

Main Idea: Psalm 32 is a thanksgiving psalm. In it David shares a personal testimony about God’s forgiveness, the difference it made in his life, and can make in ours. David gives us four insights into the forgiven man in this psalm.

- I. The blessing of a forgiven man (1-2).
 - A. We are all sinners.
 - B. The blessed person is the one who has experienced God’s provision for his sin.
 1. God removes his sin.
 2. God covers his sin.
 3. God does not count his sin against him.
 4. God takes the deceit out of his spirit.
- II. The experience of a forgiven man (3-5)
 - A. I tried to ignore my sin (3a).
 - B. I felt the consequences of my sin (3b-4).
 1. There was physical pain.
 2. There was mental anguish.
 3. There was divine displeasure.
 - C. I confessed my sin to the Lord (5).
- III. The desire of a forgiven man (6-7)
 - A. He wants others to call on God (6).
 - B. He wants to experience more of God (7).
- IV. The instruction of a forgiven man (8-11)
 - A. He tells us not to be like a mule (9).
 - B. He encourages us to trust the Lord (10).
 - C. He says that forgiven people have cause for celebration (11).

Make It Personal: If we have been forgiven, we have reason to give thanks.

Not long ago I had the privilege to spend some time with two people who were at odds. A mutual friend had asked me if I would counsel them, and they came. Their story isn’t unique. They’d sinned against each other, both ways, and they were frustrated and hurting and confused about what to do next.

So I opened God’s Word. One of the places we turned was to Ephesians 4:32, and I taught them one of the most basic lessons of Christianity, what God has to say about forgiveness, both how to seek it and then how to grant it. “Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

“Do you have any sins for which you have not asked forgiveness of the other?” I asked. The man nodded his head. When I asked if he wanted to put into practice what he had just learned, he proceeded to speak.

“I’m sorry for...” (and then he spelled out his specific sin) “I was wrong for what I did to you. Will you forgive me?”

Before she responded, I reminded the young lady again that God asked her to do with him what He had done with her. To forgive means you are making a threefold promise. You are saying, “I will never bring this sin up again to you. I will never talk to others about it. I will, by God’s help, never dwell on it again.”

“Is that what you want to do now?” I asked her. And she responded without hesitation, turning to him, “Yes, I forgive you.”

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

What was interesting was the man's answer when I asked him this follow-up question. "Have you ever in your life done what you just did now? Have you ever admitted your sin and asked someone to forgive you?"

And he said to me, "No, never." The tragedy is, he's not alone. This community is filled with people who don't know the joy that comes from seeking and experiencing forgiveness.

"How do you feel now?" I asked the couple just before they left.

They responded with the same word. "Better," they said, with smiles now filling their once frustrated faces.

I want to preach two special Thanksgiving messages today. This past week you've probably expressed thanks to the Lord for His blessings in your life, for eternal life in Christ, for the Bible, for peace and joy, for things like family, food, freedom, jobs, and health. And God deserves our thanks for these and every blessing.

But I want to talk today about two very special blessings that we enjoy if we are in Christ and for which God deserves our heart-felt thanks. This evening we're going to talk about giving thanks for the incredible blessing of *the church*, as we open 1 Peter 2 together. And this morning, I want to urge you to give thanks to God for *the blessing of forgiveness*.

No one understands the blessing of forgiveness like someone who has sinned greatly and yet just heard the words, "I forgive you." That's why I've chosen Psalm 32 as our text. The writer of this psalm, David, knew well the blessing of forgiveness.

David, of course, had sinned greatly. Though God's chosen man for leading Israel, David sinned against God and Israel by abusing his authority, committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then instigating the murder of her husband, Uriah.

We don't know for sure which sin David had in mind when he said in verse 5, "You forgave the guilt of my sin." Was it his adultery and murder? Was it some other sin in his life? He doesn't tell us. That's because he's writing this psalm for the benefit of others. It's a *maskil*, a Hebrew term that suggests this is an instructive psalm. We don't need to know the specifics of David's sin. We have our own sins to consider, and our own need of forgiveness, and of giving thanks for sins forgiven.

The *Bible Knowledge Commentary* says Psalm 32 is a psalm of thanksgiving, one of the "declarative praise psalms," along with Psalms 21, 30, 34, 40, and 66. This psalm shows us the appropriate response that should follow the amazing experience of God's forgiveness.

We learn from David four insights about forgiveness in this psalm. We see the *blessing* of a forgiven man, the *experience* of a forgiven man, the *desire* of a forgiven man, and the *instruction* of a forgiven man.

I. The blessing of a forgiven man (1-2).

Verses 1-2 "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

Notice David's first word. *Blessed*. Years later, the Son of David, Jesus the Messiah, began His Sermon the Mount, "*Blessed* are the poor in spirit." *Blessed* signifies the state of being happy, content, whole, all is well. We're about to hear what's true of this person. Who is the blessed person? The one with lots of money? No. The biggest house? No. The one with no regrets in life. No. It's the *forgiven* person, says David. "Blessed is he whose transgressions are *forgiven*."

The truth is...

A. We are all sinners. Without exception. Spurgeon makes the point that Psalm 1 describes the *result* of holy blessedness (“Blessed is the man that walks...”), while Psalm 32 details the *cause* of it. And what’s the cause? Perfection? No. You don’t have to be perfect to be blessed, for other than Christ Himself, there is no such person. We are *all* sinners.

B. The blessed person is the one who has experienced God’s provision for his sin. David likely penned Psalm 32 after Psalm 51. As the heading over Psalm 51 indicates, David wrote Psalm 51 “when the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.”

Listen to David’s cry in the first three verses of Psalm 51, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”

When David wrote Psalm 51, he felt dirty. He couldn’t escape the ugly reminders of the sin that stained his life. He was guilty, and he knew it. And more importantly, he knew God knew it. So what does he do? He asks the Lord for mercy, to... *Wash me. Cleanse me. Create in me a pure heart. Restore to me the joy of your salvation.*

And what did God do? That’s what David tells us in Psalm 32, and it’s beautiful to behold!

Friends, you’re about to see the cause of true blessedness. It’s not living a perfect life. It’s hearing God say to you, a rebel sinner, “Though you are guilty as charged, I absolve you. I pardon you. I declare you to be free from all charges and penalties.”

Hearing that divine announcement produces in a person joy unspeakable that must be spoken! Spurgeon rightly says, “Self-righteous Pharisees have no portion in this blessedness.”¹ That’s because a Pharisee thinks he deserves his good standing with God. He approaches God on the basis of merit, not mercy.

But there’s no blessedness in the merit-based approach to life, only the burden of having to perform again, and again, and again. The blessed person, says David, is the one who experiences God’s provision for his sin.

And what is God’s provision? David uses five phrases in verses 1-2 to tell us five things that God does for the forgiven man.

1. *God removes his sin.* That’s what the Hebrew term translated “forgive” means, “to lift up, to carry off.” When God forgives a transgression, that’s what He does with it. He lifts it, carries it away, and *removes* it from the sinner.

2. *God covers his sin.* “Whose sins are *covered*.” This Hebrew term means “to keep hidden, to keep from others knowing, to conceal, to *cover*.” When God forgives the sinner, He hides the sin. He puts it somewhere so He doesn’t have to see it any longer, and He doesn’t want the sinner to see it any longer either.

3. *God does not count his sin against him.* “Against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,” says the ESV. The verb means “to credit, account, consider, reckon.” When we sin, we are doing that which displeases God. When God forgives us, He is saying, “I no longer hold your sin against you.”

By the way, it’s worth noting that David uses several different words for sin here. He talks about “transgressions” in verse 1 (Hebrew *pesa*), which signifies rebellion, revolt, defiance to authority. He mentions “sins” in verse 1 (Hebrew *hata*), which means an offense against a moral standard. In verse 2 he uses a different word for “sin” (Hebrew *awon*), which describes iniquity, wickedness, doing wrong. The point is, we sin in

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, p. 81.

different ways. Sometimes sin is flat our rebellion. Sometimes it's missing the mark. Sometimes it's slipping up. But it's all a hell-deserving offense to a holy and just God.

Now look carefully at what God does when He forgives. David says, He removes the transgression. He covers the sin. He no longer considers the iniquity. But that's not all. God does something else for the sinner, namely...

4. *God takes the deceit out of his spirit.* "And in whose spirit is no deceit." The truth is, if God doesn't do this, there will be no forgiveness. That's because those who are not forgiven have deceit in their spirit. They are believing lies. Just think of some of the lies that keep people from experiencing God's forgiveness...

"Me? Sin? I didn't sin. It was just a mistake."

"Well, maybe I shouldn't have done it, but you can't blame me, not after the terrible things people have done to me in my life. It's not my fault I do what I do."

"I don't need forgiveness. It's not that big a deal. Other people do worse."

Friends, if that kind of deceit is in your heart, you'll never seek and experience God's forgiveness. There are other lies, too. Some convince themselves they don't need forgiveness. Others believe they're too far gone for it.

"What I did was too bad, too big. God would never forgive me."

"After what I've done, I'm beyond hope."

Again, listen to David. As long as there's deceit in your spirit, you will not experience God's forgiveness. But when by God's grace you stop believing the lies and start telling yourself and Him the truth, then you're ready for the blessedness of forgiveness.

But how can God just remove, cover, and not count sin against a person? Even if they confess their sin, the wages of sin is death, isn't it? The answer is, God doesn't *just* remove, cover, and not count sin. He does so on the basis of the death of an acceptable substitute. In David's day, that acceptable substitute was a lamb that died in David's place. That lamb provided a temporary covering for sin until the final lamb was offered, Jesus, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

It's worth noting that Paul quotes Psalm 32 in Romans 4:6-8 to make the point that God forgives sinners, not on the basis of their merit, but Christ's merit. "David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.'"

It's said that one day some friends asked Martin Luther which of the Psalms were the best. He replied, "*Psalmi Paulini*" (the psalms of Paul). His friends probed further wanting to know which were the psalms of Paul. Luther said, "The 32nd, the 51st, the 130th, and 143rd. For they all teach that the forgiveness of our sins comes, without the law and without works, to the man who believes, and therefore I call them Pauline Psalms."²

Martin Luther, like Paul and like David, knew the blessing of being a forgiven man. Do you? If you do, you have cause for thanksgiving! Secondly, David talks about...

II. The experience of a forgiven man (3-5)

In verses 3-5 David shares with us exactly what he was doing and how he was feeling when he was in sin. The thrill of his one night with Bathsheba was followed by months and months of grief, heartache, and pain. You're about to hear David become very

² Martin Luther, quote taken from Spurgeon, p. 86.

transparent as he shares the process he went through to experience God's forgiveness. He says he did three things with regards to his sin. First, he says...

A. I tried to ignore my sin (3a). Look at the first four words of verse 3, "When I kept silent." Our first instinct right after we sin is *not* to confess it. It's to hide it, to excuse it, to justify it, to blame it on others, to rationalize it. David said he *kept silent*.

Of course, that doesn't mean he stopped talking altogether. He was still leading the country, still going to the temple for worship, still doing a lot of talking about a lot of subjects. People in sin are often big talkers. But there's one subject that would not come from David's lips. When it came to *confession of sin*, he says, "I kept silent."

By the way, it's not impolite to try and help a sinner face his sin. In fact, it's the loving thing to do when a sinner who has found help and hope for dealing with his sin, to talk to a fellow sinner about how he can experience the same. That's what's going on in Psalm 32. As Eric Lane observes, "This is why it is called a *Maskil*, which probably means 'instruction.' There is nothing in which we more need instructing than repentance and forgiveness."³

What happens when a sinner, rather than confessing his sin, tries to ignore it? David tells us...

B. I felt the consequences of my sin (3b-4). "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah."

We can break the consequences of David's sin into three categories. To one degree or another, we too experience these consequences when we ignore our sin.

1. *There was physical pain.* He says his bones wasted and his strength was sapped. He felt completely exhausted.⁴ If you want to get old fast, just keep ignoring the sins that God is graciously commanding you to face and forsake. There are physiological consequences to violating God's commands. "Many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep," wrote Paul to a church that needed to face some sin (1 Cor. 11:30). And then said, "But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment (1 Cor 11:31)."

David talks about a second consequence. One, there was physical pain. Two...

2. *There was mental anguish.* "My bones wasted away *through my groaning*." Interesting combination of words. Silent but groaning. As far as confessing my sin, I kept *silent*. But as a result, I started *groaning*.

That's what unconfessed sin will do to a person that belongs to God. If a man is God's child, he will be miserable as long as he persists in his state of unconfessed sin. Which is why he often tries to mask his misery with substances, like drink or food, or fills his life with activity, like pornography, or even good activity like his job, or the kids, or community service. Anything to drown out a convicted conscience that won't stop reminding him of what he wants to forget.

Friends, regret is a powerful thing. If you could do it all over again, you'd do it differently. But you can't. It's done, and the mental anguish won't leave.

But it's not just the physical and mental. Those are just symptomatic of the root problem. David says...

3. *There was divine displeasure.* "Your hand was heavy upon me." That's what makes sin *sin*. We're not talking about simply disappointing yourself, or those around you. When you sin you are breaking the standard of your Maker and Master, the God of

³ Eric Lane, *Psalms 1-89*, p. 153.

⁴ See Psalm 38:1-10 where David elaborates on physical turmoil he felt.

heaven and earth. “Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,” acknowledged David in Psalm 51:4.

So is this physical pain and mental anguish and divine displeasure a bad thing? Actually, it’s a very gracious gift from God Himself, a wake-up call, you might say. If He didn’t love the sinner, God would either just let him keep going merrily in his sin, or destroy him on the spot. But the pain, the anguish, the conviction, is actually a demonstration of His mercy. It’s the engine light blinking on your car dash. It’s the chest pain that says your heart is about to stop.

And in David’s case, it worked. At first, he says, I tried to ignore my sin. Then I felt the consequences of my sin. Then by God’s grace he responded as God desired. How?

C. I confessed my sin to the Lord (5). Notice verse 5, “Then [here’s God’s purpose for the pain and anguish] I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’— and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.”

What did David do? First, *I acknowledged my sin to you*. That’s the opposite of ignoring the sin, of trying to cover it up. You admit it, first to yourself, but most importantly to the Lord and to all appropriate others (as David is doing in this psalm, for he knows his sin is public knowledge and he wants his confession to be public too).

Notice that David recalls, “I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the Lord.’” There’s a process here. It starts when David is all by himself. He admitted his sin. He also resolved that he would proceed to confess his sin to the Lord.

The verb *confess* comes from the Hebrew *yada* which means “to make an admission, to publicly admit to something, usually a wrong of some kind.” Leviticus 5:5 says, “When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned.” Proverbs 28:13 says, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” That’s what Daniel did in Daniel 9:4, “I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: “O Lord, the great and awesome God...”

Where did David make his confession? He doesn’t say, but we can be sure at some point he ended up at the tabernacle. We know that because that’s where the altar was, and as God commanded, that’s where God said the sinner had to bring the appropriate sacrifice for his sin.

So David confessed his sin. And the result? *And you forgave the guilt of my sin*, says David. Amazing. When David stopped covering his sin, God covered it for him.

It’s worth noting what David *doesn’t* say here. He doesn’t say, “I did 1,000 good deeds to compensate for my sins.” Nor, “I prayed 1,000 prayers.” Nor, “God put me on probation to see if I was sincere.” Rather, he says, “I *said*, ‘I will confess,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

That’s astounding. He says that even before he made the confession, when he simply *said* he was going to confess, the Lord saw his heart, knew the confession was coming, *and forgave the guilt of his sin!*

That’s all? Just confess. It takes more, doesn’t it? Yes, but not for the sinner. For the substitute. Friends, Jesus paid a terrible price for our forgiveness, dying as a ransom payment on Calvary’s cross. And He paid the price in full. That’s why we don’t go to a tabernacle today to make confession, and we don’t even need to go to a church building. We approach God directly, through Jesus Christ Himself.

As the apostle John explains, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness...My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for

our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2).”

But David isn't finished yet. After sharing the blessing of a forgiven man and the experience of a forgiven man, he makes known...

III. The desire of a forgiven man (6-7)

What is that desire? The forgiven man wants two things.

A. He wants others to call on God (6). “Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.”

David's words are here addressed to God, but for the benefit of those listening. He wants other sinners to experience what he's experienced, so he's urging them to do what he has done. Lord, I want everyone *pray to you while you may be found!*

Interesting, isn't it? The Lord is now using David's blunder to minister to others. I like the heading that commentator Eric Lane uses to introduce this section. “Forgiveness enlarges ministry,” he writes.⁵ It's so true. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. God rescues a sinner, forgives him, then uses him to help others.

Do you realize how vulnerable David made himself in Psalm 32? He could have stayed private. After all, he's the king. Middle Eastern kings didn't demean themselves with such transparent talk about their shortcomings.

But David did. Why? Because this is the God-pleasing desire of a forgiven man. He doesn't want to waste what God has done for him. He wants to help others.

Friends, some of us have stories to tell that could be of tremendous help to others. Granted, some of the stories might not make us look very good, but if God wants to use them to magnify His grace and help others, are you willing to be like David?

There's something else a forgiven man desires.

B. He wants to experience more of God (7). “You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.”

Eric Lane says, “To David forgiveness meant more than being spared punishment; it meant chiefly restoration to fellowship with God.”⁶

Derek Kidner remarks, “If forgiveness is good, fellowship is better. If we have experienced God's heavy hand (4), we should appreciate and seek His gentler touch.”⁷

That's what David wants, not just to be out of God's doghouse, but to be near God! *You are my hiding place*, he says. *You will protect me from trouble, and surround me with songs of deliverance.* Why's David saying that? Because his battle with sin isn't over. He needs a place to hide when the tempter brings his next assault. He needs protection. He needs deliverance. *You are all that to me, Lord!*

Brothers and sisters, this is what we need, too. If we're going to stay out of the trap that's caught us in the past, if we're going to overcome sin in the present and future, we too need to make the Living God our *hiding place*.

David finishes with a fourth and final insight. He's shared the blessing, the experience, and the desire of a forgiven man. Finally...

IV. The instruction of a forgiven man (8-11)

⁵ Eric Lane, p. 154.

⁶ Eric Lane, p. 153.

⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms*, p. 134.

Notice verse 8, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.” Who is speaking in verse 8? Who is the “I” that says, “I will instruct you?”

Some commentators say it is God speaking to David and to the people, giving them instruction that will keep them all from getting into the sin situation that brought about Psalm 32 in the first place. The NIV Study Bible says it is a priest addressing either David or the others, giving them a word of godly instruction. Though those options are both plausible, I get the sense that it is still David speaking, not to God this time, but to his people.

Remember, David isn’t just your typical person. He is the king of Israel, and he knows he’s responsible for God’s people. So this is the king speaking to those under his care, giving them counsel he’s learned from the school of hard knocks.

I’ll say it again. God doesn’t want us to waste the things He teaches us, especially when there are others around us who can benefit from what we’ve learned.

So David concludes with some instruction. He tells us three things.⁸

A. He tells us not to be like a mule (9). “Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.”

Great counsel for a sinner like me. Don’t be like a mule. Ever been around a mule? Stubborn. Mind of its own. Takes a two by four to get its attention. Don’t be like that. Don’t make the Lord get out His two by four to get your attention. There’s a better way.

B. He encourages us to trust the Lord (10). “Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.”

That’s what God wants, for us to *trust Him*. Many are the woes of the wicked man—David’s sin cost him greatly; he lost his son and much more. But the Lord’s love surrounds the man who trusts him—and that too is what David experienced, God’s incredible love.

God didn’t write off David, in spite of his adultery and murder. Remember what God did for David after his son died? He gave him another son. Remember his name? David and Bathsheba called him *Solomon*. But what did God call him? We’re told in 2 Samuel 12:25, “And because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.” Do you know what Jedidiah means? It means “loved by the LORD.” And it was through this son, a son born to a marriage that never should have happened, that God chose to be the royal line through which He would send the Savior of the world!

Indeed, it’s true, says David. The Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him. Have you blown it? Don’t hide, says David. Don’t be like a mule. Put your trust in the Lord and He’ll make something beautiful come out of your life.

But there’s one more piece of instruction from David.

C. He says that forgiven people have cause for celebration (11). “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!”

It’s only fitting. If we’ve been forgiven, then we have reason to do what David did, to rejoice, to be glad, to sing, to *celebrate*!

And on this Thanksgiving Sunday, I’m adding one more. If we have been forgiven, then we have reason to give thanks! So let’s do just that, and not just today, but every day!

⁸ Again, David doesn’t give us the specifics of his sin in Psalm 32. He shares principles that are transferrable to any and all.