

Psalm 32: The Joy of Forgiveness

In **Psalm 32**, the psalmist happily thanks God for forgiving his sin which had led to intense physical and emotional duress. This forgiveness came in response to his confession and repentance. **Psalm 32** is a *penitential psalm* (along with Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143), but it is not sorrowful because it is a prayer of thanks for God's grace of forgiveness. It also contains elements of *wisdom teaching*, using this psalmist's experience of confession, repentance and forgiveness to teach others.

1. The psalmist has had a life-changing experience of divine-chastening and then forgiveness. What do you learn about that experience in the two beatitudes the psalmist writes to introduce his poetic contemplation of it? **(32:1-2)**

How do these opening beatitudes deepen your understanding of **Psalm 1:1** and also how does the **Psalm 1:1** beatitude illuminate **32:1-2**? What does Exodus 34:6-7 reveal about God and about people?

Where are you now in your awareness of your own need for *confession*, *repentance*, and the *forgiveness* of God? How have those words become more than just words for you?

Paul quotes **Psalm 32:1-2** from the Septuagint in his letter to the Romans 4:7-8. How does Paul's emphasis on faith/trust in God as opposed to working for/earning forgiveness impact your understanding and application of **Psalm 32**?

2. Here's an outline of **Psalm 32** from Ross's *Psalms Commentary, Vol 1*, p. 706.

32:1-2 record the praise for the forgiveness of sin

32:3-5 report the dilemma and the deliverance

32:1-5 form the first section.

32:6-7 form an encouragement, and the biggest change comes in verse 6; verses 6-7 are a second section

32:8-10 are instruction, ending the last section of the psalm in v. 11 with the reminder of the joy of forgiveness

3. **Psalm 32:3-4** describe the ultimate turmoil that can come with denial, minimization, and justification of sin (independence from God rather than God-centeredness). **Psalm 32:5** describes what "awakening" looks like.

What part or parts of that experience do you identify with? Why do you think this section contains two "Selahs"?

Read Ephesians 5:7-16, warning believers not to become partners with “the sons of disobedience,” but to “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you,” probably a compilation of Isaiah 51:17, 52:1, 60:1.

When have you thought God was “asleep” only to discover that you were the one who needed to wake up?

4. What is the “Therefore” there for in **32:6**? How is the psalmist doing what he is recommending?

How does his story of repentance, confession, and forgiveness impact you?

The psalmist describes God as a “hiding place” from the difficulties of the world in **32:7** (Pss 27:5, 31:21, 91:1), and refers to the “rush of great waters” in **32:6**, the symbol of chaos from Ancient Near Eastern mythology (Pss 29:3, 107:23; 144:7).

When has God been a “hiding place” for you in chaos?

In contrast to the “righteous” who “hide out” in God, where does the prophet Isaiah say the “wicked” find refuge and shelter? (Isaiah 28:15 and 17)

5. Notice how a new section of the psalm starts in **32:8**. Whose voice is speaking now? God or the psalmist? Who is the speaker’s audience?

What kind of biblical literature does “instruct you and teach you” sound like? How is Proverbs 28:13-14 similar to **Psalm 32**?

What do you think “in the way you should go” in **32:8** refers to in the context of **Psalm 32**?

What is the encouragement and the warning for you in **32:8-11**?

6. The Psalms clearly teach us that all of the faithful, the godly, the righteous are sinners. Sometimes we suffer because of our sin, especially unconfessed sin, and sometimes we suffer innocently because of injustice and other evils in people and systems.

How is reading and praying the Psalms helping you to recognize your own thoughts and feelings? How does that awareness increase your consciousness of sin patterns, typically patterns of self-protection and self-reliance? God offers grace for repentance and confession.

What other spiritual practices or tools help you stay in reality about God’s unfailing love that “surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD” and His abundant forgiveness that “covers” our sin?