

I invite you to open your bibles to today's scripture text which can be found in the book of psalms, the 32nd chapter, verses 1-11 which can be found on page ___ in your pew bibles. We continue in our series "the peacemakers". Today's scripture encourages believers to make humble confession of sin – both of secret sins and of offenses between brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our Fathers Word

(Psalm 32)

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.

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. *Selah*

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. *Selah*

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to 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. *Selah*

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.

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.

11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

This is the Word of God, for the people of God.

Many of us have a practice of making resolutions, especially around the first of the year when holiday spending and eating have taken their toll on our checkbooks and our waistlines! It is a good thing to want to be more disciplined in our eating and spending, our exercise and time with our families. But such resolutions usually deal only with moralistic outward behaviors and are dependent on our own self-will and self-determination. Lacking a solid connection to God's grace and his sanctifying plan for our lives, such resolutions are practically doomed to failure.

Today I would like to suggest to you a new and better type of resolution. To borrow some old-fashioned language, this resolution is to *grow in the blessedness of holiness in full reliance upon God's necessary grace.*

One great example of this kind of growth is found in the life of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Some believe that Edwards was one of the greatest American theologian's that ever lived. Jonathan Edwards' greatness was centered not in terms of his intellect, but in his godly passion. This passion directed his intellect to pursue the real happiness that only comes from *gospel holiness.*

Edwards had this kind of passion early in life. He entered Yale shortly before his 13th birthday! At 17 he graduated with his Bachelor's degree, then remained at college two more years to prepare for the ministry. When he was 19, he was called to the ministry.

Knowing the great responsibility he soon was to assume, Edwards penned 70 resolutions over a period of a year (1722-1723). Already at that age he was a man aware of his utter need of God's grace.

This is most evident in the statement that he wrote at the beginning of his list of resolutions: *“Being sensible that I am unable to do anything without God’s help, I do humbly entreat him, by his grace, to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ’s sake.”* Then follow his 70 resolutions.

As you can see—this was no “New Year’s Resolution.” It wasn’t an impulsive commitment. No, young Edwards made these resolutions over the period of a year. He prayed about them, thought at length, dwelt on them.

His 22nd resolution stands out, and indicates the true measure of this man. Listen to the passion of this 19-year-old from his private journal: *“Resolved: To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea, violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.”*

Edwards knew that God had made us for himself, the source of all true happiness. But in what and for whom is this happiness to be found? That is the question now before us and which David answers in Psalm 32.

What Edwards calls happiness, and our version of the Bible renders “blessed,” David literally calls “happiness’s.” The term is always plural to connote the abundant, over-flowing, and profuse grace and blessedness that God showers upon those who love him. The grace is nothing less than God’s gift of faith and repentance, the desire to die to self so that we gain life. And the end of that grace is conformity to Christ. True grace reshapes and transforms us to be like Christ—that is, to be happy in God’s holiness.

The very happiness that Edwards resolved to get at any cost – David directs our attention to: showing not only what such happiness consists of, but also whose happiness it is. Let's take each of these in turn.

Where is happiness to be found? In what does true happiness consist? David's answer in verses 1 and 2 can be paraphrased, "Oh, the true happiness's of the one whose transgressions are being forgiven, whose sins are being covered. O the true happiness's of the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."

In what does true happiness consist? In being in right relationship with God. It is being reconciled with God, knowing personally that God has forgiven us our transgressions, has covered our sins, and has reckoned us right with him—fully accepted as his son or daughter.

To build a foundation for our understanding of confession, let's look more closely at each of these marks of true happiness.

First, *true* happiness is *forgiveness for transgression*. Sin is transgression, rebellion, a breaking of our relationship with God. It is not so much a breaking of a thing as offending a person – the Lord himself, our Creator and Redeemer. Transgression incurs both guilt and punishment. And that punishment is eternal alienation from God, being cast out of his presence, removed from his sight, banished to Hell where God and his gifts do not dwell.

But, David says, look at what the Lord has done! He crowns each sinner's head with happiness, not eternal sorrow, because he forgives our transgression. Literally, he lifts our transgression, guilt, and punishment from us. For anyone who is aware of his or her guilt and struggle with sin, isn't this sheer happiness of heart?

Secondly, true happiness consists in having our sin covered. The word here for “sin” means missing the mark, that is, failing to do what we ought to do. Whereas “transgression” describes sins of commission, “sin” refers to that of omission—failing to do what we ought, to love God and others as we ought.

But, David says, look at what the Lord has done! He not only dresses us in the garments of joy, but also covers our sin. For as sin leads to guilt, so guilt leads to shame, disgrace, and humiliation. Scripture pictures it as being naked and exposed for who we really are. But David points out the blessedness of the Lord covering us. God covers our nakedness and shame and dresses us with glory--a new glory, the glory of the gospel itself, full of his grace and mercy to sinners like us.

Finally, David says that true happiness consists in the Lord not counting our sin against us. Interestingly, the word here for sin is a third term that describes sin as a crookedness, a wickedness, that twists and perverts our relationship with our God. David says, look at what the Lord has done! He doesn't count our wickedness against us!

David knows that it is not enough have your transgressions lifted and your nakedness covered. Being crooked and wicked people, we also need to be restored, reconciled, and righted. And that is what the Lord does. He forgives, he covers, and he declares us right with him. It is His doing. He does not leave it to angels or men or some impersonal law. But all who come to him confessing their sin, he personally calls his own and declares them right.

But who is this happiness for? Who has true happiness as a real possession?

Most of us would say: the Christian has true happiness. But that isn't specific enough. A vital truth about true happiness is that it is the possession of the confessing Christian, the confessing believer.

We have completely missed the point of Psalm 32 if we think that it is aimed at new converts, those who make their first confession of sin. David is not speaking of new converts, or about conversion. Here he speaks about his own life, about one already in the ranks of the faithful. He is speaking of you and me, who gather regularly to worship God, and call each other brother and sister.

That is, David speaks of the happiness of forgiveness and justification that is a present, ongoing, and growing reality throughout the life of the confessing believer.

Why does David make this clear? It is because he knows that there is a deceit that is both deadly and devastating and that stalks every true child of God -- especially strong believers. It is the deceit of concealed sin.

Verse 3 warns us about the deceit of concealed sin. True happiness is the possession, says David, not merely of the forgiven, covered, and justified believer, but of the believer in whose spirit is no deceit. He doesn't say "in whose spirit is no guilt." Rather he says "is no deceit." All believers continue to sin and are therefore guilty, so David is not talking to the saint without guilt (there is no such creature!). No, David is talking about the saint living without deceit.

Listen. Here is a message for each one of us. It is likely that here today, right now, some of you are living in concealed sin -- unconfessed sin. You know what sin I am referring to. In another place David calls it "willful sin."

Psalm 32 is especially written for you. What immediately follows is David's own tale of deceit, the story of when he kept silent about a known sin that he refused to confess.

We know David as the "man after God's own heart." Yet here in Psalm 32, David frankly reveals himself to be of another character. Here we meet David the Deceiver, David the Truth Suppressor. What we find is not the story of happiness, but of misery-- a story of inner turmoil, that persistent, pestering, restlessness of soul – yes, even a wasting away. This is not so much the misery of the sinner, but the misery of the sin-concealer.

(The consequences of keeping silent (Psalm 32:3-4))

In June of 1984 the Boston Globe reported the tragic drowning of an 8-year-old boy named Chris. He had drowned in 8 feet of water while hunting for golf balls at a local country club with three of his friends.

According to his friends, Chris entered the pond and pretended that he was drowning. His friends said they thought he was playing a trick on them. It was no trick or game. Chris drowned.

In the aftermath of his death, the behavior of his friends startled many. One of the three began crying frequently and had to sleep with his mother. A second started hearing voices and seeing visions and was later committed to a hospital for emotionally disturbed children. A third, an 18 year old, was fired from his job because he would stay home from work when he felt "angry and disgusted about telling a lie to protect a friend."

After the drowning, all three witnesses suffered emotional instability, according to their parents, police, and themselves. Their distraught parents say the boys were withdrawn and had nightmares. They were no longer friends.

This was the mental and emotional trauma afflicting these boys for two years. But then a secret was uncovered. One of the boys confessed that Chris did not drown accidentally. He was pushed. This boy confessed that he had pushed Chris into the water. The other two boys conspired with him to hide the truth from everyone else. The police investigated and charged the boy with manslaughter.

They were involved in a cover-up -- carriers of a lie and suppressers of the truth. But they could not escape the consequences of their deceit. Neither could David.

After his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and arranging for her husband's murder, David tried to live a double life. Instead of confessing his sin, David says in verse 4 that he "kept silent." Instead of admitting his shame, his failing, he says in verse 5 that he was "covering his sin."

He thought he could do it. Most of us do. We work terribly hard at landscaping our front-yard lives. We allow people entrance into the living rooms of our homes, but we do not show them where we live – the inner rooms, the inner parts.

Now let me ask you: What of you? Where do you spend the majority of your time? Landscaping the front yard of your life or opening the closet and cleaning out the hidden sins?

Our inner “rooms” are where the Lord would have us go. This is where the Lord addresses us—in the dark chambers of our heart. David realizes this when he cries out in Psalm 51:6, “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts.” That is what God wants—truth in the inner parts, for he knows that is where sin resides. Like cultivated mushrooms, sin thrives in the darkness

Pr 28:13 13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Jn. 3:19-20 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Rom. 13:12; 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Eph. 5:8-14 8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:

"Wake up, O sleeper,

rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you."

1 Jn. 1:5-7 5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

So it is in the dark and concealed places that God would shine his truth like the noonday sun. It is helpful to look at the consequences of keeping silent. David outlines some of them for us:

- A physical destruction. “My bones wasted away...”
- A conscience that plagues us daily. “Through my groaning all day long...”
- A sense of God’s fatherly displeasure. “Your hand was heavy upon me...”
- Depression of the spirit. “My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer...”

Unconfessed sin makes us fugitives. We become fugitives from God, from the person we’ve sinned against, from ourselves. No wonder that it leads to such physical and spiritual torment!

That fugitive life is also the life of a lie. Think of it — during his term of concealment, what did David do? Surely, he prayed. He would have gathered with others for worship. He would have written songs, counseled others, poured himself into his appointed work as king, and he may even have participated in general confessions during worship. Yet all this time he concealed his sin. He kept silent. And through it all he was a stranger to true happiness – he was miserable, because he was estranged from his God.

(How does God bring true happiness to believers?)

But the Lord did not, would not, let David go. He led him down the path to true happiness. How? How does God bring about true happiness for believers?

To begin with, the Lord convicts us of our sin through His Spirit and his Word. It is the Lord who runs after us. It is he who pursues us. He lays fatherly chastisement on us to turn us back to him. At some point in David's anguish, he saw this.

Where once he only saw his torment and shame, now he saw it as God's hand! Verse 4 says, "Your hand was heavy upon me." It was not a psychological anguish, but a truly spiritual one: that is, an anguish that comes from God's Spirit. For it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and lead us back to God. David calls this the Lord's hand. Therefore, it is the grace of conviction of sin that begins his journey home.

And how does conviction of the Spirit come? The Spirit convicts by means of the word of God. In David's case, it came by way of the prophet Nathan, who counseled David and wisely exposed his sin as the heinous sin it was – his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. The Spirit always works with his Word.

Listen: The greatest single secret of spiritual development lies in personal, humble, obedient response to the Word of God. The chief means God has for conviction of sins is his Word. In it are his warnings that threaten and convict, his promises that assure us of his mercy and forgiveness, and his commandments that rebuild our lives. The way to happiness is by the Lord's Spirit and Word leading us.

If this conviction is genuine, it will lead to sincere confession. Conviction alone is not enough. It must be followed by heartfelt admission. It must lead us to that honest reckoning and acknowledgment of our sin before God. So David prays, “Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said: ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’”

A true confession must be a full confession—not full in the sense of trying to recall all that you have done, but full in the sense of being specific. We see this in verse 5 where David confesses his sin using three common terms: sin, iniquity, and transgressions.

Do you see what he is doing? He is confessing all his sin and confessing specific sin; failings, transgressions and wickedness. Sins of omission and sins of commission and the sin of perverting our relationship to God. That is a full confession. The nature of the sin and the decision of whom we confess it to determines how graphic or explicit we ought to be in our confession.

Which leads me to the next point: the way we confess our sin is determined to a large measure by the kind of sin we have committed.

First, there is secret sin, which Moses speaks of in Psalm 90:8. **8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.**

This is sin between you and God alone. Hence, your confession is secret, between you and God alone.

Second, there are private sins, sins committed against another person, which often lead to conflict or estrangement in that relationship. Jesus speaks of this kind of sin in Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." He teaches us that confession here would be made not only to God, but also to the person or persons you have offended.

Thirdly, there are public sins. Public sins are those sins committed against a group, a people, a community, a congregation. Since the sin has affected an entire group, the confession should also be made to the entire group. For example, if someone in our church started a rumor or a conflict that eventually affected a major portion of our congregation, sincere repentance would be demonstrated by a confession to our entire congregation.

So it is that God convicts, and we confess. What follows is one more step that secures for us the full measure of God's happiness: forgiveness.

(You forgave my sin! (Psalm 32:5))

I would be remiss to leave out the very climax of David's confession. In verse 5 he cries out with joy, "You forgave my sin!" It is God's forgiveness and the resulting life-changing grace that excites David to tell others of the goodness of confessed sin.

This is no mere head knowledge of forgiveness, but the personal, spiritual experience of being forgiven, accepted, reconciled, justified by the Lord and now at peace with Him. Following his confession, David does not say simply: "There is forgiveness," but "You forgave me." That is what real forgiveness is and where true happiness is found.

And look at its ultimate effect. Where once David covered his sin and hid from God, now he exclaims in the open with great joy: “You are my hiding place.” And now he lives without fear. To paraphrase verse 6: “When the mighty waters rise-- the waters of judgment-- I will not fear, for they will not reach me. You have forgiven me!”

We saw earlier that David’s recognition of the depth of his sin, his depravity, was evident in his use of the three most common terms for sin in the Old Testament: transgression, sin, and wickedness. So now he acknowledges God’s total and super-abundant mercy and forgiveness with a threefold statement.

God lifts away our transgressions, covers our sin and nakedness, and reckons the twisted and crooked sinner right.

Oh what joy! What happiness! Oh the splendor and peace and joy of a heart right with God.

(Conclusion)

Brothers and sisters, I have chosen to speak about concealed sin because I know it well. I am a practiced sin-hider. I along with all believers, am prone in particular to buy the lie that happiness consists in looking good for the sake of others. Our pride feeds on seeking man’s approval instead of God’s approval, man’s blessing instead of God’s forgiveness.

This is the way people live in most churches. As a result, believers who are hiding in the dark are unwilling to come into the light. As one brother has said: “Why is there only grace for the unbeliever--the new convert--and not for the

believer, our brother or sister who sins? Why does the church welcome the convert, but shame and cast out the confessing, repentant brother?”

I do not want to treat a repentant believer this way, nor do I want our church to. I ask you to join me today in resolving to confess my own sins sincerely and to gladly encourage and forgive others as they do the same.

We can follow Jonathan Edwards’ inspiring example and make some heartfelt, prayerful resolutions.

1. In particular, let us resolve first to acknowledge the radical reality of indwelling sin that besets everyone here. We need to remember also that we have an enemy that prowls like a roaring lion seeking to devour us. Therefore, let’s always be on our knees for one another.

2. Let us equally resolve to discover the riches of God’s gospel of undeserved mercy. Let us resolve to know God as he has offered himself in the gospel of His Son and declared his glory – the glory of the one and only from the Father, as the glory full of grace and truth. To know the Lord as he has revealed himself to be: “the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness; maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin [the same three words!]; yet he will by no means leave the guilty [or the deceitful] unpunished” (Ex. 34:6-7).

3. Let us resolve to pay earnest heed to the Lord’s Spirit-driven Word, so it can penetrate like a searchlight to the deepest recesses of our souls to expose, convict, and compel us to turn, believe, uncover, confess, and make amends for our sin.

4. Let us resolve to heed our heavenly Father's warning against those who would conceal their sin and keep silent. Isaiah says, "Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, 'Who sees us? Who will know?'" (Is. 29:15)

5. Yet, let us equally embrace and believe his very great and precious promises for those who confess their sin. As Proverbs 28:13 promises, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

6. Let us resolve to be accountable to one another, not with accusing and self-righteous spirits, but as fellow brothers and sisters who are humble, who extend a word of promise and warning and a hand of help. We can remind one another that: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

Challenge: Just as David needed Nathan, we also need others to help us see the sins in our lives. This week, ask a respected friend to help you identify a stumbling block in your life.

On August 10, 1723, at the age of 19, Jonathan Edwards resolved in #68: "Resolved: To confess frankly to myself all that which I find in myself, either infirmity or sin; and, if it be what concerns religion, also to confess the whole case to God, and implore needed help."

May that be our own resolution. And may our heavenly Father shower upon us his children the happiness he intends for us when we cease concealing and begin confessing.

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending Jesus, the Light of the World, sent to seek those

who are hiding in darkness, not only the lost, but us, his children,

who attempt to conceal our sin, to hide our sin, we who struggle to
confess our sin.

By the power of your Holy Spirit grant us strength to be peacemakers,

Bringing us back from being fugitives of God, putting us in a right
relationship with God through confession of our sins.

Thank you for giving us Hope through Jesus, who can reconcile us with God.

We thank you Lord, for your grace, for forgiving our transgressions,

For covering our sins, and for reckoning us right with you—fully
accepted as your sons and daughters.

Allow our witness to shine as the Light of Christ to our brothers and sisters

In Christ, that through our confession of sins, they will be encouraging
to seek Him in confession.

May we all bring you the glory, the praise, and the honor.

AMEN

