight-lipped and vulnerable to illness."

Denial, rationalizing and minimizing fears, pain, addictions and guilt is common among those who keep secrets. Clinical psychologist Nando Pelosi writes, "Self-deception is just artful distraction from solving the problem. By not dealing with it, I can sweep it under the rug. That becomes a temporary way to feel better, but it's not lasting." In the end it is harmful.

(Source: Carlin Flora, *Unlocking the Vault*, Psychology Today, April 2017).

A lot of it has to do with guilt. Perhaps some of you are under a load of guilt this morning. Or maybe some of you are under the guilt of things you did years ago and it's kept you in bondage. Many people harbour lifelong secrets too painful to confront, let alone admit openly. The guilt of those secrets need to be dealt with or they will harm you in the long run.

In the Bible King David is a prime example of harbouring guilt and how it almost had a toll on his life. But in the end he did something that restored him and gave him a new lease on life.

Guilt

Before we look at Psalm 32 today, let me talk about guilt and what it does to us. Guilt has two sides: the good and the bad side.

Good Side of Guilt

1. Guilt Warns Us

On the good side guilt is the early warning sign of danger, the first clue that something is wrong in your life. Mark Twain once said that, "*Man is the only animal that blushes, or needs to.*" How true. Psychologists since Freud have argued that guilt plays a huge role in the development of morality. Humans have a complex method of registering moral failure. The guilty conscience is that inner voice that warns us. Guilt acts as a deterrent against bad behavior. It can proceed to have a powerful effect on the body, mind, soul and spirit. Guilt reminds us ever so often of our place, as moral beings that we are accountable to God. Guilt serves as a prod for us to deal with a problem, a sin. It is a warning light to deal with sin in our lives.

2. Guilt Leads Us to Repentance

The goal of guilt is to restore health and a rightful relationship and that comes through repentance. That's the ultimate goal of guilt. When we mess up we need guilt to lead us to confession and to repentance. Something in us resists repentance at all costs. At times we would rather deny, lie, blame, rationalize – anything but repent. Jesus' earliest words in His ministry were "repent." Repentance was

our Lord's consist theme, repeated to a variety of audiences that include rich and poor, powerful and weak, religious and non-religious alike. The good side of guilt should always lead us to repent.

Bad Side of Guilt

If we harbour guilt and do not deal with it, it can be damaging to our lives. There are many who live with the burden of a guilty past and a guilt ridden conscience.

1. Guilt destroys our confidence.

Guilt can make us feel insecure because we're always worried that someone is going to find out what we're really like, or what we've really done.

Many years ago, Sir Arthur Doyle, the author of the Sherlock Holmes novels, played a prank on five of the most prominent men in England. He sent an anonymous note to each one that simply said this, "All is found out, flee at once." Within 24 hours all five men had left the country.

That's exactly the picture described in Proverbs 28:1: "*The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.*" Is guilt destroying your confidence?

2. Guilt damages our relationships.

When people live with dark secrets, unconfessed sin they can respond to people in wrong ways. They become impatient with others? They find themselves reacting in anger or fits of rage? They pull back from those they love. Guilt can alienate us from each other and especially from God.

3. Guilt keeps us stuck in the past.

Do you continuously replay your sins over and over in your mind? Someone has said, "Guilt cannot change the past just like worry cannot change the future. But it can make you miserable today and every other day."

While many of us wrestle with feelings of guilt, few of us take our real guilt seriously. Instead of confessing our sins, we often bury them or just try to ignore them. If we ignore them we will waste away. That's exactly what happened to King David...

Please turn in your Bibles with me to Psalm 32.

Background to Psalm 32

This psalm was written by King David. He was a haunted man after he had seduced the wife of his most loyal soldier, Uriah, and arranged with his top army general for his murder. For the best part of the year David put up a bold front and tried to hide it. Then God sent Nathan the prophet to confront and reprove David and deal with the guilt in his life.

After that experience David wrote Psalm 51 in which he promised he would teach transgressors God's ways. He did so by writing this Psalm 32. From his own bitter experience David intends in Psalm 32 to set forth a sermon in song on the nature of sin, what happens when it is concealed, and what happens when it is confessed, cleansed and conquered? He wrote this psalm to help us know that we can be fully restored and completely forgiven no matter what we've done. We can be truly set free from our guilt and guilty past.

Psalm 32 is both a sermon and a song. If you look at the very beginning of Psalm 32, right before verse 1, you'll see the phrase, "*A maskil.*" This was a literary or musical term to indicate that the words to follow are very important. In other words, this is a "preaching psalm" given to us so that we can learn from the experiences of another.

David wants us to pay particular attention to this inspired instruction so that we'll understand and embrace our need for forgiveness. With that in mind, let's see what we can learn from this psalm.

Psalm 32:1-2 "The Joy of Forgiveness"

¹ *Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

² *Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

The very first word we find in verse one is "*blessed.*" This has a very rich meaning that cannot be defined with just one word. We could say, "How happy!" or "Oh, the bliss of!" In addition, this word is in the plural so we could say, "Oh, the multiple joy and happiness, and the abundance of blessings to the one whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

True Happiness

If you're not at peace with God, the one who created you, you will never be completely happy. True happiness is to know God and being at peace with Him. When you feel right with God you feel right with yourself. That is the ultimate happiness.

God is the giver of happiness, joy and fulfillment. If you're out of fellowship with God you always have this unsettled feeling, this discontentment with life. It's like a car that needs a tune-up really badly. When you know that you're right with God and feel secure in His love and knowing that He is watching over you and guiding you, THEN you can experience true happiness and know that He has forgiven your sins and the guilt of your sins.

4 Descriptions for Sin

David provides a four-fold description of sin in the first two verses and in verse 5 of Psalm 32.

1/ Sin is a defiance

Transgression means a rebellion, revolt against lawful authority. It is what children manifest when they say "No!" to a parental command. It's what makes people test every rule and restriction placed upon them. "I'll do what I want to do!"

2/ Sin is a defect

The term "sin" comes from a Hebrew root word that means "to miss the mark" or "to fall short." It means something missing in one's life, a defect, it is coming short of the glory of God – what He represents.

3/ Sin is a distortion

The word for "iniquity" means something "perverse," and it comes from a Hebrew root meaning "bent" or "crooked." Human nature is warped and bent instead of being straight and truthful. The image is of a tree that is gnarled and twisted.

4/ Sin is deception

The word "*deceit*" at the end of verse 2 stands for insincerity, and a cunning spirit.

David in his sin with Bathsheba and in the murder of her husband Uriah had acted in revolt against God's authority and command. He had fallen short of the moral spiritual standards. He expressed the perversity and crookedness of his heart. He had cunningly sought to hide his sin and, when that failed, to pretend that nothing was wrong. All this he confesses in his opening comments of Psalm 32.

The point of using these four different words is to remind us that all types of sin and wrongdoing can be forgiven. We defiantly disobey, we miss the mark, we're inherently crooked and we are cunning.

But no matter what we've done, we can be forgiven and restored.

3 Descriptions for Forgiveness

Now, in Psalm 32 in the first two verses David uses 3 words to express the fullness of our forgiveness.

1/ *"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven."* The word *"forgiven"* means, "to lift a heavy burden and carry it away." Our transgressions are taken away. Instead of trying to tug them along with us, we allow the Lord to lift them from us.

2/ *"Whose sins are covered."* The word *"covered"* refers to that which is concealed. What is offensive to God is put out of sight. The idea is that our sins are so covered that they will never appear again.

3/ *"Whose sin the Lord does not count against him."* The third phrase, *"not count against"* is rich in meaning. We get the words "reckon" or "impute" from this term. This is the same word used in Genesis 15:6, where God "reckoned" righteousness to Abraham. God does not count our sins against us and in their place he has imputed the righteousness of another. God erases our sin-debt from the books as if it never happened. Basically God keeps no record of our wrongs, our sin. What a blessing!!

No wonder David refers to the blessedness of forgiven transgressions, the covering of sins, and the erasing of our iniquities. According to Isaiah 43:25, when God forgives, He no longer remembers our sins: *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."*

Conclusion

In the last part of Psalm 32:2, David says that God forgives and does not hold sin against the one in "whose spirit is no deceit." That doesn't mean someone who has no faults but rather refers to those who readily admit their sins. It's the idea of authenticity. It means that we are not deceitful in acknowledging our sin. Listen carefully. It's not a matter of trying to be perfect but recognizing that we're not. We need to fully admit that we are twisted transgressors and selfish sinners. Far too many of us are dishonest about our sins. Don't be deceitful with God, He desires truth, honesty and openness.

In conclusion I want to share with you a story of a man who was telling his friend about an argument he had with his wife. "Every time we have an argument she gets historical." The friend corrected him and said, "You mean hysterical, don't you?" "No, I mean historical. Every time we fight she drags up stuff from the past and holds it against me!"

Friends, God will not get "historical" with you if you have confessed your sins to Him.

I love Jeremiah 31:34, *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

After confessing and repenting - we do not need to live under the guilt of our sins. We are free because of what Jesus did for us! *"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36).

That's the joy of being forgiven, free from guilt, free from a heavy conscience and restored in a rightful relationship with God. It is healing to our soul, our spirit and our body.