

Text: Psalm 32:1-7 (Pew Bible, pg.549)
Title: “Praying Your Way Through Sin”

INTRODUCTION

There’s nothing more basic, more vital or more powerful in our relationship with God than prayer. There is no relationship without communication, and prayer is one of the primary ways that we communicate with God. And the more we pray and the more effectively we pray, the deeper our relationship with God grows. And so over and over in God’s Word we are taught to pray. Places like...

Proverbs 15:8 - The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

Colossians 4:2 - Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

So if praying is such a vital part of the life to which God has called us as Christ-followers, why is it sometimes so hard to get through to God? Why are there times when we feel like we’re just talking to ourselves ... that we are not really getting through to God? Why are there times when we have trouble getting motivated to pray? Why is it that so often we try everything else before we think to ask God? Why is it that we can go for vast periods of time and not even breathing a word to God in prayer? Why is it when we try to pray that all kinds of distracting thoughts flood our minds, like we’re in a battle ... a spiritual battle.

There’s nothing that we need more, and yet nothing that makes us feel more inadequate than prayer. So today I’m beginning a brief series of messages entitled “Praying Through.” God’s Word teaches how to pray through the barriers that we face when we try to pray. We need to learn how to P.U.S.H. through the barriers ... **Pray Until Something Happens.**

Open your Bibles to Psalm 32:1-7. One of the greatest barriers is our own sin. Sin interrupts our relationship with God, and so we don’t pray. And King David knew this. Remember David committed that awful series of sins of adultery with Bathsheba and then the murder of her husband Uriah. We’re not sure how long it had been, but most scholars believe that David composed this psalm, this prayer, just after David had been confronted about his sins by the prophet Nathan. So this psalm is autobiographical. What we have here is the testimony of David of how he prayed through his own sin and came to a place of forgiveness and cleansing. Read text.

ILLUSTRATION – A few years ago I was talking to a college baseball coach. I asked him what his great challenge was in coaching college students. He said the biggest challenge in baseball is helping players deal with failure. An average batter fails to get a hit 75% of the time ... he bats .250 which means he only gets a hit one out of four times he goes to the plate. A really good player fails to get a hit 2/3 of the times he goes to the plate. The coach said that if that gets in a player’s head it can keep him from succeeding in the game. The same thing is true with believers spiritually. If we don’t know how to handle the times when we fail, when we sin, we will be rendered ineffective in the life we have been called to live through Christ. Unconfessed sin often causes to run away from God when we really should be running to God.

But I want you to notice something generally about the psalm, the song, the prayer. It’s not a sad song. It’s a celebration. David had come to a place where he prayed through his sin to a place of forgiveness and cleansing, and it brought great joy to his heart to be right with God. Is that what you need today?

It is clear that the point of all this is to get us to a place where we pray as we ought to pray. The lesson David learned after praying through, and the challenge he has, by the Holy Spirit, to us today is...

Psalm 32:6 - Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found...

And to get to that place we have to know how to pray through the experience of our own sin. How do we do that? First we...

1. FACE THE REALITY OF OUR SIN.

It's clear that David had a reason to feel guilty. It is because he *was* guilty. And the Spirit of God brought conviction through the confrontation of the prophet Nathan. There are actually four words in this psalm that paint the ugly picture of the reality of our sin.

TRANSGRESSION

Psalm 32:1a - Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven...

The word means to step into forbidden territory. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba, he transgressed ... he stepped into forbidden territory. He was outside the will of God. When David had Uriah killed, he stepped into forbidden territory. And he was outside the will of God.

SINS (PLURAL)

Psalm 32:1b - Blessed is he ... whose sins are covered.

Now we're familiar with this word. It involves not just *doing* what we shouldn't do, but also *not* doing what we should do. And often we feel alright if we avoid the "biggies" ... the big, bad sins that everyone knows are wrong. But our sins also include the things we should do that we don't do.

James 4:17 - Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Now in v.2 there's another word used to describe the reality of our sin.

SIN (SINGULAR)

Psalm 32:2 - Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Here the word "sin" here means "iniquity." It is the perversion of what is right ... an inner crookedness. The reason we commit sins (plural) is because we have a disease, an inner crookedness, called sin.

Now it gets even more graphic when David uses the word....

DECEIT

Psalm 32:2 - Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Now this is the aftermath of sin when we pretend that nothing is wrong. We try to deceive ourselves and others. We become hypocrites who wear a mask of righteousness when behind the mask we know there is sin.

Now I John 1:8-2:2 is the NT counterpart to Psalm 32. Listen to what the NT has to say about this condition:

1 John 1:8 - If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:10 - If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

And all these transgressions, these sins, this sin, this deceit Jesus took upon Himself when He died on the Cross for our sins ... when the One who knew no sin became sin for us.

So as we pray through our sin to a place of forgiveness and cleansing we have to start with facing the reality of our sin. But next, praying through our sin means we...

2. **RECOGNIZE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.**

One grave consequence of our sin is that it separates us from God. No sin can stand in the presence of God. It hurts and hinders our relationship with God because we sin against *Him*.

Isaiah 59:2 - But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Our sin is an affront to our holy God. God is completely holy, pure and perfect in every way. And when we sin, we disrespect God. It breaks the heart of God. It is that very sin that put Jesus on the Cross.

Another consequence of sin is what it does to us. David spoke of this in...

Psalm 32:3-4 - 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

You see what is happening here is that after David sinned he quit praying. He knew he had offended God and he kept his distance. But as long as he did that it took a heavy toll on David:

- Physically David's "bones wasted away." Researchers have proven this to be true. When there is unresolved guilt in a person's life it begins to affect them physically. People get sick and tired.
- Emotionally David speaks of "groaning all day long." The word actually means "roaring," like the roaring of a lion. That's a powerful picture of a guilty conscience.
- Spiritually David said, "Your hand was heavy upon me..."

You see, for believers, sin doesn't change our position in God's eyes. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. There is no longer any condemnation. But sin does change what we think is our position in God's eyes. And we stand back from God because we think God doesn't want anything to do with us because we have sinned. And this becomes an excuse to stop praying and reading our Bibles and attending church, because in these ways we draw near to God.

And David pushes through this barrier, this wall, and he said...

Psalm 32:5 - 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

David is praying through his sin to a place of forgiveness and cleansing. And here's the outcome. We...

3. **EXPERIENCE FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS.**

And this is what God is after all along. Again, this is a psalm, a prayer, of praise and thanksgiving for something great that David has received ... freedom through forgiveness. When we acknowledge our sin and not try to cover it up. When we confess, here is what happens:

- **Our sins are put away.**

Psalm 32:1a - Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven...

The word for "forgiven" means "to put away."

EXAMPLE: In the OT on the Day of Atonement two goats were chosen. One of the goats was sacrificed as sin offering for the forgiveness of the sins of the people of God. The other goat became what has been called the "scapegoat." The priest laid his hands on the head of the goat and confessed the sins of the people. In doing that,

the sins fell upon that goat. Then the priest did something amazing. He sent the goat out into the wilderness. The goat was “put away.” Imagine what a powerful picture that was for the Israelites to watch as the scapegoat walked off into the wilderness and to know that that is what God was doing with their sins. It was a reminder that God not only forgives our sins, but He remembers them no more.

- **Our sins are covered over.**

Psalm 32:1 – Blessed is he whose ... sins are covered.

Listen, if we cover over our sin, God will uncover it. But if we uncover our sin, God covers it.

- **There is not charge against us.**

Psalm 32:2 – Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him...

ILLUSTRATION – What a wonderful thing to hear ... no charge. Remember the last time you experienced grace like that ... “no charge.” You expected to have to pay to have a flat fixed and the tow truck driver said “no charge.” You expected to pay for that extra side of mash potatoes with your lunch and the person who waited on you said, “no charge.” That’s a wonderful thing to hear, and that’s what grace is.

Let me take you back once again to the NT counterpart to Psalm 32 ... I John 1-2.

1 John 1:8-9 - 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.

Now don’t make the mistake of thinking that God is just a sloppy bookkeeper ... that He sort of forgets about what we have done ... that he just winks at our sin and waves it off ... no charge. No! God is not a sloppy bookkeeper. He is a meticulous bookkeeper. All sin will be accounted for and judged. But here’s the way God does that. When we place our faith in Christ, our sins are put away and covered with no charge *to us*. But the charge is put on the account of Jesus. God charges our sins to Jesus who paid the price for our sins by His death on the Cross. When a person puts their trust in Jesus for the gift of eternal life, what comes with that is forgiveness of our sins ... past, present and future.

1 John 2:1-2 - My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

And you see when we experience this freedom through forgiveness it opens up and clears up our relationship with God, particularly in prayer. So long as our prayer life is choked and suffocated by unconfessed sin that we haven’t dealt with, we will not be able to enjoy the benefits of praying.

Psalm 32:6 - 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.

CONCLUSION

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Now why is confession important? Confession simply means to agree with God. “God, I agree. That hateful comment is sin. That lustful look was sin. That judgmental spirit is sin.” That’s what it means to confess. And why is it important? Aren’t our sins already forgiven because of what Christ did on the Cross? If God already knows what I did what’s the point of confessing? The point is that when we confess our sin God’s is glorified. We lift up His righteousness as we acknowledge our own unrighteousness. And it clears the relationship with God.

ILLUSTRATION – When your mate or child offends you and that don't try to make it right there's a block in the relationship, isn't there? It isn't until that other person humbles themselves and says, "I was wrong; will you forgive me?" that the relationship is restored.

So we do not get the full experience of cleansing in our souls until we confess. Our sins are covered through Christ, but the relationship is not fully restored until we confess.

Remember that the Israelites had several visual reminders of their forgiveness. It's one thing for God to tell us to confess and to tell us that we are forgiven. But God didn't just do that. He gave several visual images and experiences to drive home the reality of sin and the joy of being forgiven. We talked about the scapegoat. There was the visible experience of seeing the animal sacrifices consumed by fire on the altar.

Well to close today, I want you to have something experiential and visual if you need it. Perhaps there is a sin or sins in your life that you have not confessed to the Lord and honestly repented of. You've made excuses, or perhaps you thought, "What's the use?" Or perhaps you've confessed, but you're having trouble forgiving yourself. Bow your head and close your eyes. What sin or sins has God convicted you of? Will you simply, honestly, genuinely confess and repent today? Then I want to give you an opportunity to do something with your hands and your feet to drive that home. Here at the altar is a cross to remind us of the Cross of Jesus Christ. To symbolize that you have done that I invite you to come here to the altar, take a red push pin from the basket and walk over and stick it in the cross.