

“I Will Confess”
Psalm 32

At least according to some researchers, a famous line from the 1970 film, “Love Story” really is true. In the movie, the character played by Ali MacGraw tells the character played by Ryan O’Neal, “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” As a side note, it is interesting that just two years later in the movie “What’s Up, Doc?” Barbara Streisand says the same thing to O’Neal (playing a different character) and he replies, “That’s the dumbest thing I ever heard.”

Yet recently some psychologists have not only affirmed MacGraw’s statement, but they’ve taken it a step further, saying that it is rewarding *not* to say you’re sorry:

“When you refuse to apologize, it actually makes you feel more empowered,” [researcher Tyler G. Okimoto] said. “That power and control seems to translate into greater feelings of self-worth.”

Ironically, Okimoto said, people who refused to apologize ended up with boosted feelings of integrity.

[Accessed at www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/people-who-never-apologize-are-probably-happier-than-you-12584567/#V6I6S4lkx7L7McfX.99 4/14/13.]

And that assessment is in direct opposition to what Scripture says. King David tried out the theory of Mr. Okimoto and he arrived at a much different conclusion: he discovered the power and peace of offering confession and receiving forgiveness (Ps. 32). We do well to remember the circumstance in which David penned this psalm:

- ✓ He committed adultery with Bathsheba.
- ✓ He killed her husband (who also happened to be one of the great warriors and leaders of Israel).
- ✓ He deceived the nation about his sin.
- ✓ He attempted to deceive God (for over a year).
- ✓ When confronted with Nathan (2 Sam. 12), he finally confessed his sin.

David penned two psalms following this sin: Psalm 51 is his immediate response of confession and Psalm 32 is his later reflection on the power of confession and being forgiven by God. He has had opportunity to ponder what benefit has come from confession and this is his conclusion.

As we read this psalm, we find that it deals with three great realities in the spiritual life:

- ✓ All people sin.
- ✓ All people are tempted to try to hide their sin.
- ✓ Joy and blessing only come to those who confess their sins.

Whatever your situation today, whether you are a believer in Christ whose fundamental identity has been changed from “sinner” to “saint,” or whether you are not a believer in Christ, we all still struggle with sin. We are all tempted to sin each day, and in thought and deed we do actually sin each day. And then the further temptation is, “what will I do with that sin? Will I hide it? Or will I confess it?”

David will teach us in this psalm that:

ONLY THOSE WHO OPENLY CONFESS THEIR SINS WILL EXPERIENCE GOD’S BLESSING.

Hudson Taylor once noted, “All God’s great men were weak men who counted on the fact that God was with them.” And nowhere does God’s presence impact us more fully than in His forgiveness of our sin.

Here in this psalm, we will find five realities about the nature of confession:

- 1. The Present JOY of Confession and Forgiveness (vv. 1-2)**
- 2. The CONSEQUENCES of Not Choosing Confession (vv. 3-4)**
- 3. A PICTURE of Genuine Confession (v. 5)**
- 4. God’s HOPE for Those Who Confess (vv. 6-8)**
- 5. An EXHORTATION to Confess (vv. 9-11)**

1. The Present JOY of Confession and Forgiveness (vv. 1-2)

- All men everywhere want to be happy. There are no exceptions. In his well-known work, *Pensees*, Blaise Pascal writes,

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves." [quoted in Desiring God (2003), 19.]

- ✓ Most people are just confused about where that happiness might be found and where it won't be found. That's why foolish statements like, "Love is never having to say you're sorry" are made.
 - ✓ It seems to us that our culture is overwhelmed with people pursuing happiness in sensuality and violence. But as Solomon noted, there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc 1:9); people have always sought for satisfaction outside the bounds of God's dictates — even men like King David.
 - ✓ But after a year of attempting to conceal his sin and then after finally confessing that sin and reflecting on the results of that confession, David comes to a new and different conclusion:
- ***Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.*** The word ***blessed*** refers to "happiness" or "bliss." Ps. 1:1 uses this same term; who always does that? No one. So we all need *this* Psalm, which tells us the path to happiness is paved with the acknowledgment of sin and the forgiveness of sin.
 - But before we look at what David says about confession and forgiveness, notice what he says about sin. He identifies it in 3 ways:
 - ✓ ***Transgression*** means to revolt against standard. Plain and simple, it's rebellion against God. The person who transgresses is the one who is opposed to God. He does not want God as part of his life. But David notes another aspect of sin —
 - ✓ ***Sin*** means to *miss* the standard. The word picture that is usually used of this word is to shoot at a target and to miss the bulls-eye — the sinner is "off the mark." But that picture is a little deceiving, because it suggests that this person *wants* to hit the mark of God's righteousness, but that's not what the word ***sin*** means. The actual sense is that the sinner rejects the standard and not only misses God's mark, but he doesn't even attempt to achieve God's standard.
 - ✓ The third word David uses to refer to sin is ***iniquity***, which means to *twist* the standard. Not only is the standard opposed and unachieved, but it is distorted and a new standard is proposed. That's where "new moralities" are devised — "we don't like God's standard of truth, so let's make a new truth — our truth."

- ✓ Combine these three words and you have a picture of willful and rebellious sin of every kind. David is trying to illustrate the completeness and fullness of our sin and rebellion against God.
- ✓ There is no *ultimate* joy in sin. I won't say that there is *no* joy in sin. If there were no joy in it (or if we believed there was no joy in it), we wouldn't do it. We sin because we think there is a better payoff in sin than there is in obeying God. But sin won't ultimately be joyful.
- But David says there *is* a blessing for those who sin. Joy is not going to be discovered in sin but in the forgiveness and release from the sin. So David uses three words for God's forgiveness to parallel the three manifestations of sin:
 - ✓ **Forgiven** means the sin is taken away, like the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:22).
 - ✓ **Covered** refers to something being hidden or concealed so that it is obliterated; it is considered to be in the past and God no longer brings it up against the sinner (prob. ref. to blood; cf. 85:2).
 - ✓ **Not imputed** is an accounting term; it means it is not counted. The picture is of a complete removal of sin's debt.
 - ✓ Combined the three terms emphasize the complete removal of the sin. God is *effective* in removing sin and its judgment from us.
- Now the question is, how does one come to be forgiven? Notice the end of v. 2 — ***in whose spirit there is no deceit***. He is talking about honesty before God; this is a prelude to the confession of v. 5. There is no forgiveness for the one who attempts to ***deceive*** God about sin (cf. Ps. 15:1ff; 66:18). But there is infinite forgiveness for those who confess their sin.
 - ✓ One of greatest things we can do is “act like a sinner” (Luther); i.e., before God acknowledge that we are what we are: sinners in need of Savior.
 - ✓ Joy is not achieved by being sinless (that's impossible), but in having sin removed & forgiven.
 - ✓ Now, you don't need to confess your sin, but understand that there are consequences for not confessing your sin, which is what David identifies in vv. 3-4 —

2. The CONSEQUENCES of Not Choosing Confession (vv. 3-4)

- David noted in vv. 1-2 that there is joy in confession and forgiveness and there is no *ultimate* joy in sin; here he says there is also no joy in hiding sin.
- Instead of confession, another way to deal with sin, is to ***keep silent***. I.e., impenitence. And that's what David tried for over a year. But during that year, things were happening to him —
 - ✓ ***My body wasted away***, which could be a physical pain — his bones were in literal pain and agony (38:3; 42:10). Or more likely, it means spiritual deadness (***wasted*** = “old and worn out”).

David's spiritual vitality waned (Prov. 4:23; Ez. 37; 1 Cor. 11:30).

- ✓ And he was **groaning**. A better translation is “roaring” in agony. The word is usually used of a lion's roar, but is also used of a soul in agony (Ps. 22:1-2; Job 3:24). David was in deep inner turmoil while he held onto his sin and refused to confess.
- ✓ And God's discipline was relentless: God constantly (**day and night**) disciplined David — like Jonah, there was no escape from the presence of God and His discipline. God did not leave David to himself; God's hand of chastisement was heavy on David (38:2; 39:10). And eventually that correction and discipline produced confession.
- What should we notice about the consequences of not choosing confession?
 - ✓ Confession is not easy: On one occasion the theologian Calvin was speaking to his companion Hobbes and said, “I feel bad that I called Susie names and hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did it.” To which Hobbes said, “Maybe you should apologize to her.” Calvin pondered that for a moment and then replied, “I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution.”
 - ✓ We don't like to confess our sins to one another and we don't like to confess to God either. But remember that as hard as it might seem to confess, the lack of confession is also harder. There is a cost to unrepentance. There is a cost to holding onto and keeping our sins. One does *not* have to confess. But eventually then, the conscience will be stilled; and to do so is to kill the conscience (1 Tim. 4:2), and leave one in a state of unforgiven sin, to one's eternal grief. In God's grace, that was not David's end (and it doesn't have to be ours either).
 - ✓ Notice the marginal word — **SELAH**, which means, “Stop and think about it!” What is the consequence of not confessing your sin (vv. 3-4)? And what is the blessing of confessing (vv. 1-2)? And if it isn't clear enough, David then offers his own testimony of what he did (v. 5) —

3. A PICTURE of Genuine Confession (v. 5)

- David offered a three-fold confession for his “three-fold sin.”
 - ✓ **I acknowledged my sin to You** — he made his sin known to God. That doesn't mean that God knew nothing about the sin until he confessed. It means that he was finally submitting himself to God and agreeing with God that he had sinned.
 - ✓ **My iniquity I did not hide** — Previously David had kept silent about his sin and like Achan (Josh. 7:1ff) he attempted to hide his sin. In confession he was willing to say, “This is who I am and this is *all* that I have done — he withheld nothing in his confession.
 - ✓ **I will confess my transgression to the Lord** — he affirmed the reality of his sin (Prov. 28:13). Confession is not merely asking God to clear the black slate of sin; it is to *name* the sin, *agree* with God that it is sin, and ask God to *change* you in the future (**2 Cor. 7:11**).

- ✓ Here is a picture of genuine confession. Someone has said that our fleshly tendency is to manage our sin instead of repenting of our sin. Here David repented and turned away from his sin. He didn't want it anymore. And the result?
- **You forgave** is the same word as **forgiven** in v. 1 and it means “carried away” (Lev. 16:21-22). What is noteworthy in this verse is that forgiveness *immediately* followed confession! “As soon as I said ‘I will confess,’ You forgave.” David is still overwhelmed by that.
 - ✓ The basis of forgiveness is in the forgiver, not in the one forgiven — the One sinned against paid for forgiveness (Rom. 5:8)!
 - ✓ This is the picture of forgiveness in Ex. 34:6-7 (David uses the same words for sin as Moses); and Paul refers to this psalm as a demonstration of the work of God to justify sinners (Rom. 4:6-7ff). Our forgiveness is a gift of God's grace.
 - ✓ But also be sure to note this — there was no forgiveness until David confessed (1 Jn. 1:9). If you long for forgiveness, you may have it, but you cannot have it until you confess.

4. God's HOPE for Those Who Confess (vv. 6-8)

- David applies the lesson of God's grace and forgiveness to the readers and singers of the song: **Therefore**, that is, because of these truths, there are lessons to be learned for each one...
- **let the godly pray**. The lesson is that repentance isn't just for David — it's for everyone!
 - ✓ **Godly** is an interesting word to choose — who is **godly**? Godliness indicates a lack of sin. So, no one is godly on his own; so what David means here is that the godly person is the one who willingly confronts and confesses his sin. He does not claim perfection; in fact he regularly claims imperfection, and comes to the only One who can perfect him.
 - ✓ And what happens when this man prays? Because he prays with sincerity (**no deceit**, v. 2b), God **will be found**. He will not hide from anyone who honestly and truly confesses!
 - ✓ Though our sin problem may seem overwhelming, when we confess, we won't drown. The **flood** of our sin will not overwhelm us, as David notes —
- David reminds us of three-fold response of God:
 - ✓ God becomes a **hiding place** for the repentant sinner; instead of hiding from God, when one confesses, he is hidden *in* God, *from* sin (119:114; 27:5)! When our sin is no longer hidden, we are hidden from the wrath against our sin.
 - ✓ And He will **preserve** = i.e., God is one's salvation; God will keep him alive.

- ✓ And He will **deliver**, i.e., from the penalty of sin and from the judgment of God. He is saved *by* God and *from* God.
- ✓ Following David's confession, God responds (v. 8).
 - Rather than God's hand being heavy on David (v. 4), He (gently) **instructs, teaches, and counsels** him. Not only is David forgiven, but there is also full restoration and fellowship.
 - God is showing David the way to go — guiding him on the pathway to life (Prov. 3:18-26).
 - Now God's **eye** is **upon** David to protect and keep him (17:8; 18:24; 33:18; 34:15).
- ✓ The one who doesn't confess is hopeful that he will be able to escape the scrutinizing exam of God. He can't. But the one who affirms his sin and confesses that sin is freed from that sin and from the wrath of God.
- Two implications from this truth:
 - ✓ If you are not a follower of Christ, none of this is true of you. Your sin is not forgiven, it is not covered, and iniquity has been imputed to you. You are not blessed; you *are* condemned by God. You cannot hide from God; you will never be hidden from God (Rev. 14:10). But if you confess your sin, God will move from being your enemy to your friend; instead of hunting you, He will protect you; instead of condemning you, He will liberate and save you. If you have rejected Christ, will you confess your sin and turn to Him in repentance? That is your only hope.
 - ✓ If you are a follower of Christ, you still sin. And that sin, while having been washed and cleansed by Christ, still necessitates confession. The child of God, as David was, cannot live in willful sin and expect to experience the blessing of God; if you belong to God and are willfully and intentionally sinning and not confessing, this psalm is for you; God will discipline you until you come to him in confession so that you will live in obedience to Him. Will you, like David, repent of your sin and begin living in obedience to God and His Word?
 - ✓ David tells us in the final verses why this is so very important —

5. An EXHORTATION to Confess (vv. 9-11)

- Again, one does not have to confess his sin. But David likens that to being like an ignorant, stubborn **horse** or **mule**. Don't be stubborn (v. 9). When we refuse to confess and be forgiven, we demonstrate that we are just like an unreasoning animal (Jer. 8:6); the only way to control a donkey is by the force of **bit and bridle**. Don't be unreasoning. Submit yourself to the kind leading of God.
- And David reminds the readers of the costs of unrepentance and benefits of confession (v. 10).
 - ✓ There are **many sorrows** for the **wicked** (and wicked includes anyone who refuses to confess).

There is great sorrow now and in eternity for refusing God's forgiveness. God is unrelenting in His wrath. Six times in Matthew Jesus calls Hell "outer darkness" or "the furnace of fire...in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

- ✓ But there is also great compassion in forgiveness. The one who ***trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness will surround him***. The one who confesses sin and trusts in God and Christ for His forgiveness will be overwhelmed, covered up, and surrounded by God's grace.
- Sin will always offer allurements of happiness, but *real* joy is found only in choosing God and walking with Him (v. 11).
 - ✓ Do you want gladness? ***Be glad in the Lord***. Don't continue to be glad in sin, but find your joy and satisfaction in being obedient to God. Have you ever been faced with a temptation to sin, wrestled with it, and then done what is pleasing to the Lord? Maybe you've been tempted to angrily confront someone, and instead you have asked questions, and been patient and gracious. How often do you later regret not spewing out angry, hostile words — "I sure wish I would have been impatient and mean to that person?" Yeah, me neither. That's what David is saying here — find your gladness in God and not in sin.
 - ✓ If you want to be ***righteous*** and ***upright in heart***, then ***rejoice*** and ***shout for joy*** in God.
- Why confess sin? Because joy is found in that confession. So David has returned to the theme of verse 1 — the blessed life is the life that is built on confession of sin.

CONCLUSION: This psalm was a favorite of Augustine — the fourth century pastor. It is said that he often read this psalm with weeping heart and eyes. And while sick with the illness that would take his life, he had this psalm written over his bed so that he could be comforted by it while in his sick-bed. He said about this psalm, "The beginning of knowledge is to know yourself to be a sinner."

- God is the searcher of our hearts and knows all things and ultimately all things will be laid open before Him (Heb. 4:13).
- There is nothing that He is unwilling or incapable of forgiving. He desires and is able to forgive all your sin.
- What are you attempting to hide from Him? Will you let it go? Now? You will know no greater joy.