

## Psalm 32: Join the Joyful Forgiven!

Jesus leads us to join in this joyful **song of thanksgiving** with its praise for deliverance from judgment for sin. It also includes instruction about living each day in repentance and faith. Behind the voice of the sinner who is celebrating his forgiveness is the voice of our sinless Savior, who bore our sin for us, who leads us in confession, and who declares to us the blessing and joy of the forgiveness He won for us.

More seldom than we expect, the prayer for the forgiveness of sins meets us in the Psalms. Most Psalms presuppose complete assurance of the forgiveness of sins. That may surprise us. But even in the New Testament the same thing is true. It is an abbreviation and endangering of Christian prayer if it revolves exclusively around forgiveness of sins. There is such a thing as the confident leaving behind of sin for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Yet in no way does the Psalter omit the prayer of repentance. The seven so-called repentance Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) lead us into the total depth of the recognition of sin before God. They lead to confession of guilt and direct our complete confidence to the forgiving grace of God. Usually a special occasion leads to such a prayer. It is serious guilt (Psalms 32 and 51) or unexpected suffering that drives us to repentance (Psalms 38 and 102). In every case all hope is fixed on free forgiveness, as it has been offered to us and promised by God in his word about Jesus Christ for all times. (Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible*, 50-51.)

What stands out to you in the above quotation and why?

Bonhoeffer goes on to quote 2 Corinthians 5:21 and to explain how Jesus prays even these penitential, repentance psalms with us:

Not for the sake of his sins, but for the sake of our sins, which he has taken upon himself and for which he suffers, does Jesus pray for the forgiveness of sins. He positions himself entirely with us. He wants to be a person before God as we are. So he prays also the most human of all prayers with us and thereby demonstrates precisely that he is the true Son of God. (Bonhoeffer, 51-52)

Just as his first disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, we also ask him to teach us to pray using his prayerbook, the Psalms. He gives us his words and prays them with us.

The psalms that lead us to repentance are among the most rewarding Psalms to sing with Jesus. They are the psalms that show how closely Jesus identifies with us in our deepest need...Jesus

truly does stand with us to intercede even in our repentance.  
(Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms*, 83)

Let's follow Jesus's lead in reading and praying **Psalm 32**, learning from him how we can pray in every temptation/trial/emergency of life. (1 Cor. 10:13)

**1. Psalm 32** starts and ends with "blessedness" and rejoicing. Why does the psalmist say that forgiven people are "blessed"? What's this blessedness, rejoicing and joy about?

**2.** Find the 3 references to *sin* and to *forgiveness* in **32:1-2**

**References to sin:** *transgressions*=crossing the line; *sin*=getting it wrong, missing the mark; *iniquity*=getting God's straight way twisted or distorted

**References to forgiveness:** *forgiven*=lifted up, taken away; *covered*=covered up, never to be uncovered; *does not charge*=not counted, not imputed, not reckoned, not listed on the charge sheet

But what's the surprise in **32:2b**, "in whose spirit is no deceit"? What do we need to do in order for God to "cover up" our sin? (1 John 1:8-10)

**3. Psalm 32:3-4** describe the ultimate turmoil that can come with denial, minimization, justification and rationalization of sin (independence from God rather than God-centeredness).

What stands out to you in the psalmist's story of how he abandoned deceit and confessed his sin? (**32:3-5**)

**Psalm 32:5** describes what "awakening" looks like. (Notice the two "Selahs," and read Ephesians 5:7-16 for more info about "awakening.")

**Confession is the discipline that brings an end to pretense. Honesty leads to confession, and confession leads to change (repentance=a new direction).**

**4.** Here's a good example of verses of a psalm that are often quoted and used "out of context." Remember that the context in **Psalm 32** is judgment for sin. The "great floodwaters" represent the overwhelming trouble/disaster the psalmist was facing as a result of his sin.

The "hiding place" is not used in the same sense here as in other psalms where it means protection from enemies. Here it represents deliverance from his overwhelming guilt brought about by God's reaction to sin, God's "heavy hand" of judgment. (**32:4**) We hide in God's forgiveness.

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**. What kind of biblical literature does “instruct you and teach you” sound like? (Compare Proverbs 28:13-14 to **Psalm 32**.)

What does “the way to go” in **32:8** refer to in the context of **Psalm 32**?

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

**6.** The Psalms clearly teach that all of the faithful, the godly, “the righteous” are sinners. But “the righteous” are sinners who allow God’s work in them. “The righteous” live by faith, by trusting God (Habakkuk 2:4, Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:1-8). Sometimes the righteous suffer because of sin, especially unconfessed sin, and sometimes they suffer innocently because of injustice and other evils in people and systems. The righteous practice confession and repentance, leading to transformation. Surrounded by Unfailing Love, they become increasingly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord.

So the question at Lent is, “**How is my discipleship/apprenticeship to Jesus progressing?**”

Everyone who is engaged on a great undertaking, depending on many factors for its success, knows how important it is to have a periodical stocktaking. Whether we are responsible for a business, an institution, a voyage, or an exploration—even for the well-being of a household—it is sometimes essential to call a halt; examine our store and our equipment, be sure that all necessities are there and and in good order, and that we understand the way in which they should be used...Lent is a good moment for such a spiritual stocktaking; a pause, a retreat from life’s busy surface to its solemn deeps. (Evelyn Underhill, *Lent*, 14-15)

Let’s pray for wise discernment for ourselves and our family in Christ. Pray we cling to what is truly valuable and essential. Pray we get rid of the self-referenced odds and ends. Our inner life in Christ is the “business of all businesses” and “the great journey.” Lent calls the righteous to spiritual spring cleaning.