

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

THE FREEDOM OF LIVING BY FAITH

MARCH 15-21, 2015



MAIN POINT

Stop trying to prove yourself worthy before God and embrace the grace He freely offers us in Christ.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Apart from God, whose approval do you strive for? Why?
2. How does seeking this person's approval influence your attitude, behavior, and decision making?

Leader: For many of us, it is our parents from whom we most long for approval, for others it is our spouses or even our children. On the surface our desire for approval seems only natural. God created us to live in relationship with Him and with others. Part of that is learning to honor others. However, it is impossible to honor others when our relationships with them are focused on winning their approval. When we are primarily concerned with earning the validation of others, we demonstrate that we are not concerned with the value of the other person but rather with what value they have to give us. Similarly, when we try to earn God's approval by our works, we actually dishonor Him because we demonstrate that we are not interested in God Himself but merely what He can give us. God is not like us, He is holy and because of this, we will never be able to earn His approval. If we hope to truly be approved by God, we must first, like David, confess our sin and admit our desperate need for His grace. Only when we realize we cannot earn God's approval will we embrace His grace and begin living lives that honor Him.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 32:1-2.

3. How would most people in our culture define what it means to be "blessed"? What does David mean by his use of the term in verses 1 and 2?
4. How might the blessing of which David speaks be received? What's wrong with thinking that we can earn God's blessing?

Leader: The word "blessed" used in verses 1-2, is a synonym for happy, but in Scripture this word refers to more than just an emotional state. In Scripture it refers to the deep-seated happiness that comes from having a personal and intimate relationship with God. Real happiness does not come from fleeting circumstances but from knowing God and the joy of His forgiveness. As we confess our sin and receive God's forgiveness, we find

true freedom and happiness. True blessing, therefore, cannot be earned, it can only be received by faith. David found God's blessing not because he got his act together and cleaned himself up but because God had chosen to "forgive," "cover," and "not count" his sin against him. David opens this self-reflective psalm by acknowledging one of the most fundamental Christian truths—true blessing cannot be earned, it can only be received by grace through faith.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 32:3-11.

5. What motivates us to keep silent about our sin? What are some of the physical and emotional consequences that might come from unconfessed sin (vv. 3-4, 10)?

6. How was God involved in the consequences that David faced (v. 4)? Why was it important for David to acknowledge God's involvement? Why might this be important for us to acknowledge with regard to our own sin?

Leader: David's unconfessed sin took a devastating toll on him physically, emotionally, and spiritually as his bones "wasted away" and his strength was "sapped." Looking back on this experience, David acknowledged that as he faced the consequences of His sin, God's "hand was heavy" upon him. In other words, David understood that the Lord was working in the midst of David's suffering. By allowing David to face these consequences God was pressing David to acknowledge his spiritual bankruptcy and his desperate need for grace. While not all the suffering we face is the result of our own sin, we, like David, should strive to recognize that God is always at work in our lives, using even our suffering to draw us to Himself and move us to repentance.

7. In Psalm 32:5, what was David's decision? What were the consequences of David's decision?

8. If God already knows our sin, what is the point of confessing it to Him? How does the acknowledgement of sin impact your relationship with God?

Leader: David's inward groaning of spirit finally became too much for him to bear, and he experienced God's forgiveness when he confessed his sin. The turning point came in David's life when he acknowledged his sin against the Lord. He literally made known to God a sin God already knew, but David needed to confess it to experience the true joy of God's forgiveness.

9. Our relationship with God is based on what according to verse 10? What was David promoting in this psalm as the path to righteousness and uprightness in heart (vv. 10-11)?

Leader: By confessing his sin, David was expressing faith in God's grace. David's relationship with God was based on faith. The only one way to enter into a relationship with God is by trusting in His grace in Christ. Those who are "righteous" and "upright in heart" (v. 11) are only so because they are surrounded by God's "unfailing love." God's love cannot be earned, only received by trusting in Him (v. 10).

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. Ask those who feel comfortable to share some things they do to try to prove themselves worthy of God's love. How do such actions actually hinder your relationship with God?

11. How does trusting Christ for His gift of grace actually produce greater, deeper obedience to God than trying to earn His favor by good works?

Leader: When truly we understand the depth to which God went to forgive us, cleanse us, and restore us to a right relationship with Him, we will begin repenting both from our sins and from the "good" works we had been doing in a failed attempt to earn His approval. Only when we understand that righteousness before God is given and not earned will we learn to serve God with right motives.

12. How have you experienced the joy that comes from the forgiveness God gives?

PRAYER

Thank God for the eternal approval He has secured for us through the death and resurrection of His Son. Pray that we would cultivate a deeper appreciation for the eternal and immeasurable value of the righteousness we have been given in Christ. Ask God to help us stop striving to earn His love and instead readily acknowledge that we have His approval and are free to devote our lives to loving and serving Him.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **Has your perspective on God's approval shifted since this week's study? How so?**
 - **Have you practiced the spiritual discipline of confession this week? Are there any sins in your life that you need to confess not only to God but also to a brother or sister in Christ? Make plans to seek accountability this week.**
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Psalm 32:1-2.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

PSALM 32

Bible interpreters classify the psalms in different categories according to their subject matter and focus. Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm. In penitential psalms, the writer often cries out to God because of his sin and asks the Lord's forgiveness. Or the writer experiences and describes the joy of God's forgiveness after confessing his sin to Him. Psalm 32 is the latter type of penitential psalm.

Some Bible interpreters consider Psalm 32 the follow-up psalm to Psalm 51. They believe David wrote Psalm 32 after he experienced the joy of God's forgiveness. The Hebrew word *maskil* in the psalm heading probably denotes some kind of contemplative or reflective psalm.

King David began his psalm with a beatitude expressing the joy of God's forgiveness. The expression how happy is also could be translated "o, the happiness of" and further stresses David's joy. David used several words to describe his failure to meet God's holy standard. These words also may describe our own sinful situations. Transgression denotes a defiant rebellion against God's standard—one in which sinners deliberately cross the line God has established. Sin denotes falling short, missing the target, missing God's righteous standard. David used the word covered to mean "covered once and for all," that is, God would never uncover David's sin again.

Believers today need to understand this important truth. Once God forgives our sin, He forgives our sin—period. God's Word assures us we are forgiven when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9).

The Hebrew word translated sin in verse 2 is a different Hebrew word that has as its basic meaning "crookedness." David described the joy of the one who no longer had sin charged to his account. God had straightened out his life. Once he had experienced God's forgiveness, no deceit could be found in his spirit. The joy of God's forgiveness also had brought to David an inner change of attitude.

Joy is a natural by-product of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness should also help us grow in our desire to serve Him. Our human nature encourages us to pursue that which will make us happy, but happiness can be elusive and temporary. Real happiness does not come from fleeting circumstances, but from knowing God and the joy of His forgiveness.

David described the terrible battle that occurred within his soul as he kept silent about his sin. He felt as if his bones became brittle and ready to snap due to the internal anguish of his groaning all day long. Outwardly, David tried to act as if nothing was wrong, but inwardly he knew his guilt. He also probably sensed that others around him knew of his sin. Almost certainly those within David's "inner circle" of leaders had figured it out. David's inward groaning of spirit finally became too much for him to bear, and he experienced God's forgiveness when he confessed his sin. David described how day and night he struggled inwardly. He testified how God's hand was heavy on him, eventually bringing David to a point where he knew he could not go on without confessing his sin.

Believers often experience such inner pangs of conscience when their sin separates them from God. We feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders, but that weight may well be the loving hand of a patient God gently nudging us to confession and repentance.

The Hebrew word translated drained also can mean "overturned" and aptly describes the churning of David's soul within him. The summer's heat could be quite oppressive; temperatures might well reach 100 degrees or more in the wilderness of Judah and the Jordan Valley. Typically, no rain falls between May and September in Israel, so no relief is readily available from the heat. David's sin sapped his spirit as the summer sun sapped his strength.

Adults may experience times when they have asked for God's forgiveness, yet still feel guilty. God is eager to forgive, yet we may sometimes have difficulty forgiving ourselves, which leads to a false sense of guilt. God

does not want us to live in this state, but to recognize that He has extended to us His forgiveness in Jesus Christ when we ask Him to forgive us. Romans 6 assures us that Jesus died to break sin's power in our lives, and Romans 8 reminds us we have no condemnation if we stand in Christ by faith (6:1-4, 12-14; 8:1-4). The turning point came in David's life when he acknowledged his sin against the Lord. He literally made known to God a sin God already knew, but David needed to confess it to experience the true joy of God's forgiveness.

The Hebrew word translated conceal also means "covered" and is the same Hebrew word used in verse 1. David might try to cover his sin, but only God could permanently cover it and deal with it. The words I said reflect the decision David made. He would confess his transgressions to the Lord. For David and for us, confession is more than admitting our sin. It involves seeing sin as God sees it and turning from it in repentance.

The Bible asserts that all of us fall short of God's holy standard (Rom. 3:23). Agreeing with God about our sin problem is the first step to cleansing. Even Christians sin and need God's forgiveness on a daily basis to restore them to fellowship with Him. The Bible also affirms the certainty of God's forgiveness if we confess our sins (1 John 1:9).

In light of the great truth of God's forgiveness for all who repent and confess their sin, David called on people everywhere to pray and seek God's face. The words at a time that you may be found remind us of Isaiah 55:6, where Isaiah encouraged the people to seek God's face right then, while a relationship with Him was present in their minds. In the new testament, Paul encouraged people to call on God now, for now is the acceptable time of salvation (2 cor. 6:1-2). We should not put off establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith, and we should not put off experiencing the joy of God's forgiveness through confession.

The mention of great floodwaters is interesting and somewhat unexpected since Jerusalem, located on high ground, would not likely experience such a catastrophe. However, floods are sometimes known in the wilderness and desert canyons of Judah, when the hard rocky ground cannot quickly absorb hard rains and gently flowing channels quickly become rushing tides. David probably intended this expression in a figurative sense to describe challenging adversities, as did the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 43:2). The prophet Nahum used similar imagery to describe God's sweeping judgment (Nah. 1:8), but judgment is not intended in our focal passage. God was David's hiding place, his place of refuge. David knew the peace and joy of God's forgiveness as he experienced quiet solitude with his Lord. The Hebrew words translated protect and trouble sound very much alike and would have provided.

Thus far in the psalm, David had described his own experience of confession and forgiveness. The Lord God now responded to David in verses 8-9 with the promise of His instruction and guidance. He would help David grow through the experience. The Hebrew word translated instruct carries the sense of imparting wisdom and insight. It is related to the word maskil in the psalm's heading. The word show also could be translated "teach" or "instruct" and is related to the Hebrew word Torah, which is usually translated "instruction," "teaching," or sometimes "law." God's eye watched over David for good; the imagery suggests God's personal, intimate involvement in the relationship. The words give counsel describe the Lord's role as David's trusted counselor and advisor. The Lord had a perspective on David's life that David could never have, just as the Lord sees our lives from a perspective we cannot have. Faithful obedience and trust should mark our lives when we follow Christ, even when we do not fully understand what He is doing.

David began speaking again in verse 10. He acknowledged that many pains come to the wicked. Evil doers do not have the benefits of a relationship with the Lord, so they go through life totally without Him. Many struggle to make sense of life, while others have no time for the things of God. They have no foundation for life, and they have no guide for life. In contrast, David acknowledged that God's faithful love surrounds those who trust Him. God's love provides His children a foundation on which they can build their lives. In fact, God Himself builds on His foundation as He guides them.

David closed his psalm by encouraging all righteous ones and upright in heart everywhere to rejoice and shout for joy. God not only cleanses them of their sin, but He also empowers them to become better people. He sets them free to embrace life in all its fullness as they experience the joy of His forgiveness.