

GOD WITH US
Part 5: Soul Songs
Job – Psalms

Message 6 – Songs of Confession
Psalm 32

Introduction

The book of Psalms is ancient Israel's song book – 150 songs composed for both private and corporate worship. These are heart-cries, not theological treatises. The Psalms are the most emotional parts of the Bible. These are real human beings wrestling with God over real issues in life. They teach us how to be honest with God, no matter what we're going through. There are laments when you are sad and feel like singing the blues. There are songs of thanksgiving when you feel like giving thanks. There are songs of trust when you are worried and need to bolster your faith in God. There are songs of praise when you are in awe of God. There are songs for every season of life . . . even for when you've failed, when you've made a mess of things - the **songs of confession**. We're all going to need these quite often, because we all mess up a lot. Songs of confession help us get back on track with God when we've gotten off track. There are 8 songs of confession in the book of Psalms: 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.

In order to understand the importance of the confessional Psalms, we first need to understand the implications of our sin problem. The apostle Paul gave us a good definition of sin in this verse:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Sin is falling short of God's standard. The very 1st 'standard' God set for humanity was to *trust His love and follow His commands that showed that we loved Him in return.* Rather, we chose to follow our own senses, reasoning, and choices which broke our relationship with our God. Now, human instinct runs in the opposite direction of God's commands: It's lying and covering up when He says to be truthful. It's jealousy, coveting and overspending when He says to be content. It's bitterness, hatred,

abuse, and betrayal when He says to love one another. It's anger, rage and ultimately murder when He says we should be patient. It's letting people down and breaking our promises when He says to be faithful. Sin is falling short of God's standard in any area of life. It's having 'idols' in our hearts when God says to worship Him alone as our 1st love, in gratitude for how deeply He loves us. The Greek word for sin literally means "to miss the mark." It's like you're shooting arrows but you always miss the target.

Sin separates us from God. God is, by His very nature, holy and perfect. Sin is contrary to His essence. Thus, He cannot overlook or ignore the human sin problem.

“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

Sin *always* causes disruption in our relationship with God. It causes distance to form between us and God. Yet, because God is a God of LOVE, He always moves to make a way for our sin to be dealt with. He always provides a bridge back to Himself, a bridge that overcomes the sin problem.

God's first solution for our sin problem was to RECONCILE us to Himself. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so that we can now be reconciled to God. *Reconciliation is the restoration of relationship after a period of estrangement (separation).* When we accept the death of Jesus for our sins, we are at that moment reconciled to God; brought back into relationship with Him. From that moment forward, we are forgiven. We are children of God once and for all. That relationship with God is secure.

But there's still a problem. Although we've been brought back into relationship with God that does not make us perfect. We are forgiven; but not perfect. We are children of God; but we still mess up and keep doing things that fall short of the glory of God.

As children of God, this ongoing sin breaks our fellowship with God. Fellowship is different than relationship. Again, our relationship with God begins the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. That relationship is secure. There's nothing we can do to lose that relationship. It's like a child of mine; once they are born into my family, they are my son, my daughter. They can't get

out that relationship by messing up. Whatever they do, they are my son, my daughter. Our relationship with God is secure and eternal. From the moment of the new birth, we are in God's family, forever.

But our fellowship with God does change when we sin. My children can break fellowship with me by doing something wrong. My children and I can experience a loss of fellowship; a loss of intimacy; a loss of closeness. That's what happens in our fellowship with God when we sin after we have become His children. He doesn't cast us off as His children. He remains faithful to the relationship. But sin breaks our fellowship with God, and when our fellowship with God is broken, we can't really go anywhere. We get stuck spiritually. For a Christian, sin breaks our fellowship with God, and we need to know how to be honest with God about our sin *so that our fellowship with Him can be restored*.

God's second solution for our sin problem is CONFESSION. Confession is admitting to God that we have sinned. It's as simple as that. The Greek word used in the New Testament literally means "to agree with." When we confess our sins we are agreeing with God that we have done wrong. We are coming clean. We are telling Him that we agree with His Spirit inside of us, who is convicting us about some sin. God has told us that confession brings restoration of fellowship with Him. This is why confession is so important for our spiritual lives. Even as children of God, we will remain distant from God IF we don't use this privilege called confession. But if we learn to confess our sins, as we become aware of them, we can maintain close fellowship with God.

This brings us to the very important Psalms of Confession. These are in the Bible to teach us how to confess our sins to God. These are the Psalms we go to when we need some guidance in how to confess our sins to God. That's why God put them in here. I encourage you to take some time to read through all 8 of the confessional Psalms (6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). This will give you a good feel for what true confession looks like.

Psalm 32 is unique among the confessional Psalms. It wasn't written during the time of David's sin; rather, it was written after

the fact as a kind of instructional Psalm in the art of confession. It contains six lessons to help us understand what is at stake with this spiritual practice of confession.

Six Lessons in the Art of Confession – Psalm 32

Lesson #1: Confession requires that we stop deceiving ourselves about our sin.

“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” (32:1,2).

“Blessed” (fortunate, happy) is the person that experiences the freedom that comes through confession! But what hinders us from experiencing this blessing? That last line is important: *“in whose spirit is no deceit.”* If there is deceit in your spirit that means you are lying to yourself. You are trying to convince yourself that you don’t have a problem; that your sin is no big deal. This is the single greatest obstacle to confession: self-deception. We minimize, rationalize or deny our sin (failures). As long as there is deception in your spirit, you will never come clean with God about your sin. The truly blessed man or woman is the one who has given up the art of self-deception and become ‘honest to God’ about specific sin issues.

Are you harboring any hint of self-deception about the significance of a sin issue in your life? Are you minimizing, rationalizing or denying the issue? Take some quiet moments and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything He might want to point out to you. Write down what you become aware of. Be specific.

Lesson #2: It’s self-inflicted punishment to keep silent about sin.

“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” (32:3).

Keeping silent about sin is one way we try to minimize our pain. In fact, this is a sure way to maximize our pain. David speaks here about the effect of his guilt day and night. He felt the weight of God’s convicting hand upon him. Suppressing guilt is a terrible strategy. Dr. Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he *“could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that*

their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day.” Guilt is a debilitating disease that eats away at us from within. The sad thing is that so many people live under the weight of guilt when there is a remedy. God is ready to lift that burden, IF we confess our sin to Him.

Not every impression of sadness or heaviness is due to unconfessed sin; but there are times when these ‘depressing’ feelings are rooted in hidden guilt and shame. When you are experiencing the kind of heaviness of spirit that David described in Psalm 32, it is wise to stop and ask the Lord: “Have I sinned in some way such that you are trying to get my attention?” Negative emotions can be like the red light on the dashboard indicating to us that something is wrong. Don’t ignore those negative emotions. Seek discernment as to what they are trying to tell you. They might be calling you to confess your sins and receive forgiveness and healing from God!

Lesson #3: Honest confession to the Lord brings immediate cleansing to our souls.

“Then 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” (32:5).

I confessed . . . YOU forgave. It’s that simple. There’s no penance in there. There’s no doing enough good to make up for the bad. We often struggle to believe it’s that simple. But it is. Why do we complicate what God has made so simple? Why do try to make expensive what God has made free? We confess . . . HE forgives. It’s that simple, so don’t try to make it more complicated.

Do you believe that confession brings immediate cleansing from the Lord? Or are you convinced that there ‘must be’ more to it than that? If you struggle to believe confession works this simply, you should ask yourself – Why? What is causing you to believe that it must be more complicated, more involved, more costly. It is unlikely that you will ever learn the spiritual practice of confession, and use it consistently, as long as you remain convinced that it is more complicated than what Psalm 32 is presenting.

Lesson #4: Confession brings forgiveness and assistance from God.

“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. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance” (Psalm 32:6).

There’s a side benefit that comes out of confession: God moves to rescue you from the mess you’ve made in the first place! You may have made a mess with other people (as David did); but God goes to work to help you remedy the mess. You may have made a mess with your finances; but God will go to work to help you rebuild. You may have made a mess of your marriage; but after you confess, you not only get God’s forgiveness, you get God’s assistance in putting things right again. David felt like someone was picking him up and lifting him out of the flood waters. That someone was the God he had confessed to. Someone was now his “hiding place.” That someone was God who was sheltering him.

Lesson #5: Confession turns the life navigation system back on.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. 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” (32:8,9).

God now speaks and tells how He responds to the one making confession. *“I will teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you and watch over you.”* Because fellowship with God is been restored through confession, the guidance of God becomes operative again in our lives. It’s as if God moves in and retakes the steering wheel, showing us the ways in which we should walk. As long as sin goes unconfessed, we are like stubborn mules making our own decisions with *no understanding*.

Unconfessed sin leads us into the ‘self-directed life’ instead of the ‘God-directed life.’ If we remain long in this condition, we can get very far off track from where God desires for us to be in life. Have you been living the self-directed life for a long period of time? Do you desire for God to take control of your life and begin leading you again? Maybe it’s time to confess any unconfessed sin to Him and invite Him to sit in the driver’s seat once again. As He has promised in Psalm 32, He WILL guide you and direct you in a very personal way, “with His eye upon you.”

Lesson #6: Confession brings the gladness of God back into your life.

“Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart” (Psalm 32:10,11)!

Psalm 32 could rightly be titled: The Blessedness of Being Forgiven. It begins and ends with a declaration of how good it feels to experience healing in our relationship with God. That healing comes as a result of God's unfailing love towards us. And His unfailing love is accessed through confession.

A final thought on “keeping short accounts” with God:

Confession needs to become a regular part of our ongoing conversation with God. Whenever we become aware of sin in our lives, we should quickly go to God and confess it. This is called “keeping short accounts” with God. By means of regular, ongoing confession, we do not let sin build up in our lives. The New Testament writers all echo the simplicity and beauty of the spiritual practice of confession. I like the way the apostle John put it:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Notice how good and gracious God is in that verse. If we confess (the sins that we are aware of), He will forgive us of our sins AND cleanse us “from ALL unrighteousness” (even the sins that we are not aware of). Whenever you take time to honestly confess before the Lord, He wipes clean the slate of your lives. This is how we, as the children of God, walk ‘broken but blessed.’ We are forgiven sinners who are constantly accessing the amazing grace of our loving Father. Make confession a daily part of your conversation with God. You'll be amazed at how much more smoothly life runs when God is in control!

